Abstract

This academic exercise is to study the population growth and its distribution in Sarawak, one of the state of East Malaysia, during the period of 1947-1970.

The year 1947 could reasonably be the division of population growth in Sarawak. Before the year population growth was mainly due to heavy immigration, but after 1947, because of the immigration restrictions that came to be imposed against foreigner, the increase of the population was due to a high rate of natural increase. Comparatively, with the area of about 48,250 sq. miles, population explosion could be ignored at present, although Sarawak has its population of nearly a million.

The rate of population growth among races in Sarawak were different during the period of 1947-70. Highest birth rate combined with lowest death rate responsible for the rapid growth of the Chinese population. Their proportion in the total population has also been increasing steadily and they now form the second largest ethnic group in Sarawak, with the population of 294,020 in 1970, while Sea Dayak was still the largest group with the population of 302,984 in the same year.

In 1970, the average density of population in Sarawak was relatively low, i.e. 7.7 persons per square km., but 71% of the population was concentrated on the South-West area. Since Chinese are only allowed to acquire land which has been classified as Mixed Zone Land, their distribution therefore, was greatly affected and limited. On the other hand, the establishment of Planned Villages primarily aimed at attracting the inland indigenous people now practising shifting cultivation to adopt more permanent systems of cultivation, was not successful. By far, only 11,000 acres of land were developed for 1,200 household, obviously enough, the schemes of land settlement had it least affects on population redistribution in Sarawak.
Inevitably, following the diffuse of education and rapid expansion of roads, a bulk of young rural dweller have already moved into urban areas. The urban population, therefore, grew rapidly, especially in Kuching, Sibu and Miri. Besides, the construction of roads also created some small towns in the inland areas.

On a whole, population in developing Sarawak will keep on growing. The development of inland area, expansions of roads and the utilization of natural resources will probably affect the distribution pattern of population in Sarawak. Further, the utilization of those existed under-utilized manpower in Sarawak will foster and accelerate the economic growth in Sarawak.