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Indonesia's Population: Ethnicity and Religion in a Changing Political Landscape

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This is a most interesting book to all students of Indonesian society. It presents data on religion and ethnicity collected in the 2000 Indonesian census in an accessible way. The 2000 census was the first since the colonial Volkstelling of 1930 to collect information on ethnicity. Although Indonesia is one of the world's most ethnically heterogeneous nations both the Orde Lama of President Sukarno and Orde Baru of President Suharto eschewed recognition of ethnic groups in the interest of developing national unity. Hence the data examined in this book have been long awaited by many Indonesianists. The book is wholly descriptive and does not attempt any in-depth interpretation of the data relating to religion and ethnicity. It is profusely documented with 116 tables and 86 diagrams in 190 pages of text and the bulk of the text is descriptions of those data. The data are taken from the 31 published volumes of the Indonesian census (one for each province and for Indonesia as a whole). The Indonesian 2000 census was the first post-independence census which was a total count for all questions although it did suffer from a high rate of non-response and through the inability of census takers to enter some insecure regions outside of Java. Nevertheless, as the authors point out, the published data from the 2000 population census have provided a significant breakthrough in the understanding of ethnicity in Indonesia.

The book is divided into six chapters. The first summarises the main features and limitations of the data sets used and outlines the ethnic profile of Indonesia as revealed by that data. The extent of the nation's ethnic diversity is reflected in the fact that there are more than 1000 ethnic groups and sub-groups with 15 having at least one million Indonesian citizens. Numbers are provided for 101 groups the largest being the Javanese (41.71 percent of the national population with 83,865,924) down to the Gebi Gebi with 2,903 persons. The growth rates of each group are estimated through careful comparison with the 1930 colonial census and some interesting variations are discussed. A number of example provinces are examined to show the huge differences not only in the ethnic make-up of the provinces but also in the degree of ethnic heterogeneity. In Central Java for example 97.96 percent of Indonesian citizens are Javanese while in East Nusa Tenggara the largest single group, the Atoni Merto make up only 14.95 percent of the population.

Chapter two takes the eleven largest ethnic groups and systematically examines their growth, age structure, the proportion living in each province and the proportion that they make up of the provinces' population. The impact of transmigration and other internal migration is seen in the fact that the Javanese are easily the most dispersed population hence, as the authors suggest, exploding the myth that Javanese are unprepared to move away from their home areas. Indeed one interesting dimension of this chapter is the evidence that it provides of internal population movement within Indonesia during the post-independence years. Other groups examined are the Sundanese, Malay, Madurese, Batak, Minangkabau, Betawi, Buginese, Bandenese, Banjarese and Balinese.

Since the 1930 census there has been great speculation about the size of Indonesia's ethnic Chinese

population. Chapter three is devoted to an estimation of the size, growth patterns, age structure, distribution and concentration of the ethnic Chinese. The authors estimate its size to be between 1.45 and 2.05 percent of the national population but probably around 1.5 percent – somewhat lower than many previous estimates. Its slow growth is attributed to low fertility, significant emigration and severe under identification among Indonesia's ethnic Chinese. Chapter four analyses the religion data for the 2000 census, which while the ethnicity data only applied to Indonesian citizens, was collected for all Indonesians. It examines the size, growth since 1971, age structure, distribution and concentration of Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists and "others". With 88.22 percent of the national population Indonesia has the world's largest Muslim community. In chapter five, eleven of Indonesia's provinces are focused upon and their ethnic and religious profiles are examined. These are most interesting showing the varying extents to which there has been an increase in ethnic diversity in provinces over the post independence period.

In reading the book one is constantly seeing connections to a wide range of important contemporary issues in Indonesia reflecting the importance of the religious and ethnic dimensions in Indonesia. From this reviewer's own interest in Indonesia's population movement, the data presented have provided a new set of insights. Generally the authors have not attempted to make the connections with such issues as the outbreak of separatist movements in a number of outer island provinces after 1998. They have largely confined themselves to a presentation of the numbers and a careful elucidation of the trends. Chapter six is an exception in that a link is made to political behavior, namely voting patterns in the 1999 election and the extent of ethnic affiliation with particular parties is examined.

To this reviewer this is a most welcomed and interesting addition to our knowledge of Indonesia's population. Measurement of ethnicity is a very important issue in censuses worldwide. In Indonesia a self identification approach was adopted and while there are some limitations, the picture which they present of Indonesian ethnic patterns is a realistic one and at last quantifies an important dimension of contemporary Indonesian demography and society. Many readers would have preferred the authors to make use of maps to show some of the most interesting spatial distribution patterns outlined in the book and the book certainly could have had a more extensive bibliography on ethnicity in Indonesia and an index. Nonetheless, this is a significant and important contribution and the book is to be highly recommended.