Academic Scripts 13

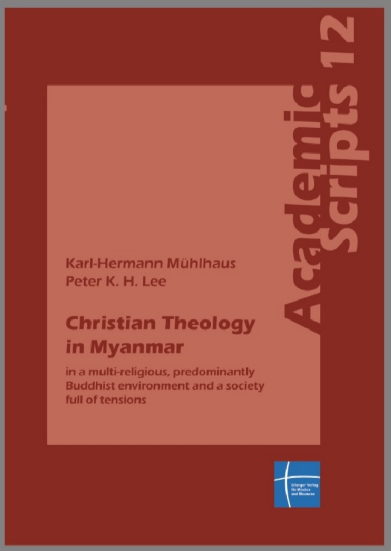
Karthik Karathikan Sibanyanam

Gotong Royong Social Management

A Cultural Approach to Organize and Manage the Social Welfare Care Services in Malaysia

Erlanger Verlag für Mission und Ökumene

Previously published in this series



K.-H. Mühlhaus
P. K. H. Lee

Christian Theology in Myanmar

Print:
ISBN 978-3-87214-374-7, € 28,90

E-Book (PDF):
ISBN 978-3-87214-643-4, € 14,99

Mehr Infos:

SCAN ME

Wolfgang Grieninger

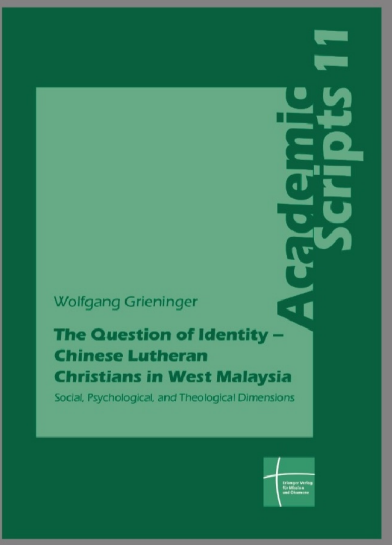
The Question of Identity - Chinese Lutheran Christians in West Malaysia

Print:
ISBN 978-3-87214-371-6, € 39,90

E-Book (PDF):
ISBN 978-3-87214-634-2, € 34,99

Mehr Infos:

SCAN ME



Karthik Karathikan Sibanyanam

Gotong Royong Social Management

A Cultural Approach to Organize and Manage the Social Welfare Care Services in Malaysia

Erlanger Verlag
für Mission
und Ökumene

Dissertation for Obtaining an Academic Degree
Doktor der Philosophie (Dr. phil.)
at Universität Bielefeld - Fakultät für Geschichts-
wissenschaft, Philosophie und Theologie

This book was gratefully supported by Mission EineWelt, Neuendettelsau

Leseprobe - Reading Sample

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über https://www.dnb.de abrufbar.
The automated analysis of the work in order to gather information, in particular regarding patterns, trends and correlations in accordance with Section 44b of the German Copyright Act ('Text and Data Mining'), is prohibited.

ISBN 978-3-87214-641-0

© Erlanger Verlag für Mission und Ökumene, Neuendettelsau 2026
Hauptstr. 2 | 91564 Neuendettelsau
erlanger.verlag@elkb.de | www.erlanger-verlag.de
Academic Scripts 13

Umschlag: Daniela Denk/Mission EineWelt
Satz: Martin Keiper/ keipertext.com

CONTENTS

1 1. Introduction

1.1 ***Gotong Royong*** 1
1.1.1 "Why Don't you *Try Gotong Royong*" 1
1.1.2 The December 2021 Flood Incident in Malaysia 2
1.1.3 Floods and *Gotong Royong* in Malaysia 3
1.1.4 *Gotong Royong* - Misunderstood or Misused? 5
1.1.5 *Gotong Royong* as a Social Welfare Approach 5
1.1.6 *Gotong Royong* Social Management 7
1.2 **Social Welfare Care Services in Malaysia** 8
1.2.1 Malaysia – A Pluralistic Society 8
1.2.2 Social Welfare Care Services in Malaysia (SWCSM) 9
1.3 **Evaluation** 20
1.3.1 The State of SWCSM 20
1.3.2 "Why SWCSM is Under-organized?" 22
1.3.3 The Effects of Under-organized SWCSM 23
1.3.4 Proposed Solution: Organizing SWCSM with the ***Gotong Royong*** Approach 25
1.4 **Research Gap, Objectives, and Questions** 26
1.4.1 Research Gap 26
1.4.2 Research Objectives and Questions 27
1.5 **Thesis Statement, Organization of Dissertation and the Methodology** 29
1.5.1 Thesis Statement 29
1.5.2 Thesis Organization 29
1.5.3 Research Methodology 35

41 2. *Gotong Royong*

2.1 **Introduction** 41
2.2 **Origin of *Gotong Royong*** 41
2.2.1 The Phrase *Gotong Royong*: The Origin and Meaning 41
2.2.2 The Genesis of *Gotong Royong* through WWII 42
2.2.3 From Javanese Culture to National Identity 46
2.2.4 The Understanding of *Gotong Royong* in Indonesia 48
2.2.5 The Use of *Gotong Royong* as an Approach in Indonesia 53
2.2.6 The Misuse of *Gotong Royong* *57*
2.3 ***Gotong Royong* in Malaysia** 58
2.3.1 From Indonesia to Malaysia 58
2.3.2 From Malay to Malaysian Culture 60
2.3.3 Understanding of *Gotong Royong* in Malaysia 62
2.3.4 The Malaysian *Gotong Royong* in Comparison with Its Indonesian Origins 75

2.4 Similar "Concept of Gotong Royong" in Other Cultures 76
2.5 Theoretical Roots of *Gotong Royong* 81
2.6 Conclusion 88

90 3. *Gotong Royong* Practices in Malaysia: A Micro-Level Empirical Investigation
3.1 Introduction 90
3.2 Empirical Investigation 91
3.2.1 Research Design, Methodology and Report .. .. .91
3.2.2 Empirical Findings 94
3.2.3 Key Findings, Incidental Insights and Interpretation 97
3.3 *Gotong Royong* as Social Service 101
3.3.1 Conceptualizing ***Gotong Royong*** as Social Service 101
3.3.2 Helping as Individuals 102
3.3.3 Helping as Neighbors 104
3.3.4 Helping as Members of a Residential Community or Social Group 108
3.4 Gotong Royong as an Approach to Organize Social Service . .. .110
3.4.1 Organizing Social Events 110
3.4.2 Organizing Community Projects 112
3.5 Conclusion 114

116 4. *Gotong Royong* Practices in Malaysia: A Meso-Level Empirical Investigation
4.1 Introduction . .. .116
4.2 Empirical Investigation. 117
4.2.1 Research Design, Methodology and Report 117
4.2.2 Empirical Findings 123
4.2.3 Key Findings and Interpretation 129
4.2.4 *Gotong Royong* in Social Welfare NGOs – Case Studies .. 131
4.3 *Gotong Royong* in Social Care Service and Organizational Practice 138
4.3.1 Conceptual Foundations of *Gotong Royong* in Social Service Organizations 138
4.3.2 Influence of *Gotong Royong* in the Personal Life of Social Care Workers, Practitioners, and Managers 139
4.3.3 Influence of *Gotong Royong* in the Organizational Life of Social Care Workers, Practitioners, and Managers 140
4.3.4 *Gotong Royong* in Organizational Management of Social Services 143
4.3.5 *Gotong Royong* as a Governance Mechanism 146
4.4 Conclusion. 149

152 5. *Gotong Royong* Management Model (GRMM): Developing a Management Model Inspired by the Practice of *Gotong Royong* in Malaysia

5.1 Introduction 152
5.2 Organizational Management 153
5.2.1 The Context of Organizational Management 153
5.2.2 Organization 157
5.2.3 Management 166
5.3 *Gotong Royong* Organization and Management 175
5.3.1 *Gotong Royong* Organization 175
5.3.2 *Gotong Royong* Management 183
5.4 *Gotong Royong* Management Model 193
5.4.1 The Motivation for Developing *Gotong Royong* Management Model (GRMM) 193
5.4.2 Framework Development for *Gotong Royong* Management Model (GRMM) 194
5.4.3 Discussing GRMM with St. Gallen Management Model (SGMM) 198
5.5 The Need and Imperative for the Gotong Royong Management Model (GRMM) in Contemporary Organizational Practice 202
5.6 Conclusion 205

207 6. *Gotong Royong* Social Management (GRSM): Implementing GRMM for Organizing and Managing Social Welfare Care Services in Malaysia (SWCSM)

6.1 Introduction 207
6.2 Social Management, Social Welfare Care Work and Shared Responsibility 208
6.2.1 Social Management 208
6.2.2 Social Work and Welfare Services in Social Management 208
6.2.3 The Interdisciplinary of Social Work and Shared Responsibility of Social Management 208
6.3 Social Management in Malaysia 209
6.3.1 The Four Conditions of Organization from the Management Perspective 209
6.3.2 The Under-organized SWCSM: Reasons, Arguments, Consequences 214
6.3.3 The Need for a Suitable Management Model to Organize SWCSM to Realize Shared Responsibility in Social Care Service 216

6.4 The Application of GRMM 220
6.4.1 Why GRMM is a Solution Model 220
6.4.2 How to Apply GRMM as a Solution Model in Social Management 223
6.4.3 The Potential Good Outcome of GRSM 225
6.4.4 GRSM and its Effect on the Structure of Malaysian Social Welfare 228
6.5 A Critical Assessment of *Gotong Royong* Social Management (GRSM) 233
6.6 Conclusion 237

239 7. Conclusion
7.1 Summary: Let's *Gotong Royong* 239
7.2 Recommendations: Strengthening *Gotong Royong* Practice and Implementing *Gotong Royong* Social Management (GRSM) 244
7.2.1 Operationalizing *Gotong Royong*: Toward a Structured and Inclusive Social Welfare System in Malaysia 244
7.2.2 Micro-Level Recommendations (Individuals, Families, and Communities) 245
7.2.3 Meso-Level Recommendations (NGOs, Faith-Based Organizations, and Social Welfare Institutions) 249
7.2.4 Macro-Level Recommendations (Government and Policymakers) 252
7.3 Reflection: *Gotong Royong* as a Theory for Social Ministry and Diaconic Management 256
7.3.1 Developing a Theory from the Phenomenon of *Gotong Royong* 256
7.3.2 Viewing *Gotong Royong t*hrough the Lens of Diaconic Science and Management 259
7.4 Outlook: The Future of *Gotong Royong* in Social Management 262

266 Bibliography

299 Appendices

Appendix 1 299
Survey Interview (S/I) Question Forms
Appendix 2 305
Questionnaire Survey/Interview (QS/I) Forms

1.2.2 Social Welfare Care Services in Malaysia (SWCSM)

1.2.2.1 The Three Levels of SWCSM and the Challenges

Organizing and delivering the various types of Social Welfare Care Services in Malaysia (SWCSM) is a complex task. Like any society, and especially in a diverse context, numerous social issues must be addressed by Malaysian society as a whole. Failure to do so may lead to societal strain, hindering progress. A society's social health, stability, and strength form the foundation for national development in various areas, including the economy and political stability.

The SWCSM can be examined from three main perspectives: macro, meso, and micro-levels. The macro-level refers to the government and policy-making aspects of the social welfare system. The meso-level pertains to the private non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in providing social services. The micro-level focuses on the individual and neighborhood community efforts in organizing and offering social care services.

The establishment of the "Federal Department of Social Welfare" by the British colonial administration in 1946 marked the formalization of government-level social welfare services in Malaysia. Prior to this, as early as 1912, the colonial government had introduced some welfare programs, mainly for the well-being of immigrant laborers from China and India.

However, the scope of social welfare services expanded significantly after the creation of the Social Welfare Department in 1946. Initially, its primary focus was on addressing the social problems arising from the aftermath of World War II (WW II) and the Japanese occupation (Cf. Ling, 2002, p. 86; Rom et al., 2016, p. 4546).

At the non-governmental level, Malaysia has a long history of organized social care services with philanthropic values. These welfare services can be traced back to the social activities undertaken by religious and ethnic-based organizations long before the formation of the Social Welfare Department in 1946 (Cf. Ling, 2002, p. 86). As early as the beginning of the 19th century, NGOs organized social services to meet the needs of the people, particularly caring for immigrant laborers brought to the country by the colonial government (Ibid).

While government-level social work focused mainly on foreign laborers, whom the colonial administration considered its primary responsibility, non-governmental social services catered to a broader spectrum of the needy. Faith-based and ethnic-based organizations, such as Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian mission societies, as well as Chinese and Indian clan associations, provided care by being actively involved in their communities. These groups served the diverse populations amid challenging circumstances (Cf. Young Soon, 2021, p. 90). Unlike the colonial government's economic-driven agenda, the social services provided by faith-based, ethnic-based, and corporate organizations were deeply appreciated. Their genuine care for the well-being of Malaysian society, motivated by compassion rather than economic gain, has always been commendable.

In the following section, the social actors at each level of the Social Welfare Care Services in Malaysia (SWCSM) will be described in detail, with an exploration of how they are perceived by their counterparts at other levels.

1.2.2.2 Macro-Level

After 67 years of independence from British colonial rule, Malaysia's government still employs the same departmental structure to organize social welfare services at the national level. The Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat (JKM), commonly translated as the Department of Social Welfare Malaysia (DSWM), operates under the federal Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development. Despite the country's rapid economic growth and development, Malaysia faces demographic pressures and increasing social issues. While the government grapples with structural challenges in meeting the growing demands for support from vulnerable groups, the capacity

of a single department like JKM to address these needs is often questioned (Ashray, 2018, p. 428). Moreover, both government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) often find themselves competing for resources and support to carry out social welfare work.

The JKM carries a heavy workload, providing a wide array of welfare services. It offers financial assistance to needy or vulnerable groups, provides counseling and consultation services to families, and manages community-based rehabilitation centers and institutions for people with disabilities, the elderly, orphans, and juvenile schools. It also regulates social service centers, including daycare centers established by NGOs (Ibid, p. 432). The JKM's role in overseeing laws and regulations pertaining to social welfare and community development is critical and should be recognized.

However, the federal government's attention to social welfare services is widely regarded as insufficient, particularly in terms of financial allocations and investments. For example, between 1997 and 2014, the federal government allocated an average of only 1% of its GDP to social welfare expenditure (Ibid., p. 429). Furthermore, Malaysia has an additional income resource known as zakat (an Islamic religious obligation to give to charity), which should be considered a supplementary fund for social welfare services, given that the majority of the population is Muslim (Ibid., p. 432). However, religious and corporate contributions are not sufficiently directed toward social welfare services in the country.

According to the Malaysian Federal Constitution, the responsibility for social welfare is shared between the federal and state governments (Ashray, 2018, p. 432; Abdul Samad, 2019, p. 31). While each state government establishes its own welfare offices, social workers and welfare officers are employed and paid by the federal department, with state governments managing their own local support staff. This arrangement illustrates the administrative relationship and cost-sharing between the two levels of government. However, the division of responsibility in the planning and delivery of non-financial social welfare services remains unclear and poorly defined.

The JKM proudly traces its origins back to the British colonial administration. It credits its transition through various ministries since independence to its vital role in the nation's social development. JKM describes this progression as an "evolution" in fulfilling its role in the nation's develop-

ment (Social Welfare Department).[4] However, JKM and its governmental counterparts perceive this evolution differently. Some critics argue that operating as a social welfare department focused on supporting the nation's economic agenda mirrors a colonial-style approach to social welfare administration.

The colonial model of social welfare administration, which primarily served to support the government's economic agenda (Cf. Ashray, 2018, p. 431), remains evident in Malaysia today. Viewing social welfare primarily as a tool for economic development and political stability is a problematic approach. The selective provision of assistance by targeting groups deemed important by the government to bolster its economic standing, has been widely criticized in Malaysia as a reflection of an outdated colonial mentality.

Additionally, the funding and spending practices of the welfare department have been criticized by non-governmental social actors. The government's social welfare expenditure is seen as neither sufficient nor appropriately allocated (Cf. Ashray, 2018, pp. 429-430), with the majority of funds directed toward cash transfers and resource distribution (protective measures) while insufficient resources are allocated for preventive and promotive social measures (Cf. Young Soon, 2021, p. 91).[5]

4 Starting with the involvement of addressing various problems arising from the Second World War, the role and functions of this Department have expanded to preventive and rehabilitation services in social issues as well as community development. As one of the government agencies that plays an important role in social development, it has been placed under several Ministries (Social Welfare Department 2023):

1946-1951: Department of Social Welfare Malaya (Foreign Labor Ministry)
1952-1955: Department of Enterprise and Social Relations
1956-1957: Department of Health and Social Welfare (Health Ministry)
1958-1959: Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (Health Ministry)
1960-1962: Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (Labor Ministry)
1963-1964: Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (Health Ministry)
1964-1982: Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (Labor Ministry)
1982-1990: Ministry of General Welfare
1990-2004: Ministry of Social Welfare Malaysia
2005-present: Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development.

5 Non-governmental social actors, such as social care providers and managers from NGOs, play a crucial role in the delivery of social welfare. For example, Wong Young Soon of Malaysian Care (2021) presents a viewpoint that contrasts with the Department of Social Welfare Malaysia's (JKM) claims concerning the preventive and rehabilitative aspects of its social services. It is important to note that Wong's assessment specifically referred to a particular financial year in JKM's reporting.

Social welfare has not received sufficient priority from both the federal and state governments, a criticism shared by many NGOs. Over 75 years of operational experience, including shifts across multiple ministries, have yielded little progress in how JKM administers financial assistance. At times, the delivery of "cash and kind" transfers is seen as a mechanism for vote-buying by the ruling party, thus making social welfare an instrument of election politics (Ibid; Ashray, 2018, p. 428). Meanwhile, social issues continue to grow in complexity, and the burden of providing social services is increasingly placed on NGOs, charitable organizations, and the community (Young Soon, 2021, p. 91).

Indeed, social care workers and service providers are in high demand in Malaysia. A common complaint among the needy and their families is, "We see only social welfare officers, but not compassionate care workers."[6] JKM officers are often overwhelmed with administrative tasks and are frequently seen processing application forms or checking eligibility for grants and services. Instead, they should be focused on conducting comprehensive assessments of the needs and issues of the vulnerable groups they serve, providing direct social work with clients, and employing a range of intervention strategies.

In addition to these criticisms, many have offered suggestions for reforming JKM's approach. One major recommendation is to redefine social welfare services in Malaysia. Part of this redefinition might involve reconsidering the translation of the term "welfare," which in Bahasa Malaysia is "Kebajikan." In English, welfare is commonly understood as "financial aid for the poor" (Mohd Rom et al., 2016, p. 4545). JKM may still adhere to the traditional British understanding of welfare, whereas modern social welfare encompasses broader concepts such as social security, social protection, and community-based welfare.[7] The term "Kebajikan" has limited the scope of social services to merely delivering financial assistance to the poor.

JKM has made efforts to evaluate and improve its welfare interventions, particularly with initiatives launched in the late 1980s. Notably, the inadequacies of the remedial and residual welfare models were acknowledged,

6 The author has personally heard this cry from many parents of children with disabilities during his service as a special education teacher and director of Bethany Home (Training Centre for Children with Disabilities) between year 2009 to 2018. See ELCM's Social Ministries at www.elcm.org.my. Supported by the author's approved doctoral research. See note 2.

7 Mohd Rom et al. (2016, p. 4545) quote Greve (2008) to explain the concept of welfare: "Basically, welfare refers to well-being. It is a condition of being well, which refers to the happiness, health, and fortunes of a person. Social protection is about preventing, managing, and overcoming situations that adversely affect people's well-being."

leading to the introduction of community-based rehabilitation programs (CBR) for people with disabilities, as well as community development projects for the rural poor and women (Ling, 2002, p. 86).

As a social actor at the macro-level, JKM has worked to engage local communities and other social actors in collaborative efforts to address social issues. For example, in CBR projects, JKM has invited local communities to join forces and work together on social problems. However, the purpose of this collaboration is not always clear to all involved. JKM often works alone, is overburdened, misunderstood, and underappreciated. It is unfair for JKM to bear the entire responsibility for social welfare, which is meant to be a shared responsibility among various stakeholders.

1.2.2.3 Meso-Level

While the Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat (JKM) operates at the government or macro-level, numerous private and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provide social welfare services at the meso-level. These organizations can be categorized as either for-profit or non-profit. For-profit business entities function within the economic framework of the country, relying on financial capital from shareholders, while non-profit organizations depend on public donations, kind gifts from well-wishers, and honorariums paid to employees and volunteers.

In Malaysia, NGOs can further be classified into two main categories: State NGOs and Autonomous NGOs. State NGOs are heavily reliant on state funding, whereas Autonomous NGOs, while registered and supervised by the government, primarily rely on donations from the public and foundations. It is important to note that Autonomous NGOs differ from State NGOs in that they were not initiated by the state, but by interest groups with various motivations such as religious, philanthropic, and more.

The origins of Malaysia's NGO sector differ from those in Western nations. These organizations were initially formed to assist the government in reaching out to rural and disadvantaged communities, rather than opposing the government. The role of NGOs in Malaysia is significant and unique, as they "play a special and unique role in a democracy by contributing to the foundation of a just, sustainable, and participative society" (Alatas, 2003, p. 62). Social Welfare Groups help the government achieve many of its objectives.

Moreover, NGOs in Malaysia are vital not only to the government but also to the private sector and society at large (Zaharuddin et al., 2018, pp. 2112-

2113). Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs from profit-driven businesses often rely on the existence and support of NGOs. By working closely with communities and the needy, NGOs facilitate these partnerships. They are sometimes seen as both libraries and bridges, providing crucial information, identifying target groups, and serving as the means to connect with the needy.

However, many NGOs, particularly non-profits, face challenges due to a lack of funding, resources, and support. This hampers their development and disrupts their operations, making long-term planning difficult. The prospect of closure is often high for NGOs. When seeking government assistance, they are often met with resistance, with self-motivation and shared responsibility being emphasized. Public fundraising efforts are also limited due to economic constraints. As Alatas (2003) and Zaharuddin et al. (2018) highlight, the question remains: "What are the sources for sustainable funding?"

While the role of NGOs and non-state actors in meeting social welfare needs in Malaysia is commendable, it is often underacknowledged. As previously noted, religious and ethnic groups have been serving communities since the colonial period and pre-independence era. These groups have been people-centered, maintaining close contact with the needy, and responding compassionately when required. Their organizational management models are bottom-up, in contrast to the top-down, bureaucratic, and politically-driven government approach. Despite their unique qualities and capabilities, they are often overlooked and treated as a threat. The differences among NGOs based on ethnic, language, and religious ideologies may make them less uniform and unofficial, but they are highly effective in providing social services, often outperforming public welfare services in both capacity and reach.[8]

Unfortunately, NGOs in Malaysia remain undervalued. As Zaharuddin et al. (2018, p. 2113) points out, the lack of government recognition and incentives hampers the growth and development of NGOs in their social work. Many NGOs struggle with limited funds and manpower, making fundraising projects increasingly complicated. While the number of new NGOs continues to rise, an equal number are forced to close down or operate with numerous limitations and challenges. This situation is further exacerbated by financial mismanagement and difficulties related to legitimacy and registration, which jeopardize the credibility of NGOs in Malaysia (Ahmad and Mat Zain 2023, p. 667). Due to some mismanagement and scandals, all

8 For example, Young Soon (2021, p. 91) notes that JKM facilities had a capacity for only 1,200 children, while NGOs were able to house 27,441 children, as discussed in The Role of Christians in Building Compassionate Communities.

NGOs are often viewed with skepticism by the general public, which further erodes trust in these organizations. Additionally, the competition for limited resources sometimes casts NGOs in an unfavorable light. This raises an important question: Who should step in to help them? Should the government take more responsibility in supporting and assisting NGOs in this matter? The continued lack of support and acknowledgment from the government further hinders NGOs' ability to improve their services and social impact (Zaharuddin et al., 2018, p. 2113).

1.2.2.4 Micro-Level

Traditionally, Malaysians have not relied solely on the government or formal social welfare organizations for social care work. Instead, social assistance is often initiated and organized by members of a neighborhood to address the pressing social needs within their communities. This practice is commonly referred to as community work or community projects.

Organizing community work has long been a custom within Malay society, predating Malaysia's colonization by foreign powers (Hatta and Mat Saad, 2014; Ng 2022). This tradition extends beyond the Malay community, as it has been widely practiced among Malaysians of all ethnic backgrounds, especially in communal living environments such as farming and fishing villages, cocoa and coconut plantations, and rubber and oil palm estates. Even during the colonial period and the early years of independence, Malaysians united to address social issues within their communities through collective action and mutual support.

Today, community work and social initiatives continue to be organized at the grassroots level. Individuals and families provide assistance to their neighbors in need, thereby strengthening the social fabric of their communities. As responsible citizens, taxpayers, and donors, individuals expect the government, elected representatives, and social service organizations to fulfill their roles in ensuring the country's social welfare. However, the contributions of individuals and neighborhoods in sharing social responsibilities deserve greater recognition.

Too often, these micro-level efforts—acts of informal social work and mutual aid—are overlooked and undervalued in official discussions about social welfare services in Malaysia. Nevertheless, these grassroots contributions play a vital role in the broader social welfare system, complementing both macro- and meso-level initiatives.

Gotong Royong and Rukun Tetangga

Traditionally, Malaysians have enjoyed living in close-knit communities. They have long managed their own social and economic issues by practicing a mutual helping system known as *Gotong Royong. Gotong Royong* is a neighborhood interdependent, mutual support system, traditionally practiced by the Malay ethnic community. It requires individuals to help their neighbors when they are in need, creating an obligation to reciprocate when the need arises. Fisk (1982) and Doling and Omar (2002) assert that this mutual helping system was especially practiced by Malays, extending beyond the family circle to relatives and members of the wider society (Doling and Omar, 2002, p. 35).[9]

Gotong Royong is a cultural norm where members of the Malaysian community help one another in times of need, whether it's for building a house or celebrating a wedding (social events). This help establishes an obligation to reciprocate when the need arises (Ibid, p. 35). This community-level mutual aid system is regarded as the heart of Malaysian social welfare. The spirit of *Gotong Royong* and mutual helping is integral to the social welfare care system in Malaysia.

Recognizing the importance of this communal approach, the Malaysian government established a department to promote and coordinate programs for societal unity in diversity. This initiative is known as *Rukun Tetangga* **(RT)**, literally meaning "pillar of neighbors" (**Wikipedia,** n.d.). RT is a community-based organization that operates as an unofficial administrative division in Malaysia (**Jabatan Perpaduan Negara dan Integrasi Nasional,** n.d.). Initially, RT was introduced as a Neighborhood Watch system in 1975, at the height of the communist revolt (Bin Abdullah et al., 2017, p. 59). Its original objective was to ensure the security of neighborhoods with the voluntary support of community members. After the communist insurgency ended in 1990, RT evolved into a community-based organization, designed to maintain the well-being of the people while fostering national unity. It is the spirit of *Gotong Royong* that continues to fuel the operation and existence of RT today.[10] RT operates effectively by combining government and non-governmental assistance with the *Gotong Royong* approach.[11]

9 Doling and Omar (2002, p. 35) claim that Malay Muslims in Malaysia are often described as a society that practices cooperation, organizing social events and welfare programs through the *Gotong Royong* cultural approach.

10 Supported by the author's approved doctoral research. See note 2.

11 See n. 10 above.

Today, *Rukun Tetangga* is a recognized local community project organization, officially comes under the Department of National Unity and Integration (JPNIN).[12] Any neighborhood can form a *Kawasan Rukun Tetangga* (KRT), officially registering with the government as a residential area organization, to organize programs within their communities. Community members, including those in need, should be involved in the decision-making, implementation, benefit-sharing, and evaluation of social welfare projects. This collaborative approach has been highlighted by Hoe et al. (2018, p. 520), who researched welfare projects in rural poverty alleviation in Malaysia.

While the government acknowledges the importance of *Rukun Tetangga*, there is still uncertainty among KRTs and even social sector NGOs about the role of local communities in shaping social welfare. The involvement and voluntary participation of local citizens are crucial for ensuring the social well-being of Malaysian society. This grassroots, community-level approach to social welfare projects which largely based on voluntary efforts should be recognized and included in the broader organization of social welfare services in Malaysia.

1.2.2.5 The Structure of SWCSM

Despite the challenges at each level of the Social Welfare Care System in Malaysia the discussion above highlights how Malaysian society – both directly and indirectly, consciously or unconsciously – has structured its social welfare initiatives to address various social issues. On one hand, Malaysia has formalized, government-led social welfare programs, such as those planned and implemented by JKM and JPNIN. On the other hand, NGOs, Corporate CSRs and local neighborhood communities play a vital

12 JPNIN stands for Jabatan Perpaduan Negara dan Integrasi Nasional. The Rukun Tetangga scheme was launched by the late Tun Abdul Razak, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, on 29 August 1975 in the Kampung Kassipilay sector of Kuala Lumpur. This initiative was established under the Necessary Regulations (Neighborhood Rule) in the Emergency Ordinance of 1969. The initial purpose of the Neighborhood Rule Scheme was to ensure the safety of residents in designated areas, known as sectors, in response to incidents that threatened national unity at the time. This scheme empowered residents to take responsibility for the safety and security of their homes and surrounding areas through mandatory patrols, aiming to improve inter-racial relations within the local community. Over the years, Rukun Tetangga has evolved to incorporate four key concepts, as outlined below:
1975: Security Concept, aimed at safeguarding people from the influence of the communist movement.
1984: Neighborhood Concept, focusing on fostering the spirit of local unity and community cohesion.
2001: Community Development Concept, promoting community development.
2010: Transformation Model of Rukun Tetangga, ensuring holistic development.
(c.f. Jabatan Perpaduan Negara dan Integrasi Nasional – JPNIN, n.d.)

role in bridging gaps in social assistance, complementing government efforts (Ling, 2002).

However, Malaysia has yet to fully integrate all components of the SWCSM into a unified system, likely due to the lack of a comprehensive framework to coordinate these diverse efforts. As a result, social welfare initiatives remain fragmented, operating within separate structures. Observing Malaysia's social welfare landscape, Ashray (2018, p. 433) proposed a model from the client's perspective, as depicted in Figure 1.2. According to this perspective, citizens and vulnerable individuals seek support through two main forms of social welfare services: cash handouts for social assistance and social care services. Contributions from government agencies, NGOs, and philanthropic organizations collectively sustain Malaysia's social welfare system, ensuring its continued function and impact.

However, this structure does not adequately reflect the role of local communities, nor does it recognize social caregivers and volunteers as key social actors at all levels. Despite their significant contributions, these grassroots community efforts remain largely overlooked. Beyond this limitation, there is still no comprehensive framework that fully integrates the diverse actors and initiatives within Malaysia's social welfare system. If the organized efforts at all three levels – Macro, Meso, and Micro – are integrated and viewed as a cohesive system, the structure of the SWCSM may resemble the framework illustrated in Figure 1.3.

Structurally, the SWCSM would be clear in its operation as a non-hierarchical framework, where no single entity – including formal government bodies – stands above other social actors or organizations. Each actor functions within his own level, scope, and capacity. However, in practice, the government plays a central role in policymaking, while the JKM oversees welfare initiatives carried out by NGOs at the meso-level and community-based programs at the micro-level. As the governing authority, the government holds the legitimate mandate to ensure the overall social welfare of the Malaysian people.

Previously published in this series and still available

Vol.	Author	Title	Year
12	Lee/Mühlhaus	Christian Theology in Myanmar	2025
11	W. Grieninger	The Question of Identity *(Malaysia)*	2023
10	R. Kit Ling Chan	Towards an Inclusive Ecclesiology	2022
9	W. Maier-Revoredo	Christian Faith and the Hope for a better Life	2022
8	E. L. Ebong	In Search of African Christianity	2015
7	A. Tofaeono	Eco-Theology: AIGA - The Household of Life	2000
6	K.W. Müller	Georg W. Vicedom as Missionary and Peacemaker	2002

For orders, please visit our new Shop
www.erlanger-verlag.de

This dissertation investigates Gotong Royong, a Malaysian practice of mutual help in residential neighbourhoods, as a management model for social welfare care services. It argues that Gotong Royong is more than a community activity; it provides a grounded framework for organizing and managing welfare provision.

Inspired by Malaysians' collective response to monsoon floods, the study asks whether the three Gotong Royong phases—preparation, coping, evaluation—can be adapted to broader welfare management. Using interviews, case studies and literature analysis, the research identifies four management functions in Gotong Royong: planning, organizing, leading and evaluating.

From these findings the Gotong Royong Management Model (GRMM) is formulated, emphasizing cooperation, shared responsibility, collective decision making and community participation. Compared with established frameworks, the GRMM offers a more collaborative, participatory and context specific approach.

The dissertation concludes that the GRMM is a practical, sustainable and appropriate structure for improving coordination, organization and delivery of welfare services. It contributes to management theory and social work practice by showing how indigenous values can strengthen service delivery, foster inclusion and build a more resilient Malaysian society.

Erlanger Verlag
für Mission
und Ökumene