

Leaving a mark in the history of human civilisations

Exploring Sustainable Development

with Dr Goh Chun Sheng

LAST month, I was delighted to have finally visited the Borneo Cultures Museum in Kuching with my family. We spent over four hours exploring the museum and ensuring that we did not miss any of its fascinating displays.

My children, in particular, enjoyed the children's centre, but what pleasantly surprised me was their equally strong interest in the regular exhibitions. The high-tech facilities and gamification techniques were undoubtedly a factor, but the museum's overall ambience, including its lighting, cleanliness, and spaciousness, also contributed to our enjoyment.

In my opinion, the Borneo Cultures Museum is on par with some of the greatest museums in Japan, Europe, and the US.

One of the most magnificent displays at the Borneo Cultures Museum is a replica of the kelirieng that once belonged to the family of Kabiung Tulu from Long Segaham, Belaga.

Kelirieng or Klirieng is a traditional carving crafted on a wooden stick by the Kajang tribe for funeral purposes. The masterpieces are adorned with intricately-carved dragons, miniature creatures, and hudo' motifs featuring huge fangs and jaws. The highest concentration of

these burial poles can be found in Bintulu and Kapit divisions. Interestingly, according to the exhibit label, the actual burial poles were crafted by skilled artisans from Pontianak and the Kapuas River. It took them two years to complete the work of art.

Last year, three 200-year-old kelirieng were found at the bottom of Sungai Penyarai Tatau. Despite being beautifully carved on Belian wood, some parts of the poles have been damaged.

The restoration of the kelirieng has sparked controversy among both the local communities and authorities. While some advocate for conserving the poles at a nearby site, others argue that moving the artifacts to a safer and more accessible location is necessary due to the risk of damage in the current conditions. This case demonstrates Borneo's own efforts and approaches in preserving its cultural heritage.

Getting to know Borneo better

With the recent political development in Malaysia and the Indonesian government's ambitious plan to move the capital to East Kalimantan, Borneo has gained unprecedented attention. Furthermore, as climate change continues to gain urgency, the island's role as a vital carbon sink has made it an essential piece of the puzzle in mitigating the crisis.

It is not an exaggeration to say that Borneo plays a key part in shaping the future of the Nusantara region, i.e. the entire archipelago that includes Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, and Brunei.



A replica of a kelirieng at the Borneo Cultures Museum.

Borneo was long overlooked, but there is now a growing demand for more knowledge about the region from various communities, including policymakers, businesses, and intellectual circles. While museums are an excellent approach to showcase Borneo, writings and other forms of media are also accessible ways to reach broader audiences, especially with the rise

of digital media. Borneo's experience in transitioning to a more sustainable trajectory of development offers many lessons to be shared, from how the island transformed its economies to how it navigated political crises and conservation efforts.

However, publications on Borneo, especially in the international outlets, have been contested between local

and foreign perspectives. On many occasions, the locals view foreign intellectuals, especially those being labelled 'Western', as being confined by their own perspectives or assumptions which may not accurately reflect the realities on the ground. The question is then how a new, objective, and locally-sensitive lens may be forged to provide a fresh approach to understanding complex development issues in Borneo.

Being pro-active in educating the global and local communities

Perhaps, it might be beneficial for Borneo to be more pro-active in creating platforms that cater to educating the diverse regional and international communities. Publications, exhibitions, seminars, workshops, and other forms of dissemination through platforms like state libraries could be useful to enable both global and local communities to learn from the diversity of Bornean experiences. These may further encourage education and eco-tourism, providing an opportunity for local communities to benefit from the interactions with visitors.

Borneo's newfound attention presents a unique opportunity for the island to leave a lasting mark in the history of human civilisation. The island has much to offer. A better understanding about the island will also prevent unnecessary confusions and conflicts.

Ultimately, these will pave the way for more productive collaborations between global and local communities to harness the island's potential for regional development and climate change mitigation.

Personally, I feel grateful for the chance to publish a book about Borneo. Hopefully, there are more platforms to further contribute to connecting perspectives, sharing knowledge, and bridging gaps.

Borneo's fantasy tales?

Having thoroughly enjoyed the exhibits and attractions that the museum had to offer, we concluded our visit with some delicious cakes and coffee at the museum's café. The experience was truly memorable, and I would highly recommend this museum to anyone visiting Kuching.

"Papa, I was thinking, wouldn't it be cool if we could have a treasure hunt game in the museum with mobile apps, like the one we played at the Sarawak Cultural Village?" He made it his mission to collect as many of the 'treasures' listed as possible during our trip to Santubong and took the time to read each and every description.

"That would be amazing! Maybe more than that? How about stories like Lord of the Rings, but set in Borneo?"

"Imagine the adventures we could have, with mythical creatures and legendary heroes!" He got a bit too excited.

Well, who knows, maybe some geeks will write it one day. Looking forward to it!

Dr Goh Chun Sheng is a researcher at Harvard University. He is interested in exploring sustainable development in both Malaysian and Indonesian Borneo.

His book, *Transforming Borneo: From Land Exploitation to Sustainable Development*, was recently published by ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore.

Go Bald campaign: 15 years of supporting childhood cancer patients

Cindy Lai

GO Bald campaign is entering its 15th year since it was first launched in 2009. Over the years, the signature fundraiser organised by Sarawak Children's Cancer Society had its fair share of exposure, as the head-shaving event has raised some impressive amount of funds and recorded thousands of heads shaved.

Yet, does achieving the numbers suffice to educate the society in understanding the gravity of childhood cancer and the impact the illness has on affected families?

Education has long way to go

Paediatric haematologist Dr Ong Gek Bee shared with The Borneo Post that while cancer treatment is readily available to cater for Sarawak's population, education is still very much lacking among the people here, causing delay in receiving treatment.

The delay in diagnosis of childhood cancer is often due to parents' response to their children's health.

"It is possible that parents find it difficult in digesting the information they received on their child's cancer diagnosis. Therefore, there is need for counselling service to explain the situation to them (parents)."

Despite the high occurrence of cancer cases in Sarawak, Dr Ong stressed that stigma against cancer is among reasons for the lack of awareness among the local community.

"My experience during cancer awareness (campaign) roadshows is people shying away when we



Two young cancer patients spend their time playing board game while receiving treatment at SGH, Kuching.

Society (SCCS) that was founded in 1999 by a group of parents of children with cancer has been intensifying their effort in educating the local communities to understand childhood cancer and plans to continue to do so.

"Every year, SCCS focuses our efforts in increasing public

campaign - Go Bald 2023 at Vivacity Megamall - to raise funds to support children with cancer and their families in Sarawak, while growing childhood cancer awareness.

"Additionally, we also hold public talks with local schools, organisations and corporations



Photo file shows Dr Ong Gek Bee when she was in Miri raising awareness on stem cell.

diagnosis needs both inner strength and the support from others. SCCS, made up of 70 per cent of parents of children with cancer, bereaved parents and parents of childhood cancer survivors, is giving the support to patients and their family.

"The hardships and challenges

patients and survivors.

Weekly recreational activities such as arts and craft events, games and sharing session with patients at the paediatric ward and Kuching half-way home are also part of the events to help patients keep their mind off treatment, and boosting their

and their families who are suffering from childhood cancer in Sarawak.

"SCCS is always excited to share more when the community enquires about what we do and how we are doing it.

"Learning institutions, organisations, corporations and



SCCS Miri liaison officer Jocelyn Hee.

approach them and ask them to look at our exhibitions. There clearly is stigma, but there is a saying that you can provide the horse water but cannot force it to drink.

"Again, the exposure and publicity by the newspapers and media are probably the best way to create awareness," she said.

Weekly articles on different types of cancer can effectively catch attention and create awareness, she added.

In cases of late detection, which many a time are also due to lack of awareness, seeking treatment in timely manner is crucial.

The brave parents and SCCS Sarawak Children's Cancer

awareness of childhood cancer through two major awareness events—International Childhood Cancer Day (ICCD) in February, and Childhood Cancer Awareness Month (CCAM) in September.

"Our objective is to ensure that the public are aware of the signs and symptoms of childhood cancer because childhood cancer is treatable with early diagnosis and proper treatment. We recognise that with more awareness, SCCS will also garner more support in helping children with cancer," said SCCS Miri liaison officer Jocelyn Hee in an interview with The Borneo Post.

In early April, she added, SCCS launched its signature annual awareness and fundraising

to share how the community can get involved to help kids fight cancer," said Hee.

As a member of the Childhood Cancer International (CCI), SCCS will be hosting the 15th CCI Asia Conference in Kuching from May 20 to 21. The two-day conference is part of SCCS' initiatives in amplifying childhood cancer awareness in Sarawak.

"The conference will be the first ever CCI Asia Conference hosted by Malaysia to drive conversations in accelerating equity in access to childhood cancer care globally."

Coping with hardship of cancer
Coping with cancer after

that come with cancer-fighting, how to care for a sick child and how to manage caregivers' emotions to stay strong in this cancer-fighting journey are highly understood by those who endured it.

"Therefore, SCCS is providing essential services of providing regular one-on-one or group caring/counselling session to both patients and caregivers.

"This ensures that they understand and are able to cater to the patient's changing needs and provide the necessary emotional support," said Hee.

In 2022, SCCS carried out 1,301 parent caring sessions to support 120 parents and held 121 heart-to-heart sessions with adolescent

spirit with birthday and festive celebrations while celebrating their significant milestones. In 2022, about 374 recreational activities were held to spread joy to about 17 children and 27 caregivers staying at the ward and halfway home.

Cancer treatment can be complicated, yet there is no one path to heightening awareness of childhood cancer, but rather it requires a confluence of objectives through purposeful partnerships with diverse stakeholders.

"Collaboration is key for us to educate the public, but more importantly is to garner more support in providing care and support for Malaysian children

other NGOs can reach out to our team via SCCS's Facebook page @ sccsmy or email us at em1@sccs.org.my to find out more on how they can become a corporate partner and collaborate with us on CSR projects to help kids fight cancer.

"The donations from Go Bald campaign and other sorts of contribution will definitely help to ensure children with cancer in Sarawak have access to the best available treatment and care they need to get better," said Hee.

SCCS' Go Bald 2023 Campaign is back and it will happen on June 11, 2023 from 1.30pm to 7.20pm at Permaisuri Imperial City Mall.

