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Chapter One: Sarawak Population and Migration

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SUMMARY

This journal opens with Chapter One focusing on the methods, issues and problems of analysing the temporal, spatial and growth of Sarawak population between 1947 and 1980 at the divisional and district levels. The uneven distribution and growth of population is both a cause and consequence of shifting population settlements through migration between districts and urban or rural areas. Details on this internal migration, especially its patterns and migrant characteristics are subsequently elaborated in the chapter which ends with a case study of Iban on the move by using the 1980 population and housing census data.

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1.1 Regional Growth of Population in Sarawak, 1947-1980

INTRODUCTION

In studying the growth and patterns of population distribution in Sarawak, the analysis could be made either in terms of the urban-rural classification or in terms of the spatial distribution of population by region; the former involves categorical measures, while the latter involves spatial measures¹. The patterns of urban growth and urbanization, together with an analysis of inter-temporal comparative problems between 1970 and 1980 have been studied by the same author in another paper². It is this paper's objective to study some of the spatial aspects of population distribution in Sarawak at different regional levels.

SCOPE OF ANALYSIS

Regional levels, in this paper, will refer firstly, to the divisional level and secondly to the district level. In 1980, figures were available also for the smaller administrative units of sub-districts, but comparable 1970 figures were not available, thus excluding the possibility of intercensal analysis at this lower level. At the district level, intercensal analysis can be made only on the basis of the 20 administrative districts in 1970; this is because no separate published figures were available in 1970 for the five additional districts in 1980. Separate adjustments will, however, be made for them to ensure comparability for at least the 1970-1980 period. Also, although Kuching Municipal Council (KMC) and Sibu Urban District Council (SUDC) are not administrative districts, they will be included for analysis, because they are the two biggest urban areas in Sarawak.

The period for which the analysis will be made refers to the thirty-three years since the Second World War i.e. between 1947 and 1980.

DATA SOURCE

The sources of data for analysis in this paper will be from the respective 1947, 1960, 1970 and 1980 population census reports³. Although a population count was made in Sarawak in 1939 under the war-time food rationing scheme,

its actual coverage and accuracy were unknown. Moreover, the various administrative boundaries in 1939 were unknown or suspected to be different from those in 1947; most of the documents related to such changes were destroyed or lost during the War, so that no meaningful adjustments could be made to ensure intercensal comparability. Further discussions on this will be made in the following section.

COMPARATIVE PROBLEMS

Based on reports from the four published censuses reports, the following types of changes were made to administrative units between 1939 and 1980:

- (1) District boundaries made smaller (e.g. Bau between 1939 and 1947).
- (2) District boundaries made bigger (e.g. Bintulu between 1939 and 1947, and Kanowit between 1947 and 1960).
- (3) KMC Boundaries reclassified to include a certain area by annexion, while excluding another area by declassification (1947-1960).
- (4) One district became two districts (e.g. Lower Rejang in 1947 became Sarikei and Binatang in 1960).
- (5) Two districts merged to become one district (e.g. Oya/Dalat and Mukah in 1947 became Mukah in 1960).
- (6) Districts name changes (e.g. Sadong in 1960 was changed to Lower Sadong in 1970 and to Simunjan in 1980).
- (7) Sub-districts became full districts (e.g. Belaga Sub-district in 1970 became Belaga District in the 1980 census).
- (8) At the divisional level, the 1970 five administrative divisions were increased to seven divisions in 1980.

Details, whether available, on the various changes are summarized in Table 1.

CLASSIFICATION ADJUSTMENTS

Because of the above changes, the following adjustments were made to overcome the intercensal comparative problems.

- (1) Based on the 1980 seven administrative divisions, all districts'

population between 1947 and 1980 were grouped into these respective divisions; this was possible, because all district changes occurred within divisional boundaries.

- (2) In 1947, no separate figures were available for Serian/Sadong and Sarikei/Binatang; the 1947-1960 intercensal comparison, therefore, can only be made for 18 districts, two of which will be at the Serian and Lower Rejang districts' level.
- (3) In 1970, no separate figures were published for the five new districts; hence, to maintain comparability with the other censuses in 1980 and 1960, the following analysis will be made mainly on the basis of 20 districts. A separate analysis will, however, be made to assess the relative importance and changes of these five districts between 1970 and 1980.
- (4) Because of the absence of records and maps on the actual geographical coverage and subsequent affected population resulting from boundary changes to Kanowit and KMC between 1947 and 1960, it is not possible to make any quantitative adjustments. Limitations due to the changes, indicated in Table 1, therefore, have to be noted when studying the 1947-1960 growth for these two areas.

The adjusted classifications of districts and divisions together with their respective population and growth rates for censuses between 1947 and 1980 are shown in Table 1.

POPULATION GROWTH AT THE DIVISIONAL LEVEL

Table 2 shows the respective population in each of the seven administrative divisions in Sarawak for censuses between 1947 and 1980; this table also shows the annual growth rate of population for three intercensal periods. Between 1947 and 1960, the highest growth rate (3.22%) was found in the Fourth Division, followed by the First and Third Divisions. For the next two intercensal periods between 1960 and 1980, however, the Third Division's growth rate dropped to below the State average, while the Fourth Division continued to be the fastest growing division followed by the First Division. The third Division's fall was caused partly by security problems in the late sixties and early seventies; curfews, insecurity, declining employment and economic activities created push forces for out-migration to the Fourth and First Divisions. The slowest growing divisions were the Second and Sixth;

both of these regions had been the traditional “losers” or “senders” in net internal migration⁴.

Because of the consistent fast growth rate in population, the Fourth Division accounted for 16.29% of Sarawak population in 1980, a 40% increase from the 11.64% in 1947; the First Division, on the other hand increased its relative importance by 14.0% from 31.52% in 1947 to 35.94% in 1980. All the other divisions, especially Sixth and Second experienced declines in their relative importance. These emerging patterns of population distribution in Sarawak are summarized in Table 2.

The “unevenness” or concentration of population relative to geographical area is indicated in Table 2. With only 7.2% of Sarawak area, the First Division had nearly 36% (an increase from 32% in 1947) of Sarawak population in 1980. The Seventh Division, on the other hand, covered 31% of the State area, but had only about 5% (a decrease from 6% in 1947), of its total population. The accompanying Figure 1 on the Lorenz Curve, Gini Concentration Ratio, and Index of Concentration⁵ show the continuing unevenness in population distribution, being marginally more even in 1980 than in 1947.

This unevenness in spatial distribution can be expected to prevail during the 1980-1990 decade; it must be noted that a pattern and trend already in force for over three decades can only be slowly reversed or modified if there are defined policies for population distribution.

POPULATION GROWTH AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL

Between 1970 and 1980, there were only five districts in Sarawak with annual population growth rates that were higher than the State 2.84%; this number represented a drop from the eight and seven districts during the 1960-1970 and 1947-1960 periods, respectively. It is interesting to note that, with the exception of Sibul which is in the Third Division, all the other four districts are in the First and Fourth Divisions. The relative growth rates for each of the districts during the three intercensal periods are given in Table 1 which clearly shows that fast growth rates are related not so much to population size, but to the geographical location i.e. whether in the First/Fourth Divisions or in the other Divisions.