

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**ECONOMIC AND HUMAN
SECURITY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA:
AN ANALYSIS OF HOW
TRANSBOUNDARY HAZE
CHALLENGES THE ASEAN WAY
AND MALAYSIA'S
ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE**

DONA ROFITHOH BINTI DON RAMLI

Thesis submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Administrative Science)

Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies

September 2025

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the persistent issue of Transboundary Haze Pollution (THP) in Southeast Asia, focusing on Malaysia's vulnerability within the ASEAN governance framework. Largely driven by Indonesian slash-and-burn agriculture, THP has plagued the region especially Malaysia for decades, with severe episodes in 1997, 2013, 2015, and 2019, disrupting public health, economies, and ecosystems. While economic interests, particularly the palm oil industry, dominate discussions, this study emphasises the overlooked human and environmental security concerns, especially the violation of rights to clean air and a safe environment. The research critically examines ASEAN's approach to THP, highlighting the ASEAN Way of its consultation, consensus, and non-interference which limits effective environmental governance. Additionally, the study assesses Malaysia's legal and policy frameworks to identify gaps in addressing THP. Grounded in Neoliberal Institutionalism, the concept of Complex Interdependence and Regime Theory, this study critically examines ASEAN's role in fostering regional cooperation, with particular emphasis on how the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution (AATHP) operates as a governance regime for managing THP. The study aims to: (1) analyse the influence of economic and human security in THP mitigation, (2) evaluate the effectiveness of the ASEAN Way, and (3) investigate the demerits in Malaysia's environmental governance. Through qualitative interviews, including eight key informants, the research highlights tensions between economic growth driven by the palm oil sector and the environmental and human costs of haze pollution. Findings reveal that while AATHP facilitates dialogue, enforcement is weak due to member states prioritising national interests. Malaysia's governance shortcomings include a lack of specific THP legislation, weak enforcement, reactive governance, diplomacy prioritisation, and complacency challenges. The study concludes by proposing best practices from other countries, advocating for a more integrated, cooperative, and rights-based approach to achieve a balance between economic development, environmental sustainability, and human security in Southeast Asia.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I express my profound gratitude and heartfelt appreciation to all those who contributed to the successful completion of this comprehensive study on “Economic and Human Security in Southeast Asia: An Analysis of How Transboundary Haze Challenges the ASEAN Way and Malaysia's Environmental Governance.” This research endeavour would not have been possible without the support of numerous individuals and organisations.

First and foremost, I extend my deepest appreciation to my supervisors, Prof Dr. Ts. Rugayah Hashim and Prof Dato’ Dr. Nasruddin Mohammed, and academic advisor, Prof Dr. Yarina Ahmad, for their guidance, knowledge sharing, and continuous encouragement throughout the research process. Their dedication significantly shaped the direction and quality of this study.

I am profoundly thankful to the informants of this study, who generously shared their knowledge, experiences, and perspectives on transboundary haze pollution. Their insights provided invaluable depth to this research, shedding light on the critical transboundary haze issue.

I am grateful to my family, especially my husband, Firdaus Ramli, my parents, Don Ramli Mustafa, and my friends for their unwavering support and understanding throughout this research journey. Their belief in my abilities and their constant encouragement is such a motivation to overcome challenges and stay focused on this research.

I extend my sincere gratitude to the academic and research communities whose works and publications served as constant sources of inspiration and knowledge. I would also like to express my thanks to the administrative staff, librarians, and lecturers who facilitated the progress of this research.

In essence, I acknowledge with deep gratitude the contributions of all individuals and institutions mentioned above. Their support and encouragement have been instrumental in the successful completion of this study.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|-------------|
| CONFIRMATION BY PANEL OF EXAMINERS | ii |
| AUTHOR'S DECLARATION | iii |
| ABSTRACT | iv |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENT | v |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS | vi |
| LIST OF TABLES | x |
| LIST OF FIGURES | xi |
| LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS | xii |
| | |
| CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| 1.1 Introduction | 1 |
| 1.2 Background of Study | 1 |
| 1.3 Problem Statement | 11 |
| 1.4 Research Questions | 13 |
| 1.5 Research Objectives | 13 |
| 1.6 Scope of Study | 13 |
| 1.7 Significance of Study | 15 |
| 1.8 Definition of Terms and Concepts | 17 |
| 1.9 Outline of Chapters | 26 |
| 1.10 Summary | 28 |
| | |
| CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW | 30 |
| 2.1 Introduction | 30 |
| 2.2 Transboundary Haze Pollution (THP) | 30 |
| 2.2.1 Defining THP and Key Characteristics | 31 |
| 2.2.2 Causes of THP | 33 |
| 2.2.2.1 <i>Anthropogenic Activities</i> | 34 |
| 2.2.2.2 <i>Natural Factors</i> | 35 |
| 2.2.3 Impacts of THP | 36 |

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a contextual foundation for the study by situating it within the broader landscape of global environmental challenges. While acknowledging the interconnectedness of various forms of environmental degradation, including air, water, and soil pollution, the chapter narrows its focus to Transboundary Environmental Problems (TEPs). It specifically addresses the recurring annual haze episodes that plague the Southeast Asian region. This focus is justified by the severe and persistent nature of this transboundary air pollution, its far-reaching impacts on human health, ecosystems, and regional economies, and its complex governance challenges. The chapter then delineates the specific problem this research investigates, followed by a clear articulation of the research questions and the guiding research objectives. It further defines the scope of the study, outlining its geographical and thematic boundaries, and emphasises the significance of the research for both academic understanding and practical policy implications. Key terms relevant to the study are defined to ensure clarity and consistency throughout the analysis. Finally, the chapter concludes with a structural outline of the subsequent chapters, providing a roadmap and summarizing the overall organisation and flow of the research.

1.2 Background of Study

In the contemporary era, states globally grapple with the complex management of Non-Traditional Security (NTS) issues due to increasing globalisation (Caballero-Anthony, 2018; Meng, 2019; Okolie, 2022). Notably, globalisation has ushered in a range of NTS concerns, generating novel risks, threats, and challenges that demand responses from governments and citizens (Khanh & Truong, 2023). While traditionally, state security focused primarily on conventional military defense, NTS issues have gained prominence due to their inherent transboundary implications (Khanh & Truong, 2023; Okolie, 2022). Particularly, NTS encompasses threats extending beyond military considerations, including environmental degradation, irregular migration, human