

# Welfare State and the Existence of Zeeno-Maden: Berakit Village, Bintan Regency Sea Tribe



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**Abstract**— This research examines the implementation of the welfare state concept on the *zeeno-maden* or sea people, who are traditionally seafaring people, but have been “settled” on land. The specific Sea Tribe community studied in this research is the Sea Tribes of Panglong Village, Bintan Regency. The choice of Panglong Village Sea Tribes for this study is due to observed socio-cultural changes in their way of life, transitioning from a nomadic existence to a settled coastal community living alongside the Malay people. While there are various versions of the history of the Sea Tribe presence in the Riau Islands, this paper primarily focuses on the contemporary lives of the Sea Tribe community. The values ingrained in the Sea Tribe culture are reflected in their daily activities at sea. The theoretical framework applied in this research is the welfare state concept proposed by Kranenburg (1989). The main issue investigated is how the welfare state is implemented by the government for the Sea Tribes of Kampung Panglong, based on the perspectives of the Sea Tribe community themselves as the recipients of these benefits. Furthermore, this study analyzes the efforts made by the Sea Tribe community of Kampung Panglong, who have transitioned to a settled lifestyle on land, to maintain their identity as sea foragers amidst the onslaught of information technology development and mainland community development. The implications of coexisting with mainland communities undoubtedly involve some degree of cultural assimilation between the two groups.

**Keywords**— *welfare state, existence, modernism, Sea Tribe, Panglong Village.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the implementation of the welfare state to the *zeeno maden*—Sea Tribe community when they were resettled on the mainland. Zeeno-maden is a Malay term that means “sea people” [1]. This term refers to indigenous peoples who live in the sea, such as the Bajau, Moken, and Orang Laut tribes. The Sea Tribe referred to in this research is the Sea Tribe residing in Panglong Village, Berakit Village, Bintan Regency, Riau Islands, whose way of life has shifted from being nomadic at sea to being settled on land. Consequently, these Sea Tribe communities are often called “Sea People living on land.” Over time, their customs have evolved, and they have adopted various mainland customs, particularly those of the Malay ethnic group in the Riau Islands region.

Since the 1990s, the Sea Tribe has gradually been resettled on the mainland by the Regional Government of Bintan Regency [2]. Presently, the Sea Tribe resides on the mainland, leading a complex life in line with modernization trends (technological and informational advancements, development, and the growth of tourist areas). In order to

address this change in their way of life, further analysis will delve into their efforts to maintain their identity as sea people.

More specifically, the Sea Tribe mentioned is an ethnic group that traditionally lived by navigating the waters of the Riau Islands Province and the South Johor Coast. This ethnic group is known as the Sea Tribe due to their nomadic or migratory way of life. The Sea Tribe's characteristics in the Riau Islands involve all their daily activities being carried out on a boat or canoe with a thatched roof known as a “Kajang.” The Kajang boat functions as a dwelling, with a central area serving as a resting place for family members. Towards the back is a kitchen and a bathroom, while cargo and the steering area are situated at the front of the boat. The boat's layout consists of three parts: the front, the middle, and the back. The Sea Tribe's way of life can be described as very simple. They reside on a canoe covered only with a *kajang* as protection from the scorching sun and rain. In order to sustain their livelihood, they fish using basic equipment such as fishing nets, spears, and harpoons. The sea becomes their home, they move from one island to another [2] [3].



Fig 1 Kajang on the Riau Islands Sea (Source: Mongabay Indonesia, 2023) [14].

In the article titled “The Orang Suku Laut of Riau, Indonesia,” Cynthia Chou (2009) explains that the Orang Suku Laut were formerly known as the guardians of the sultanate's coastal territories, as a warrior force, and for providing for the sultanate's maritime needs. Around the 18<sup>th</sup> century, during the rule of the Riau-Lingga Sultanate over the Malay lands, the Orang Suku Laut were depicted as a group of ethnic communities in service to the sultanate. Their duties included safeguarding the sultanate's waterways, repelling pirates, and guiding traders to the harbors of these kingdoms [5]. They were loyal subjects to the kingdom. The roles and functions of the Sea Tribe in the Riau Islands were

similar to the Panglima Laot, a coastal commander, in Aceh [6].

However, their vital role as guardians of the seas in the past has been forgotten. The Sea Tribe is now perceived as marginalized individuals living on the fringes of society, often looked down upon, stigmatized as backward and non-progressive. Their current marginal status is, in fact, a cultural and political construct resulting from shifts in political power and social ideologies [1]. This situation is contradictory, especially as the current Indonesian government is striving to revive its maritime glory with the slogan "Maritime Axis of the World". Unfortunately, the crucial role of the Sea Tribe in Indonesia's maritime history has been overlooked.

Furthermore, they have undergone lifestyle changes to preserve their existence as individuals and as an ethnic group. They have transitioned from a nomadic existence relying on natural resources to a settled life on the mainland, no longer exploring the seas.

The government relocated the Sea Tribe to the mainland in Panglong Village, using the pretext that it was to provide them with a decent life according to the government's perspective, ensuring their welfare or what is also known as a welfare state. This concept represents a state's democratic governance system responsible for the well-being of its entire population. Its primary objective is to alleviate various forms of societal suffering, such as poverty, unemployment, health issues, and so on. Therefore, a state that implements the welfare state concept adopts public policies that focus on services, assistance, protection, and the prevention of social issues [7].

## II. DISCUSSION

### A. *What kind of welfare is achieved?*

The welfare state concept proposed by Kranenburg (1989) [8] is that the state exists not only to maintain the rule of law but also actively strives for the well-being of its citizens. This indicates an idea that a state employing a democratic governance system is responsible for the welfare of its people from both an economic and public service perspective. The efforts are aimed at reducing the suffering of the population, such as poverty, unemployment, health issues, and so forth. Therefore, a state implementing the welfare state concept has public policies that focus on providing services, assistance, protection, or prevention for various social problems. Many indicators are used to measure the welfare of society, typically countries use indicators that are examined across eight domains: Population, Health and Nutrition, Education, Employment, Standard and Consumption Patterns, Housing and Environment, Poverty, and Other Social Aspects (BPS, 2022) [9]. This section will discuss the research findings regarding which the government has provided well-being indicators and how they are managed.

*First*, the state has facilitated the Sea Tribe people in acquiring education, which means that one aspect of the welfare state fulfillment indicator by the government has been met. *However, what kind of education do the Sea Tribe people actually desire?*

In terms of providing education to their children or the next generation, the Sea Tribe traditionally relied on the

transfer of knowledge through storytelling about the lifestyles and resilience of their predecessors. Through this method, Sea Tribe children learned to speak, observe, and follow the teachings passed down. These stories were shared by parents, adult siblings, grandparents, and other relatives within their ethnic group. However, when they settled on the mainland, this teaching method began to fade, and the knowledge transfer process was increasingly carried out through state-owned institutions known as school. This shift was necessitated by the fact that Sea Tribe parents, now recognized as legal citizens, were obliged to enroll their children in the formal educational institutions provided by the state.

Fransiskus Tintin, as the Chief of the Sea Tribe, acknowledges that it is not easy for him to teach and share the Sea Tribe's customs and traditions with his children, much like his late father did with him and his sisters. This difficulty arises from the absence of tangible examples that Sea Tribe children can observe regarding the maritime way of life, as experienced by their predecessors. Instead, the current lifestyle on the mainland is perceived as more relevant to their future.

As a result, doubts have arisen regarding the regeneration of the Sea Tribe, given that the traditional teaching methods are gradually fading away. Sea Tribe children are slowly experiencing a loss of traditional maritime knowledge. The crucial consequence of this is the potential impact on the Sea Tribe's core identity as skilled fishermen. These "experts" in fishing must not be allowed to disappear.

Most of the Sea Tribe children, choose not to continue their education beyond the junior high school level. This is because Sea Tribe children often struggle with feelings of inferiority as they continue to be perceived as outsiders by their non-Sea Tribe peers at school. As a result, they are unable to fulfill the state-recommended 12 years of compulsory education. Due to their decision not to pursue higher education, the Sea Tribe children in Kampung Panglong opt to assist their parents, who work as fishermen. Only Fransiskus Tintin chooses to pursue education all the way to college.

Article 31 of the 1945 Constitution of Indonesia stipulates in Paragraph (1) that every citizen has the right to education, and in Paragraph (2) it states that every citizen is obliged to undergo basic education, and the government must fund it [10].

Furthermore, the basis for fulfilling the welfare state in Indonesia in the field of education is found in Article 34, Paragraph (2) [11], which mandates the state to develop a social security system for the entire population and empower the weak and the less fortunate according to human dignity. Based on this provision, the government has introduced the Smart Indonesia Program (PIP), intended to assist children from impoverished families and those in need, enabling them to complete their education.

Although the state has provided educational assistance, the lack of motivation among Sea Tribe children to attend school has resulted in the free education support from the government, such as through the Smart Indonesia Program (PIP), not being fully utilized by Sea Tribe children, extending from basic education to higher education.

*Second*, The Bintan Regency Government, Riau Islands, has provided various social assistance to the indigenous people of Panglong Village, Berakit Village. The Bintan Regency Government acknowledges that the indigenous

people are still classified as a vulnerable community within the social structure. These aids are provided through various programs, such as the Family Hope Program (PKH), Non-Cash Food Assistance Program (BPNT), and Smart Indonesia Program (PIP) [12]. However, in its implementation, this program is often perceived as insufficient to meet the livelihood needs of indigenous sea people. Specifically, for healthcare programs, indigenous sea people tend not to trust medical treatment.

They hold strong traditional beliefs about health and healing. They believe that evil spirits or natural imbalances cause illnesses. This distrust of medical treatment can pose a challenge in the implementation of healthcare programs for indigenous sea people. The government and other stakeholders involved in healthcare programs must build trust among the indigenous sea people towards medical treatment.

*Third*, based on data from 75 families in Panglong Village, Berakit Village, the employment indicators are not satisfactorily met. None of the individuals work in the formal sector, and no job opportunities are created. All heads of households work as fishermen, signifying the absence of more diverse employment opportunities. The indigenous sea people believe that they can only sustain their livelihood from the sea, hence their dependence on marine resources for their living. Not working in the formal sector is directly related to an education that does not meet the required qualifications. Women in the Sea Tribe do not typically work outside the home; they are primarily homemakers or children who have dropped out of school. Population indicators, such as educational attainment, health, and skills, reflect a population's welfare level. Based on population indicators, Sea Tribe are still categorized as low-quality because they have low education and skills.

#### *B. Differences in the meaning of welfare between the State and the Sea Tribe*

The state and Sea Tribe have different understandings of welfare. The state measures welfare based on educational attainment, health, income, and employment indicators. These indicators suggest that welfare is related to the fulfillment of material and spiritual needs. On the other hand, Sea Tribe have a broader understanding of welfare. They measure welfare not only based on these indicators, but also based on other aspects. Sea Tribe have a close relationship with nature, they believe that nature is the source of their life. Therefore, the sustainability of the environment is very important to them. Sea Tribe have a strong connection to the sea. They believe that the sea is a source of life for them and will provide for their needs. This belief leads them to focus on their traditional livelihoods, such as fishing and sustaining their livelihood through marine resources. They do not need to work in the formal sector, as they believe they can meet their needs through traditional activities. Sea Tribe have the freedom to live according to their culture. They do not want to be bound by the norms of modern society.

The nomadic lifestyle of Sea Tribe, following the sea's ebb and flow, has been their way of life for centuries. This lifestyle allows them to use marine resources sustainably. Being relocated to land means Sea Tribe will lose access to marine resources. The decision to relocate Sea Tribe to land is also seen as an attempt to force them to live according to

state standards. Sea Tribe have a unique culture and customs. By being relocated to land, they will be forced to leave their culture and customs behind. This condition is also supported by the fact the Malay people are a group that avoids social contact with the Sea Tribe. In their view, the Sea Tribe are seen as a community without religion and culture and often regarded as unclean or impure [1].

In a more in-depth analysis to education aspect, for Sea Tribe children who have undergone education on the mainland through formal schooling, the education they receive falls into an "*in-between*" position. This means that they do not become experts or specialists in either of two knowledge domains: the traditional knowledge of their ethnic group or the formal knowledge from the state. As traditional teaching methods gradually fade away, their knowledge of maritime matters also becomes less extensive compared to that of their predecessors.

However, conversely, the formal knowledge acquired through school is not always engaging for Sea Tribe children. They still feel isolated and estranged in the school environment, making the formal education experience less attractive to them. As a result, they find themselves in a position where their knowledge and skills in both domains tend to be less profound and rich compared to previous Sea Tribe generations. This creates an educational dilemma that needs attention.

This not only occurs among Sea Tribe in Panglong, but also in other regions of Indonesia, such as the Bajau people in Torosiaje, Central Sulawesi. Due to their distinctive culture and characteristics as a maritime community, the accommodations and facilities provided to them are abandoned, and the Bajau people return to the sea (as observed among the Bajau community in Torosiaje in 2008). Considering these cases, educational services for Sea Tribe communities need to consider their maritime culture [1].

In addition, Sea Tribe have adopted religion as one of the administrative requirements, such as Citizen Identity Card (KTP). The provision Citizen Identity Card to Sea Tribe is one of the government's efforts to register them and recognize them as citizens. Previously, Sea Tribe did not have Citizen Identity Card, so they were not considered citizens by the government. The government has taken a special interest in the desire of the Suku Laut community to participate in political processes. In 2015, many members of the Suku Laut community participated in the gubernatorial election in Kepulauan Riau, which was the first election they participated in [12].

Prawirosusanto (2010) [13] explains that the reason behind the infrastructure development for the Sea Tribe in the 1980s was to facilitate their assimilation and prevent them from feeling estranged from the way of life of the broader society, using the term "we" from the perspective of the government or rulers rather than the Sea Tribe themselves. Azhari, et al. (2018) also conveyed that the transformation of the Sea Tribe lives in the new and permanent village on the mainland has, in fact, led to the loss of their traditional maritime knowledge [14].

The Sea Tribe in Panglong Village, Berakit Subdistrict, Bintan Regency, Riau Islands Province, have undergone changes in line with development agendas. They no longer live within the *zeeno maden* culture—wandering with their boats in the open sea, nor do they engage in subsistence economic activities. They now live in a paradox: they aspire

to become "modern" individuals or persist with the "traditions" of their ancestors, with all the accompanying consequences.

### III. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Sea Tribe understands welfare differently than the state. They believe that welfare is not just about meeting material needs, but also about living in harmony with the environment and following their traditional way of life. This belief leads them to focus on their traditional livelihoods and to reject the formal sector. Using the term "we" from the perspective of the government or rulers rather than the Sea Tribe themselves. The decision to relocate sea tribe to land is considered to be inappropriate by sea tribe themselves because it threatens the sustainability of their way of life.

The nomadic lifestyle of sea tribe, following the ebb and flow of the sea, has been their way of life for centuries. This lifestyle allows them to use marine resources sustainably. By being relocated to land, sea tribe will lose access to marine resources. The lifestyle of the sea tribe community in Panglong Village has transformed, from living at sea with a profound knowledge of the ocean and coastal ecosystem to becoming Sea Tribe who reside on land with complex lives, influenced by modernization.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I express my sincere gratitude to the distinguished committee members of the 2nd SHIMBA International Conference and the reviewers for their invaluable guidance and insightful feedback, which significantly improved the quality of this research. I hope the Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji will continue to promote academic activities for the sustainable transfer of knowledge.

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