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The Contemporary Observations of Paradiplomacy: The Case of Sabah-Australia Connections

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Abstract

Diplomacy has always been seen as a state-centric matter that views state as the only actor in international relations. Nevertheless, since the end of the Cold War, this belief has been challenged with the growing role of multinational as well as sub-state entities in international political arena. Malaysia-Australia relations have been shaped with numerous issues and challenges. Despite their bumpy political ties in the past (especially during the prime ministership of dr. Mahathir Mohamad) other spheres of the relationship remained unaffected. As such, a case study is conducted by looking at Sabah-Australia relations in terms of paradiplomatic practices. This research is qualitative in nature. Initial findings indicate that historical imperatives as well as trading interactions are two forms paradiplomatic practice that has contributed to strengthening of Malaysia-Australia relations.

Keywords: Paradiplomacy, Sabah, Australia, Historical Imperatives, Trading Interactions

Introduction

The importance of bilateralism is evident in the study of international relations. Since the end of World War I and the inception of International Relations discipline in 1919, emphasis has been given by scholars and world leaders on the efforts on how to avoid war from recurring. Ever since, numerous theories have been developed and promoted to strengthen ties between countries.

Diplomacy has always been seen as a state-centric matter that sees state as the only actor in international relations. Nevertheless, since the end of the Cold War, this belief has been challenged. The forces of globalization has made interactions between nations to be multi-faceted. Paradiplomacy is referred to as "...the involvement of the constituent units (regions) of (multi)national states in international affairs" (Kuznetsov, 2015).

Liu and Song define (2020) paradiplomacy as "...the conduct of external engagements (across socioeconomic, security, and energy fields, for example) by subnational/provincial governments in both federal and unitary systems." In short, paradiplomacy can be understood as the 'parallel diplomacy' that is practiced by sub-state or sub-national governments.

It has to be noted that the bilateral ties between Malaysia and Australia have been tested with various challenges in the past that had almost jeopardized their diplomatic

relations (Camilleri, 2001; Shamsul, 1996). This was evident especially during the administration of Malaysia's fourth Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad. Interestingly, despite the bumpy ties of their troubled governmental relationship, other spheres of the relationship remained in-tact and unaffected (Idris, 2018). As a matter of fact, the ties between these two countries continue to grow that have benefitted both parties.

As such, it is argued that the role of 'paradiplomacy' in the case of Sabah and Australia has in one way or another not only strengthened the bonds of interactions between the two entities but also indirectly promoted better understanding and cooperation between Malaysia and Australia. As such, this paper will briefly discuss the initial findings of paradiplomatic practices between these two entities.

Past Studies

It is interesting to note that there has been an abundant number of studies that have been conducted pertaining to the area of paradiplomacy. However, it is also important emphasize that there is a dearth in terms of literature, especially in the aspect of paradiplomacy of non-western states (Liu & Song, 2020).

The latest available work on paradiplomacy published in reputable journal entitled *Chinese Paradiplomacy : A Theoretical Review*, written by Liu & Song. They argue that the existing analytical framework of paradiplomatic studies confined itself to the limited aspect of the phenomenon only and are mostly on Western world case studies. Hence their discussion expands the geographical scope of non-Western paradiplomacy. Kuznetsov (2015) examines the theoretical dimension of paradiplomacy and the role of sub-national governments in international politics.

Other important works include Aguirre (1999); Lejeune (1990); Putnam (1988); Leach, Walker & Levy (1973); Atkey (1970).

Initial Findings

i. Historical Imperatives

In terms of security, during World War II, Australian troops were closely involved in defending Malaya (1941-1942) and the Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak (1945). They had also provided a temporary interim military government in Sabah and Sarawak right away after the Japanese forces had surrendered to the Allied Forces during World War II (Williams, 1992: pp. 2 & 8). That was not all, with the request made by the Malaysian government, Australia dispatched its troops in 1965, joining the British, Malaysian and other Commonwealth countries to protect Malaysia from the threats posed by Indonesia during the *Konfrontasi* (Cochrane, 2001; p. 203; Idris et. al 2010).

These experiences have contributed to the strengthening of engagements between these two entities (Sabah and Australia). For example, The Sandakan Memorial Day is held annually (every 15th August) to commemorate the sacrifices of the Australian prisoners of war (PoWs) in defending Sabah during the Second World War. This occasion draws hundreds of visitors both from the country and overseas every year to mourn the loss, honor the heroes and remember the history that was made. It is a continuous tradition to ensure history is remembered but not repeated.

In terms of education, many students from the state had benefitted from the Colombo Plan. The Colombo Plan was a clear manifestation of Australia's strong educational commitment and support to Malaysia and the region in general. As a result, many Australian-

educated Sabahans were heavily represented in politics, economics, academia and other fields in the country.

ii) Trade Interactions

Malaysia and Australia are trading partners for many years and share common open economy (Idris, 2015, 2016; Idris & Idris, 2013). Trading interactions between Sabah and Australia contribute greatly to the economic interests of both entities. As of 2019, Sabah recorded a trade surplus with Australia, despite having trade deficit for certain product categories such as Food (Sitc-0), Crude Materials (Sitc-2) (See Table 1 Below).

Table 1. Sabah- Australia Trade 2019 (Source : Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020)

| SABAH-AUSTRALIA TRADE (2019) | | | | | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| SITC | PRODUCT CATEGORIES | EXPORT TO AUSTRALIA (RM) | IMPORT FROM AUSTRALIA (RM) | TOTAL TRADE (RM) | TRADE BALANCE (RM) | TRADE BALANCE POSITION |
| 0 | FOOD | 90,891,996 | 173,111,209 | 264,003,205 | (82,219,213) | DEFICIT |
| 1 | BEVERAGES AND TOBACCO | - | 6,839,280 | 6,839,280 | (6,839,280) | DEFICIT |
| 2 | CRUDE MATERIALS, INEDIBLE | 7,409,296 | 24,011,890 | 31,421,186 | (16,602,594) | DEFICIT |
| 3 | MINERAL FUELS, LUBRICANTS, ETC. | 4,382,590,471 | 161,739 | 4,382,752,210 | 4,382,428,732 | SURPLUS |
| 4 | ANIMAL AND VEGETABLE OILS AND FATS | - | 33,851 | 33,851 | (33,851) | DEFICIT |
| 5 | CHEMICALS | 224,582,367 | 10,777,169 | 235,359,536 | 213,805,198 | SURPLUS |
| 6 | MANUFACTURED GOODS | 5,306,861 | 3,374,213 | 8,681,074 | 1,932,648 | SURPLUS |
| 7 | MACHINERY & TRANSPORT EQUIPMENT | 11,846,913 | 16,124,562 | 27,971,475 | (4,277,649) | DEFICIT |
| 8 | MISCELLANEOUS MANUFACTURED ARTICLES | 7,450,266 | 5,490,599 | 12,940,865 | 1,959,667 | SURPLUS |
| 9 | MISCELLANEOUS TRANSACTIONS AND COMMODITIES | 551,090 | 1,156,850 | 1,707,940 | (605,760) | DEFICIT |
| | TOTAL | 4,730,629,260 | 241,081,362 | 4,971,710,622 | 4,489,547,898 | SURPLUS |

Table 2. Sabah's Export To Australia At 2 Digit Code (Source : Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020)

| SITC | PRODUCT CATEGORIES | EXPORT TO AUSTRALIA (RM) |
|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 03 | FISH (NOT MARINE MAMMALS), CRUSTACEANS, MOLLUSCS AND AQUATIC INVERTEBRATES, AND PREPARATIONS THEREOF | 66,138,432 |
| 04 | CEREALS AND CEREAL PREPARATIONS | 38,694 |
| 08 | FEEDING STUFF FOR ANIMALS (NOT INCLUDING UNMILLED CEREALS) | 24,633,020 |
| 09 | MISCELLANEOUS EDIBLE PRODUCTS AND PREPARATIONS | 81,850 |
| 23 | CRUDE RUBBER (INCLUDING SYNTHETIC AND RECLAIMED) | 1,055,600 |
| 24 | CORK AND WOOD | 6,255,963 |
| 26 | TEXTILE FIBRES (OTHER THAN WOOL TOPS AND OTHER COMBED WOOL) AND THEIR WASTES (NOT MANUFACTURED INTO YARN OR FABRIC) | 75,826 |
| 27 | CRUDE FERTILIZERS, OTHER THAN THOSE OF DIVISION 56, AND CRUDE MINERALS (EXCLUDING COAL, PETROLEUM AND PRECIOUS STONES) | 11,263 |
| 29 | CRUDE ANIMAL AND VEGETABLE MATERIALS, N.E.S. | 10,644 |
| 33 | PETROLEUM, PETROLEUM PRODUCTS AND RELATED MATERIALS | 4,382,590,471 |
| 51 | ORGANIC CHEMICALS | 45,840 |
| 52 | INORGANIC CHEMICALS | 23,577 |
| 56 | FERTILIZERS (OTHER THAN THOSE OF GROUP 272) | 223,682,690 |
| 58 | PLASTICS IN NON-PRIMARY FORMS | 5,458 |
| 59 | CHEMICAL MATERIALS AND PRODUCTS, N.E.S. | 824,802 |
| 62 | RUBBER MANUFACTURES, N.E.S. | 64,297 |
| 63 | CORK AND WOOD MANUFACTURES (EXCLUDING FURNITURE) | 2,407,843 |
| 65 | TEXTILE YARN, FABRICS, MADE-UP ARTICLES, N.E.S., AND RELATED PRODUCTS | 80,611 |
| 67 | IRON AND STEEL | 1,904,737 |
| 69 | MANUFACTURES OF METALS, N.E.S. | 849,373 |
| 71 | POWER-GENERATING MACHINERY AND EQUIPMENT | 145,076 |
| 72 | MACHINERY SPECIALIZED FOR PARTICULAR INDUSTRIES | 9,208,752 |
| 73 | METALWORKING MACHINERY | 67,891 |
| 74 | GENERAL INDUSTRIAL MACHINERY AND EQUIPMENT, N.E.S., AND MACHINE PARTS, N.E.S. | 1,571,114 |
| 75 | OFFICE MACHINES AND AUTOMATIC DATA-PROCESSING MACHINES | 20,286 |
| 76 | TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND SOUND-RECORDING AND REPRODUCING APPARATUS AND EQUIPMENT | 22,256 |
| 77 | ELECTRICAL MACHINERY, APPARATUS AND APPLIANCES, N.E.S., AND ELECTRICAL PARTS THEREOF (INCLUDING NONELECTRICAL COUNTERPARTS) | 796,068 |
| 78 | ROAD VEHICLES (INCLUDING AIR-CUSHION VEHICLES) | 7,195 |
| 79 | OTHER TRANSPORT EQUIPMENT | 8,275 |
| 83 | TRAVEL GOODS, HANDBAGS AND SIMILAR CONTAINERS | 2,071 |
| 84 | ARTICLES OF APPAREL AND CLOTHING ACCESSORIES | 2,927 |
| 87 | PROFESSIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CONTROLLING INSTRUMENTS AND APPARATUS, N.E.S. | 7,074,170 |
| 89 | MISCELLANEOUS MANUFACTURED ARTICLES, N.E.S. | 371,098 |
| 93 | SPECIAL TRANSACTIONS AND COMMODITIES NOT CLASSIFIED ACCORDING TO KIND | 551,090 |
| | TOTAL EXPORT | 4,730,629,260 |

Based on the table above, Sabah's main export products to Australia include Petroleum (Sitc-33), Fertilizers (Sitc-56), Fish, Crustaceans, Molluscs (Sitc-03), Feeding Stuff For Animals (Sitc-08). It is clearly indicated that Sabah's comparative advantage in the mentioned products are indeed the highest products that Australia imported from Sabah in 2019.

Table 3. Sabah's Export To Australia At 2 Digit Code (Source : Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020)

| SITC | PRODUCT CATEGORIES | IMPORT FROM AUSTRALIA (RM) |
|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 00 | LIVE ANIMALS OTHER THAN ANIMALS OF DIVISION 03 | 5,939,782 |
| 01 | MEAT AND MEAT PREPARATIONS | 38,663,390 |
| 02 | DAIRY PRODUCTS AND BIRDS' EGGS | 13,207,618 |
| 03 | FISH (NOT MARINE MAMMALS), CRUSTACEANS, MOLLUSCS AND AQUATIC INVERTEBRATES, AND PREPARATIONS THEREOF | 2,270,828 |
| 04 | CEREALS AND CEREAL PREPARATIONS | 87,064,581 |
| 05 | VEGETABLES AND FRUIT | 17,515,475 |
| 06 | SUGARS, SUGAR PREPARATIONS AND HONEY | 281,745 |
| 07 | COFFEE, TEA, COCOA, SPICES, AND MANUFACTURES THEREOF | 5,452,460 |
| 08 | FEEDING STUFF FOR ANIMALS (NOT INCLUDING UNMILLED CEREALS) | 991,541 |
| 09 | MISCELLANEOUS EDIBLE PRODUCTS AND PREPARATIONS | 1,723,789 |
| 11 | BEVERAGES | 6,839,280 |
| 22 | OIL-SEEDS AND OLEAGINOUS FRUITS | 5,575 |
| 24 | CORK AND WOOD | 70,534 |
| 26 | TEXTILE FIBRES (OTHER THAN WOOL TOPS AND OTHER COMBED WOOL) AND THEIR WASTES (NOT MANUFACTURED INTO YARN OR FABRIC) | 50,970 |
| 27 | CRUDE FERTILIZERS, OTHER THAN THOSE OF DIVISION 56, AND CRUDE MINERALS (EXCLUDING COAL, PETROLEUM AND PRECIOUS STONES) | 18,445,275 |
| 28 | METALLIFEROUS ORES AND METAL SCRAP | 4,349,083 |
| 29 | CRUDE ANIMAL AND VEGETABLE MATERIALS, N.E.S. | 1,090,453 |
| 33 | PETROLEUM, PETROLEUM PRODUCTS AND RELATED MATERIALS | 161,739 |
| 42 | FIXED VEGETABLE FATS AND OILS, CRUDE, REFINED OR FRACTIONATED | 33,851 |
| 51 | ORGANIC CHEMICALS | 345,880 |
| 52 | INORGANIC CHEMICALS | 2,625 |
| 55 | ESSENTIAL OILS AND RESINOIDS AND PERFUME MATERIALS; TOILET, POLISHING AND CLEANING PREPARATIONS | 444,203 |
| 56 | FERTILIZERS (OTHER THAN THOSE OF GROUP 272) | 1,128,882 |
| 57 | PLASTICS IN PRIMARY FORMS | 5,918,041 |
| 58 | PLASTICS IN NON-PRIMARY FORMS | 28,646 |
| 59 | CHEMICAL MATERIALS AND PRODUCTS, N.E.S. | 2,908,892 |
| 61 | LEATHER, LEATHER MANUFACTURES, N.E.S., AND DRESSED FURSKINS | 4,129 |
| 62 | RUBBER MANUFACTURES, N.E.S. | 669,465 |
| 65 | TEXTILE YARN, FABRICS, MADE-UP ARTICLES, N.E.S., AND RELATED PRODUCTS | 159,876 |
| 66 | NON-METALLIC MINERAL MANUFACTURES, N.E.S. | 182,222 |
| 67 | IRON AND STEEL | 730,486 |
| 68 | NON-FERROUS METALS | 4,439 |
| 69 | MANUFACTURES OF METALS, N.E.S. | 1,623,596 |
| 71 | POWER-GENERATING MACHINERY AND EQUIPMENT | 887,013 |
| 72 | MACHINERY SPECIALIZED FOR PARTICULAR INDUSTRIES | 6,690,967 |
| 73 | METALWORKING MACHINERY | 50,440 |
| 74 | GENERAL INDUSTRIAL MACHINERY AND EQUIPMENT, N.E.S., AND MACHINE PARTS, N.E.S. | 2,013,154 |
| 75 | OFFICE MACHINES AND AUTOMATIC DATA-PROCESSING MACHINES | 47,003 |
| 76 | TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND SOUND-RECORDING AND REPRODUCING APPARATUS AND EQUIPMENT | 366,828 |
| 77 | ELECTRICAL MACHINERY, APPARATUS AND APPLIANCES, N.E.S., AND ELECTRICAL PARTS THEREOF (INCLUDING NONELECTRICAL COUNTERPARTS, N.E.S., OF ELECTRICAL HOUSEHOLD-TYPE EQUIPMENT) | 560,974 |
| 78 | ROAD VEHICLES (INCLUDING AIR-CUSHION VEHICLES) | 2,681,591 |
| 79 | OTHER TRANSPORT EQUIPMENT | 2,826,592 |
| 81 | PREFABRICATED BUILDINGS; SANITARY PLUMBING, HEATING AND LIGHTING FIXTURES AND FITTINGS, N.E.S. | 95,129 |
| 82 | FURNITURE AND PARTS THEREOF; BEDDING, MATTRESSES, MATTRESS SUPPORTS, CUSHIONS AND SIMILAR STUFFED FURNISHINGS | 19,639 |
| 83 | TRAVEL GOODS, HANDBAGS AND SIMILAR CONTAINERS | 14,608 |
| 84 | ARTICLES OF APPAREL AND CLOTHING ACCESSORIES | 70,530 |
| 85 | FOOTWEAR | 6,500 |
| 87 | PROFESSIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CONTROLLING INSTRUMENTS AND APPARATUS, N.E.S. | 2,041,099 |
| 88 | PHOTOGRAPHIC APPARATUS, EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES AND OPTICAL GOODS, N.E.S.; WATCHES AND CLOCKS | 3,649 |
| 89 | MISCELLANEOUS MANUFACTURED ARTICLES, N.E.S. | 3,239,445 |
| 93 | SPECIAL TRANSACTIONS AND COMMODITIES NOT CLASSIFIED ACCORDING TO KIND | 1,156,850 |

As shown in the table above, Sabah's main import products from Australia are Cereal & Cereal Preparations (Sitc-04), Meat & Meat Preparations (Sitc-01), Crude Fertilizers, (Sitc-27), Vegetables & Fruits (Sitc-05) And Dairy Products (Sitc-02). In other words, Australia offered most of the dairy products that became Sabah's main imported products from Australia.

Conclusion

Diplomacy has always been said to be a state-centric affair that views states as the dominant and only actor in international relations. However, this belief has been challenged since the end of the Cold War and the growing role of multinational as well as sub-state entities in international political arena.

As in the case of Sabah and Australia, both entities have enjoyed tremendous benefits that have eventually advanced the bilateral relations between Malaysia and Australia. As discussed in the paper, initial findings have shown that historical imperatives as well as trade interactions are two forms of paradiplomatic relationship that have taken place between them.

The continued historical legacy as well as trade interactions have indirectly strengthened the bonds of the peoples (Sabahans and Australians). These interactions are believed to bring about greater potentialities between the peoples to expand even further. The existing paradiplomatic practices could become the driving force for greater Sabah and Malaysia-Australia relations.

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