

## Nature and People Connection in the Three Selected Indonesian Short Stories

(Keterkaitan Alam dan Manusia dalam Tiga Cerpen Indonesia Terpilih)

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### Info Artikel

### Sejarah Artikel

Diterima

3 Januari 2024

Disetujui

1 April 2024

Dipublikasikan

28 April 2024

### Keywords

*ecocriticism,  
orientalism,  
postcolonialism*

### Kata Kunci

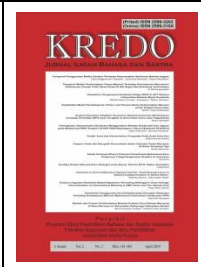
*ekokritik, orientalisme,  
pascakolonialisme*

### Abstract

*Asia has never been free from issues of oppression, marginalization, and exploitation in terms of race, politics, economy, gender, etc. that Westerners have inflicted on Easterners. In the twenty-first century, this perspective has expanded to human power over nature. The issue of natural destruction in recent decades is the result of human exploitation of nature involves power relations and marginalization of the oppressed in the concept of colonialism. The destruction of nature, natural exploitation, and marginalization of the oppressed in the Asian context is shown in three Indonesian short stories entitled *Pekik Burung Kedasi di Tepi Kahayan* (Crying Cuckoos over the Kahayan), *Caning Rara*, and *Pohon Pongo* (Pongo's Caring Tree). The purpose of this paper is to break the European perception of Asia that the East is a backward region with uncultured people who are unable to lead themselves in world-saving issues. This study uses library research. Through the ecocritical postcolonial approach, the results state that (1) the European perspective on Asia as uncultured, uneducated, and unable to voice their thoughts is misleading, (2) Asians have a strong relationship with nature and can be aligned with Europe to build the world through saving nature.*

### Abstrak

Asia tidak pernah bebas dari masalah penindasan, marjinalisasi, dan eksploitasi dalam hal ras, politik, ekonomi, gender, dan lain-lain yang dilakukan oleh orang Barat terhadap orang Timur. Pada abad ke-21, perspektif ini telah meluas ke kekuasaan manusia terhadap alam. Isu kerusakan alam dalam beberapa dekade terakhir merupakan hasil dari eksploitasi manusia atas alam yang melibatkan relasi kuasa dan marjinalisasi kaum tertindas dalam konsep kolonialisme. Kerusakan alam, eksploitasi alam, dan marjinalisasi kaum tertindas dalam konteks Asia ditampilkan dalam tiga cerpen Indonesia yang berjudul *Pekik Burung Kedasi di Tepi Kahayan* (*Crying Cuckoos over the Kahayan*), *Caning Rara*, dan *Pohon Pongo* (*Pongo's Caring Tree*). Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mematahkan persepsi Eropa terhadap Asia bahwa Timur adalah wilayah yang terbelakang dan tidak berbudaya serta tidak mampu memimpin dirinya sendiri dalam isu-isu penyelamatan dunia. Penelitian ini menggunakan penelitian kepustakaan. Melalui pendekatan poskolonial ekokritik, hasil penelitian ini menyatakan bahwa (1) cara pandang Eropa terhadap Asia yang tidak berbudaya, tidak berpendidikan, dan tidak mampu menyuarakan pemikirannya adalah menyesatkan, (2) masyarakat Asia memiliki hubungan yang kuat dengan alam dan dapat disejajarkan dengan Eropa untuk membangun dunia dengan cara menyelamatkan alam.



## INTRODUCTION

The issues of oppression, exploitation, and inequality have been prominent in human civilization for centuries. There has been a power relationship between the superior and the inferior that led to colonialism. The Western ideology of colonialism relates to the concept of Orientalism theorized by Edward Said. According to Said, Orientalism is a means of imperialism and colonialism in the East (the Orient). In the Western view, they consider themselves civilized and educated, and non-Westerners are the opposite. According to Pangestu who mentions Said's Orientalism in her article ([Pangestu, et. al., 2023](#)), for Westerners, Eastern societies are portrayed as mysterious, evil, thieves, terrorists, exotic, and untrustworthy so, they need to be civilized. This is also stated in ([Aprianti, 2022](#)) who re-explains Said's Orientalism that the East is positioned as inferior and they are under the control of the West. Schlehe outlines Said's Orientalism that in the Western perspective, Eastern societies are perceived as uneducated, barbaric, and uncivilized, therefore, the East becomes an object for colonial-style European material and cultural civilization. He also mentions that Said has criticized Europe's relationship with the East that it is for legitimizing the West's colonial mission and neo-colonialism ([Schlehe, et. al., 2022](#)). The colonial and colonialist element in this case has brought the idea of postcolonialism, which is closely related to issues of oppression, exploitation, and inequality whether in the scope of gender, race, politics, economy, society, culture, and so on.

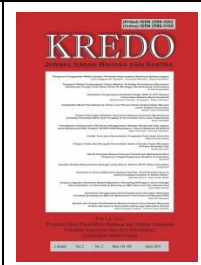
This research is necessary to reveal the shreds of evidence that in everyday life, Asians are still underestimated by  
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Westerners. Some recent data shows how in this nowadays global society, Asians (the East) have still been underrated by the Europeans (the West). For instance, research on 640,362 international students of the Australian Government Department of Employment, Education and Training (DET) dominated by China, India, Nepal, and Malaysia ([Dobinson, 2020](#)). Dobinson's study focuses on and investigates how Asian students enrolled in an Australian university are viewed by the West. Their images are always attributed to ethnolinguistic and cultural backgrounds, little to adapt material and delivery culturally and linguistically. Seen as stylish, colorful, traditional, and family-oriented, Asians are perceived never left their countries and are from rural settings. Constructed by the West as passive, uncritical, unwilling/unable to show emotion, few Vietnamese students (VOP) comment they are unable to start conversations or relationships, and unable to express themselves in public or with family. Some research on films and novels also shows Asian stereotypes that are inferior to Westerners such as in *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* movie ([Khasanah & Sili, 2019](#)), Sheridan Prasso's *The Asian Mystique*, Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha*, Giacomo Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* Opera, and Schönberg's stage musical *Miss Saigon*.

The issues of oppression experienced by the Orient are coped with the concept of Said's Orientalism. Pangestu who bases on Said's Orientalism in her article, states that Orientalists posit a real geographic distinction between the East and the West such as climate, land surface, and the diversity of flora and fauna ([Pangestu, et. al., 2023](#)). There is an attempt to create an 'imaginative geography' of the East which



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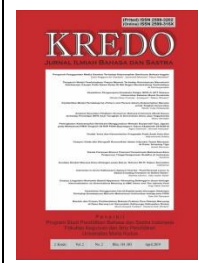


Said refers to India, the Levant (Eastern Mediterranean), and the Bible lands (Middle East). This is also stated by Dobinson who defines the Orient as incorporating countries like Syria, Turkey, Palestine, Mesopotamia, Arabia, and later on India, China, Japan, and the whole of Asia ([Dobinson, 2020](#)). After the involvement of Japan in World War 2, the definition of the Orient has broadened to the area of Far-East countries such as Japan, China, and Korea. Looking back to geographic location, those three big countries are Asians, together with other parts of the Asians namely South-East Asia, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei, Laos, Cambodia, Singapore, Thailand, and Timor Leste ([Andaya, 2021](#)). Indonesia is the country with the largest population in the Southeast Asian region and can be grouped as an Eastern society. As a plural country with various ethnicities, it includes ethnic Chinese who are largely perceived as 'immigrants' since the Dutch colonial era ([Ninawati, et. al., 2020](#)). This is also strengthened by Gao's statement which mentions the Orient copes with the Far East, and China is a part of the area in which this immigrant ethnicity gives Indonesia its Asian character ([Gao, 2023](#)). In the context of the geographical Eastern world, Indonesia as a part of Southeast Asia can represent Asia. Therefore, the writer intentionally presents Indonesian literature to give Asian characters in this paper.

Departing from the geographical difference between the West and the East, it leads to the power relation between the West (the superior) and the East (the inferior) that conducts the ideology of colonialism. In the twenty-first century, the ideology of postcolonialism has

broadened its element in the scope of not only socio-cultural but also environment/ecology. In *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*, Huggan and Tiffin declare that the ecological crisis is rooted in the modern-materialistic civilization and makes men "the butcher of Earth" since the modernity of the capitalist world has contributed to ecological destruction. This is also explained by Paliwal in her article that human beings view nature as a capitalistic commodity, the ideology of people's life in early school education starts with the concept that 'man is the best creation of nature' and that 'nature's sole purpose is to serve mankind' ([Paliwal, 2020](#)). Ecological issues have been spotted as an important topic since the twentieth century. Populations of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fish have declined by sixty percent (60%) on average and seventy-five percent (75%) of the land has been significantly altered by human activities ([Almond, et. al., 2020](#)). In their *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*, Huggan and Tiffin say that humans have exploited nature massively and taken its natural resources for their well-being. Related to nature exploitation, environmental studies give privileges to a white male Western subject that leads to ecological imperialism. It views human attitudes to the environment as the masculinist that sustains European dominance that now brings the planet into a mass extinction of nature and animals. The idea brings men to view nature and animals as a service to their needs so they become endless resources.

Challenging the issues of the West's perspective towards the East, and ecological destruction in Asia, this paper will discuss the three selected Indonesian



short stories taken from <https://dalangpublishing.com/> entitled *Pekik Burung Kedasi di Tepi Kahayan* (Crying Cuckoos over the Kahayan) by Han Gagas, *Cenning Rara* by Umar Thamrin, and *Pohon Pongo* (Pongo's Caring Tree) by Rinto Andriono. The topic of the three short stories is mainly about the actions of saving the environment in Indonesia involving a postcolonial perspective. The first short story *Pekik Burung Kedasi di Tepi Kahayan* with four young figures, presents their voice toward ecological destruction caused by the gold mining industry along the Kahayan River in Borneo (now it is Middle Kalimantan Province). Presenting an indigo girl and a *bissu* from the upstream Sumpara River, Kolaka City in Southwest Sulawesi, *Cenning Rara* delivers a message of an ecological issue by featuring Bugis' ancestral spiritual tradition. The little girl claims that her imaginary friend has settled in the bodhi tree near her house and she would like to save the sacred tree (the bodhi tree) from the tractor. The last story, *Pohon Pongo* (Pongo's Caring Tree) gives deep sympathy to the 2019 memorable fire forest in *Rimba Raya Sebangau*, Central Kalimantan. The issue in the story is closely related to palm oil plantations and implies the mourning of *orangutans* in Borneo.

The purpose of this study through picking out the three Indonesian short stories is intended to counteract the perspective of the West toward the East that the East (Asia) is viewed as uneducated, uncultured, and unvoiced people. Being a part of Asia, Indonesia proudly presents herself through the three selected short stories which emerge with two problem formulations (1) to challenge the West perspective toward “the

backward Asians” and (2) to reveal that Easterners (Asian) are comparable to Westerners (European) in leading actions to save the earth.

## THEORETICAL REVIEW

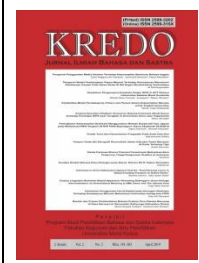
### The Concept of Orientalism

According to Elmenfi in his article, Said's Orientalism interprets Orientalism as a multidimensional concept. He explains Orientalism is a political doctrine imposed on the East that the ideology may be based on the ontological and epistemological distinction made between the East and the West (Elmenfi, 2023). Meanwhile Hamet in his article states Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as an instrumental system for treating the Orient in various ways which covers a concrete geopolitical space, a space of 'life, history, customs' which, inadvertently, designates a 'raw reality that is obviously beyond anything that can be expressed in the West' (Hamet, 2023). Said has explained that the Occident (Europe, the West) is in contrast to the image, idea, personality, and experience of the Orient (the East). For the West, the East is a romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, and remarkable experiences. Utilizing Foucault's theory of the relationship between power and the structure of hierarchies, Said's Orientalism leads to an examination of cultural imperialism. As Foucault's concept of human construct, that a concept of man is an invention, so is the Orient as a social construct as well. The structure of Orientalism is nothing more than a mythical structure and it will simply disappear. It is more concerned with a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient than its discourse about the Orient. Orientalism is the idea of Europe; a





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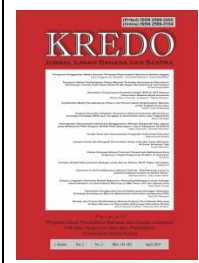
collective notion of identifying ‘us’ (the Europeans) as against all ‘others’ (the non-European). European identity is a superior one in comparison with all non-European peoples and cultures. It merely reiterates European superiority over Oriental backwardness. The element of colonial and colonialist in the concept of Orientalism has brought the notion to postcolonialism, a study on how colonialism influences cultures and societies, and how European imperialism conquers and controls the Third World in terms of culturally, political, and economically. The keyword for this study is a power relation between the colonizer and the colonized, the superior and the inferior, the master and the slave. Presenting the concept of power relation, the characters in the three selected Indonesian short stories can be positioned as the inferior, the Third World, who experience oppression. Meanwhile, the business stakeholders and the companies take their part as the colonial masters who control the colonized and their land on behalf of development for the country.

Reviewing Said’s Orientalism which is rooted in Cross War, ([Gao, 2023](#)) mentions the Orient (the East) refers to the Bible lands (the Middle East), the Levant (Eastern Mediterranean), and India and since the involvement of Japan in World War 2, the definition of the East broadens to the area of Far-East countries such as Japan, China, and Korea. This statement is supported by Kobayashi whose article says that according to the discourse of Orientalism, non-Western societies like Japan have been represented as ‘the Other’ ([Kobayashi, et. al., 2019](#)). Looking back to geographic location, those three big countries are Asians ([Nationsonline, 2022](#)), together with other parts of the

Asians namely South-East Asia (i.e. Indonesia, Malaysia, and Philippines), South Asia (i.e. India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan), and Middle-East (i.e. Turkey, Iraq, and Palestine). Dobinson in his journal ([Dobinson, 2020](#)) states the Orient incorporating countries such as Turkey, Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia, Arabia, and later on India, China, Japan, and the whole of Asia.

Said’s Orientalism explains that in the eye of Europe, the East is depicted as a mysterious, evil-spirited, thieving, terroristic, exotic, and untrustworthy place where the scopes of romantic, haunting landscapes, and remarkable experiences are in their existence. In the Western perspective, the East is perceived as uneducated, barbaric, and uncivilized beings, therefore, they assume the East as an integral part of European material civilization and culture, ideologically as a mode of discourse, imagery, doctrine, and colonial style. As depicted in the three selected Indonesian short stories, shreds of evidence about Asia are vice versa, revealing that the Orient, has been cultured and civilized in many ways from history.

Counteracting the West notion of the East in Said’s Orientalism, the ancestors of Asia have proved that they generated valuable culture and civilization. Asian writing such as Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Thai, Javanese, or Sanskrit languages have writing system that differs from the alphabetic systems we are more familiar with. Revisiting Orientalism in the Chinese context, the West’s statement of “Chinese language or Chinese script” seems to be racist that Orientalist prejudice against the Chinese language, and by extension, Chinese culture itself ([Pinggong, 2019](#)). Chinese is not a backward language, and turns out, in the



twenty-first century, Chinese characters are not only going strong but they are also one of the fastest, most widespread, and most successful languages of the digital age. Through the classical literature of China such as *Water Margin*, *Journey to the West*, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Dream of the Red Chamber* ([Lewis, 2020](#)), of Javanese *Purwaning Dumados: Genesis in Javanese* ([Akbar, et. al., 2019](#)), of India such as Vyasa's *Mahabharata* and Valmiki's *Ramayana* ([Venkateshwar, 2021](#)), it denotes that Asians are literate, scholarly people and it leads Asian to cultured and civilized society. Even nowadays, in Western literature, in *Harry Potter*, a figure of an Asian, Chao Chang emerged, and in Asian *Avatar: The Legend of Aang and Naruto*, Asians have been popular in the Western film industry. Therefore, it is a consideration for the Western to alter their perspective on Asia (the East, the Orient) that they are unequal to the West/the Occident.

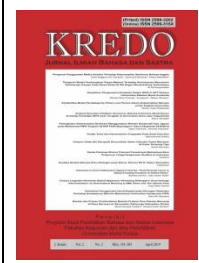
Schlehe explored the imaginations and experiences of the West in Indonesia and how it has changed the Western perspective towards the South countries. Indonesian leaders express their critique in moderate and balanced language, usually even without explicitly naming the West. Related to the environmental issue at present, Indonesian leaders have warned the West to comply with their responsibilities and control their insatiable thirst for raw materials. In terms of governance norms, Indonesia is considered to have successes in democratization such as the Bali Democracy Forum and human rights and it is a notion that the country obtains international recognition. In Israeli-Palestinian, Indonesian views there are human rights violations perpetrated against Muslim populations and they do

not seem to figure prominently in the Western human rights agenda. The emergence of Indonesian leaders represents Asians to be popular in the West. Modern globalization has raised the figure of Asians in the eyes of the West in many aspects, i.e., politics, economics, arts, music, language, and literature. Some Asian writers such as Jhumpa Lahiri, Haruki Murakami, and Kafka, music genres such as K-pop and J-Rock have been icons in the global marketing music industry in the West at present, being comparable to the American-European music industry ([Schlehe, et. al., 2022](#)). Gradually, the West's perspective on the East has changed since Asians have proven to develop significantly and equally towards the West by their capability to voice their thoughts and to initiate significant movements.

## Asia's Characters

### 1. River

One of the landscapes that makes Asian characters is the river. As a form of body water, the river is the source of civilizations everywhere, for example, the River Mekong in the East and the River Thames in the West. Fitry in her article mentions the water study of Andaya that more than seventy percent (70 %) of Southeast Asia is scoped by water ([Fitry, et. al., 2021](#)). Water especially in Southeast Asia countries such as Brunei, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Timor-Leste, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam is essential for Southeast Asians in their daily life activities. She adds that the monsoon rains are a common natural element of those regions and they have tried to focus on water as both an essential element of environmental setting and an

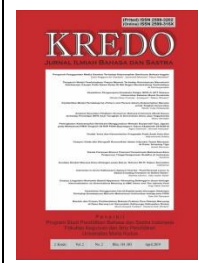


understanding of Southeast Asian society. For example, the Mekong River which flows through China and Myanmar in the Upper Mekong, and Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam in the Lower Mekong basin has been a vital element for the agrarian communities. In his article, Le Tran ([Le Tran, 2023](#)) says that based on statistics from the Mekong River Commission in 2022, the Mekong River Basin is home to approximately seventy (70) million humans, including sixty (60) million who are residing in the Lower Mekong Basin, and ten (10) million are living in the Upper Mekong Basin ([Le Tran, 2023](#)). Barito River and the Martapura River are very important for everyone in all places of South Kalimantan, including urban areas as a means of transportation for the mobilization of residents to various urban areas ([Ramadhandi, et. al., 2021](#)). In the aspect of religion and spirituality, the Ganga River plays a role in the Hinduism of India ([Das, 2019](#)). Meanwhile, the Central Kalimantan is an area whose surface is a river flow and supports the availability of the *lanting* houses as the indigenous Dayak and Malay community residences on the shore of the Kahayan River ([Hamidah, 2022](#)). In Asia, rivers are the source of life because they supply clean water, fish, and stones for materials building and transportation. The river is inseparable from the human culture of Asia and represents Asian civilization. However, for the sake of development, rivers nowadays are no longer as appropriately useful as they are supposed to be, the rivers are polluted and causing natural resource damage as in the case of Balok River's metal pollution in Pahang, Malaysia, and a pollution crisis in Mekong Delta, Vietnam which impact on land degradation ([Dewi, 2020](#)). Depicting

landscapes of Asia, the three selected Indonesian short stories take setting of place in Kahayan River in Borneo, in upstream Sumpara River, Kolaka City in Southwest Sulawesi, and in a forest where orangutans live in Rimba Raya Sebangau, Central Kalimantan.

## 2. Rice

Together with the river as an essential element of Asian culture, Asia also presents rice culture in their civilization. The grain is commonly eaten by Asians and therefore has been a staple food for most Asians. Shen Yuan in his article explains that the rice systems located in the river basins and deltas of Southeast Asia have produced a large and stable surplus of rice. This rice production does not only meet the regional demand but also makes a significant contribution to the global food supply ([Yuan, et. al., 2022](#)). Rice can be eaten alone or together with a great variety of soups, side dishes, and main dishes. Other products in which rice is used are breakfast cereals, noodles, and such alcoholic beverages as Japanese sake. Early rice cultivation was in India and China and the civilizations of Southeast Asia. Rice has become an identity of many Asian societies as common Indonesians say that everybody wants to have had rice first and they have not eaten without the existence of rice. Indonesia as a part of Southeast Asia, has a rice-based diet and rice-cooking cultural tradition in any feasts and ritual beliefs which keep ancestors close in their philosophical life. This is underlined by Wijaya who states in her article that Indonesian culinary tourism is not merely exposing the traditional food but telling the market about the socio-cultural values behind the food itself ([Wijaya, 2019](#)). The story *Pekik Burung Kedasi di Tepi*



*Kahayan* and *Cenning Rara* mentions rice, paddy fields, peasant families, forests, and agricultural society which are common landscapes found in Asia. To grow the crops, they need to clear forests for crop fields, and usually, small gardens near the houses to grow fruits or vegetables for their food supply.

### 3. Spirits and Myths

Related to ancestors and cultural traditions, there are similarities in cultural values among Asia countries, such as patriarchy, hierarchy, collectivism, and traditional practices (De Silva, 2023). According to De Silva, patriarchy is prevalent in many Asian societies, men and older families have higher social status and typically have greater authority and respect than those of lower social status. There are requirements of the family and community over the individuals, and honor or reputation is highly valued in collectivist societies. He adds that traditional practices, religious teachings, and beliefs regarding gender roles encourage the idea that wives should be submissive and obedient to their husbands (De Silva, 2023). The historical factor contributes to the Asian voice that these cultural beliefs and practices are held by Asians. Eslit explains that mythical creatures and spirit beings have been a part of the cultural heritage of Southeast Asia and can be found in various folk literature across the region. They play an essential role as symbols of power, wisdom, and spirituality in the cultural imagination of Southeast Asia. Therefore, myths and supernatural beings give a deeper understanding of the cultural beliefs and values that have shaped Southeast Asia's history and character identity (Eslit, 2023). Dayak people are in a close relationship with nature and spirits, by performing

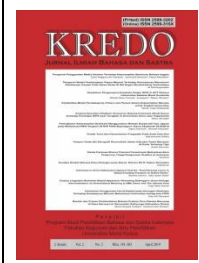
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*sangiang* - the traditional healing ritual, they seek help from the ancestral spirits to heal the patient (Hartati, et. al., 2020) although modernity has introduced them to doctors and medical knowledge. According to Hartati, Dayak people in Central Kalimantan are never separated from the spiritual realm and their attachment to nature, for example, when a Dayak child has a physical illness, the shaman will hold a healing ritual, and traditional medicine as an institutionalized ritual is always related to people's belief in supernatural powers. The medicine is made from leaves and roots taken from the forest. Those who are within the scope of influence of these beliefs will have a deeper appreciation of healing through traditional medicine and have a higher expectation of being healthy.

### Postcolonial Ecocriticism

Asian landscape, society, culture, and tradition are issues scoping in the environment. Environment is the natural world, the surroundings in which a person, animal, or plant lives. As stated by Huggan and Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*, it has been introduced the concept of ecocriticism as an understanding text how human is connected with the environment. Having a long history of ecological concern, the relationship between humans, animals, and the environment in postcolonial text is examined in which colonial power is applied to those who are colonized. Underlying Huggan and Tiffin's ideology which states the late-capitalist world of the twentieth century proposes an ecological crisis that roots in the modern-materialistic civilization and causes men 'the butcher of Earth', Indriyanto in his article explains postcolonial ecocriticism has addressed the aftermath of colonialism in the





exploitation of the landscape for the benefit of imperial power. The ecological imperialism is seen as a pattern of invasion, land-clearing, and destruction since the European materialistic civilization views nature exists only as a wholesale commodity and a benefit for (Western) human intrinsic values ([Indriyanto, 2019](#)). This modernity has contributed to ecological destruction, for example, the area of land in East Kalimantan is permitted for the exploitation of natural resources which reaches 13.83 million hectares, even though the total land area of East Kalimantan province is only 12.7 hectares ([Ardianto, et. al., 2020](#)). The environmental crisis has a close relationship with the oppression, of the superior and the inferior which ruins the existence of the natural world. The exploitation of the natural world of the colonized is done for the needs of the colonizer's materialistic civilization, therefore, to analyze the three selected Indonesian short stories; *Pekik Burung Kedasi di Tepi Kahayan* (Crying Cuckoos over the Kahayan), *Cenning Rara*, and *Pohon Pongo* (Pongo's Caring Tree) is best discussed in the field of postcolonial ecocriticism.

## RESEARCH METHODS

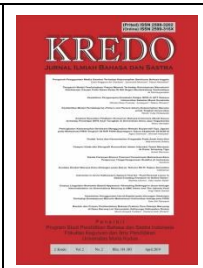
The paper uses library research and the research questions will be revealed through descriptive qualitative data. According to ([Sugiyono, 2020](#)), a method of qualitative research is research based on post-positivism and interpretive philosophy. This is used in natural objects to understand meaning, and uniqueness, construct phenomena, and find hypotheses ([Sanjaya, et. al., 2019](#)). To further understand, in positivism, it is not always transferable to the social world.

Meanwhile, ([Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020](#)) state that interpretivism considers differences such as cultures, circumstances, as well as times leading to the development of different social realities.

Since this paper uses library research, the data collection is from reading primary and secondary sources. The primary data is taken from the three selected Indonesian short stories *Pekik Burung Kedasi di Tepi Kahayan* (Crying Cuckoos over the Kahayan) by Han Gagas, *Cenning Rara* by Umar Thamrin, and *Pohon Pongo* (Pongo's Caring Tree) by Rinto Andriano. While reading the primary and secondary data, taking notes is included as the technique to get the data. The theory used to discuss the problem formulation is *postcolonial ecocriticism* by Huggan and Tiffin and the supporting theories and references are related to *Orientalism* and Asian characters.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Çolak mentions Said's Orientalism in his article that the ideology is a part of imperialist practices. The representation of Asia as the East is based on false experiences characterized by mysterious, heartfelt adventures, evil-spirited, exotic beings, and extraordinary visuals resembling an oasis and its imagery is fictionalized in the world of imagination ([Çolak, 2021](#)). In this discussion, there will be explanations of how the three short stories portray Asians in the landscapes, the culture, and the environment and how the Asian natural environment is connected with the people reviewed through the postcolonial ecocriticism perspective.

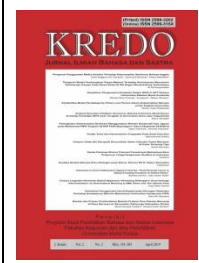


## Asia and Its Landscape, Culture, and Environment

Unlike the West, Asia's landscape is close to the rivers, forests, mountains, and villages which shapes agriculture society with its sociocultural phenomena and philosophical life. The story *Pekik Burung Kedasi di Tepi Kahayan* (Crying Cuckoos over the Kahayan) presents a landscape of a village in Gunung Mas Regency, on the banks of the Kahayan River, Borneo (now Central Kalimantan). As a part of Southeast Asia, Borneo has a distinctly Asian landscape. The *lantings*, traditional houses of Dayak Ngaju settle along the water's edge of the Kahayan River and shape a river civilization. Dayak ethnic ancestors in Central Kalimantan are believed to have originated from their ancestors living on a hill called Bukit Raya or *Puruk Bondang* where several upstream rivers in West, Central, and East Kalimantan are met ([Suswandari, et. al., 2022](#)). The term water refers to a variety of types such as salt, fresh, brackish, land-water, and forms, for example, oceans, seas, straits, estuaries, rivers, lakes, ponds, reservoirs, and canals. River as a form of water is perceived as a symbol of energy and a life-giving force to most people in Southeast Asia ([Dewi, 2020](#)). In her article, she says it is not unusual for Southeast Asian people typically live near the river banks for clean and fresh water, food sources like fish and shrimp, and building materials like sand and stones. The quote "*Their ancestors never lived far from the river*" in *Pekik Burung Kedasi di Tepi Kahayan* clearly describes that the Dayak people choose to settle on the banks of major rivers and live with their culture as a community of river inhabitants. For Asians, the river is an essential liquid substance such as for washing activities,

household needs, and drinking, as it is said in the story, "*Do you remember how, when we were little, we sometimes drank the water straight from this river?*" River also gives sociocultural phenomena for the community as water is meaningful to forming agricultural society and to supporting religious/ritual traditions and beliefs, for instance, Hinduism ritual in Gange River ([Das, 2019](#)). There is also local wisdom of people around the nature reserve of water, for instance, a myth around Mahakam River, East Kalimantan which believe *pesut*, river dolphins are human descendants to be protected and preserved ([Rosmini, et. al., 2022](#)). Kahayan River in Central Kalimantan gives privilege to its inhabitants. There is a belief that they are born from rivers so they do not need to learn to swim from anyone as stated in the story, "*When they were babies, their mothers had bathed them in the river, laying them on their backs atop the water until they quickly learned to float naturally on their own*".

Being an Asian agricultural society, the people along the Kahayan River depend on the fertile soil for planting vegetables and fruits. On both sides of the riverbank, some plants give Asian characteristics such as bamboo, coconut, and some fruit trees like bananas, jackfruits, *durians*, cluster figs, *cempedak*, and cashews thrive in the fertile soil of Kalimantan's peatland. The plantation in the story represents an Asian atmosphere that will not be found in the West (European) countries. The Kahayan River also provides various Asian traditional dishes mentioned in the story such as *ikan bakar* with a special flavor of Dayak cuisine, grilled mystus fish dressed with a lemongrass chili sauce, *amplang ikan pipih*, *abon ikan pipih*, etc. ([Septo, et. al.,](#)



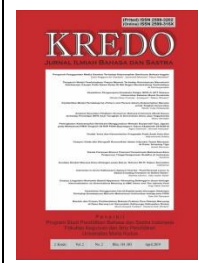
2021). Regardless of its civilization and philosophy, water in Asia is essential as a mode of transportation. Dayak people use rivers for transportation and we often see boats tied to wooden poles along the Kahayan River, they have built traditional stilt houses with sturdy Kalimantan ironwood floating atop pilings driven deep into the riverbed. Since it supplies water, fish, and transportation for the society, humans along the river are getting livelihood as fisherman, and the boatman. This has been proven as Huggan and Tiffin declare in their *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* how nature, people, and culture are intertwined. The story shows how since their early childhood, Asians live closely with nature as it is said “*In elementary school, the children usually went home at noon, the hottest part of the day. They would plunge into the river and swim as long as they wanted, using whatever style came naturally to them. Some swam like a frog, others like a dolphin-or anything else, as long as they remained afloat and kept from drowning*”. Their ancestors have never lived far from the river and this makes their children adept at swimming without no one to teach them how. Another Asian element of nature shown in the story is the forest. Asian forest provides the local people with special roots and leaves that are close to traditional medical treatment, for example, *billy goat* roots and leaves to make a poultice, spear grass, and white jasmine roots for tea to drink, which they believe these plants are natural remedies. Eslit explains that mythical creatures and spirit beings have been a part of the cultural heritage of Southeast Asia and can be found in various folk literature across the region. They play an essential role as symbols of power, wisdom, and spirituality in the cultural imagination of

Southeast Asia ([Eslit, 2023](#)). As myths and supernatural beings give a deeper understanding of the cultural beliefs and values that have shaped Southeast Asia’s history and character identity, performing *sangiang* led by the *balian* (the traditional healing ritual) to seek help from the ancestral spirits is a common thing ([Hartati, et. al., 2020](#)). The story presents the *balian*, a shaman elder who appears to be possessed by the supernatural. The people along Kahayan River understand the nature voice, like when a plaintive cuckoo perches on the top of a *shorea* tree, shrieking, the ear-piercing noise frightens the villagers, who believe the bird to be a bearer of evil and death. The story shows strong Asian characters through its landscape, culture, and environment by presenting the natural environment of the Kahayan River, people’s livelihood, local beliefs and myths, and ritual traditions. Having organized systems of community life, traditions, beliefs, values, and philosophies, the people along Kahayan River have shown the world that they have a civilization following the environment in which they live. Things are being sentenced adaptive when it is in harmony with the environment and that means it is not backward or primitive. Therefore, it cannot be said the Dayak people, are backward, uncultured, and must be educated as Said's Orientalism explains that the West views the East as inferior and backward.

Mentioning indigo, *bissu*, and *calabai*, *Cenning Rara* presents a mythical story of the Bugis-Makassar people. Kurniasih in her article utters that a belief in the existence of mystical and occult things is not something unusual in Southeast Asia countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. This



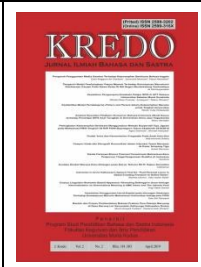
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mystical mindset is frequently related to the events of supernatural. Southeast Asia's myths and folktales are explicitly engaging with spiritual beings and this portrays Asian culture ([Kurniasih & Krismonita, 2023](#)). Karma, myth, and spiritual beings are attached to Asian cultural life and it is depicted in the second short story. Caya's father worries about his lonely daughter because he believes he has gotten karma from his past deeds. He believes God punishes him when his wife dies giving birth to an imperfect baby daughter who has epilepsy. He is a loan shark and although he has returned all the blood money to the community, he still gets the karma. Myth as a cultural element is a common feature that colors Asian characters as stated by ([Eslit, 2023](#)) that myths and supernatural beings give a deeper understanding of the cultural beliefs and values that have shaped Southeast Asia's history and character identity. A spiritual being and *bissu* become a mediator to convey a nature message to the world regarding the environmental destruction and cultural change due to human interventions. The local people believe that with certain traditional rituals by a mediator, nature will become good and will not harm humans. The story is about an indigo child who wants to save the tree inhabited by her imaginary friend, a spiritual being. With the help of a *bissu*, she becomes his student and inherits *Cenning Rara*, the Bugis magic love spell which can attract people and favor her. Eventually, she will become a savior of Bugis culture instead of a savior of Bugis natural environment, of her helplessness to save a tree where her imaginary friend resides. Wessing explains all narrations such as myths and folktales shape the perceptions of the listeners or readers about the nature of their local

reality which creates 'truth' as the basis for their social identities ([Wessing, 2020](#)). The majority of Bugis Makassar people are identically Muslims and they adhere to this faith. However, in their community, they admit five gender systems and it is accepted as a unique identity in their community; *calalai*, *calabai*, and *bissu* as male and female sexes. They confess that *calalai* is assigned female at birth but takes the role of heterosexual man, *calabai* is assigned the opposite verse of *calalai*, and *bissu* is neither male nor female but represents the totality of the gender ([Azizah, 2022](#)). A *bissu* is a sacred Bugis-Makassar transvestite who worked as the spiritual adviser at the court of the ancient Bugis-Makassar kingdom ([Syam, et. al., 2021](#)). This cultural phenomenon is interesting and challenging since it provides us with a critical analysis of a contradiction between *musyrik* (something forbidden in Islam) and *Cenning Rara*, the magic love spell of Bugis Makassar. *Cenning Rara*, *bissu*, *calabai*, and *calalai* are considered a respected social identity of the Bugis-Makassar community which are not found in any other parts of Southeast Asia and it gives Asian characters respectably. The story conveys the condition of the Bugis people who are still closely related to their traditional beliefs and myths. This also states that the Bugis people are never separated from the spiritual realm and their attachment to nature. A belief in myths and spiritual beings is not something immoral and Godless as imagined by the West towards the East for they represent the identity of a nation, and a nation can stand because there is a stable civilization and social system, and a nation can stand because there is a stable civilization and system. Therefore, the Western view of the East as



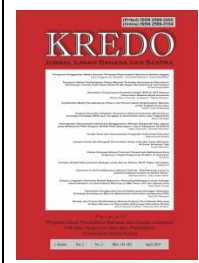


primitive and backward cannot be justified.

Like *Pekik Burung Kedasi di Tepi Kahayan, Cening Rara* shows an Asian landscape where rice fields and rivers exist as a natural background. Living in an agricultural society, the local people plant crops in the field. Setting a location upstream on the Sumpara River, near Kolaka City in Southwest Sulawesi, the village was a forest in the old days, only inhabited by snakes, crocodiles, and forest spirits. Based on Fuller's study of rice, Spengler confirms that rice has become an identity of many Asians since the lands of Asia provide rice fields to the people. Spengler writes in his article that rice spreads across East and South Asia and eventually becomes an important ingredient in global cuisines ([Spengler, et. al., 2021](#)). This edible starchy cereal grain can be eaten alone or together with a great variety of dishes. Rice has become a food culture in Asia that cooking tradition must be an inheritance. Asian values ancestors' teaching and tradition and the story shows implicitly how rice is more than just food, it is a tradition containing teaching and preserving culture, as it is quoted in "Under my mother's guidance, I soon became an expert in making coffee and tea — even better than my mother! Little by little, I started helping her make all kinds of breakfast dishes, like fried rice, glutinous rice, and grits." Related to ancestors and cultural traditions, there are similarities in cultural values among the Asia countries ([De Silva, 2023](#)), for instance, obedience and respect for the elderly. The teaching and education of Asian people preserve the local culture and values that the children should learn good things to be a part of family and society members. Values of teaching and

education show that a social community is educated and cultured. Therefore, the villagers along the Sumpara River embrace a civilization since their values, teachings, education, and cultures have been passed down from ancestors to the next generation. Therefore, it is not proven that the villagers along the upstream of the Sumpara River are said to be uneducated and seen as morally unadvanced as the West perceives the East.

Offering the environmental issue of the palm oil plantation and the fire forest in *Rimba Raya Sebangau*, a jungle in Central Kalimantan, the story *Pohon Pongo* (Pongo's Caring Tree) gives Asian atmosphere, presenting the Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation, BOSF, at the *Sebangau* National Park. This large nature reserve is carved out of the *Rimba Raya Sebangau* jungle ([Panda, et. al., 2021](#)). The writer responds to the serious environmental destruction, and how the development of palm oil plantations causes *orangutans* habitat interrupted. Through the main characters, the story delivers Asian characters. One of Asian cultural values related to gender roles is the idea of encouraging wives to be submissive and obedient to their husbands ([De Silva, 2023](#)). Miranti, a veterinarian who takes care of *orangutans* is awaiting the arrival of her husband Lukman, an environmental activist who was kidnapped by government officials until his death. On the day of the devastating forest fires, she can flee to the safest place, but her loyalty as a woman persists. She keeps expecting him to return to her as seen in "But although they searched until they ran out of supplies, they always came back empty-handed-as empty as the half of Miranti's heart that was usually filled with Lukman's presence". When the fire rages,



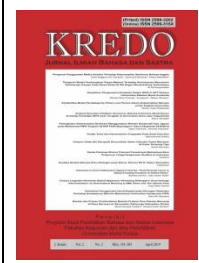
between hallucination and reality, she can still see his figure emerging from the flames. Miranti has shown the character of an Asian woman who is loyal to her husband until she becomes a victim. She does not represent submissive, obedient, weak, or unthoughtful Asian women as portrayed by the West, but loyalty and love persist. She shows her bravery, strength, courage, and hope in the middle of chaos. She is truly a hero for defending the existence of *orangutans*, the trees, and the forest.

As a part of the cultural heritage of the Southeast, mythical creatures and spirit beings play an essential role as symbols of power, wisdom, and spirituality in the cultural imagination. Therefore, it gives a deeper understanding of the cultural beliefs and values that have shaped Southeast Asia's history and character identity (Eslit, 2023). Serving the ancestor spirit, myth, and belief, *Pohon Pongo* portrays how the supernatural characterizes Asian culture. Waiting for Lukman's return, Miranti never sees her husband anymore after he leaves that night but she holds her belief. As a daughter of the Sundanese, she inherits her knowledge of *siloka*, a mystical cultural belief, from her Sundanese *karuhun*, ancestors. *Siloka* convinces her that Lukman is still alive somewhere in the jungle and preparing something for their family's future, for the life, they have been dreaming of, a life in union with the forest. Some following situations point to the spirit and supernatural power present in the atmosphere of the Asian story. Lukman always says "*The Spirit is the light of my life; I am only a reflection of its light*" when they argue about the dangers that threaten him. The next case is when Kasih investigates the Spirit of the jungle,

Miranti convinces her that the Spirit is the power of all forces that supports everything in the forest and the one who regulates everything in the jungle. Therefore, she believes her husband is still alive with the Spirit and, lately, visiting her in dreams that bother her all day long. During her eight years living with *orangutans*, she concludes that they are very spiritual creatures as they act possessed during the *barzanji*, they are facing the jungle's Spirit. She believes that the forest's singing is heard by the *orangutans* who have gathered to perform a *barzanji* and she is sure that humans, with too many demands and preconceived notions, cannot hear the song of the forest. For the Western, a belief in *roh* or spirits is godless, but for the Eastern, spirits that live together with humans in nature can tell us conditions that cannot be conveyed through human language. The East has a different form of belief than the West, which has so far been indoctrinated in religions such as Christianity or Islam, and this does not mean that the East is godless and barbaric as perceived by the West.

### **Asia and the Connection of Its Nature and People**

From the discussion of the Asian portrait in its landscape, culture, and environmental world, the three short stories reveal nature is inseparable from human culture and that livelihood, tradition, spiritual belief, and myth are only a few examples of prominent Asian vibes in the stories. The three tell us that the Kahayan River has formed a river civilization of Dayak Ngaju, a village upstream on the Sumpara River has merged the spiritual of Bugis ancestors with nature, and the jungle of Kalimantan embraces the spiritual belief that *Roh* or spirit rules in the forests. Khasanah states



in her article ([Khasanah & Sili, 2019](#)) that Said's Orientalism describes Western literary works discriminating and marginalizing the Orient with negative features such as irrational, depraved, childlike, feminine, sensual, primitive, passive, despotic, undisciplined, aberrant, backward, crude, inferior, inauthentic, sexual, corrupt, decadent, weak, and barbaric. However, these West perspectives have been refuted by the figures in the three short stories; the three writers would like to challenge Orientalism that the East has equal opportunity and responsibility to develop and engage with leadership roles in the world as the West does.

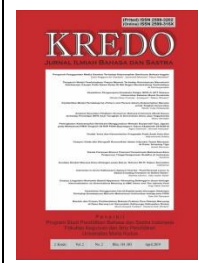
*Pekik Burung Kedasih di Tepi Kahayan* presents Mawinei, a bachelor's degree in environment science from a college in Yogyakarta who is depicted as smart, brave, and critical to the neighborhoods. Counteracting the West perspectives on Asian students that they are passive, uncritical, unwilling/unable to show emotion ([Dobinson, 2020](#)) she presents a figure of an educated Asian graduate who protests against environmental destruction in her village. Responding to the natural exploitation of the gold companies, Mawinei emerges as an Asian heroine who voices her critical thinking and awareness of the chaotic environment. She makes many efforts to save the Kahayan River ecosystem. Said's Orientalism reflects the West perspective toward the East as backward, weak, unvoiced, uneducated, barbaric, and uncivilized beings. However, the story presents Mawinei an Asian figure who challenges the ideology of Orientalism. She can break down the perspective that Asian people are unable to participate in saving the world's environment.

The story invites us to consider the ideology of development which works as a tool of the technocratic West to fulfill their economic political interest as stated in Huggan and Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*. This developmentalism has led to the idea of ecological imperialism. It is a pattern of invasion, land-clearing, and destruction since the European materialistic civilization views nature exists only as a wholesale commodity and a benefit for (Western) human intrinsic values ([Indriyanto, 2019](#)). On behalf of developing the village, the entrepreneurs open a gold mining industry along the river. The company claims their practices are due to the villagers' prosperity. The gold becomes a prosperous commodity for capitalist entrepreneurs and they ignore the ecosystem. The water of the Kahayan River becomes very dirty, itchy, and poisoned for the miners to dump the toxic waste into the river. This ecological crisis along the Kahayan River is rooted in the modern-materialistic civilization and makes men "the butcher of Earth". The entrepreneurs are the capitalists, hiding their political-economical interests behind developmentalism. They prosper themselves by exploiting the gold and ignoring the environmental destruction along the river. As nature, people, and culture are interconnected, the entrepreneurs' intervention toward nature has influenced the livelihood of the indigenous. The agriculture society switches their livelihood to industrial work and it changes the natural environment of the river into an environmental destruction.

Like *Pekik Burung Kedasih di Tepi Kahayan*, the main character in *Cenning Rara* has challenged Said's Orientalism that the East is unequal with the West to



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take a part in the world's sustainability. Caya is a gifted child who dares to protect a bodhi tree that is about to be demolished by the tractor driver. She claims that her unseen friend has settled in the tree. Blocking the tractor driver who is about to demolish the tree, she throws pebbles at the destroyer of nature. Asian women are described as submissive, obedient, and physically weak creatures in the eyes of the West ([De Silva, 2023](#)), but Caya has shown vice versa. Counteracting the West's perspective toward Asians, the story warns us not to underestimate the inferior in maintaining cultural identity as a part of the social environment. Displaying Bugis' love magic spell named *Cenning Rara*, the story would like to connect nature, people, and culture from the perspective of postcolonial ecocriticism.

The story invites us to be thoughtful about the intertwined connection between environmental degradation and the marginalization of the subordinate who inhabits a certain location ([Indriyanto, 2019](#)) as Huggan and Tiffin state in their *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*. The government designs to develop rural areas of the Sumpara River into a city by demolishing trees and clearing the lands for infrastructure. The development interrupts the natural environment since modern structures like roads and office buildings are established. In postcolonial ecocriticism, development is a tool of technocratic superiors to fulfill their interest and benefit, therefore, it is acceptable for them to marginalize the subaltern to exploit their natural resources. This developmentalism ignores the local wisdom of the indigenous that they believe spiritual beings reside in elements of nature like trees. With the help of a *bissu*,

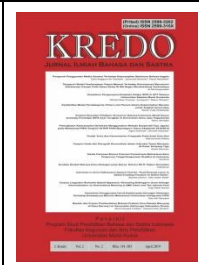
she is an attempt to balance the microcosmic and macrocosmic through maintaining Bugis heritage. The story shows us that she can carry out a big mission, preserving the Bugis' cultural heritage. She may not save more trees in her village from the tractors demolishing, but she has completed the heaviest mission to save the bodhi tree, her imaginary friend, and her ancestor's heritage. For centuries, Europeans have perceived that Asians cannot take any role in the global world because they are viewed as subaltern who never can speak out their voice. The story has spoken out about Caya's disapproval of the city's development. It has demonstrated that Asians are as equal as the Europeans in leading their community by presenting us a heroic and masculine action which for centuries has been marked for the West.

Having *Sebangau* National Park in Central Kalimantan as the setting of the place, *Pohon Pongo* presents Lukman, an environmental activist, and Miranti, a veterinarian working at Borneo *Orangutan* Survival Foundation (BOSF), dedicating their lives to natural preservation. The two are engaged in a conflict between environmental activists and the companies due to the palm oil plantation expanse which potentially threatens the habitat of orangutans in the *Sebangau* National Park. Like the two other stories, *Pohon Pongo* challenges the West notion of the East in Said's Orientalism. The two characters have broken the West perspective on the East that Asians are spoiled, timid, and unequal to the Europeans to carry out important roles in the global world. Miranti and Lukman have represented Asians who take a part in saving the wider world, as Europeans usually do in their heroic superior action.





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The palm oil plantation expansion is designed for the economic and political concerns of the government, the First World. Underlying Huggan and Tiffin's postcolonial ecocriticism, Paliwal confirms nature as a capitalistic commodity starting with the concept that 'man is the best creation of nature' and that 'nature's sole purpose is to serve mankind' (Paliwal, 2020). This ideology has been manifested in serious issues of palm oil plantation expansion in Kalimantan for decades. The demand for palm oil for domestic consumption in Indonesia is quite high and the export of crude palm oil is a necessity in world trade. The fact that Kalimantan with its peatlands is very suitable for growing palms led the entrepreneurs and government to clear more forests in Kalimantan for massive oil palm plantations. They exploit the land to gain profit effectively by burning more peatlands for palm oil plantation areas and ignoring the environmental destruction created. As a result, the habitat of *orangutans* is threatened since they burn forests to clear the land efficiently. This action damages not only the ecosystem of flora and fauna in Kalimantan but also causes air pollution in the Earth's atmosphere.

The stories of *Pekik Burung Kedasi di Tepi Kahayan* (Crying Cuckoos over the Kahayan) written by Han Gagas, *Cenning Rara* by Umar Thamrin, and *Pohon Pongo* (Pongo's Caring Tree) by Rinto Andriano in the discussion have given evidences that Asian people are close in relation with nature. The stories show us that Asian people depend on nature because it is not only to support their biological living but also to maintain their socio-cultural environment. The destruction of the

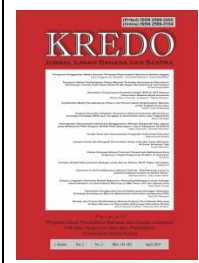
natural world has affected the life socio-cultural of native Dayak Ngaju and Bugis Sulawesi as depicted in the three short stories. From the three selected Indonesian short stories, it has been proven that the Western perspective on the East (the Orient) in the assumption that the East needs to be civilized and educated is simply not true. The East already has a high civilization and the people have their social-cultural system and the life order to live in harmony with people and the surrounding environment. The East knows very well how to treat nature properly and harmoniously so that humans can still coexist with nature so that civilization and human life can prosper without any act of exploitation of nature. Thus, the East cannot be underestimated by the West because it has been depicted from the stories that the East can be a pioneer to take part in saving the world through their concern for their natural environment.

## CONCLUSION

The issues of inequality, oppression, discrimination, and marginalization have been prominent for decades in human civilization and are discussed in postcolonial studies. Through Said's Orientalism, it has been revealed how the West perceives the East as inferior and that the practices of inequality and oppression exist in terms of gender roles, race, politics, economics, etc. It has been acknowledged that the East/Asia experiences colonial issues because, through the eye of the West, the East/Orient/Asia is uneducated, exotic, and barbaric. The West perspective on the East/Asia in terms of postcolonialism is scoped in the three selected Indonesian short stories which aim to voice the equality between the West/Europe and the East/Asia. The postcolonial study broadens



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into a larger field nowadays. Since ecological issues are prominent in the twenty century, environmental degradation has become a serious discussion among scholars. Since the exploitation of natural resources is uncontrollable, it creates environmental destruction. The three selected Indonesian short stories *Pekik Burung Kedasi di Tepi Kahayan* (Crying Cuckoos over the Kahayan) written by Han Gagas, *Cenning Rara* by Umar Thamrin, and *Pohon Pongo* (Pongo's Caring Tree) by Rinto Andriono challenge the issues. The protagonists presented in the three stories are Indonesians, who are appropriately representing Asians. The

characters are prominent figures in their action to save nature from the exploitation of the capitalist, the business owners. Mawinei struggles to save Kahayan River in Central Kalimantan from chemical waste pollutants, Caya defends the bodhi tree near her house in a village in Southwest Sulawesi, and Miranti dedicates her life to orangutans in Sebangau National Park in Central Kalimantan, are the figures of Asian people who challenge the West perspective toward the Asian. Through the three Indonesian short stories, the readers are invited to counteract the practice of oppression and inequality toward the East.

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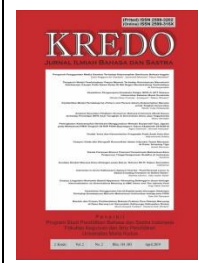
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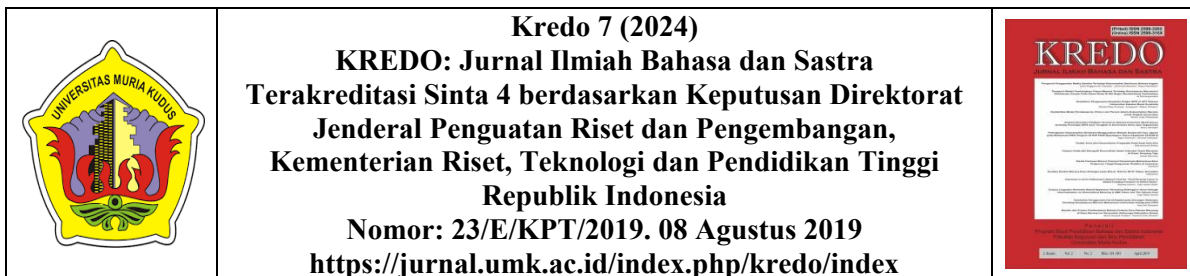


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