

**The Sarawak Museum Journal****Vol. XL No. 61****December 1989****ISSN: 0375-3050****E-ISSN: 3036-0188**

Citation: Hock, J. K. T. (1989). A Socioeconomic Study of The Iban Today. The Sarawak Museum Journal, XL (61): 79-96

A SOCIOECONOMIC STUDY OF THE IBAN TO-DAY***Joseph Ko Tee Hock****INTRODUCTION**

In Sarawak, as in the other states of Malaysia, there has been in recent years a burgeoning awareness and interest on how the socioeconomic status of respective ethnic groups have changed through time, either in absolute or relative terms. While there is always a demonstrable need for more appropriate, comprehensive and accurate data to study such changes, our knowledge could be significantly advanced by more effective and exhaustive analysis of data that are already available, but often remain grossly underutilized if not completely unknown to researchers; socioeconomic analysts are generally reluctant to make innovative exploitation of existing, sometimes scattered or incomplete data. Statistics from population censuses, for example, provide an invaluable source of such readily available data. With various methodological improvements and developments in recent census data collection, published results provided invaluable raw material for studying socioeconomic pattern and change. And in the current study, interests centre especially on the socioeconomic position of the Iban relative to the other major ethnic groups in Sarawak.

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DATE SOURCE

The quantitative study in this paper will be carried out by mainly using published statistics from the 1970 and 1980 population censuses. Since this is only a descriptive note, methodological details on definitions and concepts together with their related limitations, already published in the respective reports, will not be repeated here. For comparative purposes, without venturing into details of comparability problems, published figures from earlier censuses conducted in 1939, 1947 and 1960 will be utilized also; wherever figures are extracted from other non-census sources, such sources will be appropriately footnoted in the respective tables.

OBJECTIVE

Statistical users are often unaware or uncertain as to what and where figures are available. This is understandable especially if the required figures are available in different reports, at times not available or accessible, and in

different tables. Certain indicators require calculations from different tables, a task which some users find too adventurous, especially at the sight of voluminous reports. Moreover, methodological intricacies in terms of coverage, concepts, definitions and limitations characterize statistical tables as areas many fear to thread. Finally, operationalizing theoretical terms into calculable statistics is a task not many analysts like to attempt.

This paper attempts to bring together, from different sources and tables, pertinent statistics for operationalizing theoretical correspondences of selected socioeconomic indicators so that such indicators, with intercensal and inter-ethnic comparisons, are readily available at a glance to indicate the relative socioeconomic position of the Iban.

Interests on the socioeconomic positions of the Iban arise partly from the fact that it is the single biggest ethnic group in Sarawak; and, as will be discussed later in this paper, available statistical evidences seem to highlight the commonly known fact that it is also the poorest ethnic group in the State. Socioeconomic aspects of development are closely interrelated with other developmental aspects like culture and politics. Cultural development thus affects, and is itself affected by, socioeconomic progress. An analysis of the socioeconomic position of the Iban, therefore, provides the required perspective background against which its cultural heritage and dynamics can be studied and understood.

The choice of variables or indicators in any socioeconomic research is dependent not only on the availability of data, but also on the objective and analytical preference of the analyst. This naturally leads to the scope of the study which, on the basis of census data, in this case is limited to the following eight socioeconomic concerns from which various major and sub-indicators are derived and presented:

- (1) Population distribution, urban concentration, annual growth, dependency ratio and number of children born.
- (2) Divorce and religion.
- (3) Internal migration by propensity, recency, volume, streams, and reasons.
- (4) Possession of specified household items.
- (5) Poverty in terms of
 - (a) incidence, percent among poor and selectivity index.
 - (b) non-availability of basic amenities.
 - (c) malnutrition
 - (d) expenditure patterns.
- (6) Education in terms of school attendance and literacy.
- (7) Distribution of each ethnic group's economically active population by usual industry.
- (8) Labour force in terms of unemployment, employment status and occupational distribution.