



**COOPERATION BETWEEN THE NATIVES AND CHINESE
COMMUNITY IN SABAH (1945-1963):
AN ANALYTICAL STUDY**

BY

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**A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the
degree of Master of Human Sciences in History and Civilization**

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ABSTRACT

Tolerance and responsibility are important among society to establish a good quality of life. This study explores the situation in Sabah between 1945-1963 by giving special attention to the cooperation between the natives and the Chinese immigrant community. The cooperation focuses on the fields of socio-economic and political fields. It shows the significance of cooperation between both groups of people in the development of the region after World War II. Before the war, the situation in Sabah could be considered as developed. However, everything changed after the region faced heavy destruction through the war. A lot of efforts had been placed to re-establish the region. This study will then examine how the cooperation among the people can be established. Cooperation is one of the core elements for any countries or nations to create a civilization or development. It cannot be denied that cooperation is not an easy thing to bring forward in a multi-cultural society. Sabah consists of different groups of people and, as a result, cooperation became a big challenge to develop. Therefore, this study investigates the responses of the natives and the Chinese community on this. In this study, primary and secondary sources were used in searching for the information regarding this topic. The findings indicate that cooperation can occur because of the people and the situation of the land.

خلاصة البحث

نجد التسامح والشعور بالمسؤولية بين المجتمعات أمرين ضروريين للحياة السعيدة. وتتناول هذه الدراسة الوضع في ولاية صباح من سنة ١٩٤٥ إلى ١٩٦٣، وتركّز على قضية التعاون بين المواطنين، ومجتمع المهاجرين الصينيين في مجالات الاجتماع والاقتصاد والسياسة. وتشير إلى أهمية التعاون بين المجموعتين في تنمية المنطقة بعد الحرب العالمية الثانية. وقد كان الوضع في ولاية صباح متقدماً قبل الحرب، غير أن دماراً كبيراً قد حدث خلال الحرب، مع أن جهوداً كبيرة قد بذلت لإعادة تأسيس المنطقة. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استقصاء كيفية تعزيز التعاون بين الناس. فيعتبر التعاون عنصراً من العناصر الأساسية لأي دولة أو دول في بناء الحضارة أو تنميتها. فلا شك أن تعزيز التعاون في المجتمع المتعدد الثقافات ليس بالسهل، إذ أصبح تعزيز التعاون تحدياً كبيراً في ولاية صباح لكونها مكونة من مجموعات مختلفة. لذلك، تستقصى هذه الدراسة الردود من المواطنين والجالية الصينية في هذا الشأن. وقد تمّ استخدام المصادر الأولية والثانوية في هذه الدراسة من أجل الحصول على المعلومات المتعلقة بها، وتشير النتائج إلى أن الناس، وحالة الأرض هما العاملان المؤثران في تعزيز التعاون.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (History and Civilization).

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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IN SABAH (1945-1963): AN ANALYTICAL STUDY**

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This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved mother and father

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Baker (1965) claims that Borneo is the third largest island in the world, after Greenland and New Guinea. This island is surrounded by South China Sea in the west, Sulu Sea in the northeast and Celebes Sea in the east. North Borneo is part of Borneo Island located at its northern tip and covers about 10% of the total area. North Borneo is situated in the centre of South East Asia, some 1,000 miles from Singapore, 1,200 miles from Hong Kong, 600 miles from Manila and 1,500 miles from Port Darwin, Australia. Its borders share land property with Sarawak and Kalimantan (please refer to Appendix I). The geographical location of the land is a mixture of mountains, beaches and tropical rain forest.

North Borneo is now known as Sabah. It is believed that the name Sabah is given by the local people but under the British rule, it came to be known as North Borneo. After the formation of Malaysia, British North Borneo gained back its original name, Sabah.

On 16 September 1963, Sabah was officially declared as being a part of Malaysia together with the territories of Malaya, Singapore and Sarawak. Currently, Malaysia consists of 13 states and three federal territories; and Sabah is the second largest state among them. Sabahans are multi-ethnic with a total of 32 native groups that speak 50 regional languages and 80 ethnic dialects.

Sabah was administered by British Chartered Company from 1881 until 1941. Subsequently, it was ruled by the Japanese army for a short period (the end of 1941-August 1945). After Japanese defeat, the British came back to rule for a short period

before the formation of Malaysia. Each successive administration had its peculiar policies and objectives on the stability and progress of Sabah.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this study is to examine the development of Sabah after World War II until the formation of Malaysia in 1963. The development of Sabah with its cooperation between the natives and the Chinese community is the key focus of this study. Before the coming of the Japanese to Sabah, the Chinese already had their settlement in the region living together with the natives. Even during the Japanese occupation, the natives and Chinese joined in the fight against the Japanese. After the Japanese surrendered, their cooperation remained cordial - which meant they still lived in peace and harmony. Therefore, this study focuses on their harmonious relationship towards the development of Sabah.

The condition of Sabah was dreadful during war time when it suffered heavy destruction. It is believed that such damages were done to other parts of the British Commonwealth, including Burma (Myanmar) which was also utterly devastated (Tregonning, 1965). The present study shows that Sabah faced the most serious consequence in comparison to other countries in Southeast Asia after World War II. Thus, the restructuring of Sabah in immediate terms was highly needed in every aspect of life especially its physical development. One of the ways to develop Sabah is to spread unity and integrity among the people without discriminating against their different backgrounds.

Illiteracy was one of the big problems faced by the natives before and after World War II. Most of them could not read or write because of the difficulty in attending school. The situation of the Chinese community was different, they were

literate. The coming of Chinese in Sabah brought significant benefit to the natives. In the period after World War II, the Chinese not only gave education to their people, but at the same time helped the natives to gain education. It made the natives realize the importance of knowledge.

The time frame for this study is from 1945 until 1963; the period when the British regained control over the region from the Japanese until the formation of Malaysia in September 1963. During this period, the people of Sabah strategized a plan for re-establishment and development by seeking help from the British and Chinese. This development was carried out by the indigenous people and the Chinese community during the time when British colonial armies had regained their power to rule. The spirit in uniting the ties between the natives and the Chinese community as a voice of Sabah was supported by the colonial power. This union however faced several difficulties among Sabahans who had differences in their practices of cultures, religions and languages since they came from multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-lingual backgrounds. These factors resulted in a slow pace of development for Sabahans.

I confine my study to the native and non-native ethnicities of Sabah's demography. This study focuses on Kadazan, Dusun and Rungus native-ethnic groups that settle in the area of Kudat, West Coast and Interior Division¹ while Chinese is the non-native group that will be highlighted. This study includes a sizeable number of Chinese who were employed in business, education, politics, civil service and other jobs from 1945-1963. Although the ratio of Chinese population was small in the region, they played a major role in leading and controlling the economy of the state.

¹ Sabah divided into five administrative divisions which are Kudat, West Coast, Interior, Sandakan and Tawau Division. Among these five divisions, Kudat, West Coast and Interior Division are the main settlements for the Dusunic speakers.

They gave financial support to natives to develop their education system and fishing industry. In addition, the natives and Chinese community organized an alliance party for the sake of a better environment for all.

The relationship study between the natives and the Chinese groups towards the development of Sabah in this period is important because Sabah is a multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-lingual state. Inter-marriage is occurred among the natives and Chinese community and its produced new race, Sino-Kadazan. Huge populations of Sabah are practicing traditional belief while others are Christians and Muslims. However, they manage to live together without any prejudice. This scenario makes Sabah a unique place in the region.

1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aims to:

- 1) Identify factors that lead to cooperation between the natives and the Chinese community.
- 2) Study the cooperation between the natives and the Chinese community in building Sabah.
- 3) Examine the degree of cooperation that have achieved in the field of socio-economy, and politics.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research attempts to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the factors that contributed to the cooperation between the natives and Chinese?

- 2) How did the natives and Chinese cooperate in the development of Sabah (1945-1963)?
- 3) How has cooperation been achieved in the field of politics and socio-economy?

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The end of World War II brought much destruction to the region of Sabah. Subsequently, Sabah was under the rule of British North Borneo Company. To re-establish Sabah, both communities, i.e. the natives and the Chinese groups had taken part without any prejudice to re-build the state.

This study is important because there is no comprehensive study giving details of the cooperation between the natives and the Chinese towards the development of Sabah. Most of the studies focused only on one community, either the natives or the Chinese. In this study, I encompass both communities in their effort to develop the region.

This study also highlights the spirit of unity and tolerance between multi-cultural and multi-racial groups and shows how they cooperated with one another without any prejudice of language, culture, religion, colour and race.

The post-World War II effects on socio-economic and cultural development have not been properly studied before. Therefore, in this study, I would like to highlight the socio-economic and political history of Sabah from 1945-1963. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the efforts made here would provide an impetus for others to conduct further research on the history of the development of Sabah.

1.5 LITERATURE REVIEW

Various modern studies deal with the development of Sabah after World War II. However, none of them has studied the issue of cooperation between the natives and the Chinese towards the development of the region in post-war period. This study will examine the broad issues which cover socio-economic and political cooperation between the natives and Chinese within the time frame.

The Colony of North Borneo 11 March to 23 March 1948: UNESCO Post-War Educational War is a report on the colony of North Borneo provided by the UNESCO Archive, UNECSCO/REC/Rep.5. It is called UNESCO Mission to North Borneo that took eight days, 11 to 19 March 1948.² This report is important because it provides much information about the educational system in this region including the schools, teachers, budget and others. It also mentions the adult education system. It focuses on the area of Jesselton, Menggatal, Sandakan, Tamparuli, Tuaran, Papar and Penampang. In addition, the report mentions well-known political and academic figures in the region such as the governor, E. F. Twining and the director of education, R.E. Perry. In terms of education development, this report is a good source of reference because it shows the development of education system in the region before World War II until 1948. This report also provides information regarding the natives, Chinese and the British government.

M.H Baker's *Sabah the First Ten Years as a Colony, 1946-1956*,³ discusses the socio-economic and political conditions of the region. He gives detailed information of the education system and the economic development of trade, commerce, industry

² Even though, the mission only took eight days, the transportation problem made them stay there till 23rd March. Due to that, the report was dated 23rd instead of 19th. See UNESCO/REG/Rep.5., *The colony of North Borneo, 11 to 23 March 1948: UNESCO post-war education survey* (Paris: 1948), 1.

³ Baker, M.H., *Sabah the First Ten Years as a Colony, 1946-1956* (Singapore: University of Singapore, 1965).

and agriculture in Sabah. He also explains the situation of the Kadazans and the Chinese during that period. In terms of sources, Baker depends on Government Gazette and newspaper reports. He uses the new terminology for Kadazan, which is Kedazan.

K.G Tregonning's *Under Chartered Company Rule: North Borneo, 1881-1946*,⁴ covers all aspects of life of the people in the region for about sixty-five years. It is a valuable source of reference for detailed and lengthy information on the development of Sabah. It illustrates the history of socio-economic condition of the people during World War II. The author frequently uses the original sources and consults the archival material such as British North Borneo (Chartered) Company Papers, which are located in London and some of them in Jesselton⁵. Besides, the book includes information from British Government Papers, Parliamentary Papers and Parliamentary Debates that are housed in Public Records Office. Even though this book deals with pre-1946, it is important to know the situation of this time.

His other book, entitled *A History of Modern Sabah: North Borneo 1881-1963*,⁶ covers all the aspects of people's life in Sabah including socio-economic and political developments. It is an important source because the author consults the primary sources on the documents from the British North Borneo (Chartered) Company Papers and British Government Papers that were housed in Colonial Office Library in London and Jesselton Archives. The book not only covers the development of Sabah before and after World War II, but also includes the condition of the region during the destruction of Sabah after the war. It also provides details of economic,

⁴Tregonning, K.G., *Under Chartered Company Rule: North Borneo 1881-1946* (Singapore: University of Malaya Press, 1958).

⁵ Jesselton is the name for Kota Kinabalu under the British rule.

⁶ Tregonning, K.G., *A History of Modern Sabah: North Borneo 1881-1963* (Singapore: University of Malaya Press, 1965).

political condition, administration, education, health, lives of people and administrative set up in the region. Besides the archival materials, several interviews with important people like R.K. Hardwick who drew freely on his fifty years of knowledge on Borneo is also included. In addition, W.K.C. Wookey read the first draft of this book and gave his remarks. Hence, this work is crucial for my study.

Cecilia Leong's *Sabah the First 100 Years*,⁷ is an important source for the economic cooperation between the natives and Chinese in the growing fishing industry which was made possible because of the British Plan of Reconstruction and Development in the region⁸. Before World War II, this industry was fully controlled by the Chinese *towkays* (business owners) who gave financial support both to the natives and Chinese communities. It also sheds light on the socio-political and economic condition of the people as well as the emergence of political parties of the ethnic background towards the formation of Malaysia. However, she did not explain the issue that she raises in detail.

Danny Wong's *The Transformation of Immigrant Society: A study of the Chinese of Sabah*,⁹ examines the arrival of the Chinese community in Sabah from 1881. This book is important because it provides detailed information of this community until 1945. It also shows how the British brought this community to Sabah and how they struggled for survival. The book also sheds light on the cooperation between the natives and Chinese before World War II, especially during the Japanese occupation. Although, it deals with pre-1945, it is still relevant to this research because it includes interesting information regarding the population of Chinese in

⁷ Leong, Cecilia., *Sabah the First 100 Years* (Kuala Lumpur: Percetakan Nan Yang Muda, 1984).

⁸ Through the idea of reconstruction and development, there were many plans carried out to improve the situation of Sabah, e.g, the region received \$3 million as war damage compensation and \$2.7 million was given as grants-in-aid up to the end of 1950.

⁹ Wong, Denny., *The Transformation of Immigrant Society: A Study of the Chinese of Sabah* (London: Asean Academic Press, 1998).

1951. The reason behind studying Chinese history in pre-World War period is to examine the purpose of their arrival and the reaction of the natives.

Ong Puay Liu's *Packaging Myths for Tourism: The Rungus of Kudat*,¹⁰ is a tourist guide that focuses on Rungus ethnic. The book is suitable for this study because it highlights the British rule in Sabah from 1945 to 1963. It also gives valuable information regarding the Japanese Occupation and the formation of Malaysia. He mentions the important role played by E.F Twining, Governor of North Borneo, who introduced several plans to rebuild the region such as the development of trade, medical services, education, transportation, water and electricity supplies. He also clarifies the improvement on economy through the agricultural sector. On politics, he describes that the development of political party in this land only began in 1960. In terms of sources, the author employed library research for his studies because most of his information came from books and articles. The author used valid sources to elaborate the historical part of his work and he also interviewed the Rungus people to gain information.

Zawawi Ibrahim's *Voices of the Crocker Range Indigenous Communities Sabah: Social Narratives of Transition in Tambunan*¹¹ and its Neighbour,¹² describes the lives, culture and traditional knowledge of medicine of the natives in the area of Tambunan. It gives interesting information regarding the consequences of inter-marriages between the Dusuns and the Chinese which helped in raising the economic status of the Dusuns. Besides inter-marriages, the Dusuns are also involved actively in

¹⁰ Ong, P.L., *Packaging Myths for Tourism: The Rungus of Kudat* (Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2008).

¹¹ It is located in the Interior Division of Sabah and the population consists more of Dusuns.

¹² Zawawi Ibrahim, *Voices of the Crocker Range Indigenous Communities Sabah: Social Narratives of Transition in Tambunan and its Neighbours* (Sarawak: University Malaysia Sarawak, 2001).

business and other commercial activities. He also argues there is no difference between both communities and because of that, the term ‘KadazanDusun’ emerged.

Dayu Sansalu’s *Kadazandusun di Sabah: Pendidikan dan Proses Pemodenan, 1881-1967*,¹³ focuses on the lives of Kadazandusun community before and after World War II by referring to the lives, cultural, socio-economic and political aspects. The interesting point in this book is about the cooperation between the natives and Chinese in the establishment of Sabah Alliance Party.¹⁴ This alliance is joined by United Sabah National Organization (USNO), United Kadazan Organization (UNKO) and Borneo Utara National Party (BUNAP). Most of the information regarding the alliance is based on newspaper reports. Sansalu interviewed a few people to get information regarding the condition of Sabah. However, the term “*Kadazandusun*” is mixed with the term “*Kadazan*” and “*Dusun*”. The author gives no comprehensible picture on this issue.

Hanizah Hj. Idris’s *Perdagangan Pelabuhan di Borneo*,¹⁵ discusses the development of harbour and commerce in Brunei, Sarawak and North Borneo from 1880-1963. In terms of economic development, it provides valuable information about local and international commerce, import and export, and seaborne trade. In this study, it shows the connection between the harbours and the economic development of the region. The re-development of North Borneo is contributed by the British plan known as the *Reconstruction and Development Plan*. This book also includes graphs and tables to show how the economic condition in North Borneo changed in the pre and

¹³Dayu Sansalu, *Kadazandusun di Sabah: Pendidikan dan Proses Pemodenan, 1881-1967* (Selangor: Dawama, 2008).

¹⁴According to Ratnam in his book, *Communalism and the Political Process in Malaya* and Milne in his work, *Government and Politics in Malaysia*, the political alignment in Sabah was very similar to the Malayan Alliance. This alliance is established in August 1962 and it consists of USNO, UNKO, BUNAP and PMP.

¹⁵Hanizah Idris, *Perdagangan Pelabuhan di Borneo* (Kuala Lumpur: University Malaya Press, 2006).

post-world war period. This book will help in studying the cooperation between the natives and Chinese towards economic development in general. She did not discuss the cooperation among Sabahans clearly. She only pays attention to British role in the region.

Ismail Yusof's *Politik dan Agama di Sabah*,¹⁶ describes the political and religious issues in Sabah and its effect on the society. He highlights the important issues that have caused unrest in Sabah due to religious fanaticism. The indigenous groups in Sabah embrace different religious backgrounds. Besides that, it also discusses the formation of political parties based on religious and ethnic background. This is a good study and provides sufficient information about the coming of Islam and Christianity in the region. The author looks only on the negative side of religious issues among the Sabahans.

Siti Aidah Lokin's *Perubahan Sosioekonomi dan Pentadbiran: Masyarakat Pribumi Sabah (1883-1963)*,¹⁷ describes the changes experienced by the indigenous people in Sabah (1881-1963) from the socio-economic and political aspects. She provides useful data in describing the development of Voluntary School under the effort of the natives and the Chinese communities. The Voluntary School is the evidence of close-knit relationships between the natives and the Chinese communities who are willing to sacrifice their money for the benefit of their younger generation. In terms of political development, the natives of Sabah without considering the religious backgrounds and ethnic origins were willing to unite under one party. In this study, she does not highlight the cooperation between the natives and the Chinese from

¹⁶Ismail Yusoff, *Politik dan Agama di Sabah* (Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2004).

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

political development perspective. She also consulted many primary sources like archival materials, newspaper reports and interviews with important personalities.

Anthony Reid in his article entitled “*Endangered Identity: Kadazan or Dusun in Sabah (East Malaysia)*”¹⁸ raises the issue of the main natives in Sabah whether it is the Kadazans or Dusuns. He argues by looking back to three previous censuses, that they were called Pribumis (indigenous people) in 1980, and Kadazans in 1970, Dusuns in 1960 respectively. In this study, the clear definition of the issue of identity of Kadazans and Dusuns is not provided. The author did not give his stand on this issue, even though he had done the research on it.

C.P Bradley’s *Communal Politics in Malaysian Borneo*,¹⁹ emphasizes the socio-economic and political aspects in Sarawak and Sabah. The author describes that Kadazans, who are known as Dusuns in the early period are important local people. Besides, there were intermarriages between Kadazans and Chinese in Sabah and it impacted the assimilation process. In terms of the Sabah economy, there was a remarkable economic boom mainly in the timber industry in 1950s. However, the shortage of labour became a problem in the region. The people in the land engaged in agricultural production. By focusing on the political condition in this region, there are four important political parties which are the United Kadazan Organization (UNKO),²⁰ United Sabah National Organization (USNO),²¹ Borneo Utara National

¹⁸Reid, A., “Endangered identity: Kadazan or Dusun in Sabah (East Malaysia)”, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1 (1997): 120-136.

¹⁹Bradley, C.P., “Communal Politics in Malaysian Borneo”, *The Western Political Quarterly*, vol. 21, no. 1 (Mar., 1968): 123-140.

²⁰The first political party established by the local people in August 1961 and it belonged to Kadazans located in the West Coast of Sabah. The first leader of this party is Donald Stephens.

²¹This party was established in December 1961 and it belonged to the Muslim communities of Sabah such as Bajau, Bisaya, Brunei, Suluk, etc. At the same time, the membership was also opened to the non-Muslims. Datu Mustapha Datu Harun was the leader of this party and he was helped by Mohd Said bin Keruak, Mohd Yassin bin Haji Hashim, Sakaran bin Dandai, etc.