

Imagining there are Garuda and Harimau

Exploring Sustainable Development



with Dr. Goh Chun Sheng

RECENTLY, I came across the wonderful thesis by Lidya Lestari Sitohang of Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, namely 'Cross-border interaction in the context of border-regional development in Kalimantan', completed in March 2022.

It vividly illustrates the lives of the border communities in the Krayan Highlands, providing unique insights into both formal and informal cross-border exchange.

Before the 'Nusantara move' (the plan to relocate Indonesia's capital to East Kalimantan), Kalimantan had long been regarded as the frontier of Indonesia. The inland areas, mostly highlands that border Malaysia are probably the frontier of the frontier.

Embedded in the Heart of Borneo at an altitude of 760-1,200 metres and confined to mountain ranges, the Krayan highlands may be regarded as a borderland isolated from the other parts of Kalimantan. Unlike other places in Borneo, rivers here are unusable for regular transportation to the

lowland due to extreme rapids.

Due to the terrain, the highlanders have limited access to other parts of Indonesia. Air transportation is the only way out. Long Bawan has several connecting flights to Nunukan, Tarakan, and Malinau. Obtaining the necessities of modern life from other Indonesian towns has been fiendish.

Interestingly, the only linkage to the outside world is via Ba Kelalan in Sarawak. Sarawak and Sabah are separated from North Kalimantan by the long-stretching Kayan Mentarang National Park, which encompasses huge blocks of pristine rainforests with a wealth of flora and fauna. The main channel that sees cross-border exchange is Long Bawan in the Krayan plateau. Note that 'Krayan' and 'Kayan' are not the same, but refer to two different rivers.

The cross-border connection to Ba Kelalan actually opened up the door to the modern world. The road constructed since the 2000s completely transformed the life of the locals. Regularly, Krayan's inhabitants purchase goods from Malaysia to meet their basic needs, including gasoline, sugars, cooking oils, etc. Sometimes, they also do petty jobs in Malaysia for extra income. Cross-border marriage is also common here, creating a broad kinship network among the border communities.

Another interesting element of the cross-border exchange is the export of Adan rice, a famous

highland rice from Krayan. The rice has a unique texture and comes in white, red, and black varieties. The black Adan rice is probably the most well-known with its uniquely sweet fragrance and delicious taste. It is recognised and protected with a geographical indication in Indonesia, i.e., a sign used on products with specific qualities, characteristics, or reputations due to their place of origin.

Historically, the highlanders lived in a borderless world before the colonial age, speaking the same language and sharing the same culture.

Now, they are divided by borders, with different names given to communities residing on the different sides: Lundayeh in Sabah, Lun Bawang in Sarawak, and Dayak Lundayeh in Kalimantan. Changes and development are relatively slow and limited for those drawn into the Kalimantan territory compared to their counterparts in Sarawak.

In Sitohang's masterpiece, she explored Kalimantan-Sarawak interactions in the context of border-region development. Especially, Sitohang carefully studied how the people in Krayan perceive the border in everyday life and how they interpret nationalism.

The border did change the highlanders' societies. What touched me most were the sad stories about those who came across the border to work in Malaysia. Sitohang reported that some Krayan people were

'treated in an unpleasant way and looked down upon' by their families in Malaysia. They felt they were considered 'inferior' and 'lower caste'.

This echoed the findings of another researcher, Matthew H. Amster, who did his research in the Kelabit Highlands in the 2000s, describing that the Krayan people were marginalised and demeaned as 'outsiders'.

To an extreme, Sitohang documented a case of potential human right violation: 'we worked like slaves, we finished our job, but we were not paid for it'.

Just like everywhere else, entrepreneurship also grew wildly in Krayan. In his delightful paper published in 2021, Bart Klem reported stories about 'brokers' who took advantage of the differences across the border and made themselves a fortune. With their knowledge and networks on both sides, they could exploit the currency differences and make windfall profits through cross-border trade, turning Krayan into an 'indigenous version of an informal special economic zone' as described by Klem.

'Garuda di dadaku, Malaysia di perutku' – Sitohang put this phrase as the subtitle of her thesis. Garuda is the national emblem of Indonesia. This subtitle accurately describes the awkward position of Krayan's inhabitants.

At first, I thought Harimau was a better word choice as a counterpart to Garuda. But then, I realised there is no concrete

evidence of the tiger's existence in Borneo. And well, Garuda is a mythical bird anyway. By drawing artificial borders, people created the fiction of countries and fabricated a sense of belonging to animals not even seen in Borneo. John Lennon asked to 'imagine there's no countries', but 'countries' are just imaginations.

It is tempting to indulge ourselves like John Lennon in an ideal world without borders and all of us living in harmony as one community. However, it is hard to imagine the political structure, given the vast area we are talking about.

The existence of states, whether symbolised by a Garuda or a Harimau, is a result of both rational and moral considerations. While states provide a governing system to guarantee people a stable life, they also fulfil emotional needs by fostering a sense of attachment.

In reality, Krayan's people have been demonstrating their remarkable national pride as Indonesians with the omnipresence of national flags and symbols, although culturally, they are closer to their Malaysian counterparts across the border.

Some may attempt to imagine how Borneo's history would have gone differently had colonisation not happened to divide the island. Indigenous communities might have opportunities to flourish with natural resources available, but less likely we would see a

unified powerful Bornean state due to the physical geographical constraints.

Speculatively, there might probably be more independent territories, borders, and possibly more conflicts, as seen elsewhere. Borneo has never been placed under a unified system of power except for a loose one during WW2 under the Japanese occupation.

Assessing the counterfactuals sensibly is quite challenging, considering the complexities of the what-ifs.

However, we may take bolder moves in exploring a more comprehensive governing system in the border regions, where states voluntarily and proactively collaborate to do more than the status quo. The current institutional design is a legacy of colonisation and does not necessarily fit the peoples' nature better than other arrangements.

The Nusantara move (although it may not be materialised) may trigger a re-examination of collaboration between the Bornean territories.

Be it Garuda or Harimau, after all, we are Homo sapiens who know better about cooperation for long-term interests, not to mention people who share the same language and culture.

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Department for Children brings hope



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THE BORNEO POST

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THE announcement by Datuk Seri Nancy Shukri, Women, Family and Community Development Minister, that the Cabinet had agreed to establish a special department or institution for children brings hope to 2023.

It is good that Pakatan Harapan (PH) is living up to its election manifesto. We, child advocates and civil society organisations, are delighted that children are getting a clear focus from the new government.

We recognise that these are early days; this proposal will need to be worked on, with the scope and powers of the proposed department to be clarified. We ask that the minister and ministry engage with child advocates and civil society organisations in shaping the formation of the proposed Children's Department.

One key issue will be the extent of the scope and powers of this Department for Children.

Will it be akin to a Children's Ministry, fully responsible for all children's issues, overarching all other ministries that have some responsibility for children, and with powers to make policy changes?

Or will it just be a coordinating body between different ministries and agencies on children's issues?

We recommend that the government form a Children's Ministry so that it will have the real capacity to make significant changes to the lives of ALL children in Malaysia

and not just be a 'welfare' organisation.

No ministry or government agency should make policies that would impact on children's wellbeing without timely consultation with any Children's Department or ministry that the government creates.

We advocate that the Department for Children will adopt an equitable and rights-based approach and have a wide scope to cover critical areas, including the following:

1. Establish and strengthen an interagency child protection case and data management system, and the prevention of abuse, neglect, exploitation and all forms of violence against children.
2. Improve basic health service delivery, especially to marginalised children, and prevent deaths from road injuries and drowning.
3. Support the rights and needs of children with diverse disabilities.
4. Improve the status of marginalised children, including those who are migrants, refugees and stateless.
5. End child poverty, especially among our indigenous peoples, and target those in Sabah and in inner city environments.
6. Encourage good practices in the provision of reasonable accommodation, to mainstream children with special education needs (inclusion) and ensure access to universal education.
7. Improve the timeliness, quality, access and safety of early childhood care and education (this includes nurseries).
8. Avoid/pervert the detention

of any child.

9. Removing all barriers to children, adopted children of Malaysian parents and foundlings, from acquiring Malaysian citizenship.

10. Persevere systematically to end child marriage and reduce teenage pregnancies.

This list, although not exhaustive, seems like a tall order. The government announcement inspires confidence that, together, we can make a firm start to work in this direction and build success overtime.

Leadership and experience of the child realities in Malaysia will be critical to shaping success.

It is important to institutionalise children's participation in the organisation and have representatives from diverse communities, including those who are marginalised and disabled.

A dedicated, accountable and competent workforce, perhaps some staffing taken from other agencies, and a meaningful budget will be critical to the execution of function.

The new entity will have to review and lift Malaysia's reservations to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and harmonise national legislation and policies with the Child Act and Sexual Offences Against Children Act.

We would like the minister and Cabinet to know that we, child advocates and civil society organisations, are firmly behind this initiative and offer our full support.

It is the single most important plan that the government has put forward for the betterment of children in our nation.

May the hope that has come with the new government blossom in 2023 and all children experience meaningful and lasting change that improves their outcomes.

As the CRC embodies, in all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

Signatories of child advocates and civil society organisations:

1. Dato Dr Amar-Singh HSS, Child/Disability Advocate and Advisor Nation Early Childhood Intervention Council
2. Dato Dr Hartini Zainudin, Yayasan Chow Kit, Voice of the Children
3. Datin PH Wong, Childline Foundation
4. Yap Sook Yee, Children's Rights and Empowerment Advocate, WeCare Journey and Friends Arts
5. Cathryn Anila, Founder, Vanguard's Change
6. Prof Dato Noor Aziah Mohd Awal
7. Dr Farah Nini Dusuki, Child Rights Advocate and Practitioner
8. Dr Mary Marret, Dr Irene Cheah, Child Protection Subcommittee, Malaysian Paediatric Association
9. Anisa Ahmad, Persatuan Pengasuh Berdaftar Malaysia (PPBM)
10. Datuk Dr Chiam Heng Keng
11. Pertubuhan Kebajikan Vivekananda Rembau Negeri Sembilan
12. Family Frontiers - Persatuan Kebajikan Sokongan Keluarga Selangor & KL
13. Association of Women Lawyers
14. Make It Right Movement
15. Malaysian Rare Disorders Society
16. Protect and Save the Children
17. Montessori Association Malaysia
18. EndCSEC Network Malaysia
19. Malaysian Council of Child Welfare
20. OKU Rights Matter Project
21. Jeanie Low, Play Unlimited
22. Persatuan Guru-Guru Tadika Perak
23. Prof Datin Dr Mariani Md Nor, ECCE Council Malaysia
24. Persatuan Pendidik Awal Kanak-Kanak Pahang
25. Persatuan Tadika Islam Malaysia
26. Eeveleen Ling, Persatuan Tadika Malaysia
27. Malaysian Child Resource Institute
28. Ahi Majlis Kanak-Kanak Petaling Jaya
29. Dr Amelia Alias, Child Rights Advocate
30. PUAK Payong - Persatuan Untuk Anak Kita
31. Home of Peace, Kuala Lumpur
32. NGO Hub
33. Dr Raihan Mohamed, Toy Libraries Malaysia
34. Wan Shakila, Borneo Komrad
35. Siti Asa, Persatuan TASKA RumaMisia
36. Sarawak Women for Women Society
37. Wong Hui Min, President, Nation Early Childhood Intervention Council
38. Asia Community Service
39. Kiwanis Down Syndrome Foundation
40. BOLD for Special Needs Penang
41. Simon Hoo, SPICES Early Intervention Centre
42. Dr Wong Wan Ying, Consultant Paediatrician
43. Association of Professional Early Childhood Educators



A 2022 study in medical journal 'Parasites & Vectors' confirmed that *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes were highly resistant to current insecticides, while a 2021 paper in 'PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases' found that Senegal's *Aedes aegypti* population had a high metabolic resistance to widely used insecticides. — Malay Mail photo

Aedes: Fogging has unintended effect, warn experts

KUALALUMPUR: Two species of dengue virus mosquitoes – *Aedes aegypti* and *Aedes albopictus* – have recently been found to have developed a stronger resistance to insecticides, said researchers.

They said this added resistance contributes to the risk of a widespread dengue outbreak and must be taken into account when designing new measures to control mosquito populations and curb dengue fever.

'Genetic mutations in these mosquitoes in response to the widespread use of insecticides are likely the cause of their heightened resistance', epidemiologist and health informationist Prof Datuk Awang Bulgiba Awang Mahmud of Universiti Malaya was quoted as saying in the New Straits Times.

According to the report, a 2022 study in medical journal *Parasites & Vectors* confirmed that *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes were highly resistant to current insecticides, while a 2021 paper in *PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases* found that Senegal's *Aedes aegypti* population had a high

and clogged drains in urban settings', environmental health expert Prof Jamal Hisham Hashim was quoted as saying.

The researchers agreed that spraying fine insecticide is only an ineffective, short-term measure against the spread of dengue virus as it does not affect the mosquitoes' breeding sites and larvae.

'Mosquito fogging has always been a short-term measure which targets only adult mosquitoes. It does not get rid of the larvae, nor does it get rid of mosquito breeding sites.'

'So, while it does have its benefits, this is unsustainable nor an effective long-term vector control strategy,' Awang Bulgiba said.

Meanwhile, former deputy health director-general and epidemiologist Prof Datuk Lokman Hakim Sulaiman was quoted as saying that while some dengue virus mosquitoes might die from fogging, there is no evidence that fogging works.

'I never believed that fogging was cost-effective.'





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(MAPECE)
44. Amy Bala, Malaysian Association of Social Workers
45. World Vision Malaysia
46. Reproductive Cadre on Sexuality Education & Queries (RCSEQ)
47. Persatuan Sahabat Wanita Selangor
48. Persatuan Guru Tadika Semenanjung
49. Margaret Loy, Community Transformation Initiative Bhd
50. CbR Network Malaysia
51. Global Shepherds Berhad
52. Be My Protector
53. Anne Sivanathan, Inclusive Outdoor Classroom

aegyptu population has a high metabolic resistance to widely used insecticides.

"It is only natural for simple creatures like insects, such as mosquitoes, to evolve and adapt to a changing environment.

"For Aedes mosquitoes, this changing environment is mainly due to urbanisation and climate change.

"They have adapted to breed in discarded containers, small puddles of clean water, gutters

was cost-effective. "During my time (in office), I had even reduced fogging to once from twice for each reported case.

"To me, we continue doing it because it is the politically correct thing to do," he said.

Studies have also shown that in addition to the adult mosquitoes, fogging with insecticide also unintentionally kills other insects and harms animals in the area. — Malay Mail

