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CHINESE MIGRANTS
AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF SABAH:
LOCAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH CULTURAL
COOPERATION¹

Rosdianah Yacho

Abstract

The clash of cultures that happened in Sabah since the 19th century brought positive physical and spiritual development until today. In this survey, the term 'clash of cultures' refers to the culture of the native people and the Chinese community. During the colonial period, the Chinese were one of the immigrant communities induced to seek a better life in Sabah. The natives could accept the presence of Chinese, whereas the Chinese could adapt the ways of life of the natives. While mingling and living side-by-side, they continued to preserve and maintain their unique civilizations and individuality. The Chinese brought worldly knowledge while the native people providing an open-minded and accepting social structure. This importance of knowledge and attitudes as elements that contributed to the development of a positive relationship between the groups. The idea of cooperation between both is highlighted in order to re-develop Sabah from the heavy destruction wrought upon it by conflict between colonial powers. It is significant even to study in order to know the level of acceptance between these two groups and to understand the positive relationship between natives and the Chinese community in Sabah-- in the present and future as well as in the past.

Keywords: Migrants, Chinese, Sabah, Malaysia, Development

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Introduction

The positive and mutually beneficial relationship between the local people and immigrant communities in Sabah, especially the Chinese, was developed through a long and dedicated process. Sabah is a land located in the northeast of Borneo Island² located in the centre of the Southeast Asia region. 'Sabah' is the pre-colonial name for the land called 'North Borneo' by the British during their intervention, subsequently adopted by other colonial powers.³ Even though this study deals with the British occupation, the term 'Sabah' is used rather than 'North Borneo' because the former is currently and conventionally used.

At the outset of British colonialism in Malaya, the Dutch controlled Kalimantan, while the area of Sabah was controlled by the Sultanate of Brunei and later other local powers. The main British goals of the Anglo-Dutch Convention of 1814 and Treaty of 1824 were to establish their control of the Strait Settlements, and their colonial activities in Sabah were relatively late. However, encroaching British control followed the familiar pattern of opening trading posts that gradually developed into possessions, in this case confirmed by the Madrid Protocol (1885), which apportioned local territories between Britain ('North Borneo') and Spain (which was allotted the Sulu Archipelago), and in 1888 Sabah was elevated to 'Protectorate' status. There were episodic instances of resistance in response to British offences against local sensibilities, but the only serious challenge to British hegemony was the Japanese occupation in 1942-1945.⁴

During the Protectorate the British rule was dominated by the business interests of the North Borneo Chartered Company, but the local colonialist became increasingly interventionists in local affairs and antagonised many locals. Periodic rebellions occurred, such as those led by Mat Salleh⁵ and Antanum.⁶ Following WWII, as a

² Borneo Island is currently divided between Brunei, Indonesia and Malaysia.

³ The Japanese conquerors of Sabah in 1942-1945 acknowledged the region as 'North Borneo', as did the American and Dutch colonizers of neighbouring lands.

⁴ Kennedy Gordon Tregonning, *A History of Modern Sabah: North Borneo 1881-1963* (Singapore: University of Malaya Press, 1965), 213-222.

⁵ Mat Salleh was a prominent figure in Sabah that belonged to Bajau-Suluk. He

Crown Colony - from 1946 - the policies were less confrontational rapacious and the relationship between natives and the British improved. Consequently, there was no revolt against British colonization thereafter.

This study focuses on the cooperation between the natives and Chinese during the British era, 1882-1963. Although, both had different cultures, it was not a big issue because culture can be used to establish cooperation not only within groups but also across cultural difference in a land.⁷ The cultural cooperation between the natives and Chinese can be established because they can live side by side with tolerance, understanding and respect. It means here cultural cooperation is the ability to accept and adapt others in order to create social stability and at the end will bring positive development in economics and politics.

The Natives

The main natives in Sabah can be divided into three major linguistic groups: Dusunic, Murutic and Paitanic-speaking people.⁸ The Dusunic-speaking people consist of the Dusun, Kadazan, Lotud, and Rungus tribes, among others. They are the biggest and most influential native group in this region. Murutic-speaking people comprise the Timogon, Paluan, Lundayeh and other tribes, while the Paitanic are known as Orang Sungai. There are many sub-ethnicities of the Orang Sungai, such as Idahan, Lingkabau, Paitan and others. Kadazan Dusun Cultural Association (KDCA) considered these three groups to be Kadazans or Kadazandusuns, but some of Murutic and

challenged the British over five years (1894-1900), with his multi-ethnic confederation. In January 1900, he was killed by the British.

⁶ Antanum was a prominent leader of the Muruts who was killed in 1917. His revolt was the last in Sabah.

⁷ Morgan Brigg, *Culture, 'Relationality', and Global Cooperation* (Duisburg: Centre for Global Cooperation Research, 2014), <https://duepublico.uniduisburgessen.de/servlets/DerivateServlet/Derivate37959>, 11.

⁸ The Dusunic, Murutic and Paitanic-speaking people were the main natives in Sabah, but the Dusunic-speaking people were the most prevalent. The majority of the Dusunic and Murutic-speaking people were non-Muslims, while the majority of Paitanic-people embraced Islam.

Paitanic peoples refused designation as Kadazans, Dusuns or Kadazandusuns.⁹

All of them have different dialects, traditional customary laws and other cultural traits such as festive attires and forms of dance. They are considered as egalitarian, cognatic societies whose subsistence is traditionally based on rice cultivation, supplemented by rearing domestic animals, hunting, river fishing and collecting edible and non-edible forest products. Among them, the Tanggara (Dusunic-speaking) people are considered more cosmopolitan, because their settlement is located in the coastal area, while others mainly dwelt in the hinterland. None of these groups have writing systems, and there are no scripts or written documents recording their origins. Their oral tradition, particularly their famous folklore narrates that Nunuk Ragang of the Dusunic tribe was the first nation to come and build a settlement in Sabah.¹⁰

Scholars have different ideas regarding the origin of the Dusunic-speaking people, but they all agree that the Dusunics were not the original inhabitants. Many of them believe that they came from China, while some of them prefer the Philippines. Sabah was covered by untouched jungles including the coastal areas and the people of Tambunan mentioned the place was still covered by jungles.¹¹ The Kadazans and those who lived in the hills set-up wet paddy fields wherever they can and if they were the original inhabitants, this kind of activity would have been done centuries ago.¹² Based on their folklore, some said that Nunuk Ragang was an ancestor while some said it was their first settlement in Sabah.¹³

⁹ Dayu Sansalu, *Kadazandusun di Sabah: Pendidikan dan Proses Pemodenan, 1881-1967* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2008), 54.

¹⁰ Low Kok On, *Membaca Mitos dan Legenda Kadazan Dusun* (Kuala Lumpur: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2005), 166-176. Ranau was their first settlement in Sabah in order to run away from their enemies but because of their enemies were still following them, so they continued their journey to other parts of Sabah such as Tambunan, Apin-apin and Keningau.

¹¹ A.G. Lampe, "The Kadazan." *Borneo Society Journal*, no. 3 (1962), 6-7. See also Rosdianah Yacho, "Cooperation between the Natives and Chinese Community in Sabah (1945-1963): An Analytical Study" (master's dissertation, International Islamic University Malaysia, 2015), 21.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Dayu Sansalu, *Kadazandusun di Sabah*, 47.

In addition, there were Muslim natives known as Bajaus, Ilanuns, Suluks and Brunei-Malays. The Bajaus were the second largest race in Sabah but their existence has received little attention.¹⁴ These groups of people can be considered as more developed because their settlements were located in coastal areas, which increased their contacts with the outside world. Uniquely, the Suluks and Bajaus have a written language.¹⁵

The existence of the Muslims influenced the life of the non-Muslims, especially in terms of religion, and there was intermarriage and cultural exchanges between the Muslims and the non-Muslims through which the latter changed their identity and lifestyle.¹⁶ In this case, we can refer to the Orang Sungai that belonged to Patanic, who refused to be recognized as Kadazans, Dusuns or Kadazandusuns because the majority of these groups adhered to pre-Islamic animist beliefs and (after the coming of Europeans) Christianity. Despite such reservations, the groups have always accepted each other and lived together. This shows that they tried to preserve their beliefs while fulfilling responsibilities amongst the human beings. In the history of Sabah, there has never been any serious conflict premised on race or religion.

The Immigrant Communities

The location of Sabah in the centre of Southeast Asia made it easy to access by people from other regions, especially from Southeast Asia. Although, it was an isolated place from the perspective of colonial powers, there were already immigrants there prior to the European arrival, including Filipinos, people from various parts of modern Indonesia, and Chinese from the East Asia. Some of these immigrants were not wholly voluntary. This study focuses on Chinese immigrants due their long history in Sabah and their greater differences relative to locals in terms of culture, language and thought.

¹⁴ Siti Aidah Lokin, *Perubahan Sosioekonomi dan Pentadbiran Masyarakat Pribumi Sabah, 1881-1963* (Kota Kinabalu: Universiti Malaysia Sabah, 2007), 17.

¹⁵ Agnes Keith Newton, *White Man Returns* (Kota Kinabalu: Opus Publications, 2008), 80.

¹⁶ Siti Aidah, *Perubahan Sosioekonomi*, 14.

British and Its Policy towards Sabah

It was more than sixty years, the British North Borneo Chartered Company ruled Sabah of 29, 437 square miles and administered by a Court of Directors sitting in London and a Governor chosen by the Colonial Secretary.²² The Governor acted as British agent towards the peoples that known as British Protected Persons.²³ The British presence was predicated on trade, particularly due to the existence of raw materials and agricultural. Its forests covered by remarkable value of hard woods and timber such as ebony, bilian and others such as the smaller trees that can be turned into charcoal, a material for which there is an unlimited demand in China.²⁴ Besides, its land was richly fertile and capable to cultivate tobacco, coffee, sugar, tea, pepper, cocoa, plantains and other tropical fruits.²⁵ T. J. Speedy, Surveyor-General in this land mentioned that one of the finest tobacco leaves in the world can get here.²⁶ The British saw the high possibility for profit, but this land was not enough professional main powers and even the unskilled to utilize the forests and lands. Therefore, they encourage the coming of the Chinese migrants such mentioned by Speedy that large numbers of Chinese, who were given assisted passages from Chinese ports, were now taking up land

²² “The Malay States”, *New Zealand Herald*, August 14, 1945, https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19450814.2.12?query=north%20borneo&items_per_page=10&page=11&start_date=01-01-1943&end_date=31-12-1945&snippet=true&title=EP,NZH.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ “British North Borneo”, *Oamaru Mail*, December 26, 1883, https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/OAM18831226.2.19?query=north%20borneo&items_per_page=10&start_date=1876-01-01&end_date=1920-01-01&snippet=true&title=OAM.

²⁵ Ibid. See also “The Future of North Borneo”, *Evening Post*, October 23, 1886, https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/EP18861023.2.52?query=north%20borneo&items_per_page=10&page=9&start_date=01-11-1867&end_date=20-05-1941&snippet=true&title=EP,NZH.

²⁶ “Life in Borneo”, *The New Zealand Herald*, June 4, 1930, https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19300604.2.16?query=north%20borneo&items_per_page=10&page=7&start_date=01-11-1867&end_date=20-05-1941&snippet=true&title=EP,NZH.

around 15 to 20 acres on easy leasehold terms from the British North Borneo Chartered Company.²⁷

In terms of social, the British managed to show respect on the religious beliefs and customs of the land. One of the significant things was the process of abolishing slavery. In this land, the outsiders such as Chinese and even the Europeans cannot own a slave but it was permissible for the natives.²⁸ This kind of action showed that not only the British had to put respect on the natives, but the Chinese too.²⁹ Slavery system was against the human rights, thus to deal with this the British cannot be hasty. Gradually, the British managed to fully abolish it.

In August 1945 the Japanese military forces in Sabah surrendered, having destroyed decades of agricultural development. In July 1946 Sabah became a British Colony and the North Borneo Chartered Company ended due to heavy destruction of the land³⁰ and the Company unable to deal with it. Before this, they already faced financial and energy problems to venture in this land.³¹ Once, it became colony, Sandakan was replaced as the capital city by Jesselton, because everything had been destroyed in the former. The British were entrusted to restore stability and development in Sabah.

The Factors of Acceptance and Adaption to Other Cultures

In this region, natives have historically accepted migrants, while migrants have managed to adapt to the way of life of the natives. In this case, acknowledgement must be given to the natives and the Chinese for their own willingness to coexist, presenting a sharp distinction to the selfishness of modern wealthy states that seek to avoid accepting migrants in their lands. The natives of Sabah – who

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Tregonning, *A History of Modern Sabah*, 190.

²⁹ Since the British came to Sabah until 1960s, they were committed to establish and maintain the relationship between the natives and Chinese community. They encouraged and asked the natives to banish fear and welcome the Chinese as brothers and at the same time, they wanted the Chinese to respect the natives. (North Borneo 1954 to 1959, November 28, 1957, H-GN-11, Racial Harmony: Address to Legislative Council, Pink File, Sabah State Archives.)

³⁰ Ibid., 223.

³¹ “The Future of North Borneo”.

had nothing according to conventional materialist understandings – did not oppose the influx of Chinese migrants. While cynics might say that the natives had no scope to oppose the British decision to bring Chinese immigrants, Chinese immigrants was never an issue in resistance to British rule (or during the postcolonial period), and there were no instances of conflict about labour rights etc., while Britain and the white Dominions were ablaze with anti-Chinese hysteria (as reflected in the Cape Colony Transvaal Immigration Restriction Act of 1902 and the Cape Chinese Exclusive Act of 1904, targeted to prevent indentured Chinese labours from undercutting the wages of white men in South Africa).

The natives' experience of the Chinese was coloured by their perception of the superior knowledge of the Chinese, which created a distance between them. Although the Chinese were migrants, their knowledge especially in agriculture and industry helped them to have a better life.³² For example, they managed to run businesses and work as civil servants under the British administration, which were almost inconceivable for natives, who found employment mainly as labourers in agriculture, fisheries and hunting, remaining for the most part illiterate.³³

Consequently, the Chinese migrants came with (basically) nothing and went on to occupy a superior social position to the native people, with immeasurably greater opportunities and access to wealth and resources, yet this did not result in hostility but emulation. A native leader, Fuad Stephens, noted that the right things to do was to emulate the Chinese, to use them as examples in order to improve standards of living among the natives³⁴, declaring that the Chinese were not to be blamed for the natives falling behind, rather the latter had to wake up and overcome their weaknesses. The Chinese were migrants, who ran away from their land to survive and they managed

³² North Borneo 1954 to 1959, October 23, 1957, H-GN-11, Racial Harmony: Address to Native Chiefs' Conference, Pink File, Sabah State Archives.

³³ Before the coming of the British in 1882, this land was isolated and the natives lived separately based on races peacefully. This was a main factor that may contribute to illiteracy, as their lack of contact with the outside world obviated the need for reading and writing.

³⁴ "Kadazans Form National Organization", *N.B.N & Sabah Times*, March 27, 1961, 2, Sabah State Archives.

Chinese. The ancestral animist beliefs of the natives were largely supplanted by Islam and Christianity. The majority of Chinese migrants in Sabah were also Christians, and this similarity in religion was possibly a factor to bring together these communities.

There were many events in history that show how similarity in religion and belief could bring positive impacts. They may differ in terms of skin colour, language and ethnicity, but because of religion they can unite. The establishment of the first Islamic state under the Prophet Muhammad S.A.W contributed to cooperation and toleration among the local Muslims in Madinah, the Ansar with the immigrant Muslim community from Makkah, the Muhajirin. The Ansar had all the things money and properties, but the Muhajirin needed to start from the beginning to have a better life. However, the Ansar wholeheartedly embraced and supported the Muhajirin alone, even to extent of sharing half of their wealth with the refugees and migrants, demonstrating how religion can abolish barriers between people. Furthermore, the Constitution of Madinah declared that the Jews living in the Muslim community were equal with the Muslims in one ummah.

In Sabah, natives and Chinese Christians lived in harmony with others too. They did not see Muslims as different from Christians or atheists, or indeed Chinese Buddhists as different from Chinese Christians or atheists; religion was an important aspect of identity and self-expression, but social attitudes were governed by mutual respect and peaceful coexistence. This was possibly facilitated by the fact that unlike most parts of Southeast Asia and indeed the world, Sabah did not experience the Communist threat. Consequently, religion was not galvanized as a military asset. The way in which political issues can produce or exacerbate ethnic conflict can be seen in attitudes toward the Japanese. Before WWII, the natives had no issues with the Japanese, but after the Japanese conquest they attacked and destroyed the land, while torturing and killing the people. For instance, in Suluk Island, Udar Island and Danawan Island where the men were captured and killed while the women and children were brought to Bongawan as agricultural slaves.³⁸

³⁸ Siti Aidah, *Perubahan Sosioekonomi*, 114.

Jules Stephens Pavitt, father of Fuad Stephens, joined the Kinabalu Guerrilla Defence Force that led by Albert Kwok Fen Nam. Albert Kwok was not from the Sabahan-Chinese migrants; he was from Sarawak. The Kinabalu Guerrillas failed to protect Sabah from the Japanese occupation. Jules Stephens, Albert Kwok and other members of Guerrilla Kinabalu were arrested, then shot or beheaded in Petagas as a punishment. While this insurrection was military and politically unsuccessful, it highlights the fruits of the long-standing peaceful coexistence between natives and the Chinese, which in the instance of war enabled them to mount a formidable opposition to Japanese occupation.

Following the defeat of the Japanese in 1945, the British reverted to their previous concern of restricting the infiltration of Communist influence in Southeast Asia, which was mainly spread by the Chinese. Consequently, they restricted Chinese immigration in the region, which had the side-effect of preserving the close-knit ties between the local people and the historical Chinese immigrant community in Sabah.

The Effects of Clash of Culture

Negative or positive effects of a clash of culture depend on the responses of the people involved towards the differences. Usually, people are accepting of similarities and potentially hostile to differences, which may create problems and challenges. However, if they can tolerate differences, they can benefit from that. This kind of situation happened in Sabah during the early period. The natives and Chinese were able to live together with a special relationship like relatives and friends. It cannot be denied that problems were happened in the process, but at the same time it helped the development of the nation and the land. It can be said that as human beings, problems are needed to shape and develop ourselves.

In 1947, the Rungus and Chinese, who were settled in Kudat district, gathered to build the Native Voluntary School. The funds for this school were raised by public subscription, with no assistance from the British. Hang Chin Siew, the Chinese leader donated

\$153.80 and nine leaders from the Rungus – O. T.³⁹ Mosohoi (\$29.00), O. T. Magimbal (\$13.50), O. T. Magani (\$11.00), O. T. Masakup (\$5.50), O. T. Majulu (\$5.00), O. T. Magambon (\$4.00), O. T. Marapit (\$2.50), O. T. Parong (\$2.00), and O. T. Bangalon (\$1.00) - donated a total of \$73.50.⁴⁰ These donations indicate the underlying differences between the groups and their mutual commitment to the common good; the locals were far outstripped by Chinese capital even as a group, but they donated land and labour. Although most of the Chinese community arrived as improvised immigrants, as successful businessmen they were already capable of building their own schools and sending their children to urban areas to study. Nevertheless, they wholeheartedly cooperated with natives to build a voluntary school in their area, providing a valuable lesson that differences can be overcome and people can act altruistically for the benefit of all.

Education is an important key to a better standard of living, which the natives realized through their contacts with the Chinese. Although they were owners of the land, the British appointed Chinese as civil servants, mainly due to their literacy, as discussed previously. British missionary schools provided education relatively cheaply or for free, but they were concentrated in the urban areas, while most natives lived in the countryside. Urban areas were inaccessible for the majority of native people due to the distance and the lack of transportation facilities. Consequently, in order to emulate the Chinese and provide education to their children, they sought to build their own institutions, which was only possible in most cases with Chinese patronage.

From 1962 the voluntary schools were gradually converted into government primary schools with oversight by the British authorities, one of the teachers had to have received training from the Native Voluntary School Teacher Training Centre in Jesselton. During the late colonial period (i.e. under the Crown Colony administration) there was a concerted effort to improve the standard of living of native people, with meaningful cooperation. Also during late colonial period, the clash of culture between natives and

³⁹ O. T. (*Orang Tua*) refers to the native chiefs or village headmen.

⁴⁰ Siti Aidah, *Perubahan Sosioekonomi*, 148.

immigrants had produced the new Sino-Kadazan and Sino-Dusun ethnicities due to intermarriage, signalling the deep collaboration between the groups and mutual support assistance. This was contemporaneous with burgeoning Malaysian national consciousness, which inaugurated the formation of local political parties with multi-ethnic membership and a local interest focus, such as United National Kadazan Organization (UNKO), United Sabah National Party (USNO), Posok Momogun Party (PMP) and Borneo Utara National Party (BUNAP).

In 1962 these and together with the United Party and Democratic Party merged to form the Sabah Alliance Party, membership of which was open to all ethnicities and religions.⁴¹ This party was the vehicle by which people of Sabah decided to accede to the Federation of Malaysia, led by the natives Mustapha and Fuad Stephens. The Chinese showed their respect to natives' leadership and they did not claim the more prominent position to which they may have been entitled by virtue of their education and administrative expertise. In this situation, it can be said that the contact between natives and Chinese over the previous years once more came to the fore.

Fuad Stephens was an influential leader among all Sabahans who displayed promise from an early age. During the Japanese occupation, he and his Chinese friends worked with Takehana a salt factory. Although Takehana was Japanese, he allowed Fuad Stephens to barter salt for rice and meat, helping many needy people get food. Under the British administration he also played an important role to help others through his writing in *North Borneo News*. While he devoted his life to helping others, he suffered from leprosy. His family was always supportive and tried to find way to cure him, but they ultimately gave up hope of finding a solution. At this juncture his friend John Dusing brought the good news of a cure he read about in *Reader's Digest*; however, sulphapromin was extremely expensive at \$1,000 for a suitable course.⁴² The family consequently requested

⁴¹ Herman Luping, "The Formation of Malaysia Revisited" in *Institute for Development Studies Sabah: 25 Years Later, 1963-1988*, ed. G.J. Kitingan and J.M. Ongkili (Kota Kinabalu: IDS Sabah, 1989), 11.

⁴² Patricia Jacqueline Granville-Edge, *The Sabahan: The Life and Death of Fuad*

a loan from the local Chinese entrepreneur Philip Lee Tau Sang, who when learning of the purpose of the loan declared:

“Don’t make this repayment a burden on yourself, let’s share the work and collect the money from his friends who will be more than happy to give. Please, no borrowing!”⁴³

Philip Lee had this kind of attitude because he knew that Fuad Stephens was a kind person willing to help others, even if he himself was in a difficult situation. Without hesitation, he went to meet all of the friends of his own family and of Stephens with Ben Stephens and John Dusing to ask for donations to help Fuad Stephens. They managed to collect the money, despite the endemic poverty in the region, including how the whole community valued Fuad Stephens. It was also an instance of how the deep ties between the local immigrant ethnicities, fostered over many generation, were harnessed to concern to for the common good. Cooperation between the ethnic groups to develop Sabah is still continued nowadays. Spiritual development established by them for many years ago is preserved and maintained by generations nowadays.

Conclusion

People always say that sometimes we need to learn from the experiences of others’ for our own benefits. Ethnocentrism tramples the contributions of minority ethnicities and prevents mutual assistance. Mainstream media discourse now presents migration, particularly of immigrants, as an intrinsically negative demographic phenomenon, which has not been true in most historical experiences. Natives’ populations are often enriched by the skills and resources of migrants, and both parties benefit from the humanitarianism engendered by mutual respect for human rights. Unfortunately, these kinds of attitudes are difficult to practice in our daily lives.

It cannot be denied that some resentment existed between both groups, despite their general cooperation. Tun Fuad Stephens urged

Stephens (Selangor: The Writers’ Publishing House Sdn. Bhd., 1999), 67.

⁴³ Ibid.

local people not to capitulate to populist racism, nothing that Chinese material success was due to being hard working, thrifty and industrious, and he urged his compatriots to follow their example.⁴⁴ The coming of forced migrations such as the Chinese community in Sabah brought positive developments to the land and its people. The Chinese representative, Philip Lee mentioned that the death of many Chinese under the Japanese occupation was to show their devoted to the land.⁴⁵ It was not only the locals had sense of belonging towards Sabah, but the Chinese too. If anyone experienced kindness in a place, they will appreciate that place.

However, such relations necessitate that immigrants respect the natives as the original owners of the land in order to establish rapport. The Chinese managed to do that through their willingness to adapt the culture of the natives. In the case of the formation of Malaysia, the Chinese showed their respect for political decisions made by the natives, even if they might personally disagree with such decisions. In the native's side, through this contact, the natives realized the importance of knowledge as to themselves and their land. It can be seen through the emergence of capable leaders such as Fuad Stephens, whom mingled and had a good relationship with the Chinese. If they looked the Chinese as enemies, it will be hard to go further. However, if they accepted their weaknesses, the Chinese can be a motivation to them because they will put efforts to be like the Chinese.

The Chinese escaped persecution in China while local people benefitted from Chinese business and agricultural expertise, and both played essential roles in the development of Sabah. In the timber industry and tobacco plantation, the British preferred the Chinese to work in it because they had skills and knowledge. Both were part of the export commodities that provided income to this land. Although, the Chinese were more dominant, they did not put it as a gap between

⁴⁴ Donald Stephens, "Dusun or Kadazan", *N.B.N & Sabah Times*, June 30, 1960, 2, Sabah State Archives.

⁴⁵ "North Borneo a Colony: Change in Status", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, July 17, 1946,

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/17991482?searchTerm=north%20borneo%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20&searchLimits=1-title=35>.

themselves and the natives. Positive progress in economics affected the natives too, because through it jobs opportunities arose. Before 1882, *tamu*⁴⁶ already existed and it still exists until now. Here it can see the natives and Chinese carried out their economic activities side-by-side. This traditional market place managed to survive because the varieties of goods and peoples there. It was impossible to preserve the existence without sufficient sellers and buyers.

It is hoped that social stability in Sabah can be preserved and maintained forever. In this 21st century, social media such as *Facebook* may become a potential method to challenge it. As demonstrated by this paper, the provincial nature of Sabah and its unique development created its harmonious inter-communal relations, largely independent from the development of the metropolis in West Malaysia, where inter-ethnic divisions are frankly more pronounced. Like other people, Sabahans in all areas of Sabah can access this social media easily, and those who do not like to see the harmonious relationship that happened in this region, they can use the social media to disturb it. For instance, political entrepreneurs or rabble-rousers can spread feelings of ethnocentrism, prejudice or stereotyping.

Sabahans must be alert to the challenges posed to their venerable and harmonious way of life by encroaching globalisation and modern communications, and they must work to maintain their communities if they are not to be atomised and blown apart by modernity. They must follow in the footsteps of previous generations in order to accept, adapt, respect and cooperate among each other. If a crisis arises, they should look at the problems carefully and deliberate before rushing to wrong judgements or conflict. In the era of fake news and malicious anti-social media, social stability can only be maintained by rational calmness and avoidance of blaming. The previous illiterate generations faced different challenges, including poverty and war, but they bequeathed a harmonious society to the current literate generation; if the latter choose to abandon the principles of their forbears, they cannot claim that they are more

⁴⁶ Tamu refers to the traditional trading centre in Sabah that sells many kinds of goods especially the agricultural products. (Rosdianah, *Cooperation between the Natives*, 81)

civilized because of materialist knowledge, rather they will have descended into digital savagery.



AL-SHAJARA

Special Issue

Contents

RETHINKING UNHCR AND OIC RESPONSE TO FORCED MIGRATION <i>Fethi B Jomaa Ahmed</i>	1
RAWA MIGRATION TO THE MALAY PENINSULA IN THE 19 TH CENTURY: THE CASE OF PAHANG, PERAK, AND SELANGOR <i>Fauziah Fathil, Wan Suhana Wan Sulong & Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf</i>	27
A USES AND GRATIFICATIONS PERSPECTIVE ON MEDIA USE BY REFUGEES FROM MYANMAR AND PAKISTAN IN MALAYSIA <i>Aida Mokhtar & Nurul Miza Mohd Rashid</i>	51
A SCATTERED LIFE: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ROHINGYA REFUGEE MOTHERS IN MALAYSIA <i>Munira Arshad & Arshad Islam</i>	107
ERDOĞAN'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND FOREIGN POLICY NEXUS: THE CASE OF THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS AND TURKEY'S ROLE <i>Suleyman TEMIZ</i>	123
FROM IMMIGRANTS TO SPORTS FIGURES: THE CASE STUDY OF THE IOC REFUGEE TEAM IN RIO OLYMPICS 2016 <i>Baidruel Hairiel Abd Rahim, Nurazzura Mohamad DiaH & Mohd Salleh Aman</i>	137
CHINESE MIGRANTS AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF SABAH: LOCAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH CULTURAL COOPERATION <i>Rosdianah Yacho</i>	155
MUSLIM MIGRATION TO THE WEST: THE CASE OF THE MUSLIM MINORITY IN INDIA <i>Zulqernain Haider Subhani, Nor Azlin Tajuddin & Nurazzura Mohamad Diah</i>	173
THE CRISIS ON THE BORDER OF TURKEY: AN ANALYSIS OF SYRIAN REFUGEES' EDUCATION, SHELTER AND HEALTHCARE <i>Ahmed Cagri INAN</i>	195
GENOCIDE OF ROHINGYA MUSLIMS: A CLASSICAL MODEL OF ETHNIC CLEANSING <i>Noor Mohammad Osmani, Belayet Hossen, Qutub Shah & Maulana Akbar Shah @U Tun Aung</i>	215
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS	237

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