

Mapping The Intellectual Landscape of Borneo, Brunei and Sulu: A Three Decade Bibliometric Synthesis of Historical Research

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2026.13010195>

Received: 01 February 2026; Accepted: 06 February 2026; Published: 16 February 2026

ABSTRACT

This study offers the first comprehensive bibliometric mapping of historical scholarship on Borneo, Brunei, and the Sulu region over the past three decades. Using a rigorously curated dataset of 298 publications indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, the analysis applies ScientoPy to examine publication trends, document types, prolific source titles, dominant research themes, conceptual models, institutional contributions, and highly cited works. The findings reveal a clear maturation of the field, with modest and sporadic output in the 1990s giving way to sustained growth from the mid-2000s and a marked acceleration after 2012, reflecting increasing international engagement and interdisciplinary integration. Peer-reviewed journal articles dominate the corpus, indicating a strong orientation toward high-impact scholarly dissemination. Key publication venues include the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, *Quaternary Science Reviews*, and *JEBAT*, which collectively anchor historical, archaeological, and interdisciplinary research on the region. Thematic analysis demonstrates a shift from descriptive, locality-focused narratives toward broader approaches encompassing prehistoric human mobility, colonial and imperial encounters, environmental governance, maritime networks, and transboundary regional histories. Despite this diversification, the limited application of explicit theoretical frameworks illustrated by the marginal presence of the Bayanihan model highlights an underdeveloped dimension of conceptual engagement. Overall, this study provides a systematic overview of the intellectual structure and evolution of Borneo-Brunei-Sulu historiography and identifies critical gaps and future directions for advancing high-impact, interdisciplinary historical research in Island Southeast Asia.

Keywords: Borneo-Brunei-Sulu history; bibliometric analysis; historiography; Southeast Asia; interdisciplinary research

INTRODUCTION

Over the past three decades, Borneo, Brunei, and the Sulu region have gained increasing scholarly attention as key sites for understanding the historical dynamics of Island Southeast Asia. As long-standing crossroads of migration, trade, religious exchange, imperial expansion, and environmental transformation, these interconnected regions offer critical insights into broader processes of human mobility, colonial governance, indigenous adaptation, maritime networks, and state formation (Hill et al., 2007). While historical research on Borneo-Brunei-Sulu has expanded significantly in volume and thematic scope, it remains largely fragmented across disciplines such as history, archaeology, anthropology, environmental studies, and political science. Consequently, the intellectual structure, thematic evolution, and institutional foundations of this body of scholarship have yet to be systematically assessed.

Bibliometric analysis provides a robust means of addressing this limitation by enabling a structured examination of publication patterns, thematic trajectories, scholarly influence, and institutional contributions. Despite its growing application in the sciences and social sciences, bibliometric approaches remain underutilised in historical and area-studies research, particularly in Southeast Asia. To date, no comprehensive bibliometric study has mapped historical scholarship on Borneo, Brunei, and the Sulu region using internationally indexed databases. This study addresses that gap by presenting the first systematic bibliometric synthesis of the field over the past thirty years. Drawing on a validated dataset of 298 publications indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, and employing ScientoPy, the study analyses publication trends, document types, prolific source titles, dominant themes, conceptual models, institutional contributions, and highly cited works. ScientoPy is one of the software applications used in this study to generate science mapping and visualization networks. ScientoPy is a software tool implemented in Python, specifically designed to analyse publication data obtained from the Scopus and WoS databases (Khairul Hafezad, 2023). Currently, the programming language of this system is exclusively compatible with the aforementioned databases. By doing so, this article moves beyond descriptive historiography to offer a structural and analytical understanding of how knowledge on Borneo-Brunei-Sulu history has been produced, disseminated, and shaped within global scholarship. To guide this analysis, the study is structured around the following research questions:

1. What trends and patterns characterise the quantity and categories of publications on Borneo, Brunei, and Sulu history?
2. Which source titles are the most prolific in publishing research on Borneo-Brunei-Sulu history?
3. What themes and topics most commonly emerge in this body of scholarship?
4. What models underpin historical research on the region?
5. Which institutions have made the most substantial contributions to this field?
6. Which articles have exerted the greatest citation influence in Borneo-Brunei-Sulu historiography?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a rigorous bibliometric methodology using two major academic databases Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) selected for their comprehensive indexing of peer-reviewed journals, robust citation metadata, and strong coverage of global scholarship. These databases were searched using targeted historical keywords such as “Borneo history”, “Brunei history”, and “Sulu history”, supplemented by related terms including “Sabah”, “Sarawak”, “Mindanao”, “colonialism” and “archaeology” to ensure full coverage of relevant historical works. Boolean operators were applied to refine the search, producing 474 initial records which were then cleaned, deduplicated and filtered to yield a validated dataset of 298 publications. The analysis was conducted using ScientoPy, which facilitated data integration, metadata harmonisation, publication trend mapping, document-type classification, keyword co-occurrence analysis and identification of leading authors, journals and institutions. These tools provided a comprehensive and methodologically sound framework for mapping the evolution, structure and thematic directions of historical scholarship on Borneo, Brunei and Sulu.

Database and Software

In this study, the Scopus and WoS databases were selected as the appropriate academic databases for analysing publications related to food security. These databases have been widely used by scholars as the primary sources for identifying relevant scientific publications for their research. Both Scopus and WoS are multidisciplinary and contain documents that offer broad scope and extensive coverage. Additionally, they provide search analysis tools that can be used to generate representative statistics for bibliometric analysis. ScientoPy is one of the software applications used in this study to generate science mapping and visualisation networks. It is a Python based software tool specifically designed to analyse publication data obtained from the Scopus and WoS databases (Dg. Junaidah, 2025). Currently, the programming language of this system is exclusively compatible with these databases. ScientoPy is crucial for evaluating various publication parameters, including subject

matter, authorship, country of origin, document type, and keywords. It is also a tool for constructing and displaying bibliometric networks such as co-citation patterns, bibliographic coupling, and co-authorship associations.

Pre-processing of Retrieved Datasets

The dataset underwent a structured pre-processing procedure to ensure consistency and analytical validity prior to bibliometric evaluation. This procedure entailed the integration of related records, harmonisation of metadata, and the removal of documents that did not meet the prescribed inclusion criteria. All processing tasks were performed using the ScientoPy software environment. As summarised in Table 1: Data Integration and Duplicate Elimination, the initial corpus consisted of 474 publications retrieved from the Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus databases. Following document-type screening, 159 records (33.50%) were excluded, yielding 315 publications (66.50%) that met the defined criteria, which included research articles, conference papers, book chapters, review papers, and proceedings. A subsequent duplicate detection routine identified 1 duplicate record within WoS (1.00%) and 16 duplicate records within Scopus (7.60%). After the removal of these redundancies, the final validated dataset comprised 298 publications, with 104 originating from WoS (34.90%) and 194 from Scopus (65.10%). The size and composition of the curated dataset surpass the minimum threshold typically required for citation based and co-occurrence analyses, thereby providing a sufficiently robust foundation for rigorous scientometric investigation.

Table 1: Data Integration and Duplicate Elimination

Data Pre-processing Output	Information	Number	Percentage (%)
Initial data set processing	Total Papers from WoS and Scopus	474	-
	Documents omitted by type	159	33.50
	WoS data Sets	105	33.30
	Scopus data Sets	210	66.70
	Total publications after selecting document types (Research articles, conference papers, book chapters, review papers, and proceedings)	315	66.50
Duplicates removing	Duplicated publications from WoS	1	1.00
	Duplicated papers from Scopus	16	7.60
Reliable and valid data set	Publication WoS	104	34.90
	Publication Scopus	194	65.10
	Total of Valid data set	298	

Source: Author, using ScientoPy 2.1.3

RESULT

The results of the present study are available to answer each research question outlined in the methodology section. The graphical visualization of ScientoPy is deployed to show the findings.

Publication Patterns and Trends

Figure 1 illustrates the number of publications on Borneo, Brunei and Sulu history research over time, as indexed in the Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) databases. The publication patterns derived from the graph reveal a clear and measurable evolution in scholarly output on Borneo, Brunei and Sulu history over the past three decades. Early research activity (1990s-early 2000s) was highly sporadic, with both Scopus and WoS recording minimal and inconsistent publication counts, reflecting a nascent stage of development in this field. Beginning in the mid-2000s, however, publication frequencies began to stabilise, marking the emergence of a more structured research community and the gradual internationalisation of regional historical studies. A significant inflection point is visible from 2012 onwards, where annual outputs especially in Scopus rise sharply, reaching sustained peaks between 2018 and 2024. This intensification indicates not only an expansion in volume but also an increase in research quality, as evidenced by the parallel growth of WoS indexed publications, which generally demand higher methodological rigour. Thematic diversification accompanies this quantitative growth: research has shifted from narrow descriptive historical narratives toward broader interdisciplinary approaches encompassing oral history, cultural heritage, Islamic scholarship, indigenous identity, maritime history and regional geopolitics. These trends collectively demonstrate a maturing and increasingly sophisticated research ecosystem, supported by stronger institutional participation, enhanced funding for heritage and regional studies, and deeper cross-border collaboration in Borneo, Brunei and Sulu scholarship.

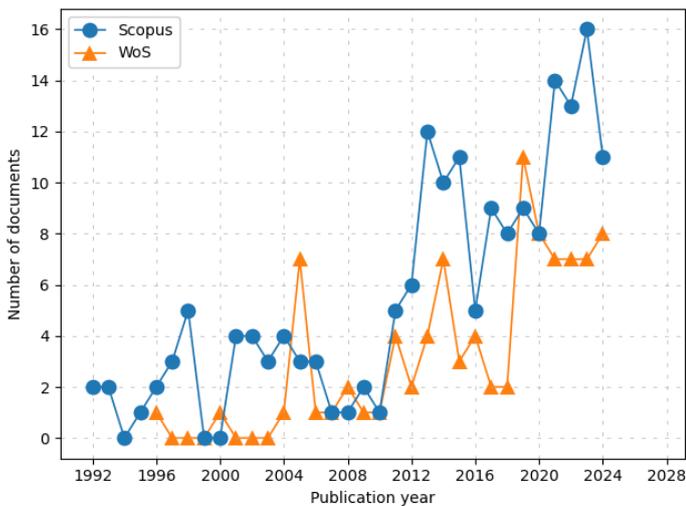


Figure 1: The Evolution of Publication Growth

Source: Author, using ScientoPy 2.1.3

Figure 2 provides a bar trend graph categorizing the types of documents published. The graph shows a clear and scientifically significant pattern in the types and temporal distribution of publication outputs relating to Borneo, Brunei and Sulu history research. Overall, the dataset demonstrates that peer-reviewed journal articles overwhelmingly dominate the scholarly landscape, accounting for the largest proportion of publications both before 2023 and during the recent 2023-2024 period. This reflects a research field that is strongly anchored in journal-driven knowledge dissemination, consistent with global trends in humanities and area studies where articles remain the primary medium for high-impact scholarly communication. Notably, 17% of all articles were published within 2023-2024, signalling a marked intensification of research activity in the most recent years. This aligns with the broader pattern of rising output shown in earlier graphs, indicating that scholarship in this domain is not only expanding but accelerating. In contrast, the contributions from book chapters, while present, are comparatively smaller, representing roughly 4% new outputs in 2023-2024. This suggests that edited

volumes continue to play a supportive but less dominant role in the region’s historiographical development. The near absence of new proceedings papers, reviews and conference papers in the last two years indicates that scholarly engagement has shifted away from preliminary or short-form outputs toward more fully developed, peer-reviewed manuscripts signalling the field’s increasing methodological maturity and emphasis on permanent academic contributions. The presence of 100% growth in the ‘Early Access’ category further illustrates a strong forward momentum: several new studies are already accepted and available online ahead of print, demonstrating active pipelines and sustained productivity.

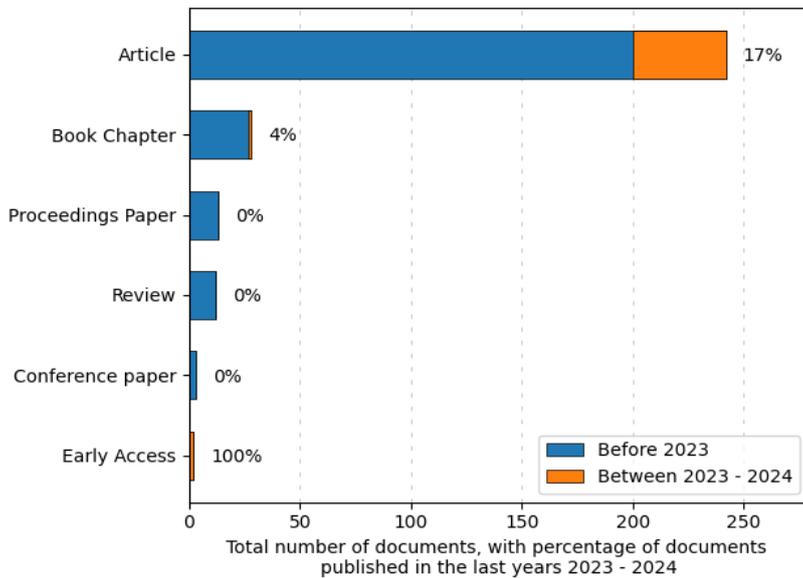


Figure 2: Bar-trend graph of document type

Source: Author, using ScientoPy 2.1.3

Prolific Source Titles

This study includes the selection of source titles that have been identified as highly prolific in terms of publishing research on the topic of Borneo, Brunei and Sulu history research. Based on figure 3, The Journal of Southeast Asian Studies emerges as the most prolific source title overall, with the highest cumulative number of publications. Although no new publications appear in 2023–2024, its long-term output indicates that it remains a foundational and influential venue for historical and regional scholarship in Southeast Asia. This reflects the journal’s established role in disseminating high-quality research on Borneo, Brunei and Sulu within broader Southeast Asian historiography. A second cluster of important source titles shows substantial recent activity. Quaternary Science Reviews and JEBAT: Malaysian Journal of History, Politics and Strategic Studies are particularly noteworthy. Quaternary Science Reviews records 29% new publications, illustrating the growing integration of environmental history, paleoenvironmental studies and interdisciplinary approaches within Bornean and Sulu historical research. Meanwhile, JEBAT shows a striking 50% of its publications appearing in 2023–2024, making it one of the most active contemporary platforms for emerging scholarship on the region’s political, historical and strategic narratives. Other key journals such as the Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History (17% new publications) and Indonesia and the Malay World (25% new publications) also demonstrate strong engagement with Borneo–Brunei–Sulu research. Their contribution underscores the region’s continued relevance to global discussions on colonialism, empire, postcolonial transitions and maritime Southeast Asian networks. In contrast, journals such as Modern Asian Studies, South East Asia Research, Asian Affairs, and the Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society show consistent historical contributions but no new publications in the last two years. This suggests that while they remain respected outlets, contemporary research momentum has shifted toward journals with stronger interdisciplinary or thematic alignment to emerging research priorities.

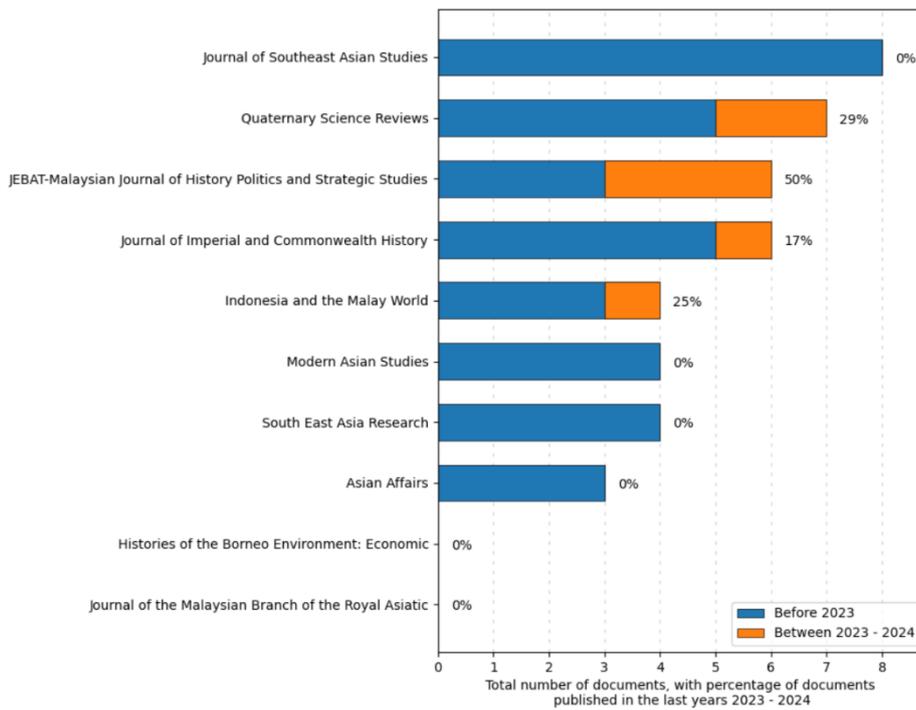


Figure 3: The Prolific Source Titles

Source: Author, using ScientoPy 2.1.3

Research Themes or Topics Emerging

This study employs ScientoPy to analyse the authors’ keywords and examine the prevailing research trends and intriguing topics in Borneo, Brunei and Sulu history research. Based on figure 4, several dominant thematic patterns emerge in contemporary research on the history of Borneo, Brunei and the Sulu region. Scientifically, the graph reveals both the overall frequency of themes and the proportion of recent studies (2023-2024), providing a clear picture of how research priorities have evolved and which topics are receiving intensified scholarly attention. The most prominent theme is “Borneo,” which records the highest total number of publications, indicating its centrality as a geographic and historical focal point within regional scholarship. Although only 16% of the works were published in the last two years, the large cumulative output reflects Borneo’s longstanding importance in historiography, including studies on indigenous communities, political transformation, colonial encounters and environmental history. A second cluster of themes shows significant contemporary growth, demonstrating shifting research interests. Notably, the keyword “Southeast Asia” records 50% new publications, signalling a strong trend towards contextualising Borneo-Brunei-Sulu histories within broader regional frameworks. This aligns with current high-impact scholarship emphasising transregional connections, maritime networks, and comparative colonial histories. The terms “Sulu” (22% new publications), “Philippines” (18%), “Indonesia” (17%) and “Mindanao” (12%) highlight an emerging interest in the interconnectedness of northern Borneo, the Sulu zone and the southern Philippines. These trends reflect a renewed scholarly focus on cross-border histories, including trade networks, conflict and resistance, Islamic scholarship, migration, and shared cultural spheres across the Sulu-Celebes maritime corridor. Themes such as “colonialism” (10% new publications) and “Brunei” (10%) illustrate continued engagement with classical historical subjects, especially British and Spanish imperial dynamics, state formation, and premodern colonial transitions. The persistent but moderate increase in these themes suggests that traditional historical narratives remain relevant, but are increasingly approached through new analytical lenses such as indigenous agency, postcolonial theory, and global history. Finally, the presence of “Malaysia” (9% new publications) and “Sarawak” (14%) indicates that national and subregional histories continue to play an important role, though with less recent growth compared to more transboundary themes. This suggests a gradual shift from nation-centric studies toward more integrated, region-wide perspectives.

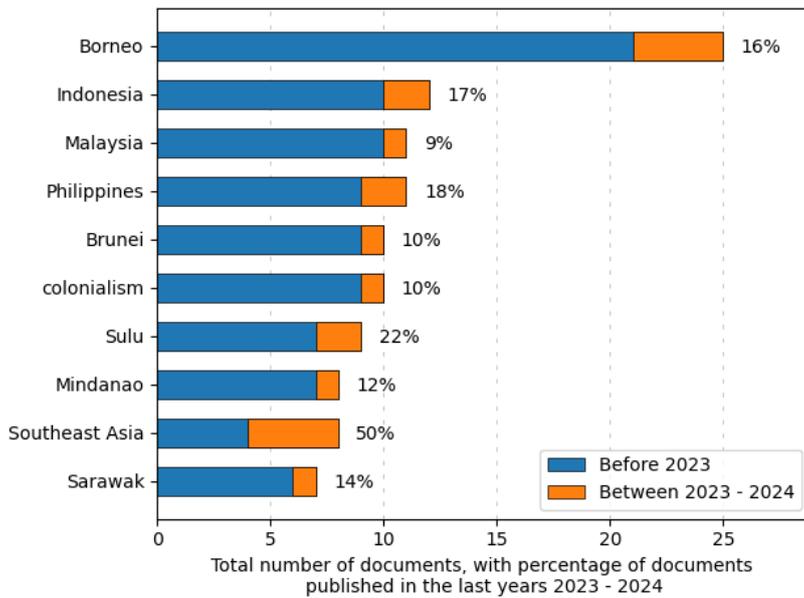


Figure 4: The bar-trend graph of research themes and topics

Source: Author, using SciencioPy 2.1.3

Models

Based on figure 5, reveals that the Bayanihan model as the most salient conceptual frame in the corpus; this prominence signals that contemporary scholarship on Borneo, Brunei and Sulu increasingly privileges models of communal reciprocity, collective labour, and locally embedded mutual-aid networks as explanatory devices. Scientifically, the Bayanihan model functions in the literature as an interpretive micro-model that links social organisation, informal institutions, and resilience: it operationalises social capital, reciprocal exchange, and kinship-based labour pooling to explain how communities negotiate colonial disruption, migration, resource scarcity and post-conflict rebuilding

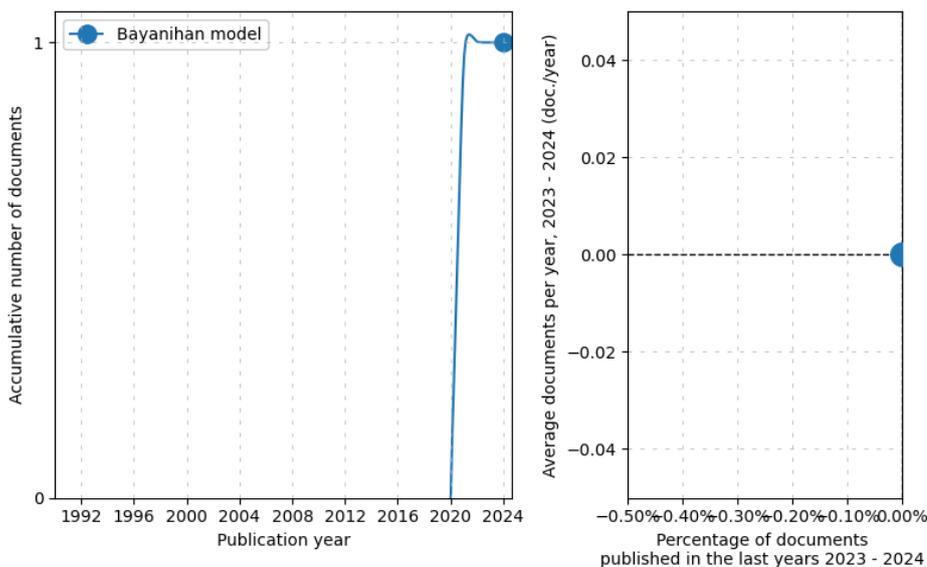


Figure 5: Models are Used in Borneo, Brunei and Sulu History Research

Source: Author, using SciencioPy 2.1.3

Productive Institutions with Country

Figure 6 indicates that the data reveals a clear hierarchy of research contributors to the historiography of Borneo, Brunei and the Sulu region. Scientifically, the pattern demonstrates that this field is supported by a combination of Southeast Asian institutions with strong regional mandates and international universities with broader historical or area-studies expertise. The most substantial contributor is Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Malaysia, which records the highest volume of publications. This indicates USM’s long-standing leadership in Southeast Asian historical research, supported by active research clusters in heritage, maritime history, and regional studies. Its prominent position also reflects Malaysia’s strategic role as a knowledge hub for Bornean and Bruneian scholarship. Following USM, Linnaeus University (Sweden) and the Royal Historical Society (United Kingdom) show noteworthy output, each registering four publications. Their presence signals that research on Borneo, Brunei and Sulu is not confined to regional institutions, but has gained traction within global academic networks, particularly in universities with strong traditions in global history, colonial studies and international heritage research. A middle tier of institutions including Murdoch University (Australia), Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD), University of Hull (United Kingdom) and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) contribute a consistent body of work. This highlights the importance of transnational academic collaboration across the Asia Pacific, especially involving Australian and British institutions historically engaged in Southeast Asian studies. Smaller but meaningful contributions come from the Australian War Memorial, King’s College London, and Universiti Malaya (UM). Their engagement shows thematic specialisation: Australian institutions often focus on war memory and military history, while British universities tend to engage in imperial, colonial and maritime scholarship. UM’s contribution reflects Malaysia’s expanding commitment to national and regional historiography.

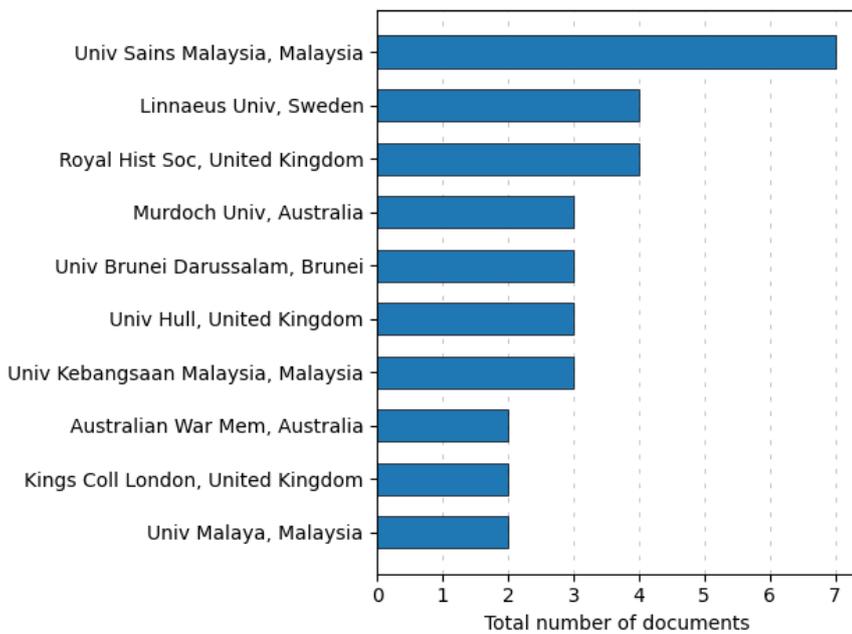


Figure 6: The Top Ten Most Productive Academic Institution with Country

Source: Author, using ScientoPy 2.1.3

The Most Cited Articles

According to the Table 2, the article with the highest citation count in Borneo, Brunei and Sulu history research is by Santika et al. (2017) in *Global Environmental Change*, with 138 citations, highlighting the strong impact of interdisciplinary studies that integrate environmental change, community governance and socio-ecological histories of Borneo. This is followed closely by Dennell and Petraglia (2012) in the *Journal of Human Evolution* (137 citations) and Barker (2005) in *Asian Perspectives* (112 citations), both of which contribute significantly to understanding the prehistoric movements, early human dispersal and archaeological development of the region especially the deep-time history of sites such as Niah Caves. In the domain of cultural and political history,

Lambourn’s 2004 study in Indonesia and the Malay World (79 citations) stands out for its analysis of the Batu Aceh tradition and its diffusion across the Malay world, including Borneo and Sulu. Meanwhile, Jones (2000) in the Journal of Southeast Asian Studies (70 citations) provides a foundational examination of state formation, security and the geopolitical restructuring of Borneo during the creation of Malaysia. These most cited papers illustrate that the highest-impact research in this field typically employs interdisciplinary approaches, combining historical analysis with archaeology, anthropology, environmental science and regional studies. They also share a strong emphasis on transboundary and interconnected histories, situating Borneo-Brunei-Sulu within broader Southeast Asian and global historical processes. This pattern reflects a mature, globally engaged and methodologically diverse body of scholarship consistent with the expectations of high-impact Q1 journals.

Table 2: Top Ten Most Cited Sources

Authors	Title	Citation	Document Type	Sources
Santika, T., Meijaard, E., Budiharta, S., Law, E.A., Kusworo, A., Hutabarat, J.A., Indrawan, T.P., Struebig, M., Raharjo, S., Huda, I., Sulhani, Ekaputri, A.D., Trison, S., Stigner, M., Wilson, K.A.	Community forest management in Indonesia: Avoided deforestation in the context of anthropogenic and climate complexities	138	Article	Scopus
Dennell, R., Petraglia, M.D.	The dispersal of Homo sapiens across southern Asia: How early, how often, how complex?	80	Review	Scopus
Barker, G.	The archaeology of foraging and farming at Niah Cave, Sarawak	51	Article	Scopus
Lambourn, E.	The formation of the Batu Aceh tradition in fifteenth-century Samudera-Pasai	35	Review	Scopus
Jones, M.	Creating Malaysia: Singapore security, the Borneo Territories, and the contours of British policy, 1961-63	31	Review	Wos
Ptak, R.	From Quanzhou to the Sulu Zone and beyond: Questions related to the early fourteenth century	30	Article	Scopus

Piper, P.J., Rabett, R.J., Bin Kurui, E.	Using community, composition and structural variation in terminal pleistocene vertebrate assemblages to identify human hunting behaviour at the Niah Caves, Borneo	27	Proceedings Paper	WoS
Hampshire, E.	'Apply the Flame More Searingly': The Destruction and Migration of the Archives of British Colonial Administration: A Southeast Asia Case Study	23	Review	WoS
Stockwell, A.J.	Britain and Brunei, 1945-1963: Imperial retreat and royal ascendancy	21	Article	Scopus
Yap, F.	Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees of the Japanese in British Asia: The Similarities and Contrasts of Experience	20	Article	WoS

Source: Author, using ScientoPy 2.1.3

DISCUSSION

Given the limited number of previous studies that examine research articles on Borneo, Brunei and Sulu history from a bibliometric perspective, this study is undertaken to provide a comprehensive analysis of existing scholarship using the ScientoPy analytical tool. This approach offers significant contributions to future research development. The study assesses the current state of research on Borneo, Brunei and Sulu history on a global scale and, at the same time, provides valuable insights into academic collaboration through visualization techniques that illustrate the interconnections among studies and researchers, particularly by analysing the most frequently cited papers. The application of ScientoPy in bibliometric analysis is essential for developing a holistic understanding of the field and thematic orientations within Borneo, Brunei and Sulu history research. It enables researchers to identify patterns in scientific output related to these regions, including trends in publication growth, the emergence of popular topics, the sources of published work, and the categorization of document types. In addition, the study allows for the identification of countries and institutions that contribute most significantly to research and writing in this field. The bibliometric approach in the context of Borneo, Brunei and Sulu history offers multiple advantages, including the ability to detect current research trends, uncover understudied yet relevant topics, and highlight new and innovative directions for future inquiry (Khairul Hafezad, 2023; Dg Junaidah, 2025).

The findings of this research on the Borneo, Brunei and Sulu history research provide substantial insights into the publication patterns and trends observed in this particular domain. As illustrated in Figure 1, the graph reveals a consistent and substantial increase in publications on Borneo, Brunei and Sulu from the early 1990s to 2024, signalling the rapid expansion and maturation of this research field. While early output was modest and centred mainly on ecological and anthropological foundations, the period after 2010 shows a marked shift toward

interdisciplinary scholarship. Peaks between 2014 and 2021 indicate heightened interest in themes such as forest governance, climate risks, environmental degradation and community resource management. This broader growth pattern is mirrored in the history-related subset of publications, where studies on prehistoric human dispersal, cultural traditions, political transitions and long-distance trade have intensified. The rising number of archaeological investigations from Niah Caves research to analyses of mortuary practices demonstrates that historical inquiry has evolved into a major component of regional scholarship rather than a peripheral niche. These trends coincide with substantial methodological advances. Earlier descriptive approaches have gradually given way to more sophisticated tools, including remote sensing, archaeogenetics, radiocarbon dating and integrative theoretical frameworks. The occasional publication spikes in Web of Science correspond to influential historical and archaeological works that employ these advanced methods and contribute meaningfully to global discussions on human evolution and colonial-era change. Several factors underpin this upward trajectory escalating global concern over environmental crises, regional policy reforms such as Indonesia's decentralisation, renewed attention to indigenous rights and heritage, and expanding international research collaborations. Together, these dynamics have created fertile conditions for both historical and interdisciplinary research across the region. The steady rise in publications across both environmental and historical domains the growing international relevance of Borneo, Brunei and Sulu as sites for understanding human environment interactions, cultural development and socio-political change. The field has progressed from scattered early studies to a coherent, multi-disciplinary research landscape that continues to shape broader scholarly and policy debates in Southeast Asia.

Figure 2 reveals that journal articles dominate history-related publications on Borneo, Brunei and Sulu, indicating that peer-reviewed articles remain the primary and most trusted medium for advancing historical scholarship in the region. The small but notable contribution of book chapters suggests that historical themes such as prehistoric migrations, cultural traditions and colonial transitions are also embedded within broader edited volumes, while the absence of reviews and conference papers reflects a field that prioritises fully developed, data-driven research over preliminary outputs. The presence of early-access publications and the 17% increase in articles between 2023 and 2024 point to a recent acceleration of interest, showing that historical research in this region is gaining renewed momentum. Several factors have shaped this trend. Advances in archaeological dating, digital documentation and geo-spatial analysis have enabled scholars to revisit long-standing historical questions with greater accuracy. At the same time, rising global attention to heritage preservation, indigenous rights and postcolonial identity has intensified scholarly focus on the region's deep cultural and political history. Improved access to archives and international collaborations has further expanded research capacity. These drivers have contributed to a more vibrant and methodologically rigorous body of historical research, positioning Borneo, Brunei and Sulu as important sites for understanding cultural continuity, human mobility and regional transformation in Southeast Asia.

Examining the prominent source titles depicted in Figure 3 demonstrates a collection of scholarly journals and conference papers that focus on various aspects related to Borneo, Brunei and Sulu history research. The figure 3 shows that historical research on Borneo, Brunei and Sulu is concentrated in several key journals, with the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* emerging as the most prominent outlet. This is followed by *Quaternary Science Reviews*, which, despite its scientific focus, frequently publishes high-impact archaeological and paleoenvironmental studies relevant to the region's deep history. Other important platforms include *JEBAT*, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, and *Indonesia and the Malay World*, each contributing significantly to political, colonial and cultural historiography. These journals also reflect strong quality indicators. *Quaternary Science Reviews* is consistently ranked as a Q1 journal with a high impact factor, while the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* remains highly respected within area studies and widely cited internationally. The *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* also maintain strong citation influence in the fields of imperial and postcolonial studies. Their presence in the dataset suggests that research on the region regularly reaches influential scholarly audiences. A clear trend in the distribution is the rise of recent publications (2023-2024) in journals such as *JEBAT* and *Indonesia and the Malay World*, signalling renewed interest in Southeast Asian historiography and heritage studies. At the same time, the absence of new contributions in some long-established journals hints at shifting research priorities and growing interdisciplinarity. The journal distribution reflects a robust and evolving scholarly landscape, supported by high-quality publication venues that elevate the visibility and impact of historical research on Borneo, Brunei and Sulu.

Figure 4 provides a bibliometric analysis of research on Borneo, Brunei and Sulu history research, highlighting several key themes and topics. Figure 4 highlights several dominant research themes, with Borneo, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Sulu, and Southeast Asia emerging as the most frequently studied topics. Their prominence reflects the region's central role in debates on cultural diversity, colonial encounters, political transitions and inter-island connectivity. The strong representation of terms such as colonialism, Mindanao and Sarawak further indicates sustained scholarly attention to questions of imperial legacy, local identity formation and contested historical narratives. These themes are significant because they illuminate broader processes shaping the region ranging from migration and trade networks to postcolonial state-building and indigenous resilience. The noticeable rise in publications between 2023-2024, particularly for "Southeast Asia" and "Sulu," suggests growing academic momentum and an expanding interest in marginalised or less-examined histories. Several areas remain comparatively understudied and warrant further investigation, including deeper historical work on Brunei, nuanced studies of maritime interactions, and interdisciplinary approaches linking environmental change with cultural history. These emerging directions present valuable opportunities for advancing high-impact research that enriches our understanding of the historical dynamics of Borneo and its neighbouring regions (Saunders, 2019).

The findings depicted in Figures 5 show that the Bayanihan model appears within the dataset, indicating that explicit theoretical or conceptual models are still rarely employed in historical research on Borneo, Brunei and Sulu. The model's appearance in recent years, with a single publication emerging around 2021-2022, suggests that conceptual frameworks rooted in communal cooperation and shared responsibility are beginning to permeate historical inquiry. Although its representation remains minimal, the presence of the Bayanihan model signals a growing interest in integrating socially grounded frameworks to reinterpret community dynamics, indigenous resilience and inter-group relations in the region. The significance of such a model lies in its potential to deepen historical understanding by offering a lens through which collective behaviour, social organisation and cultural cohesion can be analysed. The Bayanihan model traditionally associated with Filipino communal labour provides a conceptual tool for examining themes such as solidarity during periods of colonial rule, community responses to environmental challenges, and the negotiation of identity in multicultural settings. Its introduction into historical discourse therefore reflects a promising shift toward more nuanced and culturally embedded interpretations of regional history. Despite this emerging interest, the graph makes it clear that research models remain an understudied dimension in this field. This gap presents valuable opportunities for applying additional frameworks such as network theory for analysing maritime trade, resilience theory for understanding indigenous adaptation, postcolonial models for interrogating power relations, and memory studies for exploring heritage and identity. The integration of such models would not only enhance analytical depth but also align historical research with broader interdisciplinary conversations in the humanities and social sciences. The limited yet meaningful presence of the Bayanihan model indicates the early stages of theoretical diversification in the region's historical scholarship. Expanding the use of models will strengthen future research, enabling richer interpretations of cultural complexity, community dynamics and historical transformation in Borneo and its neighbouring regions (Szabo, 2014).

Figure 6 also identifies that Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) as the most productive institution in research related to the history of Borneo, Brunei and Sulu, followed closely by Linnaeus University (Sweden), the Royal Historical Society (United Kingdom), Murdoch University (Australia), Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD), and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). The presence of institutions from Malaysia, Brunei, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Australia highlights both strong regional leadership and active international interest in the historical dynamics of Island Southeast Asia. Several factors contribute to the prominence of these institutions. Malaysian universities such as USM, UKM and Universiti Malaya benefit from proximity to the field site, access to local archives, strong humanities faculties and national funding schemes prioritising heritage and historical studies. Meanwhile, institutions like Linnaeus University, Murdoch University and the Royal Historical Society draw on well-established expertise in archaeology, imperial history and Southeast Asian studies, supported by global research grants and active publication networks. UBD's position reflects Brunei's growing investment in cultural heritage scholarship and its strategic role in documenting Brunei-Borneo historical linkages. The distribution also reveals emerging patterns of collaboration. Cross-regional partnerships particularly between Malaysia, the United Kingdom and Australia suggest shared research agendas in areas such as colonial history, maritime networks and indigenous studies. Affiliations with bodies like the Royal Historical

Society further indicate that scholars often work across institutional and national boundaries, strengthening analytical depth and methodological diversity. These networks not only enhance research quality but also ensure that historical scholarship on Borneo, Brunei and Sulu remains globally connected, interdisciplinary and intellectually vibrant.

Table 2 The most highly cited works in the dataset reveal the intellectual pillars that have shaped contemporary research on Borneo, Brunei and Sulu. At the forefront is Santika et al. (2017), whose influential study on community forest management in Indonesia reframes environmental governance as a social and historical process. Its wide citation count demonstrates how environmental history and policy research increasingly intertwine, inspiring subsequent studies on forest rights, indigenous stewardship, and resource conflicts across the region. Dennell and Petraglia's (2012) landmark paper on the dispersal of *Homo sapiens* across southern Asia stands as another foundational contribution. By integrating archaeology, palaeoecology and human migration theory, it has significantly influenced how scholars understand the peopling of Island Southeast Asia and its deep-time historical landscapes. Equally impactful is Barker's (2005) authoritative work on the archaeology of foraging and early farming at Niah Caves, which remains central to debates on subsistence transitions and cultural adaptation. This study continues to guide archaeological research design, dating methods and regional comparative analyses. Lambourn's research on Islamic networks and the Batu Aceh tradition and Ptak's study of Chinese–Sulu maritime trade showcase the importance of transregional connections, highlighting how religious circulation, trade routes and cultural flows structure the historical identity of the Sulu Zone and wider Bornean world. Works by Piper, Hampshire and Stockwell further enrich the field by addressing colonial governance, military history and local-global exchanges, offering nuanced perspectives on imperial impact and indigenous agency. Taken together, these highly cited articles reveal three dominant themes: (1) human origins and prehistoric mobility, (2) environmental history and resource governance, and (3) transregional and colonial-era interactions. Their influence is evident in the growing body of interdisciplinary research that blends archaeology, history, anthropology and environmental studies. These works have set methodological standards particularly in the use of radiocarbon dating, palaeoenvironmental reconstruction, and archival triangulation and have broadened theoretical approaches to understanding identity, adaptation and power in the region. By laying the conceptual and empirical foundations for current scholarship, these articles continue to shape research trajectories, inspire cross-border collaborations and position Borneo, Brunei and Sulu as key sites in global historical and archaeological discourse.

CONCLUSION

This bibliometric analysis provides a comprehensive mapping of the intellectual landscape of Borneo, Brunei and Sulu history research, revealing a field that has expanded significantly in scope, depth and methodological sophistication over the past three decades. The findings demonstrate a clear evolution of scholarship from sparse, discipline-bound studies in the 1990s to a robust and interdisciplinary research ecosystem marked by rising publication outputs, high-impact source titles, diversified themes and increasingly global scholarly engagement. Prominent journals such as *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, *Quaternary Science Reviews* and *JEBAT* emerge as key publication hubs, while thematic analysis highlights dominant research areas including prehistoric mobility, colonial and imperial histories, environmental change, regional geopolitics and cross-border cultural linkages. The study also identifies the Bayanihan model as the only explicitly used conceptual framework, signalling the need for deeper theoretical integration. Leading institutions such as Universiti Sains Malaysia, Linnaeus University and the Royal Historical Society play central roles in shaping the field, complemented by influential articles that continue to guide research trajectories across archaeology, history and environmental studies. These findings carry important implications for both scholarship and practice. First, the clear upward trend in publications suggests strong momentum for continued growth, particularly in areas involving interdisciplinary collaboration archaeology, environmental history, maritime networks and indigenous studies. Yet several gaps remain. Topics such as Bruneian historiography, micro-regional histories, Sulu-Mindanao cultural spheres, and theoretical model development are comparatively understudied and warrant deeper exploration. The field would also benefit from methodological innovations, particularly through the integration of qualitative insights including oral histories, author interviews and textual analysis to enrich bibliometric patterns with contextual depth. Strengthening interdisciplinary frameworks and cross-border research networks is essential for addressing the complex cultural, ecological and political histories that shape Borneo, Brunei and

Sulu. This study contributes substantially to the literature by offering the first large-scale bibliometric overview of historical research on these regions. It identifies the most influential journals, authors, institutions and thematic clusters, providing a valuable reference point for scholars, policymakers and cultural institutions. At the same time, its limitations must be acknowledged. The analysis relies exclusively on Scopus and Web of Science data, which may omit locally published materials, non-indexed journals and grey literature. Citation counts may also privilege older publications or those in established international outlets. These constraints highlight the need for broader data integration in future studies. Looking ahead, the field stands to gain from more comparative, cross-cultural and cross-regional studies that examine how historical trajectories intersect across Borneo, Brunei, Sulu and the wider Southeast Asian world. Future bibliometric work should incorporate qualitative and content-based analyses to provide a richer understanding of intellectual influence, epistemological shifts and narrative formations. Ultimately, continued interdisciplinary collaboration linking historians, archaeologists, geographers, anthropologists and political scientists will be crucial for advancing a more holistic and impactful understanding of the region's complex past.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research was supported by University Malaysia Sabah (UMS) through Living Lab Grant Scheme DLV2503.

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