

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 roe 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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