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FACULTY OF ADMINISTRATIVE SCIENCE
AND POLICY STUDIES



INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP IN SABAH :
PERCEPTIONS OF KDM'S YOUTH
TOWARDS HUGUAN SIOU

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JUNE 2015

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, thanks to God that gives us strength to work with this practical report from the beginning until completely finished. We would like to express our sincere gratitude to Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Sabah to letting us fulfil our dream of being students here. We would also like to thank the Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies for giving us the opportunity to write an honours research paper. To our supervisor, Mohd Rahezzal Shah Abdul Karim, we are extremely grateful for your assistance and suggestions throughout this project. The field survey would not have completed without the hardwork shown by the enumerators in Papar, Penampang and Tambunan. We would like to extend our thanks to them for their involvement. Our family members have been our sources of inspiration and strength in the course of completing this research. To all friends for helping us to survive all the stress from this year and not letting us give up. It is therefore dedicated to them.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Sabah is the second largest state in Malaysia; it is situated at the northern part of the Island of Borneo, the third largest island in the world. It covers area 72 500 sq kilometers with a coastline of 14 400 kilometers long washed by the South China Sea in the west, the Sulu Sea in the northeast and the Celebes Sea in the east. The Kota Kinabalu City is the capital of SABAH, set between lush, tropical hills and fronting emerald green waters- vibrant and exciting yet serene and uplifting, what with its eco-treasures from top to bottom. Formerly known as Jesselton before its name was changed in 1986 to Kota Kinabalu, the state capital is also affectionally called KK by locals. Known as 'The Land Below The Wind' because geographically, it is below the typhoon belt. The three million population of SABAH is as diverse as its ecology.

The indigenous people of Sabah are friendly and possess rich traditions and cultures. There are over 30 different ethnic groups and more than 80 local dialects in the state. The one of largest indigenous groups of Sabah is the Kadazan-Dusun Murut (KDM), approximately about a third of the population in Sabah. These are the prosperous rice producers of Sabah, although in recent times many have ventured into other trades. Living in the interior plains they are well known for their unique customs that feature female priestesses called 'bobohizan' presiding over still practiced ancient rituals. One way you can gain insights into their culture and dances is to visit the Monsopiad Cultural Village in Kota Kinabalu. Mostly Murut being agriculturists and hunters, they live in the interior region near the borders of Sarawak and Kalimantan. Once feared for their head hunting, the Muruts are great hunters with spears, blowpipes and poisoned darts. Many still reside in their traditional communal longhouses and they are well known for their elaborate displays of bride-wealth, dancing and feasting.

The Leader of KDM is also known as 'Huguan Siou'. The title "Huguan Siou" Office is an institutionalized Paramount Leadership of the Hongkod Koisaan (Unity Hall). It is currently headed by Huguan Siou Honorable Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan. The power and responsibility to bestow the Kadazandusun Paramount Leadership Title "Huguan Siou" rests with the KDCA, which, upon the vacancy of the Huguan Siou's Office, may hold an Extraordinary Delegate's Conference to specifically resolve the installation of their Huguan Siou. The Kadazandusun Cultural Association Sabah (KDCA) previously known as Kadazan Cultural Association (KCA), is a non-political association of 40 indigenous ethnic communities of Sabah, first registered under the Malaysian Societies Act 1966, on 29 April 1966 by the then Deputy Registrar of Societies Malaysia, J. P. Rutherford. However if no leader is considered worthy of the Huguan Siou's title, the office would rather be left vacant (out of respect for the highly dignified and nearly sacred office of the Kadazandusun's Huguan Siou), until such time as a deserving Kadazandusun leader is undoubtedly established.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Even though Kadazan Dusun Murut is the largest ethnic group in Sabah, their youths are still unable to fully identify and give positive perceptions toward their paramount leader of their races, Huguan Siou. A number of studies have shown that the Kadazan Dusun Murut remain loyal to PBS due to Pairin's role as Huguan Siou and PBS's status as a strong local-based party (Chin 1994, p. 904-915; 1996, p. 98-126, 1999b & Puyok 2007, p. 289-310). However, that was a decade ago; these modern era youths are become wiser and have thought such as 'Why should indigenous leader involve in politics matter rather than focuses in unite the community?'