POPULATION GROWTH IN MALAYA

A SURVEY OF RECENT TRENDS

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Malayan Civil Service

ROYAL INSTITUTE
OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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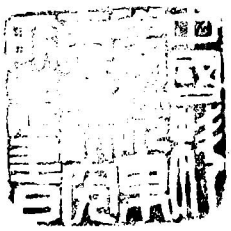

by

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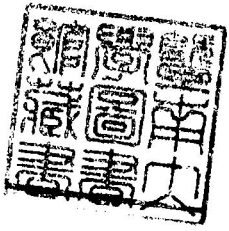
Foreword by

FRANK W. NOTESTEIN



London & New York

ROYAL INSTITUTE

OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

First published 1952

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
AT THE BROADWATER PRESS, WELWYN GARDEN CITY, HERTFORDSHIRE
BOUND BY THE GARDEN CITY PRESS, LETCHWORTH, HERTFORDSHIRE

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THE ROYAL INSTITUTE
OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
London: Chatham House, St James's Square, S.W.1
New York: 542 Fifth Avenue, New York 19, N.Y.

Toronto *Bombay*
Melbourne *Wellington* *Cape Town*
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

FOREWORD

By Frank W. Notestein

A NEW interest is arising in the problems of population growth in the world's densely settled agrarian regions. It comes in part from the dramatic progress made in controlling disease in recent years, and in part from a new awareness that substantial economic development has in many instances brought only rather limited relief from poverty because of population growth. Unfortunately knowledge of the processes of population change in the technologically undeveloped areas does not match interest in the topic. Sound statistical information is itself the product of an advanced technology and an educated population. As a result our information is most adequate where it is least important, and least adequate in the very regions in which the problems of health and economic and social development are most closely tied to those of population change. Urgent practical problems, a paucity of information, and widespread interest combine to yield controversy that generates more heat than light. In this situation, one sound analysis is worth a hundred discussions. The present study of population growth in Malaya is such an analysis. In it, careful statistical research, enriched by an intimate knowledge of the region and its people, has enabled the author to describe the main outlines of demographic development, to assess the potentials for future population change, and to point out the nature of the problems to be encountered.

The study deals with population growth in Malaya but it has a much wider relevance. Apart from a substantial Indian minority, the major populations are Malaysian and Chinese. Something can be learned about their demographic behaviour outside Malaya from the Malayan experience. Malaya is, moreover, a valuable example of an area whose population has been heavily recruited by immigration that has not become assimilated with the indigenous stocks. Malaysians are now outnumbered by the Chinese, whose demographic characteristics are nearly as sharply differentiated from those of the Malaysians as their economic roles, language, and social institutions.

The difficulties inherent in ethnic ambivalence and rapid population growth are perhaps partially compensated for by the possibilities for economic development, which are impressive for

the congested Far East. Here at least, the intricate problems of economic development in the presence of rapid population growth can be studied free from preoccupation with imminent limits to feasible extensions of the economy. The Malayan situation contains much that is relevant to other regions about which the current information is much less satisfactory.

Finally, the study is an excellent example of the ways in which the limited and inevitably imperfect basic data obtained from uneducated populations can, by careful and skilful analysis, be used to portray the essentials of the demographic situation. It is to be hoped that the study will stimulate analogous efforts for other regions.

Office of Population Research,
Princeton University,
Princeton, New Jersey

27 March 1951

PREFACE

THIS book was written at Princeton, New Jersey, during the author's tenure of a Commonwealth Fund Civil Service Fellowship in 1949–50. It would not have been written without the constant encouragement and advice of Professor Frank W. Notestein, Director of the Office of Population Research, Princeton University, and of Professor Frederick F. Stephan, Director of the Study of Education at Princeton, both of whom also made the facilities of their respective offices available to the author. In addition to Professors Notestein and Stephan, the author is indebted to Sir Richard Winstedt, to Mr Caradog Jones, and to Mr George W. Barclay, all of whom read the manuscript and made suggestions and criticisms which were of the utmost value when the time came to revise the first draft. The difficult work of decoding the author's handwriting and producing the typewritten manuscript fell to Audrey N. Barclay of the Office of Population Research at Princeton University. The generous assistance of the Commonwealth Fund ensured publication of this book.

The demographic analysis is necessarily tentative. All demographic indices estimated are subject to a wide margin of error. It is possible to go a certain distance with the present census, registration, and migration statistics, but a great deal of research work which could usefully be done as a background for framing social and economic policy must await the improvement of those statistics. The analysis will, it is hoped, prove an adequate illustration both of the possibilities and of the limitations of using current Malayan social statistics.

The statements made and opinions expressed are entirely the author's, and should not be regarded as having in any sense the official acceptance of the Governments of the Federation of Malaya and the Colony of Singapore.

T. E. S.

CONTENTS

MAPS

FIGURES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

MALAYA is a land of contrasts. It is an advanced country economically and industrially by South East Asian standards, and yet its jungles contain some of the most primitive people inhabiting the globe. The developed areas of west Malaya are quite thickly populated, but three-quarters of the country is still jungle covered. For the demographer, Malaya offers contrasts. There are considerable differences in the fertility of the Chinese and Indian communities on the one hand, and the Malaysians on the other hand. Moreover, these three communities, which together form 98 per cent of the population of Malaya, have greatly differing mortality rates. The rural Malaysian (by which term is meant the indigenous Malay and the immigrant Indonesian of similar stock) has relatively low fertility and high mortality; the Indian sojourner has high fertility and medium mortality; and the newly established Chinese community has high fertility and low mortality rates.

Historically Malaya has passed through a number of phases of demographic growth, and has just entered a fresh phase in the post-war years. The first phase consisted of the establishment of the first permanent settlements of a Malay people who came down the Asiatic mainland from the north and pushed the nomadic aborigines away from the coastal areas. The second phase saw Malay kingdoms rise and fall in various parts of the peninsula and the population subject to periods of alternate increase and decrease in numbers.

The third phase covers the period during which the Malay peninsula became a sphere of British influence; this period started in 1786 with the establishment of the Settlement of Penang, was continued through the Anglo-Dutch treaty of 1824 defining the mutual relations of the two countries in the East Indies, and finished at the time of the First World War when all the States in present-day Malaya had accepted British protection. During this period, and particularly during the last forty years up to the First World War, there was a flood of Chinese and Indian immigrants of the poorer classes, the very great majority of whom were adult males, staying in the country for a number of years, working very hard, and saving as much as possible before returning to their own homelands. In a great many years of this period, there was an ex-

cess of deaths over births, the crude birth rate being low because of the very abnormal sex ratio and the death rate being high because tropical diseases were not under control in those early days; only the flood of fresh immigrants caused the population to rise rapidly.

The fourth phase between the two world wars was a period of falling levels of immigration, falling death rates, more normal sex ratios particularly among the Chinese who had now begun to settle in Malaya in very considerable numbers, and rising birth rates due to the ending of the Chinese sentiments against the emigration of women, and the greater stability of family life among the immigrants. It ended with the catastrophic Japanese invasion and occupation of Malaya, a dismal period of four years during which birth rates fell because of the disruption of family life and death rates rose to their old high levels.

In the fifth phase, which has just started, immigration is no longer a factor of importance in population growth; in fact there is a small net balance of Chinese and Indian migration out of the country. The crude death rates have fallen, as in Ceylon, to the 12–15 level per 1,000 population among the Chinese and Indian communities who make good use of Government and private hospitals, but the Malaysian rate is still over 20. The fertility of all communities is as high as ever, and Malaya has started an era in which the rate of growth of population is well over 2 per cent per annum even allowing for a small net balance of migration out of the country.

Although Malaya is a small country, it does not as yet suffer from the same population pressure as Java, China, India, and the Philippines. Nevertheless there must clearly be a fairly low upper limit to the number of years during which Malaya can absorb an annual population increase of this order without feeling acute indigestion. Over Malaya as a whole, the density of the population was estimated at 115 persons per square mile in the 1947 Census Report;[1] and it must be borne in mind that the country includes very considerable areas of steep mountainside which are not likely to be opened up in the foreseeable future.

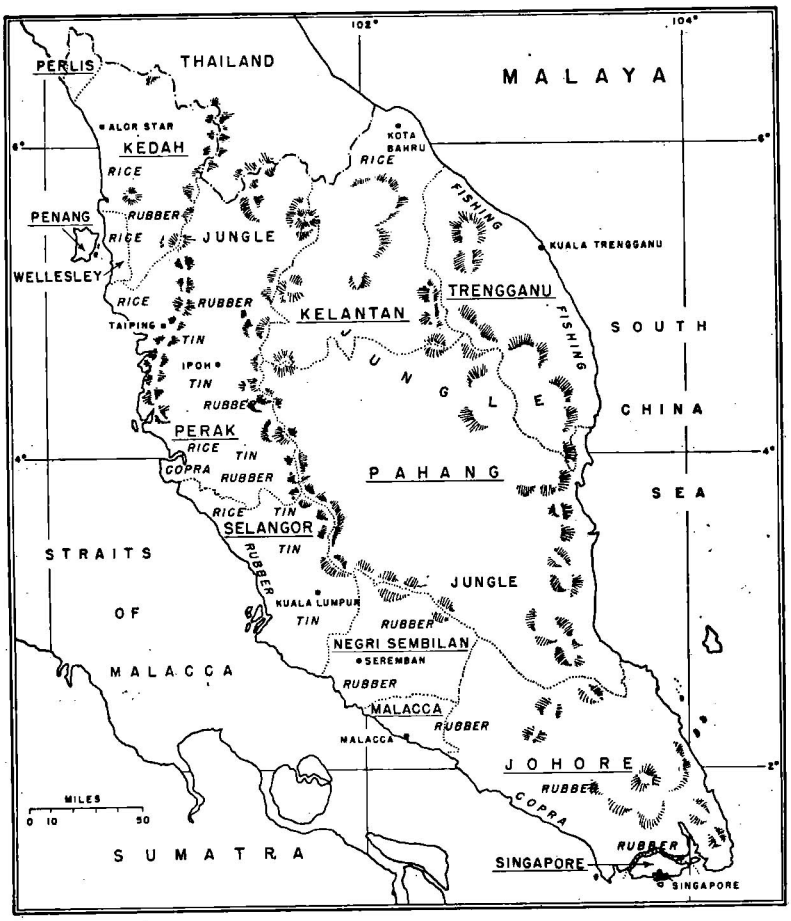
A study of the recent growth of Malaya's population has a more than local significance in so far as it can throw some light on the demographic characteristics of peoples coming from countries whose vital statistics are either non-existent or at best very in-

[1] The full titles of the Malaya Census Reports of 1931 and 1947 referred to are:
British Malaya, *A Report on the* 1931 *Census and on Certain Problems of Vital Statistics*, by C. A. Vlieland (London, Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1932).
Malaya, comprising the Federation of Malaya and the Colony of Singapore, *A Report on the* 1947 *Census of Population*, by M. V. del Tufo (London, Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1949).

complete. Malaya's statistics are very far from perfect, but they are better than those of China, India, and Java, and are good enough to make rough estimates of age specific birth and death rates and reproduction rates.

The territory which is now called the Federation of Malaya consists of nine Malay States, and the Settlements of Penang (which includes both Penang Island and Province Wellesley on the mainland) and Malacca. These two Settlements, together with Singapore, formed the pre-war Straits Settlements. Of the nine Malay States, four—Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan, and Pahang—were grouped together as the Federated Malay States before the Second World War, while the remaining five—Johore, Kedah, Kelantan, Trengganu, and Perlis—formed the Unfederated Malay States. The Colony of Singapore is now a separate administrative and political unit. 'Malaya' means the Federation of Malaya and the Colony of Singapore in this text.

Penang, Singapore, and Malacca have been British possessions for well over a century. Essentially these three Settlements each consist of an important port town with surrounding rural areas of moderate size. The Malay States of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan, and Pahang accepted British protection in the eighteen-seventies and the eighteen-eighties and it is these territories, particularly the first three, which contain the great majority of the rich tin-producing areas of Malaya and also a large proportion of the huge areas of land under rubber. Agreements with the other five Malay States were concluded during the period 1909–19. Johore, situated at the southern end of the Peninsula between Singapore and the old Federated Malay States, has experienced a rapid economic development comparable with that of Perak, Selangor, and Negri Sembilan. The northernmost States of Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, and Trengganu have remained primarily areas in which the Malays carry on traditional methods of rice production and fishing, little disturbed by the vast economic and social changes which the rest of Malaya has seen during the past seventy-five years. The southern portion of the State of Kedah, flanking Province Wellesley and the State of Perak, contains a large area under rubber, and there are other smaller pockets inside these four northern States in which mining and the production of rubber and other commercial crops are important in the local economy. In most of the tables in this text the territories are arranged with the Settlements of Singapore, Penang, and Malacca at the top, followed by the four former Federated Malay States, and then Johore and the other former Unfederated Malay States. This order results in the territories with largely urban Chinese



MAP I. MALAYA AND ITS MAIN INDUSTRIES

populations (Singapore and Penang) being placed at the top, the territories with mixed populations (Malacca, Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan, Pahang, and Johore) being placed in the middle, and the four States with predominantly Malay populations (Kedah, Kelantan, Trengganu, and Perlis) being placed at the bottom.

There are very marked regional differences in the ethnic composition of the population and these differences reflect regional variations in the economic structure. Table I gives the total enumerated population (including transients, service personnel, etc.) in the whole country and in each State and Settlement in 1947, and shows the percentage of males in these totals, and the percentage

of each of the three major communities in the male population. Owing to the preponderance of males among the Chinese and Indians, the percentage composition of the male population only by communities is a better guide to the local economy than the percentage composition of the total population by communities.

TABLE I

Composition of Male Population of the Various Territories of Malaya 1947

	Total enumerated population 1947 census (in tens of thousands)	*Percentage male in total population*	*Composition of the male population (percentages)*			
			Malaysians	*Chinese*	*Indians*	*Others*
MALAYA	590	53·6	40·2	45·1	11·9	2·8
State or Settlement						
Singapore	98	56·5	11·5	70·3	10·2	8·0
Penang	45	52·4	28·5	54·6	15·2	1·7
Malacca	24	50·4	46·4	42·8	9·5	1·3
Perak	96	53·3	35·2	47·6	16·0	1·2
Selangor	72	54·6	24·9	50·2	22·0	2·9
Negri Sembilan	27	54·1	37·2	44·5	16·1	2·2
Pahang	25	54·1	50·0	42·0	6·9	1·1
Johore	74	54·9	40·3	49·7	8·6	1·4
Kedah	55	52·2	65·2	22·6	10·4	1·8
Kelantan	45	50·1	91·0	5·8	1·5	1·7
Trengganu	23	49·9	90·0	8·4	1·3	0·3
Perlis	7	51·7	75·6	18·9	3·0	2·5

The large urban population, 29·5 per cent of the total population in 1931 and 35·1 per cent of the total in 1947, is predominantly Chinese. The term 'urban' is here used to include towns and villages with populations of 1,000 and upwards. The largest towns in Malaya are Singapore, which in 1947 contained 680,000 persons living within the municipal limits, Penang (properly George Town, but seldom called by this name) with 189,000 inhabitants, and Kuala Lumpur (in Selangor) with 176,000. Singapore, Penang, and Selangor are the three territories in which more than 50 per cent of the male population in 1947 were Chinese. Table II shows the community distribution of the urban population in the last two census years; this distribution has not changed greatly in the sixteen and a half years between the censuses, although the total urban population has grown by 60 per cent during that time.

The labour force of both European- and Chinese-owned mines is predominantly Chinese. Although mining and quarrying of all kinds occupied only 4 per cent of the working population in 1931 and less than 2 per cent of the working population in 1947 when production was hampered by shortages of equipment for rehabilita-

tion, the rich tin-mining areas have dense Chinese populations centred round some of the largest towns on the Malayan mainland —Ipoh in the Kinta Valley in Perak, Kuala Lumpur (the capital city of the Federation of Malaya) in Selangor, and Seremban in the less important Negri Sembilan tin-fields.

TABLE II

Percentage Distribution by Communities of Urban Population of Malaya

	Census Year 1931	1947
Malaysians	15·9	17·4
Chinese	65·4	68·3
Indians	14·8	11·4
Others	3·9	2·9

(SOURCE: Census Report, 1947, p. 46.)

Both the 1931 and the 1947 censuses returned about half a million persons engaged in rubber production. The racial pattern has, however, changed since 1931 through the gradual replacement of Indian and Chinese by Malaysian wage labour, and it is likely to continue to change slowly in this direction. Table III shows the

TABLE III

Persons Engaged in Rubber Cultivation in Malaya (in thousands)

		Census Year 1931	1947
Malaysians:	male	101	123
	female	27	50
Chinese:	male	164	119
	female	21	50
Indians:	male	128	86
	female	62	65

numbers of each of the three major communities reporting rubber growing as their occupation. While most areas in which rubber production is the main industry[1] have a mixed population, the percentage composition by communities varies considerably according to the size and ownership of rubber holdings. Small holdings,[2] which in the nineteen-thirties accounted for about two-fifths[3] of the aggregate Malayan production of rubber, are mostly

[1] These areas include Malacca, Negri Sembilan, Johore, most of Selangor and Perak, south Kedah, and parts of Pahang.

[2] 'Small holdings' includes all rubber holdings of under 100 acres.

[3] At the end of 1937 the area under rubber in Malaya comprised 2,020,382 acres on estates (= 100 acres and over) and 1,265,822 acres of small-holdings

owned by Malays and Chinese, and worked by the owners and their families with paid assistance if necessary. Rubber plantations owned by Europeans generally employ Indian labour, whereas plantations owned by Chinese are usually worked by Chinese labour. However, Malaysians are appearing in rubber estate labour forces in increasing numbers, and this is part of a larger movement described in the 1947 Malayan Union (now Federation of Malaya) Annual Report of the Labour Department as follows:

> For many years there has been a reluctance on the part of the Malays to resort to a wage economy. They have preferred to live in their kampongs[1] and only work to the extent they considered necessary in order to live. Several factors, however, have contributed to the disintegration of this spirit of congregationalism, independence, and self-sufficiency. The cost of living has increased appreciably as compared with pre-war conditions and this has rendered it progressively more difficult to obtain a decent livelihood by operating small-scale industries in the kampongs or growing fruit or rice for the local markets. Moreover, middlemen profits are large when rubber is produced on very small holdings. . . There is also a growing political consciousness and realization that Malaya is their home and they should therefore take an ever increasing interest in local industry and commerce. This outlook is rightly fostered from above and the result has been that whereas only 25,896 Malays were employed as labourers in December 1938, this had increased to more than 78,000 by December 1947.[2]

Where rice growing is the important industry, as it is in Kelantan, Perlis, central and north Kedah, the Province Wellesley section of the Settlement of Penang, and in parts of most of the other territories, Malaysians form the majority of the population. Rice growing as an occupation is in most States almost entirely confined to Malaysians and nearly half of the Malaysian working population are so engaged. In the whole of Malaya there were, in 1947, over 470,000 persons returned as engaged in rice growing (89 per cent of them Malaysians) out of a total working population of $2\frac{1}{4}$ million.

Fishing is a Malay occupation on the east coast of Malaya[3] (although the capital equipment is often owned by or mortgaged to Chinese fish dealers) but both Chinese and Malaysians are engaged in fishing in considerable numbers on the west coast from Penang down to Singapore.

(Table III of the Report of the Department of Agriculture, 1937. Brunei and Labuan acreages not included in figures quoted).

[1] 'Kampong' is the Malay word for village.

[2] p. 23.

[3] A valuable study of an east-coast fishing community (in Kelantan) has been made by Raymond Firth in *Malay Fishermen; their Peasant Economy* (London, Kegan, Paul, 1946).

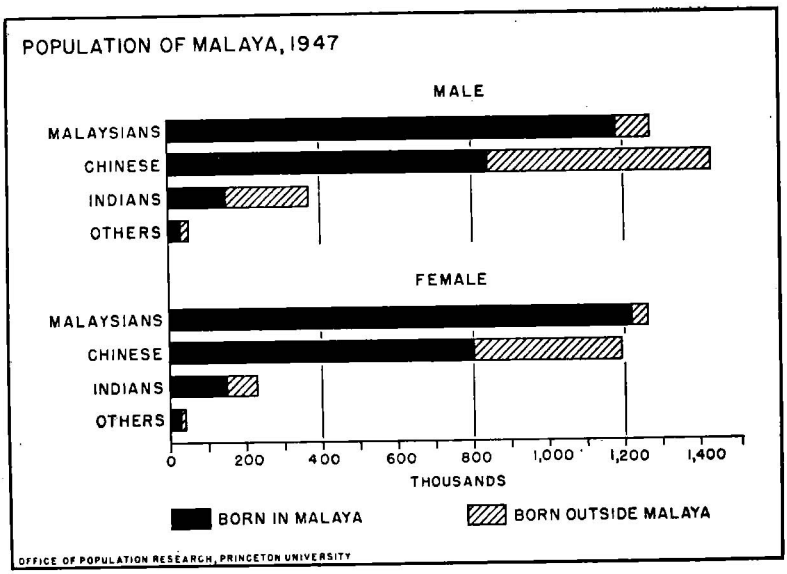


FIGURE I

It has been mentioned that Malaysians, Chinese, and Indians together account for 98 per cent of the population enumerated at the 1947 census of the Federation of Malaya and the Colony of Singapore. If transient categories and service personnel are excluded, the percentage is even closer to 100. Table IV gives the numbers (in tens of thousands) of these three major communities at the last four censuses. Tables V and VI show the percentage

TABLE IV

Total Enumerated Population of the Three Major Communities in Malaya
(in tens of thousands)

		Census Year			
		1911	1921	1931	1947
Malaysians:	total	142	163	193	254
	male	72	83	98	127
	female	69	79	95	127
Chinese:	total	92	118	171	262
	male	74	85	113	143
	female	18	33	58	119
Indians:	total	27	47	62	61
	male	21	34	42	38
	female	6	14	20	23