



ISSN: 2617-6548

URL: [www.ijirss.com](http://www.ijirss.com)



## Economic adaptation strategies to the relocation policy of Suku Laut in Lingga, Kepulauan Riau Province, Indonesia

 Marisa Elsera<sup>1,2\*</sup>,  Darsono Wisadirana<sup>3</sup>,  Ali Maksum<sup>4</sup>,  Anif Fatma Chawa<sup>5</sup>,  Iwan Nurhadi<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1,3,4,5,6</sup>*Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Brawijaya, Malang, Indonesia.*

<sup>2</sup>*Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji, Tanjungpinang, Indonesia.*

Corresponding author: Marisa Elsera (Email: [marisaelsera@umrah.ac.id](mailto:marisaelsera@umrah.ac.id))

### Abstract

This research aims to analyze the adaptation strategies of the Suku Laut community towards the relocation policy in Lingga Regency, Kepulauan Riau Province. This study is guided by Merton's [1] social adaptation theory, specifically the concepts of retreatism and conformity, to understand the post-relocation community adjustment patterns. The research employed a qualitative method, with data collection techniques including observation, interviews, and documentation. Research informants comprised the Suku Laut community, the local Malay community, and government officials. Empirical findings reveal three economic adaptation patterns among the Suku Laut post-relocation: nomadic, semi-nomadic, and sedentary. The nomadic Suku Laut tend to adopt a retreatism strategy, maintaining traditional nomadic customs, the stability of the sea, and the barter system. Semi-nomadic sea tribes exhibit a synthesis of retreatism and conformity; they still farm the sea seasonally but are involved in the local market economy. The settlement of the Suku Laut reflects a conformity strategy through adopting a market economy, participating in fishermen's cooperatives, and experiencing business diversification. This study affirms that the success of the Suku Laut's adaptation depends on social-economic integration in harmony with local wisdom and ongoing support from government policies.

**Keywords:** Adaptation, local knowledge, Orang Suku Laut, and relocation policies.

**DOI:** 10.53894/ijirss.

**Funding:** This study received no specific financial support.

**History:** Received: 3 June 2025 / Revised: 7 July 2025 / Accepted: 9 July 2025 / Published: 16 July 2025

**Copyright:** © 2025 by the authors. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Competing Interests:** The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

**Authors' Contributions:** All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Transparency:** The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

**Publisher:** Innovative Research Publishing

### 1. Introduction

Society is a collection of individuals living together in a specific geographical area, bound by various social, cultural, and economic relationships. These individuals interact with each other to form social structures, values, norms, and habits

that govern their behavior. In Ibn Khaldun's view, society can be categorized into two types: settled society and nomadic society [2]. The two types of society can be distinguished by their civilization. Civilization is an expression of complexity and progress in human life, marked by extraordinary achievements in various fields and demonstrating human potential for continued development and innovation. Sedentary societies are characterized by settled dwellings and tend to produce higher levels of civilization. Nomadic societies, on the other hand, are known for their mobility and generally exhibit lower levels of civilization, with behaviors often based more on myth and pretense than on reason [3].

Nomadic societies, according to Gerhard Lenski, are societies in early development, which he also refers to as gathering and hunting societies. This type of society still exists in groups that hunt and gather food. They live in groups of between 10 and 50 people. The dependence of nomadic societies on foodstuffs provided by the surrounding natural environment requires them to move around when the food sources are depleted. Men are responsible for hunting, and women collect forest products and food [4]. In Lenski's view, nomadic societies are defined as primitive societies that survive through hunting and gathering. The characteristics of such societies are often associated with land-based nomadic communities. However, nomadic communities that hunt are also found at sea. These are known as sea nomads. In Southeast Asia, sea nomads are referred to by at least three terms: Orang Laut, Moken, and Bajau. Orang Laut is known in Thailand (Urak Lawoi), Malaysia (Johor Bahru), and Indonesia (Riau, Jambi, Riau Islands, and Bangka Belitung). In Indonesia, Orang Laut is also called Suku Laut, Orang Sampan, Duano, Akit, and Orang Asli [5]. The Suku Laut is recognized as a diverse group inhabiting Riau, the Lingga Islands, Batam, as well as the coastal regions of eastern Sumatra, southern Johor, and Singapore [6-8]. Moken is used for the term Sea Nomads in Thailand (Ranong, Phang-nga, Phuket Phang-nga, Phuket) and Myanmar (Taninthayi) [9]. Bajau is known in Indonesia (Sulawesi, Maluku, South Kalimantan, East Nusa Tenggara), the Philippines (Manila, Basilan, Palawan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Zamboanga), and Malaysia [10, 11]. The presence of Sea Nomads in Southeast Asia can be observed from the following distribution map:

Based on the figure above, it can be seen that the most extensive distribution of sea nomads in Indonesia is the Bajau Tribe, which has a population of approximately 161,524 people. Meanwhile, the Orang Laut population is only about 28,387 people. Government intervention towards the Bajau Tribe has been more substantial from local, central, and international governments. The Wakatobi Bajau Tribal Community has also been involved by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in the declaration of commitment to preserve the biosphere reserve. In terms of civilization, the Bajo tribe is more advanced than the Orang Suku Laut. The attention of the local government to the Sea Tribe is only regulated [12, 13]. Since the 1980s, the New Order government implemented a program to settle the Sea Tribe, but until 2020, there have been no policies or empowerment programs for the Sea Tribe from the local government in Riau Islands Province.

There are several facts about the Sea Tribe. The first source states that the Sea People existed from 2500 to 1500 BC. They are part of the Old Malay (Proto-Malay) nation and spread throughout Sumatra and the Malacca Peninsula. The Orang Laut used to be pirates but played an important role in the Srivijaya Kingdom, the Malacca Sultanate, and the Johor Sultanate. The Orang Laut is considered to have been instrumental in establishing the legitimacy of maritime kingdoms in the seas around Southeast Asia. When Malacca fell to the Portuguese, the Orang Laut's position began to be threatened due to the loss of wealth. When Europeans began to dominate Southeast Asia, the Orang Laut started to be labeled as pirates who often harassed European merchant ships in the Strait of Malacca. The Europeans urged several Malay kingdoms to crack down on the pirates who disrupted shipping routes [14, 15].

Hunt in Ali [16] uses the spelling (appellation) Orang Kanaq. The second source, Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli (JHEOA), refers to the Sea Tribe as Orang Kanaq in Malaysia. Historical records show that the Kanaq tribe found in Kota Tinggi, Malaysia, is believed to have ancestors of the Sekanak people in the Riau Islands. Ali [16] uses the term Orang Laut to describe the tribe or people who inhabit the islands in the southern part of the Malay Peninsula, especially in the Riau-Lingga Islands [16]. In Kota Tinggi Malaysia, 34 Kanaks inhabit the area. Sopher describes that before the Kanaq abandoned their nomadic life and dependence on the sea, they had gone through a long period of being regarded as pirates during the royal era. In fact, in 1842, the Kanaq's land settlement at Teluk Sekana (Lingga Regency, Indonesia) was destroyed by the Dutch [16]. There is a strong suspicion that the Orang Laut in Malaysia still share the same lineage as the Orang Laut in the Riau Islands. This is evidenced by their physical characteristics and life experiences, which include migration from the north coast of Singkep Island to Bintan Island, then to Selangor and Johor. This second fact is disputed by the Sekanak community in Lingga District. The third fact observed in 2022 was that the Sekanak people in Lingga Regency, Riau Islands Province, denied being descendants of the Orang Suku Laut, stating that their ancestors were Malay and Muslim, whereas the Orang Suku Laut traditionally practiced animism and lived nomadically until 1990.

The Orang Suku Laut was introduced to land life through the Development of Social Welfare for Alienated Communities (PMKSMT) program by the Department of Social Welfare of the Republic of Indonesia. Their lives began to change from nomadic living in Kajang (the typical canoe used by the Orang Suku Laut) to living on land or the coast. Gradually, 28,387 people spread across four provinces in Indonesia, namely Riau, Riau Islands, Jambi, and Bangka Belitung. The largest province inhabited by the Orang Suku Laut is Riau Islands Province, with 12,800 people living across five regencies or cities in Riau Islands Province, namely Batam City, Lingga Regency, Bintan Regency, Tanjungbalai Karimun Regency, and Anambas Regency.

The Orang Suku Laut Settlement was built by the central government in Riau Islands Province in 44 locations, while 30 were in Lingga Regency. Since the PMKSMT program was implemented, the Suku Laut have experienced significant changes in their lifestyle. Initially, they lived in Kajang (canoes) with rain tarpaulins and stakes, fish storage, wood stoves, and cooking and eating utensils such as lanterns, serampang, and mata kail (fishing tools), as well as bags or cloth bags to store clothes and pets. After receiving the PMKSMT program, they began living like the local Malay community in wooden

houses built by the government [17]. Another change experienced by the Orang Suku Laut is in religion; during the nomadic period, they were still animistic. When they were settled, they were asked to choose one religion. This change is related to the need for civil registration and the population management of the Orang Suku Laut. Their livelihoods, customs, culture, interaction patterns, and other aspects have also changed, requiring the tribe to adapt to the new environment [18]. Most (estimated 86%) of the Suku Laut who chose to settle down had problems adapting, while the 16% estimated to still be nomadic at sea chose to withdraw from the PMKSMT program by leaving the houses that the government had built for the Suku Laut. Some Orang Suku Laut choose to remain nomadic, while others choose to live seasonally on boats, while others choose or are forced to settle in coastal settlements [19]. Sociocultural adaptability is a common feature of sea nomads [20]. Since the implementation of the PKMT and PMKSMT programmes, there have been at least three typologies of Orang Suku Laut: nomadic, semi-nomadic and sedentary [21]. The relationship between the sedentary Orang Suku Laut and the Malay Tribe is strongly influenced by economic, social and government policy factors, which together shape the dynamics of life in the Riau Islands [22]. One of the dynamics of the Orang Suku Laut's life is that the values embedded in their cosmology differ from those of the Malay community [23]. The Orang Suku Laut requires adjustment and adaptation to life on land. This research will analyze the adaptation strategies of the Suku Laut following the relocation policy in Lingga Regency, Riau Islands Province.

## **2. Research Methodology**

This research discusses the Suku Laut living in Lingga Regency, Riau Islands Province. This study uses a qualitative method that allows researchers to explore the adaptation strategies of the Suku Laut after the relocation policy. This research employs observation, interviews, and documentation as data collection techniques to understand the adaptation strategies of the Suku Laut after settling down. Observations were made to directly observe the lives of the Suku Laut in their settlements after experiencing changes in settlement patterns from nomadic living in Kajang to sedentary living. Interviews were conducted using unstructured and semi-structured formats with 15 informants, consisting of the Suku Laut community, the local Malay community where they were relocated, and government officials from the village to the provincial level. Informants from the Suku Laut community were involved in revealing the strategies adopted by the Suku Laut after the relocation policy.

Meanwhile, the local Malay community was used as informants to reveal the interaction patterns between the Suku Laut and the local community that helped them adapt to their new lives. Government officials were chosen to find a suitable development approach model for the Suku Laut. Documentation techniques were used to collect events, data from news, and previous research related to the adaptation strategies of the Suku Laut after the relocation policy through village data, the Lingga Regency Government, and the Riau Islands Provincial Government. The collected data was then analyzed, from transcribing the data to coding and identifying specific themes based on the research objectives.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

### **3.1. Overview of the Research Context**

Lingga is one of the regencies in the Riau Islands Province. Astronomically, Lingga Regency is located between 00°20' North latitude and 00°40' South latitude, and between 104°0' and 105°0' East longitude. The coordinate location of the regent's office of Lingga Regency is at 00°12'38.52" South latitude and 104°36'23.004" East longitude. Lingga Regency has an area of approximately 211,772 km<sup>2</sup>, with 90% being oceanic, or around 654.28 km<sup>2</sup>, while the land area is only 1%, or 2,117.28 km<sup>2</sup>. Lingga Regency consists of 13 sub-districts: Bakung Serumpun District, Katang Bidare District, Posek Islands District, Lingga District, East Lingga District, North Lingga District, Selayar District, Senayang District, Singkep District, West Singkep District, Singkep Pesisir District, South Singkep District, and Temiang Pesisir District. The boundaries of the region are as follows:

- North bordered by Galang Sub-district of Batam City and South Natuna Sea.
- South bordered by Bangka Sea and Berhala Strait.
- West bordered by Indragiri Sea.
- The North Natuna Sea borders the East.

Lingga Regency has a tropical and wet climate, with an average rainfall variation of 244.1 mm throughout 2023. This indicates that rainfall in Lingga Regency is relatively high. December is the month with the most rainy days. The average air temperature in Lingga Regency in 2023 is 27.6 degrees Celsius. Additionally, the average humidity is 86.4 percent. The following is a map of Lingga Regency based on area by sub-district:

The population of Lingga Regency has various occupations, ranging from fishermen 10,813 people, self-employed 6,035 people, casual daily labourers 2,572 people [24]. The majority of Lingga Regency residents who work as fishermen come from ethnic Malay and Orang Suku Laut. The fundamental difference in the fishing profession from the Malay Community uses engine boats while the Orang Suku Laut uses kajang boats. The Orang Suku Laut still uses traditional fishing gear (nets, fishing rods and speriauars) that are environmentally friendly [25]. Fishing activities for the Orang Suku Laut are solely to fulfill their needs. It is very rare for the Orang Suku Laut to obtain a large catch because the fishing gear they use is still traditional. However, if the catch exceeds their daily consumption needs, they can sell it to collectors.



**Figure 1.**  
Kajang — Traditional Wooden Boat.  
**Source:** Marisa Elsera's Primary Data.

### 3.2. Economic Adaptation Strategies of the Orang Suku Laut After Displacement

The lives of the Suku Laut changed after the introduction of the Remote Community Welfare Programme (PKMT) in 1970-1980 and the Remote Community Social Welfare Improvement Programme (PKSMT) in 1981 [8]. Significant changes have been experienced by the Suku Laut [26]. Based on their way of life, the Orang Suku Laut in Lingga Regency can be categorized into three groups: nomadic, semi-nomadic, and sedentary. First, the nomadic Suku Laut referred to in this study are those who refuse to live in houses built by the central government. Nomadic Orang Suku Laut tend to move from one place to another in search of resources. Second, semi-nomadic Orang Suku Laut settle in one location for an extended period but still maintain a migration pattern within a specific timeframe. Semi-nomadic Orang Suku Laut still live in Kajang but return to the houses built by the government during the north wind and south wind seasons [5]. Thirdly, sedentary Orang Suku Laut live in houses built by the central and provincial governments, either on the coast or on land. Settled Orang Suku Laut have a more structured life and have developed a more stable and organized economic system. After the implementation of the Remote Community Welfare Programme (PKMT) in 1970-1980 and 1981, and the Remote Community Social Welfare Improvement Programme (PKSMT) in 1981, significant economic changes in the Suku Laut can be observed. There was a change in the way the Suku Laut survive. The following table shows the economic transformation of Suku Laut:

**Table 1.**  
Economic Transformation of Suku Laut: From Nomadic to Sedentary in Kepulauan Riau.

Economic Aspects	Nomadic	Semi Nomadic	Settled
Economic Mobility	Refusing to land because nomadic mobility in Kajang is considered more effective for optimizing sea catches.	Temporary settlement patterns are carried out as an adaptive strategy to changes in the wind season and fluctuations in the availability of marine resources.	Settling patterns make it easier for the Orang Suku Laut to interact and buy and sell with the local community.
Pengelolaan Sumber Daya Laut	Marine Resource Management Using environmentally friendly traditional tools to preserve the sea and prevent overfishing	Go to sea according to the fishing season; return home during the windy season	Modern and organized management through facilities such as fish markets and processing plants
Economic System	Barter during travel to fulfill needs.	Semi barter-monetary transaction for basic needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monetary transaction (buying and selling)</li> <li>• Buying and selling directly or through collectors as a form of integration into the local economy;</li> <li>• Diversification of income sources</li> </ul>

Economic Aspects	Nomadic	Semi Nomadic	Settled
Lokal Adaptation to Local Natural Resources	Utilizing wood, leaves, and stones as Kajang-making tools, fishing gear, and shelters.	Using Natural Resources for basic seasonal needs	Collecting forest products (fruits, vegetables and firewood), mariculture and processing catches
Social and Trade Networks	Exchange marine products with fellow Orang Sea Tribe	Subsistence economy (marine products for daily consumption); marine products if there is excess to collectors	Build permanent trade relations with tauke; cooperate with government and institutions.
Production and Crafts			
Production and handicrafts: none. Production of handicrafts such as serving hoods from nipa leaves and fishing nets.	None	None	Production of handicrafts such as serving hoods from nipa leaves; fishing nets
HR and Education Empowerment	None	None	formal education and skills training in aquaculture or modern fisheries
Ecotourism Potential	None	None	There is no development of cultural and nature-based tourism; introducing the culture of marine people, daily life, and traditional skills.

The transformation of the Orang Suku Laut from nomadic-semi-nomadic to sedentary has been a lengthy process. Some Orang Suku Laut who disagreed with settling on land eventually chose to remain nomadic at Kajang. Dependence on marine resources and a lack of skills beyond fishing led the informants to decide to return to a nomadic life at sea. The following is their narrative:

*"If we are on land, we don't know what to do. At sea, we can find fish daily to eat and sell. If we move to land, everything has to be bought, while there may not be any income." Informant Tan, Interview January 23, 2025.*

This statement reveals the economic attachment of the Suku Laut people to the marine environment as their primary source of livelihood. The informant stated that the main reason for their rejection was the Suku Laut's attachment to and dependence on the sea as their source of livelihood and traditional values. The informants had no skills other than fishing, so when asked to adapt to a land-based environment, they could not do so. Tan and a group of six families decided to remain nomadic at sea. Tan and his group move around the waters of the Riau Islands depending on the wind season. During the south or north wind seasons, the nomadic Orang Suku Laut would look for small islands to dock their Kajang. On the islands, they make shelters from leaves and branches in the forest.

The Orang Suku Laut living in Kajang uses traditional equipment when going to sea. They use Kajang boats, spears, and fishing rods to catch fish. They use environmentally friendly traditional tools to preserve the sea and prevent overfishing. The catch is used for their consumption. If there is excess, it is usually used to barter with other goods needed. The Orang Suku Laut can sell it to the local community or fellow Orang Suku Laut. However, the Orang Suku Laut only go ashore when selling or buying necessities, then return to the Kajang.

The boats used by the nomadic Orang Suku Laut are generally self-made from wood in the forest. The roof of the kajang is made using woven mengkuang leaves. To prevent rainwater from entering from the sides and top, the kajang is installed with a triangular roof similar to that of a house. There is also a tarpaulin made of plastic or cloth used to prevent rainwater from entering from the front and back. The height is only sufficient for an adult to sit. Meanwhile, to make the kajang boat sail, the Orang Suku Laut uses oars, and a long stick is used to change direction.

The Orang Suku Laut withdraws from the dominant social structure of the Malay community, which leads a settled and established life. They do not pursue modern economic standards, capitalism, or the more stable mainland way of life characterized by bureaucracy. The fact that this type of tribe chooses to live at sea and rely on natural resources suggests that they are distancing themselves from the commonly accepted values of mainland society. Nomadic Orang Suku Laut are more likely to adopt a strategy of retreatism because they isolate themselves from the social and economic structures of the wider community. Merton [1] and Ritzer and Goodman [27] explains that the adaptation strategy of retreatism (withdrawal) is where citizens reject the goals and means provided. An Ocean Tribe that chooses to live a nomadic life is an entity that has retreated from the dominant role of community norms and goals. Retreatism occurs when the Ocean Tribe has rejected cultural goals and legitimate ways to achieve them. The Orang Suku Laut in this category does not seek to achieve material success as society expects. They do not follow conventional paths such as work or schooling to achieve success. Retreatism is often associated with groups that choose to live outside of the central social system. Communities that live nomadically without being bound by general social rules.

The contents inside the kajang are very complex. In addition to family members, it contains pet dogs that are useful when hunting in the forest. Sea equipment, such as torchlights or petromax, is always present in Kajang and is useful at night. The

adaptation strategy carried out by the nomadic Orang Suku Laut is a type of retreatism adaptation in the form of withdrawal actions. The indigenous people in Thailand and the Suku Laut withdrew from the dominant social structure of the local community, leading to well-established and settled lives [9]. The Orang Suku Laut withdraws from the dominant social structure of the Malay community, which leads a settled and established life. They do not pursue modern economic standards, capitalism, or bureaucratic ways of life on the mainland. The fact that this type of tribe chooses to live at sea and rely on natural resources suggests that they are distancing themselves from the values commonly accepted on the mainland. Nomadic Orang Suku Laut are more likely to adopt a strategy of retreatism because they isolate themselves from the social and economic structures of the wider community. Merton [1] and Ritzer and Goodman [27] explain that the adaptation strategy of retreatism (withdrawal) is where citizens reject the goals and means provided. An Ocean Tribe that chooses to live a nomadic life is an entity that has retreated from the dominant role of community norms and goals. Retreatism occurs when the Ocean Tribe has rejected cultural goals and legitimate ways to achieve them. The Orang Suku Laut in this category does not seek to achieve material success as society expects. They do not follow conventional paths such as work or schooling, to attain success. Retreatism is often associated with groups that choose to live outside the central social system, communities that live nomadically without being bound by general social rules.

Merton [1] and Ritzer and Goodman [27] explain that not all who enter retreatism experience failure; some consciously choose an alternative lifestyle. Merton sees retreatism as a form of escape from social pressures that demand economic success and social status. The main factor that causes retreatism is the absence of equal access or opportunity in society. Groups that experience economic or social marginalization tend to be more prone to retreatism. Retreatism can take the form of living in closed communities or choosing not to participate in the formal labor system. It can also occur due to psychological pressures, such as stress from failing to meet social expectations. Thus, retreatism demonstrates that not all individuals attempt to fit into the existing social structure but may choose to withdraw from the system.

The Orang Suku Laut, who have chosen to live a nomadic lifestyle, optimize the natural resources available in the waters and islands they visit. They resist government efforts to settle them, aiming to preserve the cultural heritage of their ancestors living in Kajang/sampan. The nomadic Orang Suku Laut believe that a sedentary life on land or the coast is unsuitable, especially given the demands of a changing way of life that they find difficult to adapt to. Those who live nomadically are not accustomed to staying at home for long periods. They also find it challenging to interact with the Malay community near their settlements. Feelings of being ignored, unaccepted, and underestimated—sometimes to the point of insult—by the local community have led them to return to a nomadic life at sea. Furthermore, their primary skill is fishing, which they have practiced for years, and they cannot easily abandon this activity. They use traditional tools such as sectionals and hooks, and their catch is usually sufficient only for their daily needs. Adopting a sedentary lifestyle would impose economic pressures, as their needs would extend beyond daily meals.

The Orang Suku Laut has intentionally or unintentionally maintained the balance of the ocean system. The Orang Suku Laut catches fish in a balanced way to sustain fish populations. They use traditional practices with nets and fishing rods to avoid overexploitation of fish. They avoid using explosives and poisons that could damage the marine environment. The Orang Suku Laut move from place to place to prevent overfishing in any one area. They do not settle permanently to preserve marine resources. They understand that overexploitation reduces future catches. They do not catch large quantities of fish for sale in large markets, prioritizing meeting their own needs over economic gain. They pay attention to fish migration patterns to ensure populations remain stable. They maintain a balanced food chain by not catching large numbers of marine predators. They have customary rules that prohibit fishing in certain areas during specific seasons. They collaborate with other communities to conserve the ocean. The Orang Suku Laut demonstrates that nomadic living is a form of adaptation aligned with sustainable fisheries principles.

The nomadic Orang Suku Laut are generally uneducated and illiterate. To meet their needs, the Orang Suku Laut use a barter system. To acquire tools, materials, or goods that are not obtained from the sea, they exchange sea catches. The barter system helps them obtain goods that are difficult to find in the places they visit. They prefer to maintain the barter system because they do not recognize currency. The results of bartering with local communities are used by the Orang Laut to make canoes, fishing gear, eating utensils, and roofs. They use wood, leaves, and stones to build boats and temporary shelters during the windy season. The Orang Suku Laut use wood and stone to make fishing gear, such as sectionals and hooks.

The nomadic Orang Suku Laut refused to be resettled because they were unable to adapt to the environment and social pressures. They were unable to survive a sedentary life like local communities due to the government's inadequate approach to the tribe, and some chose to return to nomadic life. The government only provided houses without providing assistance so that the Orang Suku Laut could adapt to their new life on land/coastal. Referring to Merton [1] view in that not all who enter retreatism experience failure, some consciously choose an alternative lifestyle. Merton sees retreatism as a form of escape from social pressures that demand economic success and social status [27]. The main factor leading to retreatism is the absence of equal access or opportunity in society. Seas experiencing economic or social marginalisation tend to be more prone to retreatism. Retreatism can also occur due to psychological pressures, such as stress from failure to achieve social expectations. Thus, retreatism indicates that not all individuals seek to conform to existing social structures, but may choose to withdraw from the system.

The second type is seminomadic Orang Suku Laut. This type of Orang Suku Laut exhibits two adaptation strategies: conformity and retreat. Conformity adaptation occurs when the Orang Suku Laut achieves the goals of the cultural community, such as earning a living and maintaining living customs, and follows socially acceptable means to achieve them. Since being laid off, the tribe has begun to adopt the market economy system that the local community believes in. The tribe no longer relies entirely on a subsistence economy but has begun to sell their catches in traditional markets. They followed the rules of the local economy by using money as a medium of exchange, replacing the barter system they used more often.



The Orang Suku Laut cooperated with coastal communities in trading activities and sharing catches. Conformity in the economic dimension helps social integration and benefits the Suku Laut community economically.

While some activities of the Orang Suku Laut demonstrate a strategy of conformity and adaptation, there are times when other activities show reticence. In other words, there are circumstances where the Suku Laut does not conform to the values and norms of the local community. For example, this semi-nomadic group of Suku Laut only stays at home during the north wind and south wind seasons to ensure safety and comfort for their families. During the north wind (December-March) and south wind (June-August) seasons, the Suku Laut descend from the Kajang and settle in houses provided by the government. While living in these houses, the semi-nomadic Suku Laut do not interact much with the local community, only with the local authorities and a few people involved in their economic activities. The Suku Laut have developed social and economic networks with other tribes by exchanging goods with fellow Suku Laut. For example, marine products can be exchanged with land-dwelling groups specializing in non-marine products. This exchange strengthens economic resilience by utilizing access to a range of resources. The Suku Laut tend not to engage in modern market systems and rely more on subsistence fishing for consumption or bartering with neighboring communities. This barter system is considered more relevant than using money as a means of transaction because these semi-nomadic Orang Suku Laut do not have high consumption needs. The Orang Suku Laut refuse to work in permanent jobs that would require them to live a sedentary life. The semi-nomadic Orang Suku Laut remain outside the formal economic system. Retreatism in the semi-nomadic Suku Laut economy is reflected in their withdrawal from the modern economic system and their maintenance of a nomadic and subsistence-based lifestyle.

According to Merton [1] and Ritzer and Goodman [27], retreatism occurs when a person or group rejects general economic goals (e.g., prosperity through formal labour or market trade) as well as legitimate economic means (e.g., steady employment). From Merton's [1] perspective, the change indicates that Suku Laut not only received prevailing economic goals from society but also began to employ means accepted socially and legally. Participation in government programs such as cooperatives for fishermen, fishing gear assistance, and the ownership of legal documents such as KTP and business license forms are also evidence of how Suku Laut has adapted more to the prevailing economic structure.

The third type is the sedentary Orang Suku Laut that lives in both coastal and inland areas. Sedentary Orang Suku Laut exhibit a conformity adaptation strategy. Economically, they have begun to play a role in the market trade. Whereas nomadic and semi-nomadic Orang Suku Laut rely on subsistence and barter systems, sedentary Orang Suku Laut have demonstrated a market-oriented economy by selling their catches to collectors. They also use currency, adjusting selling prices according to the local market. They are involved in developing local market-based economic systems with seafood processing and marketing facilities, such as fish markets, canning factories, or seaweed processing sites. This will create more stable and organized economic opportunities.

The Suku Laut are beginning to accept the concept of asset ownership, such as renting outboard vessels to intermediaries. Catch shares are based on operational costs, boat rental, and wages. Some members of the Orang Suku Laut who could not afford to rent a vessel work as fishing laborers on vessels owned by local businessmen. These members of the Orang Suku Laut earn wages from their catches. The change in the economic system from subsistence to market-oriented is inseparable from the role of religious leaders [28]. The intervention of community leaders and the Foundation. Merton's [1] perspective, this change shows that the Suku Laut not only accepted the prevailing economic goals of society but also began to use socially and legally acceptable means. Participation in government programs such as fishing cooperatives, fishing gear assistance, and ownership of legal documents such as ID cards and business permits proves that the Suku Laut has adapted to the existing economic structure. They have started to produce seafood or handicrafts, such as woven nipa leaves, to make serving hoods. These products could have been marketed to increase the tribe's economic income but were constrained by marketing issues. By settling down, the Suku Laut can establish an education system that introduces new skills to community members, such as aquaculture techniques or skills in modern fisheries, to increase their economic capacity. In addition to fisheries, they could develop agricultural businesses or sea cucumber farming around the settlement. Some Suku Laut people join construction laborers, port workers, or laborers in other sectors. Economic diversification provides an additional source of income and improves food security.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study concludes that the adaptation strategies of the Orang Suku Laut community in facing the relocation policy in Lingga Regency, Kepulauan Riau, Indonesia, vary based on their living patterns, namely nomadic, semi-nomadic, and sedentary. Each group showed different responses to Merton [1] social adaptation theory. Nomadic Orang Suku Laut adopted a retreatism strategy by maintaining their nomadic lifestyle, subsistence economic system, and traditional practices that preserve the marine ecosystem. They reject the modern economic system because they cannot adjust to mainland society's social and economic pressures. Semi-nomadic marine tribes practice a mixed strategy of retreatism and conformity; they continue to live seasonally at sea but have begun to engage in the local market economy through catch sales and barter. The permanent settlements of the Suku Laut exhibit a strategy of conformity, adapting to the market economy by diversifying their businesses and participating in fishing cooperatives and ecotourism-based businesses. The findings reinforce that successful adaptation of the Suku Laut depends on continued government policy support, recognition of local wisdom, and economic capacity building in line with their potential and culture. Good social integration between the Suku Laut and local communities is also important in the adaptation process.

#### **References**

- [1] R. K. Merton, *Social theory and social structure*. New York, USA: The Free Press, 1968.

- [2] I. Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An introduction to the history of the world*. Jakarta: Wali Pustaka, 2019.
- [3] A. Comte, *The positive philosophy*. New York: Hard Press, 2012.
- [4] G. Lenski, *Power and privilege: A theory of social stratification*. Capel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1984.
- [5] M. Elsera, R. Afriani, and E. Solina, "Singkretism in the sea tribe community in the Riau Archipelago," presented at the International Conference Social-Humanities in Maritime and Border Area, Tanjungpinang: Atlantis Press, 2023.
- [6] C. Chou, *Indonesian Sea Nomads*, 2nd ed. UK: Routledge, 2005.
- [7] G. Benjamin and C. Chou, *Tribal communities in the malay world: Historical, cultural and social perspectives*, 1st ed. Singapore: ISEAS / IIAS, 2002.
- [8] C. Chou, "The water world of the orang suku laut in southeast Asia," *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and-National Studies of Southeast Asia*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 265-282, 2016.
- [9] J. Cheva-Isarakul and C. Sperfeldt, "Citizenship and statelessness among mobile maritime populations: the case of the Moken in Thailand," *Citizenship Studies*, vol. 27, no. 4, pp. 530-547, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2023.2178638>
- [10] N. A. Abd-Ebrah and R. F. Peters, "Giant clam conservation in Sabah: A need for the appreciation of the Bajau people's traditional ecological knowledge," presented at the IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science, IOP Publishing Ltd, 2021.
- [11] W. Ariando and N. Arunotai, "e Bajau as a le t-behind group in the context of coastal and marine co-management system in Indonesia," *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 260-278, 2022.
- [12] Local Government of Lingga Regency, *The regional government had enacted regulation of the regent of lingga No. 44 of 2021 on Orang Suku Laut empowerment*. Indonesia: Lingga Regency, 2021.
- [13] Regional House of Representatives of Lingga (DPRD Lingga), *Regional regulation of Lingga regency Number 4 of 2022 concerning empowerment of the sea tribe community*. Indonesia: Lingga Regency, 2022.
- [14] L. Y. Andaya, *The strait of Malacca: History of trade and ethnicity*. Jakarta: Komunitas Bambu, 2017.
- [15] F. R. Wargadalem and D. T. A. Putra, "The relationship between orang Laut and Palembang in 17-18 Centuries," in *Proceedings of the Fifth Sriwijaya University Learning and Education International Conference (SULE-IC 2022)*, Atlantis Press SARL, 2023, pp. 383-392.
- [16] Z. A. H. Ali, "The role of the department of Orang Asli Affairs (JHEOA) in the development of Orang Asli communities," Unpublished Master's Thesis Universiti Putra Maysia, 2010.
- [17] M. Elsera, D. Wisadirana, W. E. Kuswandro, A. F. Chawa, A. Anggaunitakiranantika, and R. Syafitri, "The suku laut view of the settlement program in lingga regency," *Jurnal Sosiologi Andalas*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 187-202, 2024.
- [18] M. Elsera *et al.*, "Religious and Maritime cultural integration of the Suku Laut in Riau Islands, Indonesia," presented at the BIO Web of Conferences, EDP Sciences, 2024.
- [19] C. Chou, "The Orang Suku Laut," *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 125-153, 2024.
- [20] M. Boutry, C. Chou, J. Ivanoff, and C. Sather, "Introduction: Seeing Southeast Asia through a Sea-nomadic lens," *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 28-37, 2024.
- [21] L. Lenhart, "Ethnicity of Orang Suku Laut and acculturation," *Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia*, vol. 153, no. 4, pp. 577-604, 1997.
- [22] K. M. Prawirosusanto, "Sea tribes and Malays in the Riau Islands: A descriptive-ethnographic interpretation," *Indonesian Anthropology*, vol. 31, no. 3, pp. 108-115, 2010.
- [23] C. Chou, *Indonesian Sea Nomads: Money, magic and fear of the Orang Suku Laut*. London, UK: Routledge Curzon, 2003.
- [24] Community and Village Empowerment Service, *Lingga Regency population data by occupation*. Lingga, Indonesia: Community and Village Empowerment Service, 2021.
- [25] M. Elsera, "Sea tribe in Linau Batu Hamlet, Tanjungkelit Village, Lingga Regency, Riau Islands Province," *Sosiloglobal: Journal of Sociological Thought and Research*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 1-19, 2019.
- [26] M. Elsera, H. Hanim, Casiavera, and A. Valentina, "Social and cultural life of Sea tribes in Senang Island, Lingga regency," *Jurnal Masyarakat Maritim*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 1-7, 2022.
- [27] G. Ritzer and D. J. Goodman, *Sociological theory (From Classical Sociological Theory to the Latest Development of Postmodern Social Theory)*, 12th ed. Bantul: Kreasi Wacana, 2017.
- [28] M. Elsera, N. Rahmawati, and A. Valentina, "Intervention of Sea tribe communities by religious figures in the Riau Islands," *Journal of Society and Culture*, vol. 24, no. 1, pp. 45-60, 2022.