ISEAS
INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES, SINGAPORE

CULTURE AND FERTILITY
The Case of Singapore

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Research Notes and Discussions Paper No. 21
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FOREWORD

It is generally recognized that ethnic diversity is characteristic of Southeast Asian countries. However, very little is known about the relationships between this diversity and other social and behavioural dimensions. In most countries in the region, such relationships have yet to be fully explored, partly because of the sensitivity of the issue and partly because of the dearth of essential data on ethnic behaviour and differentials.

In the case of population behaviour, although several aspects, such as fertility, mortality and a variety of attitudinal dimensions, have been measured successfully in most Southeast Asian countries, they are normally presented as national aggregates, and are often only broken down by rural-urban residence, education, income, household size and ethnic group. Thus, while there is some information available on the relationship between ethnic identity and fertility, the relationship has not been systematically examined in most of the Southeast Asian countries. The lack of this kind of basic data on ethnic differentials in population behaviour in Southeast Asia has definite implications for national population policies and programmes. These policies and programmes are usually implemented or launched on a national level with very little consideration for the ethnic diversity of the country, and are therefore often perceived, on an ethnic group or community level, as being ethnically based, unacceptable or even biased. Perceptions like these certainly have a direct effect on the manner in which such policies and programmes are implemented and received.

With conditions as the foregoing in mind, and in view of the importance of, and the lack of information on, the relationship between dimensions of ethnic identity and population, the Institute in 1975 got together with a group of interested research scholars from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand and began an investigation of such relationships and their implications for population policies and progress. Entitled "Culture and Fertility in Southeast Asia", this investigation consisted of two separate but linked activities, divided into Phase I and Phase II of the project, with the former focused largely on the analysis of secondary data and the latter on material generated by planned fieldwork and the administration of a questionnaire.

The work that follows forms part of the "country monographs" growing out of Phase I of the project. These monographs, like the project itself, have

been made possible through the co-operation and support of a number of individuals and organizations, particularly the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Ottawa, the various country team leaders and their colleagues, and the two co-ordinators of Phase I, Dr. Rodolfo Bulatao and Dr. Ong Jin Hui. To all of them we say, thank you.

We are also particularly grateful to Dr. Ong Jin Hui who, in addition to general co-ordinative responsibilities, helped to edit the manuscripts on which the country monographs are based.

Whilst thanking all contributors to, and participants in, the project, and wishing the monographs all the best, we hope it is clearly understood that the responsibility for facts and opinions expressed in this publication rests exclusively with the authors and their interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Institute or its supporters.

5 September 1980

Kernial S. Sandhu
Director
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PREFACE

This volume is part of a series of monographs on culture and fertility in Southeast Asia. They arose out of a regional research project, "Culture and Fertility in Southeast Asia", initiated by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, and involving researchers from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. The first phase of the Culture and Fertility project concentrated on demographic variables and issues in relation to ethnic and other cultural variables.

Each monograph, focusing on a particular country, is developed essentially on the following lines. First, the historical background and the development of the present social structure are detailed. Following this, the patterns of interaction among the various ethnic groups are considered, with particular attention paid to the identification of variables which may influence fertility patterns of the various groups. Against this backdrop, the population policies and family planning programmes are explained. The demographic structure and its changes in tandem with these policies and programmes are then analysed. In order to determine the impact of key variables on fertility patterns, a secondary analysis of available data was carried out, utilizing multiple classification analysis.

There are differences in the substance of the individual country monographs, largely on account of the nature and availability of materials and documentation. All the same, there has been quite an adequate coverage of the areas deemed important in all the volumes. Indeed, the chapters on national population policies and family planning and the ones on demographic structure are almost complete in detail; in addition, they are comparable with one another. On the other hand, the chapters based on secondary analysis have problems of comparability because secondary data were used. Since these data sets were not originally designed to answer to the project's research model, there were difficulties in comparing variable definitions and operationalization. Even more problematic was the fact that some variables were not available in the data sets. Furthermore, the data sets were not comparable in population coverage and time-frame (the target year was 1970). For all these reasons, this chapter in each of the monographs should not be treated as anything more than a preview or pretest of the research model. Seen in this perspective, it not only provides a useful means of identifying relevant explanatory variables but also shows that variations do indeed exist in a number of areas between ethnic groups and between countries.

Variations and shortcomings of the type above notwithstanding, the five monographs on the whole do provide a useful background to the identification of relevant ethnic variables. Moreover, the lack of comparability of data is currently being corrected in the second phase of the project. A standardized core questionnaire with additional peripheral and specific queries has been designed, based on the findings of the country studies of Phase I. Ultimately, it is expected that the analysis of data collected in Phase II will culminate in an in-depth examination of the relationship between ethnicity and fertility.

1 September 1980

Ong Jin Hui
Editor, Country Monographs
Culture and Fertility in
Southeast Asia, Phase I

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I: CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The Growth of a Plural Society

The modern history of Singapore, from the time of its foundation until after the Second World War, was essentially one of immigration. When Stamford Raffles landed on the island in 1819, Singapore was reportedly inhabited by only about a hundred and fifty people, mostly Malay but also partly Chinese. The development of Singapore as a new trading port immediately attracted large numbers of immigrants, both Malay and Chinese, from the nearby territories of what are now Malaysia and Indonesia. In a matter of two years, the population increased to over 5,000. Migrants also started to arrive from China and India. By 1824, when the first population enumeration was conducted, the population was already more than 10,000. The influx of migrants continued, and in half a century the population grew to almost 100,000 in 1871. It doubled again before the turn of the century and redoubled to over 400,000 by 1921. The one million mark was reached in 1950 and the two million mark in 1968. In the 1970 census, 2,074,507 persons were enumerated.

As the immigrants were predominantly males, the sex ratio of the population was, for a long time, extremely imbalanced. As a consequence, the birth rate of the population was very low. There had been excess of deaths over births before the First World War, and the growth of the population was therefore due entirely to net migration. Even between the two World Wars, when the number of births began to surpass that of deaths, net migration remained the main source of growth of the population. It was not until after the Second World War, especially after 1949 when immigration from China was stemmed, that natural increase first emerged as the main source of population increase. In more recent years, because immigration was brought under strict control, natural increase has become practically the sole determinant of population growth.

It is from this long historical background of immigration of people from differing cultural areas that a plural society has evolved, characterized by a high degree of ethnic and cultural diversity.

Table 1: Population Growth, 1824-1970

Year	Population (1,000)	Annual Growth Rate (%)
1824	10.7	7.7
1830	16.6	7.8
1840	35.4	4.6
1849	52.9	4.0
1860	81.7	1.6
1871	97.1	3.5
1881	137.7	2.8
1891	181.6	2.3
1901	226.8	2.9
1911	303.3	3.3
1921	418.4	2.9
1931	557.7	3.3
1947	938.1	4.4
1957	1,445.9	3.2
1966	1,929.7	1.8
1970	2,074.5	1.6*

Source: Chang Chen Tung, *Fertility Transition in Singapore*, p. 4.

* 1970-77.

Table 2: Sources of Population Growth, 1881-1970

Period	Population Increase (1,000)	Natural Increase (1,000)	Net Migration (1,000)*
1881-1891	43.9	-30.6	74.5
1891-1901	45.2	-42.4	87.6
1901-1911	76.5	-59.5	136.0
1911-1921	115.0	-38.0	153.0
1921-1931	139.4	15.9	123.5
1931-1947	380.4	180.1	200.3
1947-1957	507.8	403.9	103.9
1957-1970	628.6	595.1	33.5

Source: Chang Chen Tung, *Fertility Transition in Singapore*, p. 4.

* The balance between population increase and natural increase.

The Changing Pattern of Ethnic Composition

As used in censuses and most surveys, from which we have obtained data for discussion in this section, the term "ethnic group" indicates a group of people who have broadly the same ethnological origins and share certain bonds of culture, customs and language. The ethnic grouping that thus results represents "a judicious blend for practical ends of the ideas of geographical and ethnological origin, political allegiance, and racial and social affinities and sympathies."[1] In practice, the grouping is generally based on self-declaration of the respondent, and often the categories of ethnic group or even subethnic group, especially in the case of the Chinese, were prelisted for coding the respondent's self-identification.

In recent years, because of intermingling and assimilation, the differences among the ethnic groups, especially among subethnic communities, have become less pronounced. As a consequence, the dialect or community subdivisions may no longer represent distinct categories or groups. Thus, it has been noted that

> immigrants of Indonesian origin who have been living in Singapore for a few generations tended to regard themselves as Malays and were enumerated and recorded as such .... Similarly, persons of Chinese and Indian origin were recorded according to the specific dialect or community group stated. It is possible, however, that due to intermarriage and assimilation many persons who have declared themselves as belonging to a specific dialect or community may in fact be of a different or mixed ethnic origin. This would particularly be so for persons of mixed parentage and for adopted children who were generally enumerated as belonging to the dialect group of the male parent.[2]

As a result of such problems, the description of ethnic and dialect group composition using data from these sources must be taken as depicting only the broad patterns of origin of the population.

When Stamford Raffles first landed at Singapore, there were far more Malays than Chinese among the small number of inhabitants. However, once the large influx of migrants started, the Chinese very soon outnumbered the

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1 Singapore, Department of Statistics, *Report on the Census of Population, 1970*, Vol. I, p. 247 (hereafter cited as *1970 Census Report*).

2 Ibid.

Malays and, by 1836, had become the largest ethnic group on the island. The proportion of Chinese made up one-half of the total population in 1840 and three-quarters of the total population in 1921. This proportion has since remained largely stationary.

In contrast to the Chinese, the proportion of Malays decreased rather persistently over the years until the 1930s. In 1824, the Malays made up three-fifths of the total population, and in 1830 they were still the largest ethnic group. The proportion then declined steadily and reached a low level of only 20% in 1860. It rose to about 27% in 1871, but showed a downward trend again until 1931, when they constituted only 11.7% of the total population. After that there was a slight upward trend, the proportion gradually increasing to 15%, according to the 1970 census.

Unlike both the Chinese and the Malays, the Indians have maintained a proportion of the total population within a narrow range of variation. The proportion varied largely between 7 and 9% except for selected decades in the last century, when the proportion exceeded 11%. It was 7% in 1970 according to the census.

Besides these three major ethnic groupings, there have of course been a number of other minor ethnic groups. These groups are so tiny, however, that they have never accounted, even in combination, for more than a negligible fraction of the total population, the highest proportion being 5.2% in 1871. In the 1970 census these groups together comprised only 1.8%.

The Chinese

In the 1970 census, there were 1,579,866 persons enumerated as belonging to the ethnic Chinese.

A number of dialects are spoken among the Chinese in Singapore. These are mostly the dialects in use in southern China, particularly in the two provinces of Fujian and Guangdong, from where most of the Chinese in Singapore originate. Very often the dialects are so different that people who speak only one dialect will not be able to understand others who use another dialect. The problem of communication has been much mitigated nowadays, however, because of the long history

Table 3: Ethnic Composition (%) of the Population, 1824-1970

Year	Chinese	Malays	Indians	Others
1824	31.0	60.2	7.1	1.7
1830	39.4	45.9	11.5	3.2
1836	45.9	41.7	9.9	2.5
1840	50.0	37.3	9.5	3.2
1849	52.9	32.2	11.9	3.0
1860	61.2	19.8	15.9	3.1
1871	56.2	26.8	11.8	5.2
1881	63.0	23.9	8.8	4.3
1891	67.1	19.8	8.8	4.3
1901	72.1	15.8	7.8	4.3
1911	72.4	13.8	9.2	4.6
1921	75.3	12.8	7.7	4.2
1931	75.1	11.7	9.1	4.1
1947	77.8	12.1	7.4	2.7
1957	75.4	13.6	8.6	2.4
1970	76.2	15.0	7.0	1.8

Source: Chang Chen Tung, *Fertility Transition in Singapore*, p. 6.

of intermingling of the various dialect groups in a compact situation and the spread of the use of Mandarin and English.

Of the various dialect groups, the Hokkien is the largest. With a population of 667,000 persons in 1970, the group comprised 42.4% of the total Chinese population in Singapore. The Teochiu, making up 22.4% of the ethnic Chinese in 1970 with a population of 353,000 persons, is the second largest dialect group. Third in rank in terms of size is the Cantonese group. In 1970, there were 269,000 persons enumerated as belonging to this dialect group, accounting for 17.0% of the total Chinese population. Thus, more than four in five of the Singapore Chinese declare themselves as belonging to one of these three dialect groups. There are, in addition, the Hainanese, the Hakkas, the Foochow and a number of other minor groups. In 1970, the Hainanese numbered 115,000 persons, the Hakkas, 110,000 persons, and the Foochow, 27,000 persons, and they comprise 7.7%, 7.2% and 1.8%, respectively, of the Chinese population in Singapore.[3]

3 Singapore, Department of Statistics, *1970 Census Report*, pp. 255-257.

The Chinese traditionally tended to concentrate in the city centre. Although there has been a historical pattern of growth and expansion of population centres outwards from the city centre or urban area, in 1957 nearly half of the Chinese were still living in the urban area. There were 31.3% living in the suburban area and only 20.8% residing in the rural area. A great shift in the spatial pattern occurred, however, between 1957 and 1970. This was due to the implementation of the urban renewal programme in combination with the public housing programme which develops housing estates largely in the suburban and rural areas. As a consequence, urban concentration of the Chinese was reduced to 37.4% in 1970. Correspondingly, the proportions of Chinese living in the suburban and rural areas rose to 38.7% and 23.9% respectively.[4]

The Chinese in Singapore have followed a plurality of religious beliefs and practices. These include various folk, syncretic religions as well as Taoism and Buddhism. A growing number of Chinese have embraced Christianity, while some have adopted Islam. Although the folk religions, Taoism and Buddhism, have little to do with one another, both canonically and organizationally, it is very common for a lay person to utilize the services and follow the practices of more than one of them.

There are two types of syncretic religions: "Shenism" and "sectarianism". The former includes those folk beliefs that have no canonical tradition whatsoever, whereas the various sectarian religions, such as the "Great Way of Former Heaven" (*Hsien-t'ien Ta Tao*) have developed canonical traditions of their own.[5]

Taoism in Singapore is little more than a series of associations of professional priests attached to different schools and performing rites of many kinds for the public.[6] Many of the sects noted above have been influenced by, and thus perceived to be closely associated with, Taoism.

The Buddhism practised by the Chinese is primarily that of the Mahayana tradition. However, some Chinese, particularly the Babas and the English-educated, have followed the Hinayana tradition.[7] It should be noted that although a

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4 Singapore, Department of Statistics, *1970 Census Report*, pp. 251-252.

5 V. Wee, "'Buddhism' in Singapore," in *Singapore: Society in Transition*, ed. R. Hassan (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 155-188.

6 M. Topley, "The Emergence and Social Functions of Chinese Religious Associations in Singapore," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* III (1960-61), pp. 289-314.

7 Ibid.