

The Sabah Factors in the Malaysian Nation-State Construction: Identity Confusion, Nationalism and Migrants

Faktor Sabah dalam Pembinaan Negara-Bangsa Malaysia: Kekeliruan Identiti, Nasionalisme dan Migran

HAN HUHE

ABSTRACT

The rise of Sabahan nationalism in Malaysia has been linked to concerns about the loss of autonomy and uneven distribution of resources within the federation. Sabah was granted a high degree of autonomy when it joined the Malaysian Federation under the 1963 Malaysia Agreement (MA63), but this has been eroded over time by federal government statutes and constitutional amendments. This has led to discontent among the people of Sabah and Sarawak, particularly over the distribution of royalties from the oil and gas industry. The lack of investment in infrastructure and public services in Sabah has also contributed to this discontent, fueling calls for greater autonomy and fairer treatment within the federation. The paper also analyzes the complex relationship between locals and migrants in the Malaysian state of Sabah: immigrants' economic contributions to the local economy, the challenges faced by the local community, and the negative perceptions of locals towards immigrant events. The paper concludes with a discussion of the controversy surrounding the federal government's naturalization of a large number of Muslim migrants as citizens through the IC Project (Identity Card Project) and its impact on Sabah's demographic and political landscape. The paper argues that the complex dynamics between Sabah's diverse population, foreign Muslim migrants and its federal government remains an important issue in the construction of the nation-state in contemporary Malaysia.

Keywords: Malaysia; Sabah; identity; nationalism; migrants

ABSTRAK

Kebangkitan nasionalisme Sabah di Malaysia berkait rapat dengan kebimbangan terhadap kehilangan hak autonomi dan pengagihan sumber yang tidak sekata dalam persekutuan. Menurut Perjanjian Malaysia 1963 (MA63), Sabah telah diberikan hak autonomi yang tinggi apabila menyertai Persekutuan Malaysia. Namun, seiring berjalannya waktu, hak autonomi ini telah terhakis oleh undang-undang dan pindaan perlembagaan yang dikuatkuasakan oleh kerajaan persekutuan. Situasi ini telah menimbulkan ketidakpuasan hati dalam kalangan rakyat Sabah dan Sarawak, khususnya berkenaan pengagihan royalti dalam industri minyak dan gas. Tambahan pula, kekurangan pelaburan dalam infrastruktur dan perkhidmatan awam di Sabah turut menyumbang kepada rasa tidak puas hati ini, sehingga mencetus desakan untuk mendapatkan hak autonomi yang lebih luas dan layanan yang lebih adil dalam persekutuan. Makalah ini turut menganalisis hubungan kompleks antara penduduk tempatan di Sabah dengan pendatang: sumbangan pendatang kepada ekonomi tempatan, cabaran yang dihadapi oleh komuniti tempatan, serta persepsi negatif penduduk tempatan terhadap fenomena pendatang. Penulisan makalah ini diakhiri dengan perbincangan mengenai kontroversi Projek IC (Projek Kad Pengenalan) oleh kerajaan persekutuan yang menaturalisasi sejumlah besar pendatang Muslim sebagai warganegara serta kesannya terhadap demografi dan landskap politik di Sabah. Ringkasnya, kajian ini berpendapat bahawa hubungan dinamik yang kompleks antara penduduk Sabah yang pelbagai, pendatang asing Muslim, dan kerajaan persekutuan tetap menjadi isu yang signifikan dalam pembinaan negara bangsa Malaysia kontemporari.

Kata kunci: Malaysia; Sabah; identiti, nasionalisme; migran

PREAMBLE: IDENTITY CONFUSION OF
SABAH PEOPLE

A brief article headlined “Sabah Athletes Bag 6 Golds” was published in the Sabah Times on August 31, 1963, the day after Sabah was granted self-government by Britain. It highlighted the accomplishments of Sabah athletes at the first triangular international games in Singapore. In addition to reporting the athletes’ achievements, the words did express the excitement and joy that Sabah had gained its independence as a nation. It writes:

Sabah stars competing with “Sabah” emblazoned across their chests and with the new National Flag fluttering among the Malayan and Singapore national colors under a bright sky at the Farrer Park Stadium put up an excellent show (SabahTimes 1963; Ken 2015: 174).

Such news coverage was also a very inspiring encouragement for its people, who could not help but imagine that the future of Sabah as an independent country was full of infinite possibilities. At least for the 16 days leading up to September 16, 1963, the date of joining the Federation of Malaysia, that was indeed the case. When the national anthem was first played and sung, its lyrics “Negeri Merdeka” (Independent State) would also remind the people that Sabah at that time had gained independence before joining Malaysia (Ken 2015: 174-175). These 16 days of liberation and the iconic events that took place during this period with the word “Sabah” provided the original rationale for the choice of identity for its people after they had “become Malaysians”. The idea of being a “Sabahan” rather than a “Malaysian” also persisted after joining the new federation.

In fact, this has been a point of contention for many Sabahans who see Sabah as one of the components of a new federation consisting of Malaya (as it was then), Singapore, Sarawak, and Sabah. That is, they were in partnership, not subordination to each other. Many continue to question the loss and erosion of Sabah’s rights as a result of the federal government’s actions. Much attention has been paid to the “Twenty Points”. Questions have been raised as to why some points have been repealed or its powers stripped away by the federal government. On the other hand, West Malaysians are constantly asking questions that embarrass the Sabah people due to their stereotypes about Sabah. For example, “do you guys really live in caves?” “Is the Sulu Army of the Philippines invading Sabah?” “Do you need a passport to come to Malaysia?” “Is

Internet available there?” All these issues on how Sabah are wrongly perceived, coupled with those on state’s rights raised by political parties, have led to a perception that there is indeed a federal-state divide. This, in turn, adds doubt and burden to the Sabah people’s choice of whether they are only Sabahan or also Malaysian.

To ameliorate this predicament, the federal government has made efforts to try to resolve this perceived gap. The actions include the recruitment of Sabahans into the Malaysian civil service, the Royal Malaysian Police Force, and the Malaysian Armed Forces; many Sabah students are invited to attend universities in West Malaysia, and vice versa. These are expected to help lessen misperceptions about one another and enhance interpersonal connections (Ken 2015: 176). In the 1980s, former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir launched a ferry project to bridge the maritime distance between the three Malaysian creative entities separated by thousands of kilometers in the South China Sea and named the ferry *Cruise Muhibbah* (Friendship Cruise). Moreover, in 1996, AirAsia, a low-cost airline with low fares and the slogan – “Everyone Can Fly”, was introduced in anticipation of allowing more people to flow between the two regions and thus get to know each other better.

The year 2023 marked the 60th anniversary of the Federation of Malaysia and the 60th anniversary of Sabah becoming part of Malaysia. However, there were still proponents of the notions of Sabah as one of the entities that make up Malaysia, and of Sabah being special. As recently as September 2021, a columnist for the popular news outlet Free Malaysia Today (2021) posed this ongoing question, calling it “Self-government or independence for East Malaysians?” The columnist, Joe Samad, began by saying:

“It’s that time of the year again when the debate in Sabah and Sarawak becomes intense and emotional. Between Aug 31 and Sept 16, social media is full of chatter, with talk about Merdeka (Independence), its significance or insignificance and what we have achieved, or rather not achieved as a nation.”

Joe Samad went on to cite arguments that have caused Sabah people’s anxiety and frustration: “Where has our equal partnership gone?” “Why is Sabah an oil rich state still the poorest state in the nation after 58 years?” “How can there be shared prosperity when Petronas has taken a big chunk of your oil revenue since 1974?” Joe Samad’s article emphasizes the confusion that Sabahans and Malaysians have been experiencing about Sabah

and Sarawak's actual status in 1963. But what is noticeable in his article and many other similar ones is that Sabah people have always taken great pride in the names "Sabah" and "Sabahans". The Sabah factor (and Sabah-related ones) has indeed hindered the self-construction of a modern nation-state in Malaysia at several levels, and therefore, this study incorporates the factors inherent in East Malaysia (mainly Sabah) into the discussion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study sits at an intersection between converging political-ethnographic threads. At its core, it is a local discourse of nationalism for a place: a site of what is currently an ethnically diverse and resource-rich eastern dependency for West Malaysia. It interrogates political and cultural interactions, demographic and economic mobility, and Sabah's cross-border migration. In this manner, discussions about Malaysia and its eastern part, both within and outside the nation-state framework could inform this research.

MALAYSIAN NATION-STATE CONSTRUCTION: THE MISSING EAST MALAYSIAN PERSPECTIVE

Over the past half-century, whether from the perspective of (de)colonization or from the perspective of internal ethnic structure, academic circles have produced extremely rich discussions on Malaysian nation-state building and interpersonal/racial relations. In existing research, many points to an analytical model of the Malay versus non-Malay and Muslim versus non-Muslim dichotomies (or the Malay-Chinese-Indian "tri-ethnic schema") (Lee 2004; Gomez 2007; Holst 2012; Daniels 2013; Olivier 2020). This tendency and fervor of research, based solely on the West Malaysian social-political landscape, seem to have put on the academic lens of a dual dichotomy for the whole cause of nation-state building in Malaysia (Saad 2012; Heng 2017). This makes most people further overlook the other part of Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak, which lies across the sea to the east from the peninsula. The land here, since the colonial era to the present day, has been nurtured and rendered a different social landscape from that of Malaya then and Peninsular Malaysia today. The ethnic composition and social tensions here, and the complexity of the factors leading to them, exceed those of the western half of Malaysia. The dichotomous analytical framework is far from allowing us to understand East Malaysia.

CASE STUDIES ON EAST MALAYSIA: THE LACK OF HOLISTIC VIEW AND THE SEARCH FOR MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

The established literature on nationalism and identity in East Malaysia (Sabah) are rather fragmented and tend to focus on historical and political disputes and economic strife that occurred within the framework of the Federation of Malaysia (nation-state) or within the territorial boundaries of North Borneo (Hoyle 1980; Ibrahim 2013; Carruthers 2016; Sayed Mahadi 2016). Most of these studies refer to the anxiety and unease that have been pervasive in East Malaysian society. In the eyes of many Sabahans, if the equal partnership status (or autonomy) with Malaya (now Peninsular Malaysia), which was written into the MA63 signed when they joined Malaysia at that time, cannot be restored, their proudest native multiculturalism will be eroded, and their local economic prosperity will be greatly compromised (Chin 2019a). Yet in the face of prolonged neglect and false promises (almost in every general election) by the federal government, Sabahans have lost faith in Putrajaya-based authority. Confronting such a situation of helplessness, the content of the long-distance dialogue among scholars in academic channels has shifted from the formerly heated political and economic arguments to a pluralistic and scattered variety of topics.

Reflecting on the starting points and where the findings point, it is easy to see that many studies on Sabah ethnic identity are in a sense an indirect dialogue with Malaysian nation-building (or Malay-dominated discourse). Interestingly, however, these existing studies do not look at Sabah and its people as a whole, but rather isolate the inherent characteristics and unique cultural legacies of each community even in the case of dissertations (Barlocco 2009; Gimbad 2020). A distinctive feature of this approach is that it avoids being affected by the dominant political discourse. A large proportion of these studies are related to the Kadazan-Dusun community. They are one of the mainstream groups in Sabah, but at the time when their neighbors were fighting against imperialism, they did not develop the same consciousness. Their politicization and ethnic formation also came very late and are thought to have appeared after their accession to the Federation of Malaysia in 1963 (Reid 2010); At that time, as the leading indigenous people, they began to spontaneously form a modern and politically motivated group (KD-based party had a certain influence).

Detailed contemporary research has also been conducted to explore KD's identity from the lens of self-labeling (Tangit 2017). They are considered to be the most culturally mixed group in Sabah, using too many labels; and their identity labels are fluid depending on the occasion. Additionally, there is research that interrogates the commercialization of KD traditional foods in the era of information technology and the industrial revolution 4.0, as well as its potential sociocultural function (which is thought to sustain the cultural identity of the community) by focusing on a traditional trading venue (Yakin 2022). A small amount of literature has looked at other communities and examined their identities from the ideas of social development (industrial expansion) and traditional industries (rice cultivation) (Mohamad and Aman 2016). Tourism activities/expansions and their impact on local communities have been widely discussed, but few have touched on social identity, for example, by foregrounding the connection between their social identity and the uptake of modern services and industries. In addition, after 1963, the transformation of urban-rural networks and national policies changed rural practices in Sabah, yet rice cultivation remains at the core of their (Dusun people's) daily lives. It is believed that rice cultivation and maintaining ownership of ancestral rice fields can support them and serve as the main boundary separating them from other communities. The annual Harvest Festival (*Pesta Keamatan*) also serves to emphasize their identity and that of their associated communities, allowing them to assert their presence in the Malaysian political landscape (Gimbid 2020).

However, as much as these are significant contributions to Sabah (local) discourses in outlining the changes taking place in their identity formation with capitalistic features and nationalization shaping their mindset and worldview, limited studies have been initiated to examine unified Sabah nationalism and its values from the perspective of non-state actors. In contrast to the "well-maintained" and static multicultural society of West Malaysia, the Sabah identity is often challenged nowadays by geopolitical and extraterritorial factors, such as migration and the intervention of West Malaysia in it, which lead to much more complicated ideologies and conflicts. Their implication on the future social structure and ethnic pattern of Sabah, and even to Malaysia as a whole, is likely to be subversive. Because their anxiety about autonomy and resources

is not only reflected in the concerns of the Sabah elite about the distribution of political power, but also in terms of the masses' anger at cultural practices and social reshaping manipulated by the federal government. For example, the crowding out of local culture by the peninsular Malay culture and the federal government's use of peripheral geography and extraterritoriality to interfere with the demographic structure of local society (issuing Malaysian ID cards to illegal Muslim migrants from nearby countries).

PROBLEM STATEMENT & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The identity confusion among the people of Sabah stems from intricate historical, political, and socio-cultural dynamics that have lingered since Sabah's incorporation into the Federation of Malaysia in 1963. Initially, Sabah enjoyed a fleeting period of autonomy, fostering a robust Sabahan identity. However, the subsequent integration into Malaysia sparked tensions between Sabahans' regional identity and their newfound national identity as Malaysians. This identity struggle is further aggravated by several factors: the diminishing autonomy of Sabah as outlined in the Malaysia Agreement 1963 (MA63), the inequitable distribution of resources, and the cultural imposition of a Peninsular Malaysian identity onto Sabah's diverse and pluralistic society. Additionally, the federal government's policies on migration and citizenship have profoundly transformed Sabah's demographic and political landscape. The controversial Project IC, allegedly granting citizenship to a significant number of Muslim migrants to influence electoral outcomes, has heightened feelings of marginalization among Sabah's indigenous communities. This demographic shift, along with economic disparities and underdevelopment compared to Peninsular Malaysia, has fostered a sentiment of disenfranchisement and resentment, thereby strengthening Sabahan nationalism. Attempts by the federal government to bridge the federal-state divide, such as integrating Sabahans into the national civil service and promoting inter-regional mobility, have yielded limited success in alleviating these identity issues. The socio-political fabric of Sabah remains intricate, with entrenched tensions between upholding a distinct Sabahan identity and integrating into the broader Malaysian nation-state. This study aims to delve into these multifaceted

issues by examining the evolution of Sabahan nationalism, the repercussions of migration, and the federal-state relations that shape the identity and socio-political dynamics of Sabah.

The above raises the research question of this study. First, what type of nationalism has developed among the people of Sabah, and what are its underlying reasons? This question aims to explore the historical and socio-political factors that have molded Sabahan identity since Sabah's integration into the Federation of Malaysia in 1963. It investigates how the brief period of self-rule, succeeded by its integration into Malaysia, has impacted the emergence and continuation of a distinct Sabahan nationalism. Second, how have federal government policies on migration and citizenship impacted the demographic and political terrain of Sabah? This inquiry examines controversial policies such as Project IC and other initiatives that have significantly altered Sabah's demographic profile. It delves into how these shifts have triggered political and social strains, as well as altered the Sabahan perception of identity. Third, how do economic disparities and resource allocation between Sabah and Peninsular Malaysia shape Sabahan identity and nationalism? This centers on the economic facets of the federal-state relationship. It scrutinizes how the unequal allocation of resources and the perceived economic negligence by the federal government have fueled Sabahan nationalism and demands for greater autonomy. Lastly, how do socio-cultural dynamics, specifically the interactions between Sabahans and migrants, mold the contemporary Sabahan identity? The article considers both favorable and adverse impacts of these interactions, including cultural assimilation, societal tensions, and the preservation of distinctive cultural identities.

RESEARCH VISION AND METHOD

The federal-state relations perspective, in many articles on Malaysian politics, is applied to issues of electoral politics, such as the political control and dominance of the United Malay Nationalist Organization (UMNO) and its umbrella party, *Barisan Nasional*, in the federal government, until its defeat in the 2018 national elections (Lumayag 2020: 195). Against conventional explanations, the study would employ the perspective to discuss

identity formation and nationalism in Sabah, East Malaysia. The fact that the state can be visualized as either a single community or as a series of races, or in the case of a federal state as an integration of many territories, expresses and constitutes the character of the Malaysia as a federation state. It is envisioned as a parallel comrade-in-arms relationship, with ruptures between groups, and even more so in East Malaysia, which is geographically separated from the other dominant half. It is thus clear that Sabah and its people are both representatives of broader nationalism and, at times, actors in local nationalism. Also, the new identity of being Malaysian was embraced by the people in Sabah after 1963, but there are certainly different notions about how and what it should be. Today, many indigenous people are reluctant to make a living in West Malaysia, where provides greater chances. One of the reasons is that they believe they would face discrimination there and have few chances of promotion. This is indeed not a mere perception as it was proven in my previous field experience. The identity of Sabah and its people have been largely determined by how they see themselves in relation to or within the Federation since its inception. Federal-state relations, identities, and nationhood of people are, of course, not fixed and given. The application of relational perspective thus allows us to observe the efforts of the federal, reaction from the Sabah and its people, as well as the evolution of relations.

The second dimension to be examined would be migration perspective. It explores how different patterns of local people's identity and nationalist ideologies and their application led to different responses from different ethnic groups in the context of the penetration and influence of unconventional migrant groups. Migration, especially the irregular migration, and its extensive interaction with the local society are inherent attributes of Sabah, both for historical continuity and geographical reasons. The study aims to move beyond the traditional narrative model of land space as the only fundamental framework to consider the non-national and non-state actors, as well as maritime ones in the construction of the modern Malaysian nation-state. Intriguingly, illegal migrants who were caught, whipped, and deported would return to Sabah's shores within days or, in some cases, the next day. They continue to return even after being

arrested and deported more than once (for some, even more than seven times) (Hassan, Omar and Dollah 2010: 119). Besides incomplete management by the authorities, another basic reason that has to be considered is the maritime route around Sabah and the factors across the sea. Not only does this pose a security threat to the local community, but it could also indirectly have an unpredictable driving effect on the development of nationalism in Sabah. Thus, this study also addresses the de-territorializing factors, which contribute to the “incompleteness” of the national narrative by neglecting identity-forming realities in peripheral territories. This approach will provide a novel yet crucial reference for the construction of the modern nation-state in Malaysia.

This research delves into federal-state relations and their impact on identity and nationalism in Sabah, focusing specifically on the historical and present-day tensions between Sabah and the Malaysian federal government. A multifaceted methodology was utilized, encompassing document analysis, policy assessment, literature review, as well as the inspection of credible media reports and official interviews. Key documents such as the Malaysia Agreement 1963 (MA63), the Twenty Articles Agreement, and various amendments and statutes affecting Sabah’s autonomy were scrutinized to understand their underlying implications. A thorough review of relevant research literature provided contextual grounding, while the author’s individual fieldwork in Sabah ensured the accuracy of the findings in relation to reality. In summary, the intertextual and cross-verification approach guaranteed the reliability of the findings through a comparative analysis of diverse sources. The analytical framework emphasized the identification of central themes and trends in federal-state dynamics and their role in shaping identity. The study investigated how the autonomy promised in MA63 has gradually diminished, thereby fueling nationalist sentiments in Sabah. Furthermore, it scrutinized the impact of federal policies on Sabah’s political and economic contours, and their subsequent effect on regional identity. This holistic approach offers a subtle comprehension of the intricate relationship between federal-state interplay, migration as well as identity construction in Sabah, shedding light on the key forces that mold local viewpoints on autonomy and nationalism.

JUSTIFICATION OF CASE SELECTION OF AND WITHIN SABAH

WHY SABAH: ITS QUEST FOR AUTONOMY

Sabah, as a state dependency far from the Putrajaya authorities and with its own unique history, is highly representative of nationalism triggered by pre-existing local attributes and external factors. In 1963, Sabah and Sarawak initially signed an agreement to join the Federation of Malaysia as a partnership, not as ordinary states. Soon after the federation was born, however, Peninsular Malaysia did not consider them both as partners and even stripped them of several autonomy rights and downgraded them to ordinary states under the West Malaysian government. Sabah is rich in natural resources, which has raised issues of grievance and greed, including conflicts over resource allocation between the central and local levels, religious and cultural conflicts with migrants, and job grabbing by migrants. Sabah people believe that the federal government’s control over their oil revenues and the inadequacy of the budget given to them have resulted in Sabah remaining in a situation of poverty. As a result, in recent years, especially near Malaysia Day (*Hari Malaysia*), the debate on East Malaysia’s independence (or claim for autonomy) has reached a crescendo. Looking at this situation and reviewing the experiences of nationalist and separatist movements in other Southeast Asian countries (e.g., Aceh in Indonesia, Mindanao in the Philippines), Sabah, as a place of high ethnic diversity, would entail the dilemma of collective action, such as whether to integrate multiple ethnic groups into a “territorial” state through conceptual constructions or to coordinate the various ethnic groups into ad hoc coalitions to act together. Furthermore, Sabah is bordering the North Kalimantan Province of Indonesia in the south and facing the south of the Philippines across the sea in the northeast. It is only an hour by boat from the nearest island in the Philippines and is not heavily guarded by the Malaysian armed forces (Gee 2013: 35). As a result, Muslim migrants from the Philippines and Indonesia, either legally or illegally, are often seen (even inhabited) on the islands (e.g., Mabul) or coastal areas (e.g., Tawau) in Sabah.

COASTAL CITIES AND THEIR VICINITIES IN DEMAND FOR WORKFORCE

Sabah, depending on its topography, has three distinct residential (or ecological) zones, namely the inland forested highlands of the central region; the river valleys; and the estuarine periphery/coastal areas. It declines outward from the inland center into areas of tropical rainforest and networks of crisscrossing rivers. While the rivers are the lifeline of inland regions, due to the fact that tropical rainstorms cause rapid rise and fall of water levels resulting in massive and destructive flooding, the range of population centers and commercial activities are mainly in the lower river and coastal areas (Gin 2010: 2). It was also a convenient location for trade settlements that developed over time into major urban centers, such as Kota Kinabalu, Sandakan, and Tawau. The alluvial plains and gently hilly river valleys here provided opportunities for agriculture and settlement.

Most of the migrants, after entering Sabah by sea, mainly move in and around the coastal cities and rarely go inland. Migrants from Indonesia, for example, end up heading to Tawau, Tanom, and other coastal areas in Sabah, even though they enter Sabah through the border town of Kalabakan (Hassan, Omar and Dollah 2010: 121). Most Indonesians come by ferry from Sulawesi, docking at Nunukan Island, then entering Tawau through Sebatik Island, where one could take a boat to Tawau and end up at the jetty right in the town. These areas are home to plantation estates and have become the main destination and place of activities for some migrant groups. To keep the plantations running smoothly, plantation managers themselves also often travel to villages in Sulawesi to recruit new workers with the acquiescence of the owners (Hassan, Omar and Dollah 2010: 122).

DISCUSSION AND OUTCOMES

SABAHAN NATIONALISM AND ITS CAUSES: THE CASE OF INDIGENOUS GROUPS

BORNEO PLURALITY VERSUS PENINSULA MALAYNESS

The Dynamics of Malay Identity by Mohd Othman (1983) analyzes the Malay identity in terms of how it differs from other identities and how it firmly establishes itself as the dominant identity in

Malaysia (and rest of the Malay world). It discloses how rigid ethnic patterns serve as the basis for ethnic identity in Malaysian society. Since Malaysia's independence in 1957, the primary ethnic groupings of Malay, Chinese, Indian, and indigenous people have been clearly divided within Malaysian society. Malay ethnicity is distinctive from others in Malaysian society. This is especially evident in the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), the Malays' preeminent political parties since the independence. UMNO views itself as the defender and embodiment of Malay nationalism and favors Malays as the dominant group in society.

The political ideology of Malay-Islamic supremacy, vehemently upheld by the ruling UMNO, is socially divisive in Sabah and Sarawak (Chin 2014: 83). The Kadazan-Dusun and Murut, the largest indigenous groups in Sabah, and the Dayaks, the main indigenous group in Sarawak, are primarily non-Muslim. More crucially, ethnic Malays in both states do not consider ethnic Malays in West Malaysia to be their kin, with another fact that both states' versions of Islam are much more tolerant. The population structure is largely to blame for this. Unlike West Malaysia, where Malays/Muslims make up more than half of the population, both states are relatively ethnically diverse, with no one ethnic group accounting for more than 40 percent of each state's population. In Sabah, around 40 per cent of the population is Christian while Islam is not considered as the official religion in the state.

Today, many Sabahans have received tertiary education and work in the civil service, as well as in business and institutions in the cities and towns. Yet they still keep ties to their home communities and upheld traditions by adhering to their *adat* (custom or customary rules in previous time). The amicable relationships between people of many cultures and religions in Sabah today are also a result of their traditional beliefs and practices. It was built on open area between lands occupied by different ethnic groups and was a place for barter trade. *Tamu*, marked by an oath stone erected during peacemaking ceremony and consecrated with the blood of sacrifice, is a neutral place subject to the code of conduct of its *adat*. No weapons, fights or arguments are allowed in that area, where feuding groups also must set aside their differences first (Pugh-Kitingan 2015: 275). Today, weekly *tamu* events continue to exist in thousands of places in Sabah, with the most famous "*Tamu Kota Belud*" having developed into a well-known tourist spot.

In addition, the former interpersonal trading and “blood brother” alliance system also contributed to the tolerant relationship between the local people. Such a brotherhood is common on the northern and western coasts of North Borneo, especially among the Iranun, Lotud, Rungus and the coastal Kadazan people, who each specialize in different life skills and types of work. The Iranun are good at making brass work and weaving turbans, while the people of the Dusun community grow rice, raise buffalo, and have access to bush products. As Iranun men maintained barter relationships with men in the Dusun community, personal friendships started to form. By cutting their fingers, putting blood drops in coconut water, and sharing the drink, close friends swore allegiance. They then will treat each other as brothers despite differences in culture and religion, and their children and descendants will be regarded as “close relatives”. The Lotud of Tuaran and the Bajau people, who exchanged seafood for rice, occasionally had a similar relationship. Through customary labor exchanges, the Bajau occasionally assisted the Lotud households in harvesting rice even in the middle of the 20th century (Pugh-Kitingan 2015: 287). Current ethnic relations in Sabah have been shaped by this symbiotic relationship between various ethnic groupings. Today, most Sabah residents are either Muslims or Christians. The lengthy history of Christianity here directly contributed to the cessation of headhunting and feuding. The Christian church founded functioning indigenous churches, clinics, and schools. Traditional religions and Christianity also share similar concepts in common that promote acceptance and understanding. And in North Borneo, ties between Christians and Muslims are often complementing rather than antagonistic based on alliances of friendship.

Such a shared community that embraces the diverse historical and cultural resources of the homeland Borneo has been diluted by the Malay culture and “Malay-ness” concept in the peninsula after joining the Federation of Malaysia. “Malay-ness” is based on the three fundamental traits defined in the Malaysian Constitution, namely, that a Malay is a person who professes Islam, is accustomed to speaking the Malay, and conforms to Malay customs. In this sense, Malay identity is highly ambiguous and contextualized, yet it still excludes those who are not Malays.

In the 1970s, UMNO and some Malay elites actively promoted indigenous nationalism under the slogan “Bumiputera” (son of the soil – the aboriginal

people), with the main objective of the political agenda to defend the privileges of the indigenous (Lee 2005: 89-90). Interestingly, this idea and strategy not only draws an intangible boundary between Malays (considered to be indigenous) and non-Malay majorities (local Chinese and Indians) in West Malaysia, but also created the division between entitled natives, Malays and non-Malay Bumiputeras (latter mostly in East Malaysia). While every Malay is considered as Bumiputera, not all Bumiputeras are Malay. Non-Malay Bumiputeras who are original and main residents in East Malaysia now become politically and economically non-dominant indigenous ones. The vast majority of Sabahans do not identify with the peninsular-centric Malay culture and see themselves as the opposite rather than a similar community, even under the unifying concept of “Bumiputera”. The Malay-centric Bumiputera concept developed by the ruling party of the federal government is interpreted by Sabah natives as an erosion of their cultural and ethnic identity (Chin 2017). This is also the concern of Sabah Muslims, who believe that their religious traditions are belittled as insignificant compared with the peninsula-centered approach. This manifests how the people of Sabah would like to enjoy the uniqueness of their own ethnic labels and distinguish the endowment of the land with Peninsular Malaysia, although acknowledged as broader Malaysians.

According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM), the Malays and non-Malay Bumiputeras have been grouped under a single Bumiputera category since 2013 (Somiah and Sto 2021a: 5). However, the people of Sabah have not enjoyed, in any sense, the Bumiputera priority declared by the federal government (applied mostly to the Malays in Peninsular) and have been suffering underdevelopment until today. In reality, a running joke among the Kadazan-Dusun and other ethnic groups is that they are second-class Bumiputera when compared to the Malays. Additionally, they also stated that despite the New Economic Policy and its pro-Bumiputera affirmative action policies, which were adopted in 1971, they did not actually benefit from it.

FEDERAL-STATE CONFLICT OF INTERESTS: HISTORICAL ENTANGLEMENTS AND REALISTIC CONTRASTS

The rise of Sabah nationalism, as we can also understand from the argument in the previous part,

depends on the degree to which social inequality leads to conflict between the state and the federation. The public debate subsequently heated up over several matters seen as detrimental to Sarawak and Sabah as partners in the formation of the Malaysian state on 16 September 1963. The starting point for understanding contemporary Sabah nationalism is the Malaysia Agreement 1963 (MA63), the agreement that established the Federation of Malaysia. It was signed by the United Kingdom, Malaya, Singapore, North Borneo (previous name for Sabah) and Sarawak and granted the last two a substantial degree of autonomy within the proposed federation (Chin 2019b: 76-78). The origins of this autonomy lie in the so-called “Twenty Points”, which were proposed by the political leaders of Sabah and Sarawak at the time before they agreed to join the new federation. Some of these requirements are: English remains the official language [Language]; The status of Islam in Peninsular Malaysia does not apply to Sabah and Sarawak [religion]; Control of immigration remains with the local governments of Sabah and Sarawak [immigration]; The local government enjoys a high degree of autonomy in fiscal matters, such as control of finances, development expenditures, customs duties, etc. [finance]. Many of these points were considered by the Inter-governmental Committee comprising representatives of all parties and, by agreement, it was incorporated into the new Malaysian Constitution based on the Constitution of Malaya with the requirement: No amendments to the “Twenty Points” could be made without the consent of the Sabah and Sarawak governments (Harris 2020).

The gist was that both Sabah and Sarawak states were in equal partnership with Malaya (then the peninsula) and would not be part of the Federation of Malaya that succeeded in gaining independence in 1957. This is a political promise of substantial autonomy inside the federal structure. The rulers of Sabah and Sarawak believed then (and even now) that they would be “taken over” by those in the peninsula if they did not continue to preserve a high level of autonomy. However, all of these supposedly autonomous matters, with the exception of authority over immigration, were effectively taken over by the federal government in subsequent years through bureaucratic regulations and a constitutional amendment that violated MA63. And consultations with two partners in East Malaysia were almost ineffectual. In 1976 Parliament successfully passed an act to downgrade Sabah and Sarawak

(MalaysiaKini 2019). Since then, both states of Borneo have resented the denial of their “equal partnership” status by federal government.

East Malaysian nationalists argue that they contribute more to the Malaysian Federation economically than they benefit from it. This is particularly evident, for example, in royalties for the oil and gas sector in eastern Malaysia. The two states generate 60 percent of the nation’s oil and gas, yet they only earn 5 percent of the royalties; the other 95 percent of the revenue goes to the Kuala Lumpur-based federal government (The Diplomat 2021). This inequitable distribution of resources and wealth has led to the underdevelopment of Sabah and Sarawak today. More specifically, of close concern to the general public, the state and federal governments have been discussing building Monorail Transport and Light Rail Transit (LRT) Service in the state capital city, Kota Kinabalu, and upgrading public transport in the rest of the state since 2012, but it has yet to materialize (Astro Awani 2016; Besar et al. 2020).

THE NEXUS BETWEEN MIGRANTS IN SABAH AND STATE BUILDING

Another important source of social and political problems in Sabah lies in its historical tradition of population movement with neighboring countries, mainly Indonesia and the Philippines (Saunders 2020: 8). However, both the Sabah and federal governments have been unable to address the issues especially the irregular migration for decades, creating additional anxiety for the people of Sabah. Recent statistics estimate the number of migrants in the state at around half a million, alarming numbers of whom are illegal, which is of concern to many. Although migrants have contributed greatly to the economic development of Sabah, it has come at a cost to Sabah society. While providing cheap labor for the timber, construction, plantation, and household sectors, they were also seen as a threat to society because a significant number of them were also involved in criminal activities. Deportations have been used as a tool in the fight against the negative effects, but as long as jobs are plentiful in Sabah, migrants will continue to return.

ACCOMMODATION OF MIGRANTS IN SABAH

It is a painful truth that Sabah needs migrants, but at the same time despises them. This is not a mere

perception. There is research has discussed the dilemma faced by locals in hiring foreign workers and states that while the demand for foreign labor is inevitable, their accompanying negative aspects are often distasteful (Kassim and Fazli 2004). On the one hand, the enormous economic contribution of migrant groups cannot be ignored. They have broad and substantial involvement in the local construction, agriculture, timber, and fishing sectors. They also have a tremendous presence in the informal sector. The majority of them work as small-time vendors around local markets, selling items like cigarettes, produce, and seafood (Kurus, Goddos & Koh 1998: 156). In reality, the migrant community is what keeps these sectors alive, and economic activities in Sabah would suffer greatly without them. Thus, their participate is crucial.

The threat that migrants bring to Sabah's security is another issue that cannot be ignored while talking about them. The statistics show that a number of illegal activities are still associated with illegal migrants, especially those living in squatter colonies (Hassan and Dollah 2005). Prostitution, bogus passports and money syndicates, smuggling of goods and weaponry from neighboring countries, and syabu distribution are a few of the known criminal activities in those locations. The residents view squatter settlements as an inconvenience and insecurity as well. The squatter areas are not only unpleasant and filthy because of poor sanitation, but they are also likely to spread epidemic diseases. Additionally, squatters are more likely to start and spread fires. Theft of water and electricity is also widespread in the squatter camps. If this statement is adopted completely, it seems unfair to the weaker party between the two – Sabah and its small business owner versus migrants. Put another way, there are indeed locals (including some employers) who utilize illegal migrants and squatter colonies, offering houses and mostly rooms for rent in squatter colonies as a way to increase their income. For those migrants whose employers do not provide proper accommodation, squatter colonies are the only option. Thus, the interaction between migrants and natives is not only about the former creating problems for the latter, but also about the latter utilizing the former in this case. Many of Sabah's commercial employers need them, but society is unwilling to accept and bear the burden associated with them. This love-hate relationship will never end as long as they are around, or the government does not address it.

The interaction between locals and migrants in fact is much more than that. As a result of intermarriage between natives and migrants for decades, family connections and business activities in the state have been increasingly consolidated (Somiah and Sto 2021b: 2). On the micro level, families made up of individuals with different legal statuses are fraught with many hardships (e.g., inaccessible to medical care and legitimate job) and uncertainties. The parents are unable to ask for help from their children's country of birth or their own country of origin considering the possibility of being prosecuted in one way or another (Somiah and Sto 2021b: 10). Over the generations and decades of neglect or mismanagement by different administrations, local socio-economic development has been entwined with this continuing anomaly (Kaur 2015), so it is hard to be uprooted or dismissed outright.

THE GOVERNMENT'S EXPEDIENCY ON THE MIGRATION ISSUE

Even so, this interaction pattern does not seem to be enough to stir up the entire Sabah community and disturb the nation-state building of Malaysia. What is unacceptable to the people of Sabah was the action of the then federal government to naturalize a huge number of Muslim migrants as "citizens". For example, a rather controversial program known locally as Project IC (for Identity Card of Malaysian citizens) operated between the mid-1980s and 1990s. Project IC is believed to be a plan by the federal government (or the then ruling party) to import Muslim migrants into Sabah to manipulate the election results. It aims to interfere with the electoral vote by altering Sabah's demographics to favor the ruling coalition, the UMNO (IPAC 2020: 13-16). The people of Sabah have also claimed that hundreds of thousands of migrants from the Philippines and Indonesia were immediately granted citizenship. Former MP Chong Eng Leong also revealed that Malaysia had imported 750,000 citizens under Project IC, and 200,000 of them were eligible voters (MalaysiaKini 2012).

Unlike other states in West Malaysia, most of original inhabitants in Sabah are not Muslims. The Kadazan-Dusun, with its largest population, dominated politics in Sabah at the earliest. The first chief minister of Sabah, Tun Mohammad Fuad Stephens, was a Native of Kadazan-Dusun. Since then, political parties of various races took turns running the local government. For some time after

1967, the United Sabah National Organization (USNO) and Sabah People's United Front (BERJAYA) came to power. The former, led by Tun Mustafa, was made up mainly of Bajau Muslims and relies on Muslim votes in elections. The latter BERJAYA had a more diverse membership but was led by a Muslim leader, Harris Salleh. During their time in power, these two parties brought in a large number of foreign Muslims to consolidate their political dominance in Sabah, and permanently change the demographic structure and political landscape of Sabah (Sadiq 2008: 49-51; Mu 2014). Harris Salleh once publicly admitted that he was implementing the plan of dominating the Sabah population with Muslims.

Between 1970 and 2000, the population growth of non-Muslim indigenous people (Kadazan-Dusuns, Muruts, etc.) in the west coast and inland areas of Sabah was 162 percent, while the population growth in the east coast areas was a staggering 1522 percent. During the same period, the population growth rate of Malaysia as a whole was only 113 percent, but the population increase in Sabah alone was 285 percent, which definitely entails human intervention. In recent years, the number of Muslim voters in Sabah has exceeded that of non-Muslims (MalaysiaKini 2013). That is to say, the existence of Sabah migrants, utilized by certain political parties, provides a little wiggle room for the Malaysian government (or more precisely, political parties) to win elections. Some of them also build illegal wooden houses in governmental area as a steppingstone to attain cheap public house, and those who have the money are also allowed to purchase indigenous reservations. In short, their "being localized" has affected the rights and interests of locals.

CONCLUSION

Sabah has a history of diversity and tolerance among different ethnic groups and religions. Since joining the Federation of Malaysia in 1963, Sabah has struggled against the dominant political ideology of Malay-Islamic supremacy upheld by the ruling coalition party, UMNO. This has led to social divisions in Sabah and undermined the state's traditional cultural patterns. In addition, Sabah also faces economic inequality and underdevelopment due to the distribution of resources and wealth, which fuels nationalism and calls for greater autonomy in Sabah. The complex dynamic between

Sabah, its diverse population, and the federal government remains an important outstanding issue in the construction of the Malaysian nation-state. The rise of Sabah nationalism is also linked to the perceived lack of autonomy and uneven distribution of resources within the Malaysian federation. The 1963 Malaysia Agreement (MA63) that established the federation granted Sabah and Sarawak a high degree of autonomy, but over time this autonomy has been eroded by bureaucratic regulations and constitutional amendments. This has led to widespread discontent among the people of Sabah and Sarawak, particularly over the distribution of royalties in the oil and gas sector. The lack of investment in infrastructure and public services in Sabah has also contributed to this discontent; thus, the call for greater autonomy and fairer treatment within the federation has become a key rallying point for Sabahan nationalism.

The relations between natives and migrants in Sabah is a complex and fraught one. On the one hand, migrants make a significant economic contribution to the state, particularly in the construction, agriculture, timber and fishing sectors. However, they are often associated with illegal activities and are seen as a threat to the security of Sabah. Over time, intermarriage between locals and migrants has also created complex family ties and intertwined the local economy with the diaspora. This difficult dynamic will be difficult to change unless the local government gradually addresses the issue. Finally, the people of Sabah have long been disturbed by the federal government's naturalization of large numbers of Muslim migrants as citizens through the controversial IC program. This program is believed to have been implemented to manipulate the election results in favor of the then-ruling coalition, UMNO. The influx of Muslim migrants has almost permanently changed the demographic and political landscape of Sabah, resulting in the dominance of Muslim voters in the state and negatively impacting the rights and interests of non-Muslim indigenous people in Sabah.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A debt of gratitude is also due to the anonymous reviewers who read the manuscript carefully and gave many useful comments. All errors are the author's own. This article was supported by the Annual Academic Research Project grant (2022-

2024) from Sichuan International Studies University (SISU), in Chongqing, China, for “Pluralistic Islamic Actors in the Nation-State Building of Malaysia: Boundaries and Structures” and constitutes part of the research outcomes of this project.

REFERENCES

- Astro Awani. 2016. December 27. DBKK's grand plans to transform Kota Kinabalu's transport infrastructure. [Accessed July 21, 2023].
- Barlocco, F. 2009. Between the local and the state: practices and discourses of identity among the Kadazan of Sabah (East Malaysia). Doctoral dissertation, Loughborough University, UK.
- Besar, S. N. A., Ladin, M. A., Harith, N. S. H., Bolong, N., Saad, I. & Taha, N. 2020. An overview of the transportation issues in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* 476(1): 012066.
- Carruthers, A. M. 2016. Sabah ICs for Sabahans: will it help? ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.
- Chin, J. 2014. Exporting the BN/UMNO model: Politics in Sabah and Sarawak. In *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Malaysia*. Routledge. pp. 83-92.
- Chin, J. 2017. Malay Muslim First?: The Politics of Bumiputeraism in East Malaysia. *Illusions of Democracy: Malaysian Politics and People, Selangor: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre*, 201-220.
- Chin, J. 2019a. GE14 in East Malaysia: MA63 and marching to a different drum. *Southeast Asian Affairs* 2019(1): 211-222.
- Chin, J. 2019b. The 1963 Malaysia Agreement (MA63): Sabah and Sarawak and the politics of historical grievances. *Minorities matter: Malaysian politics and people*, 75-92.
- Daniels, T. P. 2013. *Building Cultural Nationalism in Malaysia: Identity, Representation and Citizenship*. Routledge.
- Free Malaysia Today. 2021. Self-government or independence for East Malaysians? [Accessed on 18 August 2023].
- Gee, J. 2013. Clash in Sabah testifies to colonialism's lingering policy. *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 32(7): 35-41.
- Gimbad, E. 2020. Cultivating rice and identity: an ethnography of the Dusun people in Sabah, Malaysia. Master's thesis. Western Sydney University.
- Gin, O. K. 2010. *The Japanese Occupation of Borneo, 1941-1945*. Routledge.
- Gomez, E. T. 2007. *Politics in Malaysia*. New York: Routledge.
- Harris, L. 2020. 20 Points brainchild of Lo: Harris. Daily Express. [Accessed on 21 August 2023].
- Hassan, W. S. W. & Dollah, R. 2005. Penempatan Kampung Air Di Kalangan Masyarakat Filipina Di Sabah. Kertas kerja Seminar Serantau Kampung Air, Universiti Brunei Darussalam.
- Hassan, W. S. W., Omar, M. A. & Dollah, R. 2010. The illegal migrants in Sabah: Why do they come back?. *Borneo Research Journal* 4: 115-128.
- Heng, M. S. 2017. A study of nation building in Malaysia. *East Asia* 34: 217-247.
- Holst, F. 2012. *Ethnicization and identity construction in Malaysia*. Routledge.
- Hoyle, B. S. 1980. Economic development of Sabah, Malaysia. *Geography* 65(4): 284-296.
- Ibrahim, Z. 2013. The new economic policy and the identity question of the indigenous peoples of Sabah and Sarawak. *The new economic policy in Malaysia: Affirmative action, ethnic inequalities and social justice*, 293-316.
- Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC). 2020. The Sabah Issue. In IPAC Report No. 63: Stopping Abu Sayyaf Kidnappings: An Indonesian-Malaysian Case Study (pp. 13-16). Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict.
- Kassim, A. & Fazli Abdul Hamid. 2004. Public responses to the presence and employment of foreign nationals in Sabah: Preliminary notes. In *Proceedings of Seminar on Public Responses to Foreign Workers in Sabah*. Kota Kinabalu: Research Unit for Ethnography and Development, Universiti Malaysia Sabah.
- Kaur, A. 2015. Labour migration, irregular movements and regional policies. *Migration and integration in Europe, Southeast Asia, and Australia: A comparative perspective*, 75-98.
- Ken, D. W. T. 2015. The name of Sabah and the sustaining of a new identity in a new nation. *Archipel. Études Interdisciplinaires Sur Le Monde Insulindien* 89: 161-178.
- Kurus, B., Goddos, R. & Koh, R. T. 1998. Migrant labour flows in the East ASEAN region: Prospects and challenges. *Borneo Review* 9(2): 156.
- Lee, K. H. 2004. Differing perspectives on integration and nation-building in Malaysia. *Ethnic Relations and Nation Building in Southeast Asia*, 82-108.
- Lee, J. H. 2005. UMNO Factionalism and The Politics of Malaysian National Identity. Doctoral dissertation. Murdoch University.
- Lumayag, L. A. 2020. Foreign Labour Migration in Sarawak, East Malaysia. *International Migration* 58(6): 195-209.
- MalaysiaKini. 2012. Sabah's lingering misery over 'Project IC'. [Accessed on 23 August 2023].
- Malaysiakini. 2013. An Analysis on Project IC in Sabah. [Accessed on 21 August 2023].
- MalaysiaKini. 2018, July 28. Yoursay: Oil states left high and dry with royalty reversal? [Accessed on 21 July 2023].
- MalaysiaKini. 2019. Sabah and Sarawak downgraded by their MPs in 1976. [Accessed on 21 July 2023].
- Mohamad, N. H. & Amran H. 2015. Social identity and community resilience towards tourism development in Mabul island, Semporna Sabah, Malaysia. *International Journal of Built Environment and Sustainability* 2(4): 330-338.
- Mu, P. 2014. Berjaya govt let 73,000 refugees into Sabah. New Sabah Times. Archived from the original on December 16, 2014. [Accessed on 27 June 2023].
- Olivier, B. 2020. *Islamic Revivalism and Politics in Malaysia*. Springer Singapore.
- Othman, M. A. H. 1983. *The Dynamics of Malay Identity, Monograph 7*. Kuala Lumpur: Fakuliti Sains Kemasyarakatan dan Kemanusiaan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
- Pugh-Kitingan, J. 2015. Cultural and religious diversity in Sabah and relationships with surrounding areas. Doctoral dissertation. Tokyo University of Foreign Studies
- Reid, A. 2010. Lateforming ethnic in Malaysia: Kadazan or Dusun. In A. Reid (Ed.), *Imperial alchemy: Nationalism and Political Identity in Southeast Asia*. Cambridge University Press.
- Saad, S. 2012. Re-building the concept of nation building in Malaysia. *Asian Social Science* 8(4): 115.

- Sadiq, K. 2008. Paper citizens: How illegal migrants acquire citizenship in developing countries. Oxford University Press.
- Saunders, D. 2020. The friction of distance in Borneo: migration, economic change and geographic space in Sabah. *World History Connected* 17(3): 8.
- Sayed Mahadi, S. A. R. 2016. The transformation in economic and workforce development in Sabah: an analysis. *Journal of Borneo Social Transformation Studies* 1(1): 99-121.
- Han Huhe
College of Eastern Languages and Cultures
Sichuan International Studies University (SISU)
Zhuang Zhi Road No. 33, 400031, Sha Ping Ba District,
Chongqing, China
Email: huhehan@sisu.edu.cn
- Somiah, V. & Sto, J. R. 2021a. Sabah's unrelenting exclusionary and inclusionary politics. *The RSIS Working Paper Series*, (No. 334). [Accessed 16 June 2023].
- Somiah, V. & Sto, J. R. 2021b. *Sabah's Unrelenting Exclusionary and Inclusionary Politics*. S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies.
- Syarifuddin, N. & Fauzi Sukimi, M. 2022. Changes in Bajau-Laut ethnic identity: a case study of the effects of marine park development in Sabah. *International Journal of Mechanical Engineering* 7: 185-197.
- Tangit, T. M. 2017. Ethnic labels and identity among Kadazans in Penampang, Sabah. Doctoral dissertation. The Australian National University.
- The Diplomat. 2021. Malaysian Cabotage Policy Agitates Old Wounds in the Country's East. [Accessed 21 July 2023].
- Yakin, H. S. M., et al. 2022. Tamu: its roles as a medium of cultural identity preservation among Sabah ethnic in the era of information technology and industrial revolution. *e-BANGI* 19(5): 152-162.