

COMMENTARY

**MALAYSIA'S 40 YEARS OF LOOK EAST POLICY AND RELOCATION OF
INDONESIA'S CAPITAL: SERUMPUN SOLUTION IN SARAWAK-WEST
KALIMANTAN CROSS-BORDER HALAL HUB AND RELATIONS[©] ^Σ**

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ABSTRACT

The relocation of Indonesia's new capital to Kota Nusantara (East Kalimantan) is a game changer. It creates a spill-over of the prosperity neighbour policy upon the existing West Kalimantan-Malaysia Sarawak border for the first Japanese AEON Big in Kuching (Malaysia's Sarawak) and potential Halal Wagyu beef market in Pontianak (Indonesia's West Kalimantan). Both countries should seize this golden opportunity to revisit their respective Look East Policy (LEP) with Japan and integrate Japan's advantages in quality assurance to overcome different regulatory Halal practices. After all, sustaining the Halal economy is no longer determined by the growing Muslim population alone but a shared knowledge and mutual policy lessons on Halal regulations and quality assurance. While both countries are essential players in the global halal hub and shared trade borders, there needs to be more harmonisation between Kalimantan-Sarawak's cross-border halal framework. With the Indonesian decision to relocate to a new capital, Kota Nusantara (located in East Kalimantan), there is a severe immediate need to bring LEP's benefits and profile the existing business ecosystem in Kuching (the capital of Sarawak) and Pontianak (capital of West Kalimantan).

Keywords: cross-border Halal hub, Japanese quality assurance in Malaysia Sarawak and Kalimantan Indonesia, 40 years of Look East Policy in Malaysia, and relocation of Indonesia's new capital.

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KOMENTAR

**40 TAHUN DASAR PANDANG KE TIMUR MALAYSIA DAN
PERPINDAHAN IBU KOTA INDONESIA: SOLUSI SERUMPUN DALAM
HAB HALAL RENTAS SEMPADAN DAN DALAM HUBUNGAN
SARAWAK- KALIMANTAN BARAT**

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ABSTRAK

Pemindahan ibu negara baru Indonesia ke Kota Nusantara (Kalimantan Timur) adalah perubahan besar kerana mewujudkan limpahan dasar memakmurkan jiran (prosper thy neighbour policy) terhadap sempadan Kalimantan Barat-Malaysia Sarawak bagi pasaraya Jepun pertama di Borneo, AEON Big di Kuching dan potensi pasaran daging lembu Wagyu Halal di Pontianak di Kalimantan Barat. Kedua negara harus merebut peluang keemasan ini untuk memanfaatkan Dasar Pandang Ke Timur (LEP) masing-masing dengan Jepun dan melimpahkan kelebihan jaminan kualiti untuk Jepun bagi mengatasi amalan kawal selia Halal yang berbeza. Mengekalkan pasaran Halal bukan lagi ditentukan oleh populasi konsumer Muslim yang semakin meningkat tetapi perkongsian pengetahuan dan pengajaran dasar bersama mengenai peraturan Halal dan jaminan kualiti di sempadan negara. Walaupun kedua-dua negara adalah aktor terpenting dalam Hab Halal Global dan mempunyai hubungan perdagangan di sempadan, keduanya memerlukan penyelarasan dalam rangka kerja halal rentas sempadan Kalimantan-Sarawak. Dengan keputusan perpindahan Indonesia ke ibu kota baharu, wujud keperluan segera untuk memanfaatkan LEP bagi menyokong ekosistem perdagangan rentas sempadan di Kuching (ibu negeri Sarawak) dan Pontianak (pusat kota Kalimantan Barat).

Kata Kunci: *Hab Halal rentas sempadan, jaminan kualiti Jepun di Malaysia Sarawak dan Kalimantan Indonesia, Dasar Pandang Ke Timur selama 40 tahun di Malaysia dan pemindahan ibu negara baharu Indonesia*

Introduction

This year marks 40 years of Malaysia's Look East Policy (LEP) (ISIS 2022), while Indonesia celebrates 60 years of harmonious relations with Japan (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia* 2022). In May 2022, former Malaysia's Prime Minister Ismail Sabri visited Japan (*The Star* 2022b), and the Japanese counterpart expressed cordial interest in increased trade and business in Borneo, especially Sarawak (*Borneo Post* 2022). Reading from the geopolitics of East Asia and the enraged rivalries since the United States (US)-China trade war, it is obvious for Malaysia's neighbour, Indonesia, that the relocation of their capital city to newly Kota Nusantara is a game changer (Ferency 2022). Geographically, Malaysia's Sabah capital, Kota Kinabalu, is closer to future Indonesia's capital, Kota Nusantara (East Kalimantan).

Significant domestic changes in Malaysia have brought the political and economic importance of the newly upgraded status of Sabah and Sarawak as equal partners to Peninsular Malaysia (Puyok 2022; Lai 2022). Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic political chaos and fragile ruling coalition of the federal government in Putrajaya, peninsular of Malaysia, have increased pressures of restoring Malaysia's 1963 agreements, which resulted in the amendment of the core provision within the Federal Constitution of Malaysia. Meanwhile, the existing Pan-Borneo highway project has linked many major cities of Malaysia, Sabah, Sarawak, and neighbouring Brunei (Mokhtar 2022). Supposedly, new political and economic values and realignment will be carried out within the new frontier of Malaysia-Indonesia relations in Kota Nusantara in East Kalimantan and existing formal and informal trans-border routes, trade, and people migrations between Malaysia Borneo and Indonesia's Kalimantan (Clark 2022). Peculiar observations of the formerly perceived underdeveloped of Malaysia-Kalimantan are crucial. Within geopolitical great power rivalries, China's assertiveness in the South China Sea and overlapped sovereignty claims of the Spratly Islands are complex (Abdul Rashid *et al.* 2022). It is no surprise to many that the East Asian and Southeast Asian regions within the existing China's Belt and Road Initiatives (BRIs) footprints have been a constant source of a contest for Japan to restore its past glories (Md Khalid and Azman 2021). Nevertheless, Japan's past official development assistance (ODA) and its constant soft power decline in the region (Lai and Moorthy 2022) could be a blessing in disguise in bringing Japan's business ethics, and part of solutions to help both Kuching-West Kalimantan cross-border halal hub.

From Geopolitical Rivalry to Future Serumpun Cross-Border Halal Diplomacy

Within the multifaceted security dilemma, Malaysia and Indonesia should reignite their *serumpun* ideals and reengage Japan's thirst for a new sphere of interest in Borneo to renew past LEP to proliferate both shared reputations in the global Halal hub. The existing literature on the Muslim markets and their aggressive roles in the global Halal hub focus on inward and domestic market build-up (Mohamed and Ismail 2021). However, few are privileged with cross-border ties between Malaysia and Indonesia. Years of "Looking East" to Japan and news of Indonesia's capital relocation should be the right endemic moment to reopen cross-border and materialise *serumpun* Halal solution (Jamaludin and Sugawara 2022). The 2019/20 Global Islamic Economic Report has shown that while Indonesia has the largest Muslim population (90%), the country is ranked number four in the global Muslim market competitiveness and Halal brands (SG 2019).

On the other hand, Malaysia, with only 63.3% Muslims, is currently ranked number one in the same Muslim economic competitiveness report and globally more trusted in their Halal assurance and Muslim brand reputations (Saiman and Yusman 2022). Both countries are essential players in the global halal market and shared trade borders. In the endemic transition of reopening economic borders, the solidarity of Ummah and prosperity neighbour should embrace the blue ocean strategy, dispel unhealthy trade competitions, and harmonise different halal regulations. On West Kalimantan-Malaysia Sarawak border, the first Japanese retail grocery store in Borneo, the AEON Big supermarket, has been established in Sarawak. Simultaneously, potential Halal Wagyu Beef between Pontianak and Kuching has enabled cross-border trade opportunities but needs help to overcome other regulatory Halal assurance impractical challenges (Maksum 2022).

Unfriendly Cross-Border Ecosystem and Red-Tape Regulatory Constrains are Becoming Unislamic

The central issue is a lack of structure to harmonise the cross-border halal frameworks between Kalimantan-Sarawak. With the Indonesian decision to relocate to a new capital, Kota Nusantara (located in East Kalimantan), there is a severe immediate need to learn and map the existing business ecosystem in Kuching (capital of Sarawak) and Pontianak as the (capital of West Kalimantan) (Jamaludin and Sugawara 2022). The issue is that both Indonesian and Malaysian Halal national authorities adopt different pathways in the Halal certification process.

The implementation of the 2014 Halal Assurance Act (*Undang-Undang Jaminan Produk Halal: UU JPH*) aims to ensure that every business sector and Halal consumer could immediately benefit from this Halal certification (Yakub and Fitriyani 2022). With the confusing registration process and high cost, the Indonesian government's hasty mandatory Halal certification discourages small-scale businesses from participating. Despite the advancement of the Malaysian halal regulatory and quality assurance framework, Indonesian and Malaysian Halal industry players often face a separate set of Halal assurance and confusing regulations requiring legal and assurance harmonisation. In the post-pandemic economic recovery era, we need to create empathetic pathways and platforms that allow key stakeholders to harmonise different concerns, issues, and shared solutions (Zulkifli *et al.* 2022). Both policymakers have learned from Japan, but they want to have a series of workshops and engage Japanese investors, researchers, and industries in convincing them that harmonising quality assurance will help the cross-border Halal framework in economic growth and benefit local communities.

Our previous preliminary fieldwork with small-scale businesses outside Jakarta and at several cross-border Halal markets, including Pontianak, has confirmed that Indonesian lower-income business owners and traders are burdened with compulsory registration with Indonesia's Halal regulation. Many Indonesian trades which rely on Malaysia's cross-border avenues have known the Malaysian Halal Logo since the late 1980s. For local rural consumers who live far away from the capital city of Jakarta and closer to Malaysian borders, the Malaysian Halal brand is more trusted than the Indonesian one. The opening of AEON Big from Japan, the first grocery retail outlet in Kuching, the capital of Sarawak (Malaysia Borneo), supports local produce and service, which highlights the importance of cross-border ties between Kuching and Pontianak (capital of West Kalimantan province) in helping to improve their post-pandemic livelihood since the end of lockdown measure.

On the West Kalimantan-Sarawak borders, existing trades are in a state of confusion with Indonesian halal regulation. Local Malaysian and Indonesian products are affected in these cross-border areas because there is no single policy framework. Local industry associations need empathetic help from the Malaysian and Japanese sides to share lessons and advice the local governments on cross-border policymakers (The Star 2022a). Arguably Malaysia's existing reputation could complement and improve Indonesia. This will be the first cross-border Halal framework which is why we suggest the similarities of both countries and history and the importance of learning from each other – *Serumpun Halal Solution* Past conversations with Halal authorities in Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur have confirmed that the Look East Policy with Japan has taught them to value quality assurance. The shared international recognition of the Halal certificate shows the market value reflected in Halal Quality Assurance, emphasising solid quality control and compliance ethics in cleanliness and hygiene.

Exploring Potential Areas in Cross-Border Serumpun Halal Framework

The under-joined transborder Halal arrangements, a similar Quadruple-Helix perspective in international business and management literature, allows mutual cross-border policy lessons and potential benefits of using shared knowledge and policy lessons in the Halal assurance cross-border Halal market. For instance, a proposed Serumpun cube for shared information on data collection and findings among researchers. The existing university networks and strengths such as Universiti Malaya's International Institute of Public Policy and Management (UM INPUMA) and East Asian Studies, Halal Research Centre in Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), biotech and food science research in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Japanese language training centre in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), and Japan Corner in Universitas Tanjung Pura, Pontianak, West Kalimantan could be considered. Academia should explore a closed-door forum and webinar to exchange ideas, issues, disputes, and solutions among Indonesian and Malaysian policymakers, local governments in Kuching and Pontianak, cross-border customs, and Halal authorities and experts. The availability of these serves as a primary data lab of the government perspective. Explorations of Delphi criteria in identifying relevant stakeholders in Halal Wagyu, Kuching retail business, and the supply chain in Pontianak must be examined. The big data analytics of the 5G, Geographic Information System (GIS), including adapting to both cities' drone video and camera footage, must be integrated. Japanese experts and advancement of research and knowledge in organisational business ethics, quality assurance, and food hygiene models could be improvised and transferred to address cross-border Halal needs. Other focus group discussion methods, hybrid market surveys, and interviews with samples from experts, industry, youth, and family households in Kuching and Pontianak could be utilised to gain local community feedback and business needs (Saiman and Yusman 2022).

Furthermore, short-, mid-, and long-term joined planning must be considered, especially in shared educational hubs, training centres, and policy advice, which will translate into creating transborder city networks and mobility for halal products. Policy framework for local government agencies to create a friendly cross-border Halal business environment for industries and the shared practice of Halal assurance and legal framework is crucial. Harmonized trans-border people-to-people relations and tapping into mutual dependencies of shared infrastructural facilities in peaceful development and healthy competency are needed to access Indonesia's new capital and more accessibility routes. Long term: Academic-industry collaboration, this project closes the academic gap

in understanding the rural communities' visualization enhancement of Japanese lifestyles, products, and services and improving their living standard while preserving their culture, providing a peaceful model of managing local communities with transborder development issues and Halal consumerism (Ren and Liu 2022).

Research Halal policies and issues by the halal-related agencies such as the Halal Development Corporation (HDC) and the Department of Islamic Development of Malaysia (JAKIM) can be critical players in initiating collaborations with similar Indonesian stakeholders and other Malaysian government agencies, namely the Standard and Industrial Research Institute of Malaysia (SIRIM), and Malaysia Productivity Council (MPC). They must explore, understand, and investigate regulatory and quality assurance issues or disputes that can be integrated with lessons from Japanese business strategy and ethics involving joined-halal assurance issues in attracting local consumers and tourists.

Forty years of LEP require a clear strategy and reading of Japanese foreign business and prospective industrial representatives already based in Kuching, Kota Kinabalu, Kuala Lumpur, Pontianak, Palangka Raya, Banjar Baru, and Tanjung Selor. Further studies to map local governments and their expectations in this ecosystem of cross-border Halal market must be able to engage local businesses, small-scale traders, and representatives of industries from Kuching and Pontianak (Nazaudi *et al.* 2022). Several Japanese representatives around Kuching and Pontianak, such as AEON, a Japan-based Malaysian operating Halal Wagyu restaurants in Japan and Malaysia, have shown their interest and wanted to take this opportunity to learn and understand the post-pandemic cross-border Halal market prospects via this harmonization solution.

Inevitably, the capability to produce a white paper and report on advising local and central levels of government representatives of both sides and learn the sensitivity of how to materialize the actual blueprint dual cross-border Halal quality assurance and regulatory framework. During the fieldwork, a representative from Indonesia informed the author of the need to build linkages with Malaysia's cross-border and Halal authorities in starting more tangible discussions on harmonizing differences. Indonesian, Malaysian, and Japanese Halal experts wanted to learn from each other. Nevertheless, there is an urgent need to provide a white paper for policymakers, demographic information about local cross-border traders, and policy studies on cross-border linkages and mobilities viability for local government. Additional GPS map information via drone technology in finding prospective buffer areas that could be used as potential business consultation areas provides several tangible solutions needed instantly.

Resolving cultural and societal cross-border gaps requires practical Halal knowledge and engagement with industry. The proposal should simplify the complicated Halal registration process, especially when dealing with the Malaysian and Indonesian Halal authorities. An innovative mobile application could be developed and should provide guidelines, resource information, and policy advice for consumers, either local or foreign industries in Kuching and Pontianak (Mohamed and Ismail 2021).

At the government-to-government level, providing information and creating two-track diplomatic linkages between different and relevant government authorities, administration, politicians, and local governments will be beneficial. It brings both sides of governments via a series of seminars and closed-door round tables (Jamaludin and Sugawara 2022). Tapping into strong diplomatic and trade ties allows government representatives to brainstorm shared solutions and potentials for harmonization of the

cross-border Halal assurance Industry. It is important to provide a platform to disseminate information and advice on policy and regulations matching local traders' associations and small-scale businesses in Kuching and Pontianak with prospective foreign investors in the retail grocery industry and Halal Wagyu from Japan (Anuar and Ikfal Raharjo 2022). They can find new ideas to justify investments, potential business contracts, and market demands. Both university and societal networks must emphasize contributing to their research output and education revenues and other focus on human capital empowerment and life-long learning process. Training and research should contribute to practical solutions addressing the fundamental problem of small-scale businesses in cross-border Halal compliance and disadvantaged communities, including vulnerable people and businesses in Kuching and Pontianak (Al-Fadhat 2022).

Conclusion

Learning from LEP and Japanese quality assurance means acknowledging the new reality of Malaysia-Indonesia's shared potential in Islamic economies, Muslim consumerism, and Halal assurance relative similarities with Japanese quality assurance. Memorandum of agreements between universities and other translations into several prospects of collaboration on Hub-Halal, a shared panel of experts, language training, and business professionalism where a selected sample of local traders and small-scale businesses involved in Digital Business Lab and Halal Incubator can be hatched and create new job opportunities along the line of cross-border Halal market.

Both Indonesia and Malaysia are key players in the world Halal market. There are many areas of cross-border trade along the line of Kalimantan Indonesia, Sabah and Sarawak Malaysia, Brunei, and the Philippines, where they are all connected to new access and networks of the Indonesian new capital Kota Nusantara in East Kalimantan. Due to the Look East Policy with Indonesia and Malaysia, foreign investors from Japan and other countries are now aiming at the cross-border Halal market between Kuching and Pontianak as a game-changer. Harmonizing this cross-border Halal quality assurance and shared regulatory framework will spill over to other standards and a single policy of managing borders, resources development, and disputes peacefully. Ultimately, a successful and viable framework and project of the cross-border Halal Market between Pontianak and Kuching will be the first test of this window prospering thy neighbour policy and learning to help each other overcome difficulties and share the wealth.

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