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Chapter Seven: Marriages, Divorces and Religion

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SUMMARY

An analysis on socioeconomic data in Sarawak will not be complete without studying marriages and divorces; nor will it be complete without an understanding of the patterns and growth of religion amongst its population. This chapter used the 1970 and 1980 census data to study the methods and problems of measuring and patterning marriages and divorces in Sarawak by sex, age, year, strata and race. This is followed in the chapter by showing the growth of major religions like Islam, Christianity and Buddhism during the 1947 to 1980 period, impacting the social and cultural development aspects in Sarawak.

CHAPTER SEVEN

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7.1 Analysing Census Data on Religion in Sarawak, 1947-1980

OBJECTIVES

This paper uses data on religion published in various population census reports between 1947 and 1980 to study firstly, the methodological changes in concepts and classification, and secondly, the pattern and rate of growth of various religions in Sarawak during the 33 year period.

METHODOLOGICAL CHANGES

During the three decade between the post-war and the most recent population censuses in Sarawak, there were various changes to the concept and classification of religions.

- (1) The 1947 Census classifies religion into five major categories i.e. Roman Catholic, Church of England, Other Christian, Muhammadan and Other Religions. This is the only census with breakdown figures (Table 6) for the various Christian faiths. Although not tabulated in the main table, separate figures were also given in the write-up for the Seventh-Day Adventist (mainly Bidayuh in the First Division), Methodist (mainly Chinese in the Third Division) and Borneo Evangelical (mainly 'Other Indigenous' in the Fourth and Fifth divisions) missions. It is also the only census with tabulated figures for each of the five administrative divisions in Sarawak. The 1947 table, however, was not classified by sex. Conceptually, all non-Christians and Muhammadans in 1947 were termed "pagans" or "animists" under "Other Religions"; these included Buddhists and those who conform to the philosophy of Confucianism which is not really a religion.

It is important to note that, as in most census taking, there were an undetermined number of misreporting between race and religion in 1947. For example, there were Melanaus who, because of being converts to Islam, reported themselves as Malays; also some Chinese children adopted by Muhammadans or children of

mixed Chinese and Malay parents were recorded as Malays.

Finally, it is interesting to note that the 1947 Census recorded only one person as having "No religion or not stated". It is possible that the majority of them in this group were grouped wrongly under "Other Religion". Even the most recent 1980 Population Census showed that 11.8 percent of the Sarawak populations had no religion or whose religions were unknown.

- (2) The 1960 Census published figures in Table 15 on religion for the same ethnic groups (actually called cultural group in 1947, and community in 1960 and 1970). Breakdown figures were available by sex, but the groupings for religion were reduced to only three main ones i.e. Christian, Muslim and Other Religion. There were no longer detail breakdowns for Christianity as in 1947, neither were those under "No religion or not stated" separately classified; the latter were grouped together with "Other Religion".
- (3) The 1970 Census produced Table 2.4 on religion in Sarawak, classified not only by sex but also by 3 strata or size of locality (i.e. urban large, urban small, and rural). Compared with 1960, it also provided further classifications on religion with separate figures for Buddhist and "No Religion".
- (4) The 1980 Census concept of, and classification, on religion were further refined and improved. Table 2.8, besides being classified by race, sex, and strata, also shows figures for three new religious groups not previously published i.e. Hinduism, Tribal/folk religion, and Confucianism, Taoism/other traditional Chinese religions.

It is important, however, to note the figures on religion in both the 1970 and 1980 Census were not adjusted for under-counts (5.5 percent in 1980), or for persons covered on the self-enumeration form designed especially for seamen, transient and institutional population.

A summary of the above changes is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Methodological changes, 1947-1980

Population Census	Religious categories	Tabulated by				Race described as
		Administrative Division	Sex	European	Strata	
1947	1. Roman Catholic 2. Church of England 3. Other Christian 4. Muhammadan 5. Other Religious 6. No Religion or Not Stated	√	X	√	X	Cultural group
1960	1. Christian 2. Muslim 3. Other Religion	X	√	√	X	Community
1970	1. Muslim 2. Christian 3. Buddhist 4. No Religion 5. Other	X	√	X	√ (3 strata)	Community
1980	1. Islam 2. Christianity 3. Hinduism 4. Buddhism 5. Confucianism/ Taoism/other traditional chinese religions 6. Tribal/folk religion 7. Others 8. No religion	X	√	X	√ (2 strata)	Ethnicity

PATTERN AND RATE OF GROWTH

Not only there were methodological changes in the concept and classification of religions during the 1947-1980 censuses, there were also changes in the pattern and the rate of growth of these religions.

Changing Patterns

Figures in Table 2 show the following interesting patterns of change in religion between 1947 and 1980.

- (1) As at 1980, Islam became the only religion among the Malays. Earlier censuses show small numbers of Malays who were either Christians or Buddhists; this could, of course, be due to misreporting as explained earlier.
- (2) Melanaus constitute the second biggest group of Muslims in Sarawak. While 12.2 percent of them were Christians in 1980, more than three-quarters or 77.2 percent of them were Muslims, a moderate increase from 71.1 percent two decades ago in 1960.
- (3) Although 40.5 percent of the Iban reported tribal/folk religion and 17.1 percent no religion (including not stated) in 1980, these represented sharp declines from the 96.1 percent figure in 1947. While the number of converts to Muslims and Chinese religions remained minimal, the number of Christians grew rapidly from only 7,901 in 1947 to 136,117 in 1980; in fact, Christianity is the dominant religion among Ibans, reported by 37.0 percent of them in 1980.
- (4) Like the Ibans, the pattern of growth among the Bidayuh was Christian dominant; the relative importance of Christianity grew from 8.6 percent in 1947 to 69.1 percent in 1980.
- (5) Although 17.3 percent of "Other Indigenous" was Muslims in 1980, the relative importance of Islam for this ethnic group had not increased during the three decades under study; growth had been accounted for mainly by Christianity which was reported by 68.1 percent of this group, an increase from only 17.4 percent in 1947.