

## Counting Ethnicity in Malaysia: the Complexity of Measuring Diversity\*

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**Abstract:** Malaysia has long been concerned with the ethnic dimensions in society. A driver of government policy since the early 1970s, it is factored into the production of official statistics. Data on ethnicity is therefore very important for monitoring and strengthening public policies that seek to address ethnic imbalances. This paper examines the complexity of defining and measuring ethnicity across time and across different official documents. The paper highlights the difficulties in collecting ethnic data and shows how creative the data collection agencies have been over the years in defining and redefining ethnicity as Malaysian society and needs evolve. The experience of Malaysia indicates that not only does measurement of ethnic data support policy but that policy can also drive ethnic measurement in data. The discussion raises important questions on how ethnic groups have been defined, the purpose for which such data is gathered and how the data is gathered. The problem is not the data themselves but how they are used to formulate, implement and monitor policies.

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JEL classification: C80, J18, Z00

### 1. Introduction

Malaysia has long been concerned with the ethnic dimension in society. Today, this concern pervades all debates, be it education or politics. Indeed, it dominates coffee room discussions on any area that relates to achievement of human potential, whether in the area of human capital, physical capital, financial capital, entrepreneurship, politics or government.

The diversity evident in the ethnic fabric of Malaysians is officially acknowledged and celebrated in Tourism Malaysia's slogan "Malaysia, Truly Asia". More importantly, it is a critical and powerful driver in the design and implementation of many public policies. With the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-religious composition of the populace, national unity remains the main stated objective of economic, social and national development. The New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced in 1971 in response to the ethnic disturbances of 1969. Its primary objectives were reduction of poverty irrespective

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of race, and restructuring of Malaysian society to eliminate identification of race with economic function so as to reduce inequalities in income distribution between races and to reduce the identification of race with economic activities. More than three decades later, the ethnic dimensions of public policy remain important, for instance as reflected in 2007 under the National Vision Policy.<sup>1</sup>

Data on ethnicity is therefore very important for monitoring and strengthening public policies that seek to address ethnic imbalances. It is not surprising then that measuring ethnicity in Malaysia extends beyond the decennial census and is an important element in the production of official statistics. Today, it seems like information on ethnicity is collected by almost every institution, whether public or private. The question is, given the difficulty in measuring ethnicity, 'is the meaning and measurement of ethnicity the same in the different surveys and documents, and over time?' This paper examines the complexity of defining and measuring ethnicity across time and across different official documents. The most important enumeration of ethnicity in the population occurs every ten years or so with the taking of the census. Ethnicity information is regularly obtained in other censuses (such as ethnic profile of employees in the Economic Censuses), surveys (such as in the Labour Force Survey) and as a by-product of administrative procedures (such as birth registration). The next section first provides an introduction to the diversity in the ethnic fabric of Malaysia. This is followed in the third section by an appraisal of how ethnicity is, and has been, measured in the censuses. The fourth section considers measurement of ethnicity by different agencies. The final section concludes the paper with a discussion of the principal findings and their implications.

## 2. Ethnic Diversity in Malaysia

The concept of ethnicity is somewhat multi-dimensional as it includes aspects such as race, origin or ancestry, identity, language and religion. As Yinger (1986) remarks, in practice ethnicity has come to refer to anything from a sub-societal group that clearly shares a common descent and cultural background (e.g. the Kosovar Albanians) to persons who share a former citizenship although diverse culturally (Indonesians in the Netherlands), to pan-cultural groups of persons of widely different cultural and societal backgrounds who, however, can be identified as 'similar' on the basis of language, race or religion mixed with broadly similar statuses (Hispanics in the United States) (Yeoh 2001).

Table 1 shows the population distribution by ethnic groups in Malaysia for year 2000. These categories are as different as Yinger notes, referring to groups that share a common descent and cultural background (e.g. the Chinese), persons whose parents share a former citizenship although diverse culturally (e.g. the Indians) to pan-cultural groups from different cultural and societal backgrounds broadly considered 'similar' (e.g. the Malays).

Some of the 18 groups listed here are categories summarising the population of smaller groups. The degree of ethnic diversity in Malaysia is apparent when we examine the Ethnic Fractionalisation Index (EFI), an index that measures the racial (phenotypical), linguistic and religious cleavages in society (Yeoh 2001). This index is based on the probability that

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<sup>1</sup> In 1991, aspects of the policy changed and were implemented as the National Development Policy (1991-2000), with a further change in thrust under the National Vision Policy (2001-2010). In the rest of this paper, we use NEP to refer to these three set of policies.

**Table 1.** Malaysia, population by ethnic group (2000)

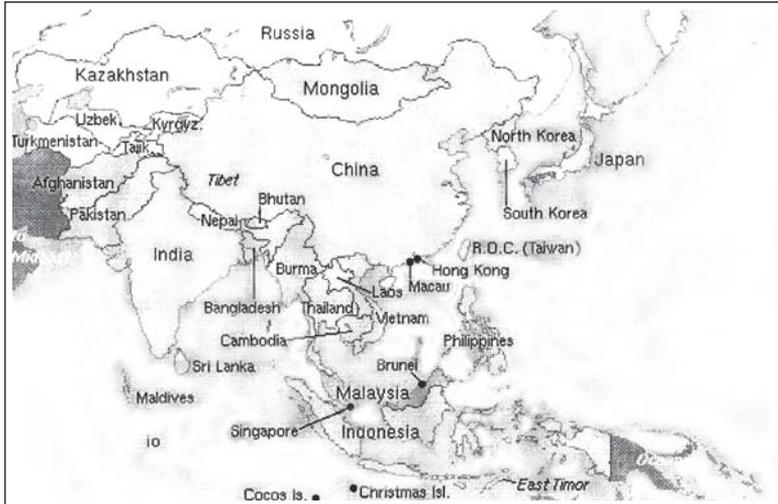
Ethnic group	Number (thousand)	Percentage distribution
Total Population	22198.2	100
<i>Malaysian Citizens</i>		
Malays	11164.95	51.0
Kadazan Dusun	456.9641	2.1
Bajau	329.9529	1.5
Murut	80.07225	0.4
Iban	578.3544	2.6
Bidayuh	159.5528	0.7
Melanau	108.275	0.5
Other <i>Bumiputera</i>	695.7017	3.2
Chinese	5291.277	24.2
Indians	1571.664	7.2
Other Malaysian Citizens	243.3723	1.1
<i>Non Malaysian Citizens</i>		
Singapore	16.66528	0.1
Indonesia	704.9711	3.2
Philippines	197.9126	0.9
Thailand	33.33057	0.2
India	28.10418	0.1
Bangladesh	64.09725	0.3
Other Foreign Citizens	164.582	0.8

Source: Based on Tables 2.10 and 2.11, DASM (2005)

**Table 2.** Ethnic Fractionalisation Index (EFI) for selected countries

Country	EFI
Republic of India	0.876
Republic of the Philippines	0.838
Republic of Indonesia	0.754
Canada	0.714
Malaysia	0.694
Thailand	0.535
United States of America	0.395
United Kingdom (Great Britain & N. Ireland)	0.325
Solomon Islands	0.133

Source: Table 1, Yeoh (2001)



**Figure 1.** Geographical location of Malaysia

a randomly selected pair of individuals in a society will belong to different groups (Rae and Taylor 1970: 22-3). Table 2 shows the values of the EFI for selected countries. Although the EFI is affected by the way the ethnic groups are measured for each country, it nevertheless can be used to provide a broad indication of the degree of diversity. The index for Malaysia is not as high as say, India, but is about the same as Canada and much greater than, say, the UK.

One reason for the great variety of ethnic, religious and linguistic groups in Malaysia can be traced to its geographical location. The region that is now Malaysia comprises Peninsular Malaysia, a peninsula jutting out from the Asian continent and East Malaysia, comprising Sabah and Sarawak, two regions in the island of Borneo (Figure 1). Peninsular Malaysia lies at the crossroads of maritime trade between the West (India, Arabia) and the East (China). The seas between North Borneo (now Sabah) and the Sulu islands have been an important trading route between Australia and China. Thus, there have been far-reaching movements of peoples between the West and the East and within Southeast Asia itself (Andaya and Andaya 1982).

The richness of the ethnic heritage can be seen in the census categories used for ethnicity in the census in 1891 of the then Straits Settlements (comprising Penang, Singapore and Malacca) shown in the first column of Table 3. The list indicates that the Straits Settlements was home at least for some length of time to many different groups. These groupings indicate that there were people from different continents (Europeans and Americans), religions ('Parsees', 'Hindoos') and from neighbouring regions ('Javanese', 'Manilamen'). However, these categories were, as Hirschman (1987) observes, made up based on 'experience and common knowledge' and not necessarily on size of group in the society. Indeed, as Table 4 shows, the large number of categories for 'Europeans and Americans' was in direct contrast to their small proportion in the population of the time.

**Table 3:** Ethnic classifications, selected censuses and regions

1871 Straits Settlements	1957 Federation of Malaya	1960 North Borneo	1960 Sarawak
Europeans and Americans (18 sub-categories)	Malaysians	European (2 sub-categories)	European (2 sub-categories)
Armenians	Malays	Dusun	Malay
Jews	Indonesian	Murut	Melanau
Eurasians	All Aborigines	Bajau	Sea Dayak
Abyssinians	Negrito	(2 sub-categories)	Land Dayak
Achinese	Semai	Brunei	Other Indigenous
Africans	Semelai	Kedayan	Bisayah
Andamanese	Temiar	Orang Sungei	Okedayan
Arabs	Jakun	Bisaya	Kayan
Bengalees and Other Natives of India not particularised	Other Aborigines	Sulu	Kenyah
Boyanesse	Chinese	Tidong	Kelabit
Bugis	Hokkien	Sino-Native	Murut
Burmese	Tiechiu	Chinese	Punan
Chinese	Khek (Hakka)	Hakka	Other Indigenous
Cochin-Chinese	Cantonese	Hokkien	Chinese
Dyaks	Hainanese	Teochew	Cantonese
Hindoos	Hokchia	Hailam (Hainanese)	Foochow
Japanese	Hokchiu	Other Chinese	Hakka
Javanesse	Kwongsai	Others	Henghua
Jaweepekans	Henghwa	Natives of Sarawak	Hokkien
Klings	Other Chinese	Malays	Hylam/ Hainese
Malays	Indians	Cocos Islander	Teochew
Manilamen	Indian Tamil	Indonesian	Other Chinese
Mantras	Telegu	Indian, Pakistani, Ceylonese	Others
Parsees	Malayali	Native of Philippines	Indian, Pakistani, Ceylonese
Persians	Other Indian	Others	Indonesian
Siamese	Others		Others
Singhalese	Eurasian		
	Ceylon Tamil		
	Other Ceylonese		
	Pakistani		
	Thai (Siamese)		
	Other Asian		
	British		
	Other European		
	Others (not European or Asian)		

Source: First two columns, Hirschman (1987); last two columns, Jones (1961) and Jones (1962).

**Table 4.** Proportion of population by nationality, Straits Settlements (1881 and 1891)

Nationality	1881	1891
Europeans and Americans	0.0082	0.0129
Eurasians	0.0163	0.0138
Chinese	0.4118	0.4450
Malays and Other Natives of the Archipelago	0.4503	0.4159
Tamils and Other Natives	0.0975	0.1052
Other Nationalities	0.0069	0.0072
Total Population	423,384	512,905

*Source:* Merewether (1892)

The inflow of immigrant workers from certain countries in somewhat large numbers also helped to define the ethnic fabric of the country. The turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in British Malaya saw the successful policy of bringing in migrant labour to work on rubber estates (workers from India) and tin mines (workers from China), when these primary products grew in economic importance. The increase in the relative size of these two groups could be seen as early as 1891 (Table 4). The British also tried to encourage immigration into North Borneo in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to work in the estates there.

Since the 1970s, Malaysia has seen the increasing presence of migrant workers as the need for estate workers, and more recently, factory workers, maids, restaurant workers and security guards increased. They have been mostly from Indonesia, but also from Nepal, Bangladesh and the Philippines. Unlike the earlier British policy, these migrants are required to return home after a fixed period. However, economic opportunities have also made Malaysia a magnet for illegal economic migrants from neighbouring countries. Since Peninsular Malaysia shares a border with Thailand and is just across the Straits of Malacca from Indonesian Sumatra, while Sabah and Sarawak share a border with Indonesian Kalimantan, the erection of political boundaries even with Peninsular Malaysia's Independence from the British (1957) or the formation of Malaysia (comprising Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah (previously North Borneo) and Sarawak) has not been effective in reducing the diversity in the population. Thus, there continues to be considerable movement of people across Borneo, Indonesia and the Philippines.

These historical patterns have led to differences in ethnic composition—as well as ethnic categories measured—in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak. The first region is concerned with three main ethnic groups, Malays, Chinese and Indians, that is, historically non migrant versus historically migrant classifications, whereas Sabah and Sarawak are concerned with the historically migrant as well as the many indigenous groups in their society. This can be observed in the census categories for ethnicity for 1957 (Federation of Malaya) and North Borneo and Sarawak (1960) shown in Table 3.

### 3. The Measurement of Ethnicity in the Census

The United Nations Statistics Division (2003), in reviewing the measurement of ethnicity in censuses, contends that “ethnic data is useful for the elaboration of policies to improve

access to employment, education and training, social security and health, transportation and communications, etc. It is important for taking measures to preserving the identity and survival of distinct ethnic groups.” Yet, 1 in 3 of the 147 countries surveyed which had done a census in year 2000 had not included a question on national and/ or ethnic group (United Nations Statistics Division 2003: Table 3). While these countries may have included such a question in previous, or plan to include one in future surveys, clearly it is not a question that regularly appears in their censuses.

In contrast, Malaysia’s experience in measuring national/ race/ ethnic group in a regular decennial census can be traced back to the late 1800s. Regular censuses, other than during war years, have been carried out despite the difficulties of taking a census in a population “with so many races speaking different tongues” (Hare 1902: 4) or the need to have census questionnaires prepared in several languages as well as enumerators who can speak the language of the respondents. Furthermore, in the timing of release of census information, ethnicity data has always been considered a priority (Chander 1972: 22) and may even be released along with other essential demographic data well before the general report on the census (compare for example, DASM (2001a) with DASM(2005)).

Hirschman (1987) has explored the meaning and measurement of ethnicity in Malaysia in his analysis of the census classifications until 1980. He notes that the first modern census was carried out in 1871 for the Straits Settlements (Penang, Malacca and Singapore) which were parts of what is now Peninsular Malaysia then under British rule. In 1891, separate censuses were conducted for the Straits Settlements and for each of the four states known as the Federated Malay States that were under British protection. The 1901 and 1911 censuses were unified censuses covering these two areas. In 1911, the taking of a census was extended to some of the Unfederated Malay States. In 1921, a unified census was conducted in the Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States and the Unfederated Malay States. This practice continued for the 1931 and 1947 censuses. The 1957 census, the year of Independence from the British, excluded Singapore (which by then was a Crown Colony). North Borneo (now Sabah) and Sarawak became British protectorates in 1888. North Borneo conducted its first census in 1891, and then in 1901, 1911, 1921, 1931 and followed by censuses in 1951 and 1960. The first census for Sarawak was carried out in 1947, with another one in 1960. In 1963, Malaysia was formed comprising Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore<sup>2</sup>, Sabah and Sarawak. From 1970, the decennial censuses have covered this geographical area. While these regions were all separated politically until 1963, they each had some form of linkage to the British. Thus it is perhaps not surprising that a reading of the various census reports indicate that experiences from the censuses were shared.

Appendix 1 contrasts two related aspects of the various censuses: the measurement of ethnicity and number of categories. The measurement of ethnicity in the early years used the term ‘nationality’. Obviously, there were difficulties in using this term<sup>3</sup> to capture the various groups in the population, and E.M. Merewether, the Superintendent of the 1891

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<sup>2</sup> Singapore seceded in 1965 to form its own nation.

<sup>3</sup> The term ‘nationality’ can be used to refer to a group with a common heritage, or established, among others, by place of birth, bloodline, place of residence or citizenship. <http://www.answers.com/nationality&r=67> [Accessed 1 October, 2007]

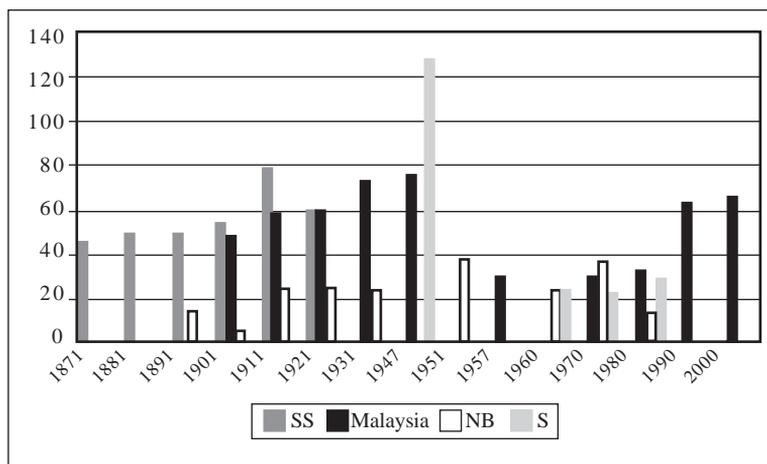
Census, in acknowledging the objections raised, proposed the word 'race' be used in subsequent censuses (Merewether 1892: 8). Hare, the Superintendent of the 1901 Census of the Federated Malay States preferred the word 'race' as it is "a wider and more exhaustive expression than 'nationality' and gives rise to no such ambiguous question in classifying people" (as cited in Hirschman 1987: 561). By 1911, the term had been changed to 'race' for the Straits Settlements as well, but 'nationality' continued to be used in North Borneo up till the 1931 census. L.W. Jones, the Superintendent of the 1951 Census of North Borneo reported that the term 'nationality' was dropped as "enumerators could not distinguish between nationality and race." This issue did not arise in Sarawak as the first census in 1947 itself used the term 'race'. There was recognition (Noakes 1948: 29) of the many indigenous groups that regarded "Sarawak as their homeland" and who were "regarded as natives by their fellowmen."

Although enumerators were told to use the term 'race' as "understood by the man in the street and not physical features as used by ethnologists" (Fell 1960:12), there was still dissatisfaction with the measurement. The 1947 census for Malaya and the 1970 census for Malaysia used the term 'community'. Chander (1972: 22) justifies the return to the practice of earlier Malayan censuses noting that "the term race has not been used as it attempts to cover a complex set of ideas which in a strict and scientific sense represents only a small element of what the census taker is attempting to define." The term 'community' was used to identify a group "bound by a common language/ dialect, religion and customs."

There were further refinements and from the 1980 census, the term 'ethnic / dialectic/ community group' has been used, although its description is the same as that used for 'community' (Khoo 1983: 289). Although the word 'dialect' was introduced formally only in 1980, enumerators have long been instructed to note the dialect when enumerating the Chinese community. Hare (1902: 6) recommended that in the next census language be added in a separate column as "if a person now writes 'Chinese' it is hard to say to which race of Chinese he belongs."

The second aspect of the measurement of ethnicity relates to the categories. The discussion here focuses on what has been presented or published, although it is possible that enumerators obtained more details than that which was subsequently coded. Figure 2 shows a summary of the number of categories used in the various censuses. The column for Malaysia includes the information for the Federated Malay States and British Malaya since Hirschman (1987) found that the unified census from 1921 adopted basically the pattern for the Federated Malay States. A steady increase is observed in the early years of the censuses for the Straits Settlements, presumably reflecting the recognition of the different groups in the society. A similar pattern is observed for the Federated Malay States, and then British Malaya. The categories were reduced for the early years of the Federation of Malaya. In contrast, Sarawak began in 1947 with 129 categories, reflecting the attempt—with the aid of Tom Harrison, Curator of the Sarawak Museum and Government Ethnologist—to document the many indigenous groups in its society, and then reduced the number when group size was ascertained. North Borneo did not have as many categories, showing an increase only in the 1951 census.

A major criterion for the inclusion of a group as a category would be its size in the population. Tom Harrison, in assisting in the determination of categories for the census,



Notes: Based on Table A2. SS - Straits Settlements; Malaysia - Federated Malay States until 1911, British Malaya until 1947; NB - North Borneo; S - Sarawak

Figure 2. Number of categories measuring ethnicity (various censuses)

observes that (Noakes 1948: 271), “classification should be as scientifically accurate as possible, the groups must be reasonably balanced in size, and it should be in sufficient detail to provide a sound basis for future scientific investigations.” For example, the aborigines of Peninsular Malaysia are not a homogenous group<sup>4</sup> (Nicholas 2004). Some of these are very small, like the 18 tribes of indigenous Proto Malays (estimated to number 147,412 in 2003) the smallest of these 18 tribes being an estimated 87 Kanaq people in 2007.<sup>5</sup>

One of the greatest problems has been the identification of people native to the region. Harrison (Noakes 1948: 271) observes that “certain cultural groups have become obscured and many complicating migrations have occurred...all this is inevitable, and largely it should be...[but] in planning a census it introduces certain complications...[since] the exact definitions of groups must partly depend on their past.” The use of a definition like “living naturally in a country, not immigrant or imported, native” requires determination of origin. For example, the enumeration of indigenous groups in Sarawak is problematic as many of these groups “know themselves by the name of a place or river or mountain or even a local chief” (Harrison in Noakes 1948: 272).

Further, there can be confusion when religion comes into play, particularly in respect of who is a Malay. As Table 2 shows, the populace has included not just Malays but also many different groups that today would be regarded as originating from Indonesia. Among the terms used to refer to this group have been ‘Malays and natives of the archipelago’ and

<sup>4</sup> Colin Nicholas, *The Orang Asli of Peninsular Malaysia: A Brief Introduction*. [http://www.coac.org.my/codenavia/portals/coacv1/code/main/main\\_art.php?parentID=11497609537883&artID=11509699100857](http://www.coac.org.my/codenavia/portals/coacv1/code/main/main_art.php?parentID=11497609537883&artID=11509699100857). [Accessed 1 October 2007]

<sup>5</sup> <http://damak.jheoa.gov.my/intranet/index.php?mid=1&vid=2>. <http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2007/4/16/southneast/17200389&sec=southneast>. [Accessed 1 October 2007].

'Malaysians'. In the 1956 census, Boyanese and Javanese were coded as Malays. Fell (1960: 12) observes that counting such groups can be difficult. Saw (1968: 10) comments that with the formation of Malaysia and the use of Malaysian to refer to a citizen of this nation, "The best solution is to use the term 'Malays' to include Indonesians as well." He argues that this is justified as most immigrants from the Indonesian Archipelago now have been absorbed into the community. The issue also extends to indigenous groups. As Noakes (1948) highlights, there has "always been difficulty in measuring the size of the Melanau population as Islamic Melanau frequently refer to themselves as Malays."

The importance of a group especially for public policy would be a second criterion for their inclusion as a category. Jones (1961) observes that the category 'Cocos Islanders' was included because this group was introduced into the population, and so their progress would be of interest. The most dramatic example of the impact of public policy on census classification arises from the affirmative policy introduced by the NEP (1971) which provides for special benefits to Malays and indigenous groups. The term *Bumiputera* ('son of the soil') is used to refer to all those eligible for special benefits. The definition of ethnic groups eligible for these benefits is provided for in the Federal Constitution (see Appendix 2). These include Malays, Aborigines of Peninsular Malaysia and indigenous tribes of East Malaysia, the latter two groups sometimes referred to as *pribumi* or 'natives of the land'.

Some of these groups have been measured in the 1970 and 1980 censuses for Malaysia, but it was clear that the categories needed to be re-examined, and in particular, to identify and enumerate clearly the *Bumiputera* population. Furthermore, with growing interest in the increasing presence of foreigners, there was also the need to clarify groups in the population who could be separately identified by nationality, say Indonesian Malaysians versus Indonesian Indonesians. In 1991, there was a major rationalisation of ethnic categories and presentation of ethnicity information since then has included information on citizenship.

The census classifications for the 2000 census (which are only slightly different from the 1990 classifications) are shown in Table 5. It is interesting to note that the detailed listing of groups in East Malaysia now resembles more the detailed classifications in the pre-Malaysia censuses of North Borneo and Sarawak. The greater diversity in Sabah and Sarawak, which together have only about 20 per cent of Malaysia's population, has been captured as can be seen from Table 6, which shows the regional EFI computed for ethnic and religious groups measured in the 2000 census.<sup>6</sup>

The role of politics in determining census classifications cannot be discounted. When Datuk Harris Salleh won the elections in Sabah in 1981, he wanted to foster more rapid integration with Peninsular Malaysia and allowed only for the measurement of three categories, *Bumiputera*, Chinese and Others, in the 1980 census (Andaya and Andaya 1982: 297). With a change in his political fortunes, the 1991 census reverted to the measurement and presentation of information on the indigenous groups in Sabah.

Politics has also influenced the categorisation of the Kadazan-Dusun group in Sabah. The Dusun and Kadazan share the same language (albeit different dialects) and culture. Traditionally the Kadazan have resided in the valleys, and the Dusun in the hills. In 1989, with the formation of the Kadazan-Dusun Cultural Association, the term Kadazan-Dusun

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<sup>6</sup> This also highlights the measurement issue in measuring ethnic diversity using the EFI. If a population is diverse but the groups are not measured then the index will show more homogeneity than it should.

**Table 5.** Ethnic classification, 2000 Census, Malaysia

Malaysian Citizens	Malaysian Citizens	Non Malaysian Citizens
Bumiputera	Chinese	Singapore
Malays	Hokkien	Indonesia
Other Bumiputera	Khek (Hakka)	Philippines
Negrito	Cantonese	Brunei Darussalam
Senoi	Teochew	India
Proto Malay	Hainanese	Bangladesh
Dusun	Kwongsai	Other foreign countries
Kadazan	Foochow/ Hokchiu	Unknown
Kwijau	Henghua	
Bajau	Hokchia	
Iranun	Other Chinese	
Murut (Sabah)	Indians	
Rang Sungei	Indian Tamil	
Sulu/Suluk	Malayali	
Bisaya	Sikh/ Punjabi	
(Sabah/Sarawak)	Telegu	
Rungus	Sri Lankan	
Sino-native	Tamil Singalese	
Kadayan	Bangladeshi	
(Sabah/Sarawak)	Pakistani	
Tidong	Other Indian	
Tambanuo	Others	
Idahan	Indonesian	
Dumpas	Thai	
Mangkaak	Filipino	
Minokok	Myanmar	
Maragang	Japanese	
Paitan	Korean	
Rumanau	Other Asian	
Lotud	Eurasian	
Cocos Islander	European	
Other Bumiputera	Others	
(Sabah)		
Iban/ Dayak Laut		
Bidayuh/ Dayak Darat		
Melanau		
Kenyah		
Lun Bawang/ Murut		
(Sarawak)		
Penan		
Kajang		
Kelabit		
Other Bumiputera		
(Sabah)		

Source: DASM (2001a)

**Table 6.** Ethnic Fractionalisation Index, Malaysia, 2000

Region	EFI	Percentage of Total Population
Sabah	0.889	11.2
Sarawak	0.874	8.9
Peninsular Malaysia	0.655	79.9
All Malaysia	0.701	100

Source: DASM (2001a) - computed from data in Tables 4.1, 4.11 and 4.12 only for religious and ethnic groups.

was coined. Up to the 1960 census of North Borneo, only the category 'Dusun' was used. For the 1970 and 1980 census, the category 'Kadazan' was used. Since the 1991 census, both categories have been used, although in the presentation of information, both categories are combined as 'Kadazan-Dusun'.

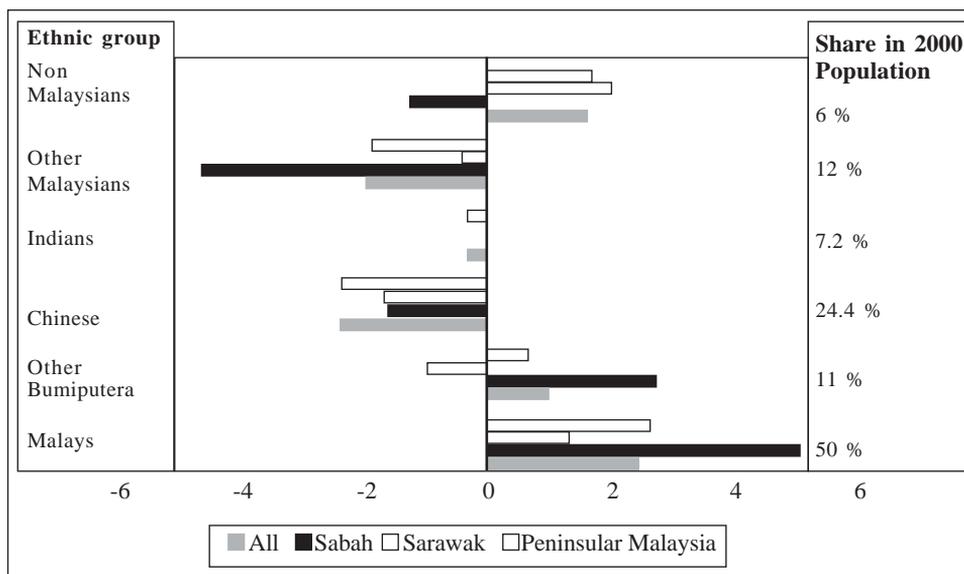
One important issue is how ethnicity is measured in the censuses. This has always been by self-identification, and applies to the question on citizenship as well. Jones (1962: 44) articulates the reason clearly: 'An individual's answer to the question on race should be accepted without question, for there would be many persons descended from at least two of the tribes listed who would claim one as their own for their own private reasons and with whom it would be quite improper to discuss or dispute these reasons.' For persons of mixed parentage, the 1970 census, which used the definition of 'community', sought to identify the ethnic group to which the person felt he or she belonged (Chander 1977: 289) failing which father's community was used.<sup>7</sup>

The measurement by self-identification, the definition of Malay and the difficulty of separating race and religion suggest that there will be great difficulty in measuring certain groups of the population. Indeed, in explaining why the Chief Minister of Sabah said that half of the state's population is Malay, the Chief Minister of Malacca is reported to have said that 'it is easy to become a Malay... a person who is a Muslim, converses in Malay and follows the Malay traditions is considered a Malay'.<sup>8</sup> A comparison of population figures by major ethnic categories for 1991 and 2000 shown in Figure 3 suggests that indeed the identification of *Bumiputera* groups is problematic. The shares of 'Malays' and 'Other *Bumiputera*' have risen greatly while the share of 'Other Malaysians' has declined.

The increase cannot possibly come from a greater fertility rate. For example, the implied average annual growth rate for Malays is 3.2 per cent per year which is much greater than the average annual growth rate based on demographic data in 1998 of 2.6 per cent (DASM

<sup>7</sup> This would suggest a serious undercounting of mixed marriages if census data are used. While the extent of mixed marriages can be determined (see, for example, Tan (1986)), it would not be possible to identify offspring from such marriages.

<sup>8</sup> <http://blog.limkitsiang.com/2007/06/11/it-is-easy-to-become-a-malay/>. [Accessed 1 October 2007]. This is in line with the definition of Malay shown in Appendix 2. Andaya and Andaya (1982: 302) note that the definition of 'Malay' in the Constitution just formalised colonial practice. In fact, it is the definition used by the British to define 'Malay reservation' land.



Source: Computed from data in DASM (2001a)

Figure 3. Change in population share of major groups, 1991-2000

2001b: Table A1.4). The implementation of the NEP in the 1970s and 1980s witnessed mass exodus of Chinese accompanied by capital flight. Between 1970 and 1980 the Chinese had experienced a migration deficit of close to 200,000 persons and this accelerated to close to 400,000 in the following decade (Chan and Tey 2000). While the exodus of the Chinese had come to a halt in the 1990s, the slower rate of natural increase of the Chinese and Indians as compared to the Malays and other *Bumiputera* would result in further changes in the ethnic composition of the country. The Chinese and Indians in Malaysia have dipped below replacement level fertility by the turn of the 21st century, but the total fertility rate of the Malays remains well above replacement level, at about 3 per woman.

#### 4. Measurement of Ethnicity for Other Purposes

The discussion has so far focused on the measurement of ethnicity in population censuses. Ethnicity data is also important in the collection of other information on a population. Registration of births and deaths, which is used to produce vital statistics data, comes under the purview of the National Registration Department. The identification of ethnicity on the Birth Certificate would be that entered by the person filling up the form. This would be the parent usually, but there may be circumstances where the information is entered by a third person (say, a policeman in the interior). Births and deaths data was, up till the end of the 1990s, coded by the Department of Statistics, Malaysia. This function has now been taken on by the National Registration Department. It is nevertheless likely that with the close cooperation between these two government departments, the coding for ethnicity

**Table 7.** Economic census, Manufacturing, 2006 - ethnic classifications for employment

Malaysians	Non Malaysians
Bumiputera	Indonesians
Malays	Filipinos
Ibans	Bangladeshi
Bidayuhs	Others
Bajaus	
Kadazans	
Other Bumiputera	
Chinese	
Indian	
Others	

Source: [http://www.statistics.gov.my/english/frameset\\_download.php?file=form](http://www.statistics.gov.my/english/frameset_download.php?file=form)  
 [Accessed 1 October 2007]

will be as detailed as provided for in the census. The Department of Statistics, Malaysia, also has close ties with other government departments like the National Population and Family Development Board (NPFDB) (previously known as the National Family Planning Board). Information on fertility, family planning and contraceptive use has been collected by the NPFDB since the late 1960s. The early surveys used the then census term ‘race’ to capture ethnicity, but from the 1970s, the NPFDB adopted the term ‘community’ and then from 1989, the term ‘ethnic group’ has been used.

Ethnicity is also measured by many institutions, whether for targeting public policy in general or in line with the need to identify target groups and monitor their progress with regard to the NEP. As Appendix 3 shows, Article 153 in the Constitution specifies that special privileges may be provided in education, scholarships and training, employment in public service and business licenses. Besides, the NEP aims to reduce the identification of race with occupation and to achieve increased *Bumiputera* participation in the economy. Thus, ethnicity information is collected by the government, banks, licensing agencies and other institutions that need to maintain the necessary information for policy monitoring.

Since the size of some of the smaller ethnic groups in some sub-populations may be small, categories of ethnicity may be limited to the (perceived or otherwise) major groups in the sub-population. For example, ethnicity is captured both for ownership and employment in Economic Censuses conducted by the Department of Statistics, Malaysia. Table 7 shows the categories captured for employment.<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to note that among the *Bumiputera* groups, ‘Kadazan’ has been captured but not ‘Dusun’; that is, the original group name used in the pre-Malaysia censuses has been dropped altogether. Since these forms are filled by the firms, it is possible that some Dusun employees may have been categorised under ‘Other *Bumiputera*’.

<sup>9</sup> Ownership has similar categories for ‘Malaysians’, but there is no distinction among non Malaysians.

On the other hand, the number of pre-coded ethnic groups can be an issue especially when a database is expected to reach everyone in the population. For example, the ethnic categories initially used in the Educational Management Information System<sup>10</sup> were based on the composition of the population in Peninsular Malaysia, and were thus too broad to identify the proportion of children from a specific indigenous group in school. These codes were subsequently expanded as needed.<sup>11</sup> The more important classification for educational outcomes is that of *Bumiputera*. The monitoring of ethnic outcomes of entry into public tertiary institutions is based on parents' ethnicity and reads thus:<sup>12</sup>

Peninsular Malaysia: "If one of the parent is Muslim Malay or Orang Asli as stated in Article 160 (2) Federal Constitution of Malaysia; thus the child is considered as a Bumiputera"

Sabah: "If a father is a Muslim Malay or indigenous native of Sabah as stated in Article 160A (6)(a) Federal Constitution of Malaysia; thus his child is considered as a Bumiputera"

Sarawak: "If both of the parents are indigenous natives of Sarawak as stated in Article 160A (6)(b) Federal Constitution of Malaysia; thus their child is considered as a Bumiputera"

Other institutions also collect information on ethnicity. For example, Maybank, the largest bank in Malaysia with over 334 domestic branches all over the country and over 34 international branches, obtains from the applicant for a new account, information on 'race', coded in five categories: 'Malay', 'Native', 'Chinese', 'Indians', and 'Others'.<sup>13</sup> In other cases, it is unclear what coding is applied by the collecting institution. For example, the application form for the Practising Certificate,<sup>14</sup> an annual requirement for a practicing lawyer, calls for the applicant to enter his or her 'ethnicity'. Yet other institutions use terms that are unclear. For example, the application for a contract post as a medical specialist with the Ministry of Health<sup>15</sup> asks for 'nationality', which could be referring to ethnic group or citizenship. Nevertheless, the form for the annual practising certificate for doctors does not request information on ethnicity.

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<sup>10</sup> Education is essentially a federal matter with a common syllabi and examinations (Nik Aziz Nik Pa, 2003). The UNESCO website notes that the Educational Management Information System was "originally designed to be a management tool but is gradually being perceived as an indispensable tool and support system for the formulation of education policies, their management, and their evaluation" ([http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=10202&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=10202&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html), [Accessed 10 October 2007])

<sup>11</sup> Report on 'The Workshop on Optimising the Use of Official Statistics for Socioeconomic Research and Planning,' 22 November, 2006, Faculty of Economics and Administration, University of Malaya. Unpublished.

<sup>12</sup> *Buku Panduan Kemasukan ke Institusi Pengajian Tinggi Awam, Program Pengajian Lulusan SPM/ Setaraf Sesi Akademik 2007/2008*. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bumiputra> [Accessed 1 October 2007]

<sup>13</sup> Online application form: [https://www.maybank2u.com.my/maybank\\_group/application\\_forms/banking/new\\_maybankacc.html](https://www.maybank2u.com.my/maybank_group/application_forms/banking/new_maybankacc.html). [Accessed 10 October 2007]

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.malaysianbar.org.my/bardocs/membership/sijil\\_guaman.pdf](http://www.malaysianbar.org.my/bardocs/membership/sijil_guaman.pdf). [Accessed 1 October 2007]

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.moh.gov.my/MohPortal/DownloadServlet?id=312&type=1> [Accessed 1 October 2007]

**Table 8.** Ethnic classifications for utilisation of Public Health Care Services, 2005

Peninsular Malaysia	Sabah	Sarawak
Malays	Malays	Malays
Chinese	Bajaus	Melanaus
Indians	Kadazans	Iban
Peninsular indigenous	Murut	Bidayu
Other Malaysians	Other Sabahan indigenous	Other Sarawak
Non citizens	Chinese	indigenous
	Indians	Chinese
	Other Malaysians	Indians
	Non citizens	Other Malaysians
		Non citizens

*Source:* 2005 Annual Report on Medical Sub-system, Health Management Information System, Information and Documentation System, Ministry of Health, Malaysia

Ethnicity data are also obtained routinely as a part of administrative and monitoring procedures for areas that are not within the purview of the NEP. For example, the Ministry of Health (MOH) provides information on the utilisation of public health care services (mainly referring to MOH services) by major ethnic groups, including indigenous groups, for Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah and Sarawak (Table 8). The information on ethnicity is entered on admission/ attendance forms by admission clerks who commonly base their input on the patients' names and physical appearance, supplemented with verbal clarification only when in doubt. Patients in the Peninsular are usually classified as Malays, Chinese, Indians, Others or Non citizens. Other indigenous groups, for example, Senoi, tend to be recorded under 'Others'. In Sabah and Sarawak, because of heightened awareness of the diversity in the population, the clerk would generally obtain information on the actual aboriginal group. Thus, for these two states, it is possible to generate data for smaller ethnic group breakdown if necessary.

Finally, it is of interest to note that there is official documentation of a person's ethnic group. The National Registration Department is responsible for the issuance of the MyKad (previously Identification Card) to all Malaysian citizens and permanent residents 12 years and above. Carrying an embedded microchip, it has at a minimum, the Identification Card number, name, ethnic group, date of birth, religion, photo and fingerprint and has to be carried by all persons when leaving home.<sup>16</sup> Although this card could possibly be used to 'verify' ethnicity, particularly where special privileges are concerned, the information is only accessible via appropriate card-readers and its use is limited by legislation.

<sup>16</sup> The information is based on the Birth Certificate. More recently, the Birth Certificate has been replaced by a chip embedded MyKid.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

Malaysia has long been concerned with the measurement of its many ethnic groups, be it in the political, economic or social arena. The discussion above raises important questions on how ethnic groups have been defined, the purpose for which such data is gathered and how the data is gathered. The counting of its major and minor groups through self-identification has been an important function of the (usually) decennial census which aims to capture the diversity in the population. Information on ethnicity is also collected in almost all areas, whether in the public or private sector, where documentation related to the implementation of constitutional provisions on ethnicity is involved. In these non census contexts, counting has been simple and local. The selection of categories may or may not have been well thought through, being defined primarily to meet the local needs, and the data collected may or may not reflect self-identification of ethnicity depending on the manner in which the data is collected. Thus, data on ethnicity in Malaysia are important not just for social analysis and policy, as for example in New Zealand (Callister *et al.* 2006), but also for economic and political analysis and policy. This is in sharp contrast to countries like France where even the potential use of official ethnic classification has seen strong debate (Morning 2008).

The study has highlighted the difficulties in collecting ethnic data and has shown how creative the data collection agencies have been over the years in defining and redefining ethnicity as Malaysian society and needs evolve. While the identification of an ethnic group can be only as good as its measurement, Malaysia's experience with the measurement of ethnicity in censuses is underscored by the careful efforts of the various Superintendents of Census to define a diverse population. The first census in 1871 in the Straits Settlements may have used ethnic categories that were subjectively defined but each subsequent census has seen changes in line with size of group or its importance to public policy. There has also been considerable sharing of experiences across the three regions even under British rule or protection that has made possible the fairly detailed ethnic classification used in recent censuses, and which have shown the great diversity in the country, and more so across regions. The categorisation of groups has also changed to accommodate changes in society. It is pertinent to note that categories have been refined, updated as required<sup>17</sup> or revised as necessary.<sup>18</sup> Since 1991, however, the measurement has been fairly detailed in respect of indigenous groups. Statisticians have also demonstrated their ability in collecting census data from people of 'many tongues', even against the odds of collecting data in the remotest parts of Sabah and Sarawak, doing so on relatively regular intervals. Ethnicity is also captured in other censuses and surveys, as well as in administrative databases. The population census categories have provided a guide; however, the degree of fineness of ethnic categories captured is based on purpose and need.

Over the years, the specific form of the question of measuring ethnicity in the population census has been modified to capture ethnic/dialect groups. The term used has changed

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<sup>17</sup> This includes adjustment to new political entities or new names: India, Pakistan, 1947; Indonesia, 1949; Sri Lanka, 1948; Siam to Thailand by official proclamation, 1949; Brunei, 1984; Burma to Myanmar, 1989.

<sup>18</sup> The category 'Kwijau' was dropped in the 1960 census of North Borneo due to small numbers but was reintroduced in the 1970 census for Malaysia.

from 'nationality' to 'race' to 'ethnicity/community/dialect'. Other surveys and censuses may use any of these terms. Across the world, population censuses have used a variety of terms: ethnicity, nationality, tribe, indigenous group, race (Morning 2008). The United Nations Statistics Division (2003) concludes that based on the current wording of the ethnicity question in the census, which includes dialect group in the definition, language is the principal criteria for measuring ethnicity in Malaysia. This study has shown that this is not entirely correct. The Malaysian experience with the population census reflects attempts to capture a conceptualisation of an ethnic group as one that shares common interests such as language, religion and customs. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that despite all these years of experience in counting, there can still be confusion about concepts such as race (for example, Chinese), dialect group (for example, Hokkien or Cantonese), language group (for example, Tamil, Telegu), nationality (Indian vs Sri Lankan) or even ethnicity itself.

The identification of ethnicity is based on self-identification in censuses, but in other cases may be entered by a third party. Irrespective of the term used to capture ethnicity, Malaysians are generally used to providing information on their ethnicity even if different terms are used to capture this information. Since just one category is provided for, there is therefore no provision to capture those who belong to more than one ethnic group, as for example, children of mixed marriages. A number of countries which capture information on ethnicity have moved to allowing respondents to check more than one category (for example, Canada, United States of America, New Zealand), allowing generic mixed ethnic group responses (for example, Anguilla, Guyana, Zimbabwe) or providing specific mixed ethnic group combinations (for example, United Kingdom, Cook Islands, Bermuda) (Morning 2008). Furthermore, ethnicity as measured in Malaysian censuses captures basically whatever the respondent answers to the question, that is, what he or she perceives ethnicity to be. Essentially, it measures identity, which as Statistics Canada notes,<sup>19</sup> has "a certain appeal because it attempts to measure how people perceive themselves rather than their ancestors." Given that mixed marriages do occur in Malaysia, the extent of the rich diversity in Malaysian society can be better captured by allowing respondents to check more than one category. Hirschman (1993) suggests that two distinct aspects be captured, primary ethnicity (which is essentially what is already obtained currently in the census) and ancestry (which captures origins and an individual could have multiple ancestries). However, such a move would, as Sawyer (1998) emphasises, require that there are clear and meaningful, and we would add transparent, guidelines on how federal agencies should tabulate, publish, and use the data once it is collected.

This is particularly important since the need to monitor the NEP has focused attention on whether a citizen is a *Bumiputera* or not, where the definition of a *Bumiputera* is constitutionally defined. The somewhat loose constitutional definition has resulted in the growth of this group. Has this now entered the social realm so that we can consider the '*Bumiputera*' community as an ethnic group? It would appear so, both in terms of Yinger's

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<sup>19</sup> Identity is, as Statistics Canada notes, one of three ways of measuring ethnicity. The other two are "origin or ancestry and race. Origin or ancestry attempts to determine the roots or ethnic background of a person. Race is based primarily upon physical attributes fixed at birth among which skin colour is a dominant, but not the sole, attribute." <http://www.statcan.ca/english/concepts/definitions/ethnicity.htm> [Accessed 1 October 2007]

(1986) description discussed previously as well Statistics Canada's measurement of ethnicity, since the *Bumiputera* can be distinguished as a group which has a wide range of cultural, linguistic, religious and national characteristics. It also meets Sawyer's (1998) three criteria for establishing an ethnic category for statistical purposes: consistency and comparability of data over time as well as a category that is widely understood, so that meaningful comparisons can be made to evaluate social progress. There are also the seemingly easy shifts between 'Malays', 'Other *Bumiputera*' and 'Other Malaysians' which reflect in part the commonalities in origin of a considerable part of the populace from the neighbouring regions that are now politically different, that is, Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand. The movement of such peoples across the region in search of economic prosperity is not new, and continues to occur. Political boundaries that straddle cultural similarities continue to cause friction, as for example, the current row over whether Malaysia can use the popular ditty *Rasa Sayang* which some Indonesian legislators consider is part of Indonesia's heritage, in its *Truly Asia* campaign.<sup>20</sup> One implication of the shifting groups between 'Malays', Other *Bumiputera* and 'Other Malaysians' categories suggests an underlying similarity, at the very minimum, recognition of the *Bumiputera* as a group both in the official and economic realms.

Although ethnic information—however imperfect—is collected and maintained by public producers of data, it is rarely available to the public, including researchers, as confidentiality is seen as a rein on ethnic sensitivities.<sup>21</sup> The data collected on ethnicity permits analyses—often only by (or with the support of) the public sector since most data on ethnicity are officially classified confidential—on outcomes of policies contrasting the achievements of the *Bumiputera* group usually against the Chinese and Indian groups, now increasingly a minority. Thus it is not surprising that there are starkly different analyses<sup>22</sup> about the achievement of NEP targets. More than thirty years after the NEP, while there have been some improvements at least on the surface, inter-ethnic inequalities remain in educational achievement and occupational attainment, and in capital ownership as well as entrepreneurial spirit. The reality is that the *Bumiputera* are an increasingly heterogeneous group whose population is growing faster than that of the non *Bumiputera*, which may explain the observed decreasing variation among Chinese and increased variation among Malays in certain studies (see, for example, Nagaraj and Lee 2003). This raises questions on how ethnic data have been used and the policies that have been designed on the basis of the data gathered and examined (see, for example, Cheong *et al.* 2009).

The experience of Malaysia has also shown that not only does measurement of ethnic data support policy but that policy can also drive ethnic measurement in data. Should we then continue to collect ethnic data? The experience of census measurement of ethnicity in

<sup>20</sup> *Rasa Sayang* 'ours too... we have right to sing it'. *New Straits Times*, 15 October 2007.

<sup>21</sup> There are exceptions, for example, detailed information on ethnic composition in a parliamentary constituency. Ethnicity is also an important factor in social science research, including public health. The issue of the relevance of ethnicity and its measurement in the medical field is addressed in several papers in *PLoS Medicine*, Vol 4(9), 2007. <http://medicine.plosjournals.org/perlserv/?request=get-toc&ct=1>

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, the government-ASLI quarrel on the measurement of *Bumiputera* equity. [http://www.malaysia-today.net/Blog-n/2006\\_10\\_05\\_MT\\_BI\\_archive.htm](http://www.malaysia-today.net/Blog-n/2006_10_05_MT_BI_archive.htm)  
<http://www.malaysia-today.net/Blog-n/2006/10/asli-backs-down-over-nep-data.htm>

Malaysia lends credibility to Thomas Sawyer's assertion of the 'compelling human need for self-identity'. The nation, its Census Superintendents, its various institutions and its researchers have attempted to document the diversity in, and its effect on, society. So the answer is a resounding yes, we need to collect ethnic data, but do not just collect them. Perhaps it is time the focus shifts away from identifying major ethnic groups in order to design more effective policies that reach the needy in the disadvantaged groups. Yes, we should collect ethnicity data to meet the needs of sound policies that seek to build national unity, policies that utilise our diversity to our national advantage, that enable our citizens to celebrate the diversity. We can have unity in diversity and that is what nature itself teaches us. The problem is not the data themselves but how they are used to formulate, implement and monitor policies.

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**Appendix 1:** Characteristics of ethnic classifications in various censuses, Malaysia

Census	Word(s) used to capture ethnicity	Total number of groups identified	Sub groupings	Remarks
1871 Straits Settlements	Nationality	46	'Europeans and Americas', 18 sub-groupings	Categories a mix of communal (eg Achinese), religious (e.g., Jews), national (e.g. Persians); and continental (e.g. African) groupings. Many categories not in use today (e.g. Jaweepekans); Europeans and Eurasians specific and important categories.
1871 Straits Settlements	Nationality	50	'Europeans and Americans', 19 sub-groupings, also divided by status in country (e.g. 'pensioner'); 'Chinese', 7 dialect sub-groupings	Small changes from 1871 census; 'Aborigines' included as a category
1891 Straits Settlements	Nationality	50	Identification of 6 major categories. Four additional primary sub-groupings to previous census; 'Malays and other natives of the Archipelago' 0 9 sub-groupings; 'Tamil and other natives of India', 4 sub-groupings; 'Other Nationalities', 10 sub-groupings	Aborigines, Filipinos ('Mantlaman') and Indonesians (e.g. 'Javanese') categorised under 'Malays and Other Natives'; Burmese categorised as 'Indians' Sinhalese and Jews categorised as 'Others'
Borneo		15	7 major groups, 'European', 'Dusun', 'Murut', 'Bajau', 'Other Indigenous', 'Chinese', 'Others'	

**Appendix 1** continued

1901 Straits Settlements Federated Malay States/Borneo	Nationality Race Nationality	55 (Straits Settlements) 49 (Federated Malay States) 7	Major sub groupings (6) as for 1891 census	Some differences in the sub groupings between the two censuses, but otherwise essentially similar to that of 1891
1911 Straits Settlements Federated Malay States	Race	79 (Straits Settlements) 60 (Federated Malay States)	For Straits Settlements, no sub groupings except for 'European and Allied Races', 31 sub groups and 'Malays and Allied Races, 22 sub groups	Major groupings introduced in 1891 census dropped: Groupings removed in Straits Settlements list; Groupings renamed in Federated Malay States list where 'Aborigines' replaced by derogatory 'Sakai'
Borneo	Nationality	25	For Federated Malay States, 6 sub groupings are 'European Pop. by Race', 17 groups; 'Malay Pop. by Race', 11 groups; 'Chinese Pop. by Tribe', 10 groups; 'Indian Pop. by Race', 11 groups; and 'Other Pop. by Race', 10 groups	
1921 British Malaya	Race	60	7 major groups, 'European', 'Dusun', 'Murut', 'Bajau', 'Other Indigenous', 'Chinese', 'Others'	First unified census for British Malaya covering Federated Malay States and the Straits Settlements Groupings as for 1911 for the Federated Malay States
Borneo	Nationality	25	7 major groups	

**Appendix I** continued

Census	Word(s) used to capture ethnicity	Total number of groups identified	Sub groupings	Remarks
1931 British Malaya	Race	74	Sub groupings as for 1921	'The Malay Pop. by Race' census grouping replaced by 'Malaysians by Race'. Confusion between ethnicity and nationality still present: now 'Nepal' is listed under 'Indians by Race'.
Borneo	Nationality	25	7 major groups	
1947 British Malaya	Community	78	Still 6 sub groupings but the 'Malaysians' now further categorised into 'Malays', 2 groups and 'Other Malaysians', 15 groups. 'Malays' include 'Aborigines' which is further subdivided into 3 subgroups.	'by Race' replaced by 'by Specific Community'. 'Aborigines' replaces 'Sakai'. 'Ceylon Tamils' a new category under 'Others' and 'Other Ceylonese' replaces 'Sinhalese'.
Sarawak	Race	129	8 major groups. 'Indigenous' including Malays and Dayaks, 100 categories; 'Non-Indigenous', 129 sub-groupings, including Europeans and other Asians.	

Appendix I continued

1951 Borneo	Race	39	7 major groups. 'European', 10 sub-groupings; 'Dusun', 2 sub-groupings; 'Murut', 'Bajau', 2 sub-groupings; 'Other Indigenous', 6 sub-groupings; 'Chinese', 6 sub-groupings; 'Others', 12 sub-groupings
1957 Federation of Malaya	Race	31	4 broad categories: Category 'Indonesian' under 'Malaysians' comprise 'Malays', 'Malay', 'Chinese by Tribe' 'Aborigines', 'Indonesian' replaced by 'Chinese', 'Eurasians' and 'All 6 subgroups; now under 'Others' New category 'Pakistani' under 'Others', 10 subgroups, 'Indians', 4 subgroups; 'Others', 9 subgroups
1960 Borneo	Race	26	7 major groups. 'European', 2 sub-groupings; 'Dusun', 'Murut', 'Bajau', 2 sub-groupings; 'Other Indigenous', 7 sub-groupings; 'Chinese', 5 sub-groupings; 'Others', 7 sub-groupings
Sarawak		26	7 major groups. 'European', 2 sub-groupings; 'Malay', 'Melanau', 'Land Dayak', 'Sea Dayak'; 'Other Indigenous', 6 sub-groupings; 'Chinese', 7 sub-groupings; 'Others', 5 sub-groupings

**Appendix I** continued

Census	Word(s) used to capture ethnicity	Total number of groups identified	Sub groupings	Remarks
1970 Malaysia	Community		4 broad categories as for 1957 census	Subgroups differ across Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak to reflect the different groupings in these three areas
Peninsular Malaysia		32		'Malaysians' replaced by 'Malay'.
Sabah		38		'Indian' now includes 'Pakistani', 'Ceylon Tamil' and Other
Sarawak		25		'Ceylonese'
1980 Malaysia	Ethnic group/ community/ dialect			Subgroups differ across Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak to reflect the different groupings in these three areas
Peninsular Malaysia		35	4 broad categories as for 1957 census	'Indian' now includes 'Bangladeshi'. 'Ceylon' replaced by 'Sri Lankan'
Sabah		16		
Sarawak		30		

Appendix I continued

1991 Malaysia	Ethnic group/ community/ dialect; Combined with information on citizenship	66	Two broad categories: Malaysian citizens, non Malaysian Citizens Under Malaysian Citizens, 4 categories, 'Bumiputera', 'Chinese', 10 subgroups, 'Indian', 9 subgroups, 'Others', 9 subgroups. 'Bumiputera' further divided into 'Malay' and 'Other Bumiputera'. Latter provides for aboriginal groups as well as the many communities in Sabah and Sarawak	Ethnic group classifications standardised to produce a common set at the national level Two new classifications: citizenship and <i>Bumiputera</i> status
2000 Malaysia	Ethnic group/ community/ dialect; Combined with information on citizenship	67		'Malaysian Citizens Others' now includes 'Myanmar' Other bumi (sabah) and other bumi (Sarawak); <i>De jure</i> (usual place of residence) approach to compilation as opposed to <i>de facto</i> (place of residence on Census Night) approach of earlier censuses

Sources: Hirschman (1987); Chander (1972); Fell (1960); Hare (1902); Jones (1953; 1961; 1962); Noakes (1948); Merewether (1892).

**Appendix 2: Constitution of Malaysia: Definitions of Ethnicity**

Article 160

(2) In this Constitution, unless the context otherwise requires, the following expressions have the meanings hereby respectively assigned to them, that is to say -

“Aborigine” means an aborigine of the Malay Peninsula;

“Malay” means a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay custom and -

- (a) was before Merdeka Day born in the Federation or in Singapore or born of parents one of whom was born in the Federation or in Singapore, or is on that day domiciled in the Federation or in Singapore; or
- (b) is the issue of such a person;

Article 161

(6) In this Article “native” means-

(a) in relation to Sarawak, a person who is a citizen and either belongs to one of the races specified in Clause (7) as indigenous to the State or is of mixed blood deriving exclusively from those races; and

(b) in relation to Sabah, a person who is a citizen, is the child or grandchild of a person of a race indigenous to Sabah, and was born (whether on or after Malaysia Day or not) either in Sabah or to a father domiciled in Sabah at the time of the birth.

(7) The races to be treated for the purposes of the definition of “native” in Clause (6) as indigenous to Sarawak are the Bukitans, Bisayahs, Dusuns, Sea Dayaks, Land Dayaks, Kadayans, Kalabit, Kayans, Kenyags (including Sabups and Sipengs), Kajangs (including Sekapans, Kejamans, Lahanans, Punans, Tanjongs dan Kanowits), Lugats, Lisums, Malays, Melanos, Muruts, Penans, Sians, Tagals, Tabuns and Ukits.

Source: <http://www.helpinelaw.com/law/constitution/malaysia/malaysia01.php>