

**'THE BORNEO EVANGELICAL MISSION (BEM) AND
THE SIDANG INJIL BORNEO (SIB), 1928-1979:
A Study of the Planting and Development of an Indigenous Church'**

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ABSTRACT

The aim of planting a ‘Three-Self’ indigenous church was the proclaimed policy of many mission societies from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, but few were able to implement it successfully. From its inception in 1928, the Borneo Evangelical Mission (BEM) aimed to establish an indigenous church in Borneo, and from 1939 this commitment was expressed specifically in terms of establishing a ‘Three-Self’ church. This study argues that the BEM was unusual as a mission society in displaying a consistent and sustained determination to implement its policies and practices toward the planting and nurturing an indigenous church, the SIB, among the *Orang Ulu* of Sarawak.

This study also investigates the processes and influences that have aided or hindered this development. As such, there will be an analysis of the interaction of the policies and practices of the BEM with three contextual factors; namely, (a) the administrative policies and style of the Brooke Raj and the subsequent colonial government, (b) the character and self-governing styles of the indigenous communities in particular the *Orang Ulu*, and (c) the changing social, economic and political climate of Sarawak from 1959 till 1979, especially under independent Malaysia.

The development of the significant BEM policies and their implications for the BEM and SIB are analysed with reference to the challenges posed by regional political events and the changing political situations within Sarawak and Malaysia. In response to these political developments, there were crucial shifts in the implementation of the policies of the BEM which enabled the fulfillment of its original mission objective.

This study further discusses relevant themes such as the nature of conversion, the mass movements of the *Orang Ulu* into Christianity, and the revival movements among the *Orang Ulu*, which were significant contributory factors toward the development of the SIB as a ‘Three-Self’ church. It is argued that the growth and consolidation of the indigenous church, the SIB, were linked to the capability of indigenous leadership, and the mass conversion and revival movements of the *Orang Ulu*. These were indigenous movements, which the missionaries did not control but attempted to influence, guide, and use to disciple the church.

The thesis also evaluates and seeks to explain the extent to which the BEM has succeeded in the implementation of its policies that resulted in the SIB becoming a viable ‘Three-Self’ indigenous church by 1979. This evaluation takes into particular consideration the constant monitoring of its mission policies by the BEM, the surprising lack of mission-church conflict, the changing socio-economic and political factors, and the enforced euthanasia of the BEM due to governmental constraints.