

Introducing a Transnational Perspective

An Alternative Analytical Framework for Understanding the Border Dynamics of Sabah, East Malaysia¹⁾

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ABSTRACT: While witnessing a massive and constant flow of people across national boundaries around Sabah, East Malaysia, we always look at the phenomenon using the “nation-state” as the analytical framework, in which we assume “mono-affiliation” to one particular nation-state or ethnic group to be the norm. This “nation-state” analytical framework of socio-cultural dynamics leads us to neglect the fact that migrants more often than not keep and manipulate multiple networks and affiliations beyond national boundaries. This reality has forced on us the need to rectify the existing analytical framework, as we need an alternative method to better articulate “multiple-affiliation,” or the partible national and/or ethnic identities of migrants. In this paper, I will first outline the recent shift in the analytical framework in migration studies towards “transnationalism,” which has been conceptualized to formulate “multiple-affiliation.” Then I will demonstrate how a transnational analytical framework can shed new light on so far neglected aspects of the socio-cultural dynamics of Sabah, East Malaysia.

Keywords: border dynamics, Sabah, Malaysia, migrants, multiple-affiliation, transnationalism

Introduction

This paper is an attempt to introduce an alternative theoretical framework, “transnationalism,” into the study of the socio-cultural dynamics of Sabah, East Malaysia.

Sabah, although located in the remote northeastern periphery of Malaysia, has been drawing worldwide attention not only of ethnologists and anthropologists but also of political scientists and historians (cf. Loh 1992 ; Reid 1997 ; Roff 1969). Sabah's remarkable border dynamics, characterized by constant human flow has resulted in waves of "reconstruction" of the society and culture. Responding to the incessant influx of migrants both from neighboring countries like the Philippines, Indonesia, China, and from more distant regions such as India and Europe, along with the strengthening of Malay hegemony in the region, the people of Sabah have repeatedly re-categorized themselves so as to include or exclude migrants. Their efforts have sometimes culminated in so-called nationalistic movements. Hence, the emergence and/or demise of "Kadazan (Dusun) nationalism" has been a major topic of Bornean studies and the "nationalism" or, to put it more precisely, the "nation-state" analytical framework seems to have become the baseline for further research on the socio-cultural dynamics of Sabah.

When we review research to date on the migration and the "Kadazan (Dusun) nationalism" of Sabah, however, we realize that we have not yet fully taken into consideration the permeability of national and/or ethnic boundaries, and the multiplicity of ethnic affiliation or identities. While we witness constant and massive human flow across national boundaries, we always look at the phenomenon from the perspective of the "nation-state" analytical framework, in which we assume "mono-affiliation" to one particular nation-state or ethnic group to be the norm. The "nation-state" analytical framework of socio-cultural dynamics leads us to neglect the fact that migrants more often than not keep and manipulate multiple networks and affiliation beyond national boundaries. This reality has forced us to rectify the "nation-state" or "mono-affiliation" analytical framework of socio-cultural dynamics. In order to articulate "multiple-affiliation" or the partible national and/or ethnic identities of migrants, we need an alternative analytical framework.

"Multiple-affiliation" or partible national and/or ethnic identity of migrants has recently been formulated as "transnationalism." In this

paper, I will first outline the recent shift of analytical framework in migration studies towards “transnationalism.” Then I demonstrate how a transnational analytical framework can shed new light on so-far neglected aspects of the socio-cultural dynamics of Sabah, East Malaysia.

Theoretical Orientation

1. Changing Aspects of Migration

In the end of twentieth century, Brettel and Hollifield (2000 : 1) estimated that in the United States of America there were 26.3 million immigrants, representing 9.8 per cent of its total population, while in Germany foreign residents consists of 8.2 per cent, in France 6.4 per cent and in Switzerland 16.3 per cent. Even Japan, known as a country having had strict immigration policy, amended her immigration policy towards the end of last century in order to recruit non-professional young foreign laborers as trainees ²⁾. The large human flow in Asia and the Middle East had culminated to the extent that some analysts warned an outbreak of “a global migration crisis” (cf. Weiner 1995).

While whether “a global migration crisis” breaks out or not remains questionable, clearly the last half of the twentieth century through the beginning of the twenty-first century has been “an age of migration” (cf. Brettel and Hollifield 2000 : 1). When we examine theory and research of migration in “an age of migration,” we have to take into consideration the changing aspects of migration itself around the late 1960s and the late 1980s ³⁾. Historically speaking, not only the “quantity” but also the “quality” of migration has been changing and accordingly migration theory or analytical framework has been also changing. That means in order to evaluate migration theory accurately, we have to examine the changing aspects of migration, in particular its “quality” or to put it more precisely processes and outcomes of migration.

Until the mid-1980s, most theoretically informed work on migration focused on the United States, the *sine qua non* of immigration countries (Schmitter Heisler 2000 : 78). In the American migration studies, until

the late 1960s, immigrants were considered as those who would be finally naturalized and assimilated into host societies. Otherwise, although in a few cases, after working and making their fortunes in host societies, they returned to their home countries. For bureaucrats, politicians and researchers as well, the latter cases did not matter much because in those days researches and theories remained rooted in “the social-problems-oriented approach.” It was the former cases and the assimilation processes that draw attention of social scientists, particularly sociologists. Sociologists of those days, as Schmitter Heisler (2000 : 77) asserted, postulated assimilation as the eventual outcome of immigration and that the assimilated immigrants would have lost their home country ties.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, it became clear that the assimilation model of migration failed to explain the “resurgence” of ethnicity and the persistence of racial inequality and conflict. Responding to the inadequacy of the assimilation theory, alternative theories based on “ethnicity” and later on “multiculturalism” had taken over it, in which immigrants and other culturally diversified groups were properly acknowledged and that they were allowed to keep their respective identities as long as they abide by the laws and regulations of host countries.

Meanwhile, by the late 1980s, migration had become worldwide phenomena involving not only politico-economic but also socio-cultural transformations on a global scale. The world had been witnessing an intensification of circuits of economic, political, cultural, and even ecological interdependence, and the resultant movements have been broadly formulated as “globalization.” The mass migration to Europe and the increased salience of international migration as a global phenomenon gave impetus to new theories. In the migration to the advanced European countries, where most host countries did not encourage permanent settlement of workers presumed to be temporary and where many sending states actively supported the maintenance of ties in order to insure the continued flow of valuable remittance, while

home country ties of migrants have been kept, migrants have semisettled in host countries (Schmitter Heisler 2000 : 84). In the United States, Massey et al. (1987) also brought to light the resembling phenomena among immigrants from Mexico. Their works and later works in the same line have made it clear that the permanent settlement of newcomers and the simultaneous loss of home country ties had never been historical realities. The acknowledgement of emerging aspects of migration has required researchers to introduce alternative theoretical frameworks other than the conventional assimilation theory.

2. Transnationalism

“Transnationalism” broadly refers to multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states (cf. Vertovec 2001 : ii). Anthropologists Basch *et al.* (1994 : 6) defined transnationalism as “the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link their societies of origin and settlement. In order to articulate and analyze the above-mentioned contemporary aspects of migration or human flow, therefore, “transnationalism” or “transnational” theoretical framework seems to be the most adequate.

However, as Vertovec (1999) distinguishes, there are at least six notions of “transnationalism”: as a social morphology, as a type of consciousness, as a model of cultural reproduction, as an avenue of capital, as a site of political engagement, and as a (re) construction of “place” or locality. Since the word has been not yet well defined, before examining “transnationalism” in the Sabah context, we had better clarify the concept and meaning of the word “transnationalism” we use.

As early as the early 1920s, “transnational” phenomena were yet vaguely but already recognized and conceptualized as such in the field of international relations or economics, where the interdependency of European economy beyond national boundaries had become increasingly obvious ⁴⁾. However, the Second World War and the Cold War had hindered the later development of global interdependency across

national boundaries. Nevertheless, in 1973, Buchan used a new word “transnationalism” without a hyphen when he lectured the international relations of those days on the BBC, and that seems to mean that by then the phenomena and the term had been widely recognized and accepted.

It was in the early 1980s when “transnational” phenomena had drawn further attention. Multinational or “transnational” companies had further developed not only quantitatively but also qualitatively to the extent that they invaded every corners of the world and their economic and/or political influences sometimes exceeded those of nation-states. At the same time, human rights, environmental issues and apprehensive exhaustion of natural resources and energy called for global response of NGOs and NPOs, which act beyond national boundaries. Those “transnational” organizations had gained strong presence in global socio-political settings. Around the early 1980s, therefore, the initial economic emphasis of “transnationalism” had moved to take its socio-political aspects into account. Yet the actors in “transnational” arena were still considered to be public or official body like NGOs, NPOs and multinational companies.

In the late 1980s, as I outlined in the above, we witnessed a quantitative and qualitative change of migration. Millions of peoples migrated to anywhere they thought being advantageous and, contrary to the conventional immigration theory, most of them had never been “assimilated” into host countries. Migrants often came and returned between host countries and home countries. They more often than not kept affiliations to their home countries and at the same time obtained residentship in host countries, which had resulted in having “dual” citizenship or nationality. They kept and manipulated intimate socio-cultural networks beyond national boundaries in order to survive and improve their way of life. The emphasis of “transnationalism” has moved again, in this case, from NGOs, NPOs or multinational companies to individual migrants or families, relatives, etc. In this sense, we can say “transnational” perspective since the late 1980s has moved to

“transnationalism from the below” (cf. Portes).

Thus, as Vertovec (1999) pointed out, depending on one’s positionality, there can be various notions of “transnationalism.” But, the “transnationalism from the below,” which focuses on multiple citizenship or nationality, individual or familial networks transcending national borders have been drawing increasing attention. Those are the points that we will highlight in this paper.

3. Anthropology of Migration

Although anthropological study on migration has long history, I outline it only as concerned with “transnationalism.”

As Brettel (2000 : 97) pointed out, until the end of 1950s, despite not a few migrants were commonly observed, anthropologists did not have much interest in migration because anthropology in those days contained a “sedentarist bias.” In the beginning of the 1960s, as anthropologists progressively rejected the idea of cultures and societies as discretely bounded, territorialized, relatively unchanging, and homogenous units, anthropology had to take migration into consideration.

In the successive decades, especially since the late 1980s, as the quantity and the quality of migration had changed drastically, anthropologists have also faced with “globalization” and “transnationalism.” In order to study the global cultural forms of the globalized world and transnational cultural flows, postmodernist anthropologist Appadurai (1991) advocated new concept of “ethnoscape,” which meant the landscape of persons who make up the shifting world consisting of tourists, immigrants, refugees, guest workers and other moving groups and persons. In the transnational arena, he argued, we have to focus on the cultural dynamics of, for instance, the cultural resistance of migrants against the national authority or the invention of hybrid cultures. Although Appadurai pointed out the necessity of anthropological study in the process of deterritorialization of culture and people, he never formulated it as “transnationalism.”

It was anthropologists Glick Schiller et al. (1992) who for the first time formulated “transnationalism” clearly as to emphasize “the emergence of a social process in which migrants establish social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders” and that “they [migrants] develop and maintain multiple relations - familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political - that span borders.” They formulated “transnationalism” because they found in their own fieldwork evidences of a new pattern of migration and since then they had been trying to grapple with the implications of what they were seeing all around them. Glick Schiller et al.’s pioneer seems to have become the base line for contemporary “transnationalism” studies. Thus, later in this line, Glick Schiller et al. (1992), Bamyeh (1993) and Kearney (1995) reviewed relevant studies while a series of edited books on transnationalism have been published one after another since the middle of the 1990s (for instance *Routledge Research in Transnationalism*).

As shown in the above short review, analytical framework of anthropology for understanding the changing aspects of migration or mass human flow has shifted from conventional “assimilation” theory towards “transnationalism.” In the following, I will demonstrate the potentiality of transnational perspectives by adopting it to describe and analyze the migration and the resultant socio-cultural dynamics of a border area of Sabah, East Malaysia. Before going further, however, we need to ascertain the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of migration in Sabah.

Migration of Sabah

1. Overview

Looking through Sabah’s history, we can discern distinct waves of migration. Kurus (1998) sorts them roughly into four stages : a) the pre-colonial unrestricted inter-island “hopping” of seafaring communities from the region’s archipelago states ; b) the British “importation” of foreign laborers during the colonial era ; c) the “exodus” of Muslim

refugees from the southern Philippines in the 1970s and d) the successive influxes of laborers from neighboring countries in response to the rubber and timber economic booms from the 1950s until the early 1980s. Over the turn of the century, despite the end of the “timber boom” in the 1980s, substantial influxes of laborers from the Philippines and Indonesia have persisted.

2. Recent Trends in Migration

Although the most recent census was taken in 2000, the data on population movement by states has not been published yet except for its basic data published on the Malaysian Government’s internet website ⁵⁾.

From the prompt data on the website, we learn that the total population of Sabah has increased by more than 50 per cent to 2,603,485 in 2000 from 1,734,685 in 1991. Looking closely at the composition in terms of citizenship, however, the Malaysian citizens are 76.4 per cent of the total population in 2000, and that ratio is almost the same as that of 1991 census (75.5 %). Of about 25 per cent of Non-Malaysian citizens in 1991 and in 2000 living in Sabah, most of them were and still seems to be Indonesian and Filipino migrants. In terms of population composition, there seems to be no great difference between the 2000 and the 1991 censuses. In this paper, therefore, by using the former census report *Population and Housing Census of Malaysia 1991 : State Population Report Sabah* published in 1995, I outline the general trends of Sabah migration.

According to the 1991 census, 425,175 (24.5%) out of Sabah’s total population of 1,734,685 were “Non-Malaysian Citizens” (see Table 1). The “Non-Malaysian Citizens” category consisted of immigrant workers residing in Sabah with foreign nationality, such as Indonesians or Filipinos. Of the 425,175 categorized as “Non-Malaysian Citizens,” 237,009 were male and 188,166 female. The latest census report estimates that the number of “Non-Malaysian Citizens” has increased to 823,100 (29.3%) out of the 1998 mid-year population estimate of 2,812,900 (*Monthly Statistical Bulletin, Sabah 1998*).

Table 1. Population by Citizenship in the 1991 Census

Malaysian Citizens	1,309,510 (75.5%)
Non-Malaysian Citizens	425,175 (24.5%)
Total	1,734,685 (100%)

Both the 1991 Census and the 1998 estimate exclude immigrants registered in the “Malaysian Citizens” category. When we examine the category in detail, 200,056 Chinese, 139,403 Indonesians and 32,210 others who retain their original ethnic identity were classified as “Malaysian Citizens.” Certain among these are considered to be immigrants or the descendants of immigrants. Thus the total number of immigrants in Sabah would actually seem to comprise more than one third of Sabah’s total population.

Present immigrants in Sabah mainly consist of two groups of foreign nationals, namely, Indonesians and Filipinos. According to the 1991 Census, out of 425,175 “Non-Malaysian Citizens,” 227,242 (53.4%) were Indonesian and 189,329 (44.5%) Filipino (see Table 2). It should be noted that although most of these (342,196, or 80.9%) were born outside Malaysia and, therefore, came themselves to Sabah from their homelands as immigrants, some of them (77,865, or 18.4%) were born in Sabah but are, nevertheless, still considered immigrants.

Table 2. Non-Malaysian Citizens by Nationality* and Birthplace

Nationality/Birthplace	in Ma’sia (Sabah)	outside Ma’sia	Unknown	Total
Indonesian	39,097 (38,279)	187,236	909	227,242
Filipino	38,672 (38,492)	149,774	883	189,329
Singaporean	618 (579)	573	6	1,197
Bruneian	62 (52)	177	0	239
Thai	41 (26)	102	0	143
Other	528 (437)	4,334	50	4,912
Total	79,018 (77,865)	342,196	1,848	423,062

* In the 1991 Census, nationality is not specified.

Table 3. Malaysian Citizens by Birthplace

in Malaysia	
Sabah	1,255,524
outside Sabah	55,904
	<hr/>
	1,262,428
outside Malaysia	
Singapore	553
Indonesia	19,922
Philippines	11,718
Thailand	87
Brunei	664
Vietnam	265
China	4,722
India/Pakistan	
Bangladesh/Sri Lanka	988
Other Countries	1961
	<hr/>
	40,880
Unknown	4,728
	<hr/>
	1,307,036

As one can be registered as Malaysian if he/she is born in Malaysia and one or both of his/her parents has/have Malaysian citizenship, it is understandable that descendants of immigrants are gradually “assimilated” into Sabah as Malaysian citizens. The process of assimilation is further illustrated by the table, “Malaysian Citizens by Birthplace” (see Table 3).

It is clear that most “Malaysian Citizens” were born in Sabah, or at least in Malaysia. But it is also clear that a sizable number, 40,880 (or 3.1%), were born outside Malaysia, most of whom were born in Indonesia (19,922, or 1.5%) or the Philippines (11,718, or 0.9%). It seems that some immigrants from Indonesia or the Philippines have obtained Malaysian citizenship and, thus, have become Malaysian.

From this brief examination of the 1991 Population Census, it is clear that some one third of Sabah’s total population now consists of immigrants or their descendants, that most of these are Indonesian or Filipino, and that they have gradually been “assimilated” into their host society, Sabah ⁶).

Transnational Perspectives in the Sabah Context

Now we are trying to adopt a transnational analytical framework to the socio-cultural dynamics of Sabah so that we can explore its hitherto neglected aspects, for instance, multiple affiliation and citizenship, transnational networks and transnational space.

1. “Denizenship” and Multiple Affiliation

Looking over the above-mentioned population census, we take notice there are always substantial “non-Malaysian citizens” in Sabah ; the non-Malaysian citizens amount to about 425,000 (24.5% of the total population) and 614,000 (23.6%) in the 1991 and the 2000 censuses. Because neither genuine migrant workers with official travel documents nor illegal migrant workers or over-staying foreigners without proper permits were counted as consisting of the Malaysian population, the “non-Malaysian citizens” are taken as those who do not hold full Malaysian citizenships but reside in Sabah as “permanent residents” or “temporary residents”⁷).

According to the National Registration Act 1959 and the National Registration Regulations 1990 of Malaysia, Malaysian population is categorized into three : “citizens” (“*warganegara*”), “permanent residents” (“*penduduk tetap*”) and “temporary residents” (“*penduduk sementara*”). While the first are the persons who are recognized as full citizens of Malaysia, the latter twos are not full citizens but allowed to reside in Malaysia for prescribed years. Depending on their statuses, the Malaysian population are given three types of identity cards : ordinary (white) cards for “citizens,” red stripe cards (“red card”) for “permanent residents” and green stripe cards for (“blue card”) “temporary residents”⁸).

A “temporary resident” is the person who resides in Malaysia with an Entry Permit, which admit the person to remain in Malaysia after the expiry of her/his immigration pass. After 5 or 10 years (in case of a

foreign husband of a citizen of Malaysia) of continuous residence in Malaysia as “temporary residents,” foreigners become eligible to apply for a permanent resident status. In order to become a Malaysian “citizen” by naturalization, the applicant needs to be over the age of twenty-one years and resides in Malaysia for a period of not less than 10 years probably as “permanent residents” together with “good character” and “adequate knowledge of Malay language.”

The point I highlight here is that, although the Pairin Kitingan’s (1992) warning will not be likely to come true⁹⁾, the “transient population” (Kitingan’s inclusive word for “permanent” and “temporary” residents) have been always substantial, and that while they keep their original nationalities or citizenships, they have been bestowed on part of rights and duties of Malaysian citizens. That means the “permanent” and “temporary” residents are not “full” yet “partial” Malaysian citizens.

The “transient population,” most of whom are historically Filipinos or Indonesians by nationalities, who have identification cards (*kad pengenalan*) of either “red” (i.e. “permanent residents”) or “blue” (i.e. “temporary residents”), have substantial rights being a par with those of full Malaysian citizens in terms of the rights for voting election, public schooling (for their children), receiving public health services, etc.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, sociologists and political scientists have begun to reconstruct the concept of “citizenship” responding to the changing socio-political situations, where the rights and duties of citizens of a country should be explained in an open system which cannot distinguish sharply between citizens and non-citizens (Kondo 2001 : 1-2). “Permanente residents” and “temporary residents” are in this sense considered to have “quasi-citizenship” or “denizenship,” through which immigrants gain many of the rights of citizenship without formal membership. “Denizens” are the persons who do not have full citizenship but are bestowed on substantial citizenship rights and duties (cf. Hammer 1990 : 13-15).

However, since the “denizenship” itself has been conceptualized within a framework of nation-state polity, the term makes blurred

another essential characteristic of “transient population,” namely “dual” nationality or citizenship observed in Sabah (cf. Castles and Davidson 2000). Since “temporary residents” or “permanent residents” retaining their Indonesian or Filipino nationalities, they are of course Indonesians or Filipinos and at the same time they are “quasi- Malaysians” as well because of their Malaysian “denizenship.” “Permanent residents” or sometimes “temporary residents” as well, in this sense, have “dual” citizenship or nationality ¹⁰).

It is a transnational framework that allows us to describe and analyze the above-mentioned aspects of “denizenship” and “dual” affiliation observed in Sabah. What have been really happened to individual migrants, families, kin groups, ethnic groups and regional groups should be pursued from transnational perspectives.

2. Transnational Networks

While the transnational networks of Hispanic migrants in the United States have been exploring by many researchers, few have systematically identified such networks in the Sabah context. Admittedly, in his epoch-making book on the Insular Southeast Asian maritime networks, Warren (1981) revealed the networks in the Sulu zone that extend from the southern Philippine islands to eastern coast of Sabah. Recently, Sather (1997) further explored the similar but wider networks of the Bajau Laut extending from the southern Philippines through Sabah to Indonesia. The revealed maritime networks around Sabah is, however, regarding mainly to the historical past rather than the present.

As Mohammed Halib and Huxley (1996 : 6) once implied, generally speaking, local researchers seem to have researched, write and publish “locally.” This sometimes prevents them from taking interests in exploring the socio-cultural networks beyond the national borders except for economic aspects. Of course, local researchers apparently recognize transnational networks extending beyond national borders. But, pursuing those networks beyond national borders is neither wanted nor needed so far.

Recently, a joint research team consisting of mainly Japanese anthropologists including me has completed their preliminary research on the socio-cultural dynamics of Sabah migrants and their research findings were edited into an anthropology entitled “Making of Multi-Cultural Sabah” (Miyazaki (ed.) 2002)¹¹). Among them, Ito (2002), Tomizawa (2002) and Shimizu (2002) described socio-cultural networks of the Bugis, the Bajau/Sama, and the Christian Filipino migrants respectively. For instance, Ito (*ibid.*) reported Bugis migrants from southern Sulawesi, Indonesia, have established their own ethnically-based welfare and/or cultural association and keep intimate networks within Sabah. Shimizu (*ibid.*) also found Christian Filipinos’ ethnically-based informal networks organized on the occasion of gatherings at particular Churches. Those ethnically-based networks are, however, described and analyzed as completed within Sabah border although they seem to well recognize “transnational” extending of ethnically-based networks beyond the national border.

Although rather rudimental, many researchers irrespective of local or Euro-American have recognized a need to research on transnational networks of migrants in Sabah. Among the above-mentioned joint research team, for instance, an Indonesian demographer Dr. Riwanto Trestono of the Indonesian Institute of Social Sciences (LIPI) has traced Indonesian migration to Sabah and consequently he has also dealt with their transnational networks extending national border. Another researcher from Australia, who had a long ethnographical fieldwork experience in Sumba Island, came far away to Sabah in order to conduct survey in the place where more than half of young villagers of her field site had come to work at least once in their life course. The Australian anthropologist’s episode demonstrates that even in an ethnographical field research we need to introduce transnational perspectives and explore transnational networks beyond national border.

3. Transnational Space

As Pries (2001 : 3) argues, in the beginning of the twenty-first century,

we have been witnessing a fundamental rearrangement of relation between geographic and social spaces. Although for centuries the mutual embeddedness of social practices, symbols and artifacts in uni-local geographic “containers” have predominated, today this complete conjunction of the social and the spatial is questionable in two ways: “stacked” social spaces could exist in a single geographic space, and social spaces could extend over more than one or the coherent geographic container spaces of different national societies. The latter, characterized as the emergence of pluri-locally spanned transnational social spaces.

From the perspective of transnational space, we may highlight the establishment and developing of so-called regional economic unit, the BIMP-EAGA (The Brunei-Indonesia-Malaysia-The Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area), and resultant emerging transnational unity. Based on the agreement of the 4th ASEAN summit in Singapore in 1993, a sub-regional economic cooperation that focus on the Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines was founded in 1994 as the BIMP-EAGA. As a joint undertaking of four governments, BIMP-EAGA aims to mobilize the potential economic cooperation to accelerate the development of specific sub-regions of the four countries, namely Brunei Darussalam, East and West Kalimantan, North Sulawesi Provinces in Indonesia, Sabah, Sarawak and Labuan in Malaysia, and Mindanao and Palawan in the Philippines. As such, when we talk of the BIMP-EAGA, we are inclined to take it as noting but economic being. From the transnational and anthropological view, however, the BIMP-EAGA attempt may be evaluated in other way.

Although it is still vague, the establishment and the later developments of the BIMP-EAGA cooperation seem to have been generating a kind of regional unity beyond national boundaries. I would like to make this point clear by showing you an episode when I attended a regional (international) conference on the BIMP-EAGA focusing on “Academic Cooperation in BIMP-EAGA,” which was held in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, in August 1999. At its final general discussion, the

convener of the session, seemingly without much intention, used a word “Eagans” in order to refer to the whole participants from the BIMP-EAGA member nation-states. The word “Eagans” is, as you recognized immediately, the abbreviation of the “EAGAN Peoples” meaning “the peoples those who live in the BIMP-East ASEAN Growth Area.” The word was welcomed with a joy by the whole participants, who took the word as only a symbol of the unity achieved by the peoples living in the BIMP-EAGA. As far as I know, the concept of the “Eagan” has never been considered seriously.

Looking back the episode from a perspective of transnational unity, however, we may be able to bring out other meanings. Since the establishment of the BIMP-EAGA in 1994, peoples, commodities, money and information have been flowing constantly within the area for almost ten years. It is certain that most of them have been of economic characters. But a series of conferences, seminars, meetings and talks have been organized annually, and the planned and achieved projects have been repeatedly propagated by local mass media within the BIMP-EAGA. Admittedly I have never heard again the nomenclature “Eagans,” but it is not denied that a kind of regional unity or grouping beyond nation-state boundaries resembling a citizen of the EU will be formed in the future ¹²⁾. In this sense, we should have an analytical framework with which we can articulate, recognize and analyze the emerging, but hitherto neglected, new transnational space and unity ¹³⁾.

Concluding Remarks

In my former paper (Uesugi 2002), I demonstrated that when we deal with the dynamics of population movement and the resultant socio-cultural dynamics in Sabah, description and analysis at the “meso-level” or “middle-range” focusing on ethnically-based cultural associations, for instance, rather than at the individual level (micro-level) or state level (macro-level) would be useful. In the “meso-level” or “middle-range,” I showed, we could recognize the Kadazan (dusun) nationalism as part of

the dynamics of a whole set comprising of the Malay nationalism on one hand and other ethnically-based nationalisms like so-called Bajau nationalism or Bisaya nationalism on the other hand. However, my former analysis was, in a sense, limited because its analytical framework was within nation-state boundaries. I did not fully take into consideration the identity construction, socio-cultural networking and space conceptualization beyond nation-state boundaries. In short, I could not fully conceptualize what had been formulated as “transnationalism.” Then, in this paper, I have attempted to introduce an alternative analytical framework of “transnational” perspectives in the socio-cultural dynamics of Sabah, East Malaysia.

After reviewing the changing aspects of migration and anthropological theoretical framework of migration from “assimilation” through “multiculturalism” to “transnationalism,” I preliminary analyzed the hitherto not-fully explored aspects of the socio-cultural dynamics of Sabah in the transnational framework: “denizenship” and multiple affiliation, transnational networks and transnational space.

In the transnational theoretical framework, migrants’ identities, citizenships or nationalities had better be characterized not as “all-or-nothing” one but gradual and partible one. Hence, in the context of Sabah, not citizenship but denizenship and not mono-affiliation but multiple affiliations were focused in this paper.

Similarly, not the socio-cultural networks within the national border but those beyond national borders have been paid attention. I have shown a few recent researches in this line. Finally, from the transnational perspectives, I have tried to re-evaluate a sub-regional economic cooperation, the Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area. Since the BIMP-EAGA is located in the transnational space and within its area the constant human, financial, information and commodities flows are continued, I have pointed out some kind of unity might emerge the long run.

Any aspects demonstrated in this paper have been not fully explored in the conventional analytical framework. In other words, it is

by introducing a transnational theoretical framework that we could have fully explored the hitherto neglected socio-cultural aspects of the dynamics of Sabah.

Mohammed and Huxley (1996 : 6-8) once lamented in the introduction to their introductory book on Southeast Asian studies that Southeast Asian studies had had the minimal impact on wider theoretical debates compared to, for instance, Latin American studies, which had a profound effect on theoretical and conceptual constructs in the social sciences. At the same time, they implied that in the “modern” disciplines like sociology, politics, economics, and international relations, the boundaries of Southeast Asia and/or her consisting nation-states as a useful region or socio-cultural units for analysis were being challenged by socio-cultural developments in the real world. To respond to their critique, we have to locate and evaluate the research on the socio-cultural dynamics of Sabah in, for instance, the contemporary theoretical debate of “transnationalism.” That is why I attempted to introduce an alternative analytical framework of transnationalism into Sabah context. “Transnationalism” perspectives, as being demonstrated in this paper, must be one of the promising alternative frameworks in studying the socio-cultural dynamics of Sabah, East Malaysia.

Notes

- 1) This paper was initially presented at the “Seminar Brunei Darussalam-Jepun : Kajian Brunei-Borneo,” held between 13th-14th August, 2003, at the University of Brunei Darussalam, Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam, and was supposed to be published in the seminar proceedings. Due to unavoidable circumstances, however, this has not yet happened. With the permission of the organizing committee of the seminar, the paper is therefore reproduced here. I am grateful to the committee for inviting me to present paper at the seminar and also for allowing me to reproduce it here.
- 2) The term “theory” in this paper is loosely defined as including analytical frameworks, typologies and models.
- 3) Responding to the expected rapid decrease of the young working population, the Japanese government has gradually eased the immigration policy since the middle of the 1980s. In 1990, a partial amendment to the Immigration Act of

Japan was made. The new act admits non-professional foreign workers to enter and stay in Japan for years legally as trainees. As a result of the amendment and its later enforcement, a total of 36,000 trainees were registered by the end of 2000.

- 4) According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2nd ed., 1989), Angell (1972 [1921]) was the first commentator who used the hyphenised terms “trans-national” or “trans-nationalism” in his book published in 1921.
- 5) See the website (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2000, “*Key Summary Statistics by State, Malaysia*, 2000, [URL : [http : //www.statistics.gov.my/English /pressdemo.htm](http://www.statistics.gov.my/English/pressdemo.htm)]).
- 6) My speculation might be backed up by the fact that the ratio of *bumiputera* (the sons of the soil, namely “the natives of Malaysia”) among the Malaysian citizens increased by approximately 30 % to 80.5% (ca. 2,096,000) in 2000, from 54.1 % (937,841) in 1991. The drastic increase of the ratio of Malaysian citizens cannot be explained in terms of the natural birthrate, rather it seems to have been achieved by the “assimilation” of, for instance, Malaysian citizens of Indonesian ancestry (Indonesian Malaysian), who in the 1991 census consisted of 139,403 (8.0 %) of the total population of Sabah.) According to the population census in 2000, the actual number of non-Malaysian citizens is about 614,000, an increase of about 200,000 from 1991 (ca. 425,000).
- 7) In the population census, no definition for the “non-Malaysian citizens” has been provided.
- 8) There is another type of identification card with a brown strip, issued to people who have a criminal record.
- 9) In the beginning of 1990's, Kitingan (1992) projected that the “transient population,” comprising mostly of Filipinos and Indonesian, would overtake the local populaton of Sabah by the year 2008.
- 10) According to the Transnational Communities Programme web site (*Dual Citizenship* [http : //www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk/traces/feature.htm](http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk/traces/feature.htm)), as of March 1998 around half the world's countries recognize dual citizenship or dual nationality.
- 11) The Project was organized by Prof. Koji Miyazaki and conducted, with the grant in-aid from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Sciences, in cooperation with the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) Sabah, Malaysia. We greatly appreciate all the advice and assistance given by everyone.
- 12) Kono (2001 : 4) implies that being people in a common-market, such as in the European Union (EU), can infer a status similar to citizens of a nation, in that they are guaranteed some social rights traditionally given to such citizens.
- 13) Although I show only a “new” transnational space and unity in the BIMP -EAGA case, a transnational perspective forces us to re-evaluate “old” case, too.

For instance, the traditional gift-exchange networks among the Murut of southern Sabah, on which I wrote a detailed ethnography (Uesugi 1998), sometimes extend beyond the Malaysia-Indonesia border. However, to complete my description and analysis effectively, I dealt with just a part of the gift-exchange networks, and only within the Malaysian national border. At the same time, I did not fully take into consideration the quite substantial number of Muruts, especially the young, who migrated out of the towns and back to interior villages within and beyond Malaysia. From a transnational perspective, those phenomena should have also been considered.

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