

# **The Population of Malaysia**

## **Second Edition**

The **Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS)** was established as an autonomous organization in 1968. It is a regional centre dedicated to the study of socio-political, security and economic trends and developments in Southeast Asia and its wider geostrategic and economic environment.

The Institute's research programmes are the Regional Economic Studies (RES, including ASEAN and APEC), Regional Strategic and Political Studies (RSPS), and Regional Social and Cultural Studies (RSCS).

**ISEAS Publishing**, an established academic press, has issued almost 2,000 books and journals. It is the largest scholarly publisher of research about Southeast Asia from within the region. ISEAS Publishing works with many other academic and trade publishers and distributors to disseminate important research and analyses from and about Southeast Asia to the rest of the world.

**Saw Swee-Hock**

**The  
Population  
of Malaysia  
Second Edition**



INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES  
Singapore

First published in Singapore in 2015 by  
ISEAS Publishing  
Institute of Southeast Asian Studies  
30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace  
Pasir Panjang  
Singapore 119614

E-mail: [publish@iseas.edu.sg](mailto:publish@iseas.edu.sg)  
Website: [bookshop.iseas.edu.sg](http://bookshop.iseas.edu.sg)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

© 2015 Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore

*The responsibility for facts and opinions in this publication rests exclusively with the authors and their interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views or the policy of the publishers or their supporters.*

---

#### ISEAS Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

---

Saw Swee-Hock, 1931–  
The Population of Malaysia.  
Second edition.  
1. Demography—Malaysia.  
2. Malaysia—Population.  
I. Title  
HB3644.6 A3S371      2015

ISBN: 978-981-4620-24-6 (soft cover)  
ISBN: 978-981-4620-36-9 (hard cover)  
ISBN: 978-981-4620-25-3 (E-book PDF)

---

Typeset by International Typesetters Pte Ltd  
Printed in Singapore by Mainland Press Pte Ltd

# Contents

|                                    |           |
|------------------------------------|-----------|
| <i>List of Tables</i>              | ix        |
| <i>List of Figures</i>             | xiii      |
| <i>Foreword</i>                    | xv        |
| <i>Preface</i>                     | xvii      |
| <b>1. Introduction</b>             | <b>1</b>  |
| Geographical Setting               | 1         |
| Historical Background              | 3         |
| Economy                            | 5         |
| Demographic Data                   | 8         |
| Administrative Division            | 12        |
| <b>2. External Migration</b>       | <b>15</b> |
| Introduction                       | 15        |
| Chinese Migration                  | 16        |
| Indian Migration                   | 24        |
| Malay Migration                    | 36        |
| <b>3. Internal Migration</b>       | <b>43</b> |
| Lifetime Inter-State Migration     | 44        |
| Five-Year Inter-State Migration    | 49        |
| Migration Origin and Destination   | 51        |
| Five-Year Inter-District Migration | 55        |
| Urban and Rural Migration          | 57        |

---

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <b>4. Ethnic and Religious Patterns</b>          | <b>61</b>  |
| Ethnic Composition                               | 62         |
| Regional Ethnic Composition                      | 65         |
| Religious Composition                            | 69         |
| Religious Composition of Ethnic Groups           | 71         |
| Regional Religious Composition                   | 73         |
| <b>5. Population Growth and Distribution</b>     | <b>78</b>  |
| Overall Population Growth                        | 79         |
| Regional Population Growth                       | 83         |
| Urban/Rural Population Growth                    | 86         |
| Regional Population Distribution                 | 88         |
| Regional Distribution of Foreign-born Population | 93         |
| Urban/Rural Population Distribution              | 95         |
| <b>6. Population Structure</b>                   | <b>102</b> |
| Sex Composition                                  | 102        |
| Age Structure                                    | 105        |
| Educational Attainment                           | 111        |
| Citizenship Pattern                              | 114        |
| Foreign-Born Population                          | 118        |
| <b>7. Nuptiality Trends and Patterns</b>         | <b>123</b> |
| Marriage Customs and Laws                        | 123        |
| Age at First Marriage                            | 127        |
| Marital Status Composition                       | 133        |
| Proportion Single                                | 134        |
| Proportion Divorced                              | 138        |
| <b>8. Fertility Trends and Differentials</b>     | <b>142</b> |
| Antinatalist Programme                           | 143        |
| Pronatalist Programme                            | 148        |
| Fertility Trends                                 | 150        |
| Ethnic Fertility Differentials                   | 155        |
| Regional Fertility Differentials                 | 158        |

---

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <b>9. Mortality Trends and Differentials</b> | <b>161</b> |
| General Mortality Trends                     | 161        |
| Mortality Pattern by Age                     | 164        |
| Causes of Death                              | 165        |
| Life Expectancy                              | 167        |
| Ethnic Mortality Differentials               | 170        |
| <br>   |            |
| <b>10. Labour Force</b>                      | <b>172</b> |
| Concepts and Definitions                     | 172        |
| Labour Force Participation Rates             | 174        |
| Industrial Structure                         | 181        |
| Occupational Pattern                         | 186        |
| <br>   |            |
| <b>11. Future Population Trends</b>          | <b>191</b> |
| Introduction                                 | 191        |
| Future Population Growth                     | 192        |
| Future Age Structure                         | 194        |
| Future Ethnic Composition                    | 196        |
| <br>   |            |
| <i>Bibliography</i>                          | 199        |
| <br>   |            |
| <i>Index</i>                                 | 209        |





## **List of Tables**

|     |  |    |
|-----|--|----|
| 1.1 | Topics Covered in the Population and Housing Censuses of Four Pan-Malaysia Censuses, 1970–2000     | 11 |
| 2.1 | Annual Chinese Indentured Immigrants, 1881–1914  | 19 |
| 2.2 | Annual Chinese Immigrants and Emigrants, 1881–1938   | 23 |
| 2.3 | Annual Indian Indentured Immigrants, 1880–1910   | 27 |
| 2.4 | Annual Indian Kangany-Recruited Immigrants, 1899–1907  | 28 |
| 2.5 | Annual Indian Assisted Immigrants, 1908–38   | 30 |
| 2.6 | Annual Indian Assisted Immigrants by Type, 1908–38   | 31 |
| 2.7 | Annual Indian Independent Immigrants, 1880–1939  | 33 |
| 2.8 | Annual Indian Immigrants and Emigrants, 1880–1939  | 35 |
| 2.9 | Annual Malay Arrivals and Departures to the Netherlands East Indies, 1923–40                       | 41 |
| 3.1 | Lifetime Inter-State Migration, 1980–2000  | 45 |
| 3.2 | Percentage of Inter-State Migration to State Population, 1980–2000                                 | 48 |
| 3.3 | Five-Year Inter-State Migration, 1995–2000   | 50 |
| 3.4 | Five-Year Inter-State In-Migrants to Major Net Gaining States by State of Origin, 1995–2000        | 52 |
| 3.5 | Five-Year Inter-State Out-Migrants from Major Net Losing States by State of Destination, 1995–2000 | 54 |
| 3.6 | Five-Year Inter-District Migrants within State by State, 1975–2000                                 | 56 |
| 3.7 | Five-Year Urban and Rural Migration, 1986–2000   | 58 |
| 3.8 | Percentage Distribution of Internal Migrants by Type and Reason, 1980                              | 59 |
| 4.1 | Distribution of Total Population by Ethnic Group, 1970 and 1980                                    | 63 |

|      |  |     |
|------|--|-----|
| 4.2  | Distribution of Citizen Population by Ethnic Group, 1991–2010                                | 64  |
| 4.3  | Percentage Distribution of Citizen Population by Ethnic Group, Region and State, 2010        | 65  |
| 4.4  | Distribution of Bumiputera Citizen Population in Sabah and Sarawak by Sub-Ethnic Group, 2010 | 67  |
| 4.5  | Distribution of Citizen Population by Ethnic Group and Urban/Rural Area, 2010                | 68  |
| 4.6  | Distribution of Total Population by Religion, 1980–2010                                      | 70  |
| 4.7  | Distribution of Citizen Population by Religion and Ethnic Group, 2010                        | 72  |
| 4.8  | Percentage Distribution of Total Population by Religion and State, 2010                      | 74  |
| 4.9  | Percentage Distribution of Total Population by Religion and Urban/Rural Area, 2010           | 76  |
| 5.1  | Total Population Growth, 1960–2010   | 79  |
| 5.2  | Components of Total Population Growth, 1970–2010   | 81  |
| 5.3  | Growth of Citizen Population by Ethnic Group, 1991–2010                                      | 82  |
| 5.4  | Population Growth by Region, 1960–2010   | 84  |
| 5.5  | Annual Rate of Population Growth in West Malaysian States, 1970–2010                         | 85  |
| 5.6  | Population Growth by Urban/Rural Area, 1970–2010   | 87  |
| 5.7  | Population Distribution and Density by Region and State, 2010                                | 89  |
| 5.8  | Percentage Distribution of Population by State, 1970–2010                                    | 91  |
| 5.9  | Distribution of Foreign-Born Population by State and Country of Birth, 2000                  | 94  |
| 5.10 | Distribution of Population by Urban/Rural Area, 1970–2010                                    | 96  |
| 5.11 | Percentage Distribution of Population in Each State by Urban/Rural Area, 2010                | 97  |
| 5.12 | Distribution of Urban Centres and Population by Class Size, 1980–2000                        | 98  |
| 5.13 | Population in Top Urban Centres, 1991 and 2000   | 99  |
| 6.1  | Distribution of Total Population by Sex, 1970–2010   | 103 |
| 6.2  | Distribution of Total Population by Citizenship, Broad Age Group and Sex, 2010               | 104 |
| 6.3  | Distribution of Citizen Population by Sex and Ethnic Group, 2010                             | 105 |

|      |   |     |
|------|---|-----|
| 6.4  | Distribution of Total Population by Broad Age Group, 1970–2010                                      | 106 |
| 6.5  | Distribution of Citizen Population by Broad Age Group and Ethnic Group, 2010                        | 109 |
| 6.6  | Distribution of Population Aged 6 and Over by Educational Attainment, 1970–2000                     | 112 |
| 6.7  | Percentage Distribution of Population by Educational Attainment, Citizenship and Ethnic Group, 2010 | 113 |
| 6.8  | Distribution of Population by Citizenship and State, 2010   | 116 |
| 6.9  | Distribution of Non-Citizen Population by Country of Origin and Sex, 2000                           | 117 |
| 6.10 | Distribution of Population by Local-Born and Foreign-Born, 1970–2000                                | 119 |
| 6.11 | Distribution of Foreign-Born Population by Country of Birth, 1970–2000                              | 121 |
| 7.1  | Muslim Marriages and Non-Muslim Marriages, 2002–09  | 127 |
| 7.2  | Singulate Mean Age at First Marriage by Sex and Urban/Rural Area, 1980–2010                         | 129 |
| 7.3  | Singulate Mean Age at First Marriage by Sex, Ethnic Group and Citizenship, 1991–2010                | 132 |
| 7.4  | Distribution of Population Aged 15 and Over by Marital Status and Sex, 1980–2010                    | 133 |
| 7.5  | Proportion of Single Persons Aged 15 and Over by Sex, Ethnic Group and Citizenship, 1991 and 2010   | 134 |
| 7.6  | Proportion of Single Persons by Sex and Age Group, 1980–2010  | 136 |
| 7.7  | Proportion of Single Persons Aged 15 and Over by Sex and State, 2010                                | 137 |
| 7.8  | Proportion of Divorced Persons Aged 15 and Over by Sex, Ethnic Group and Citizenship, 1991–2010     | 138 |
| 7.9  | Proportion of Divorced Persons Aged 15 and Over by Sex and State, 2010                              | 139 |
| 8.1  | Family Planning Acceptors by Agency, 1967–83  | 147 |
| 8.2  | Annual Average Births and Crude Birth Rates, 1970–2011  | 151 |
| 8.3  | Births and Total Fertility Rate, 1991–2012  | 152 |
| 8.4  | Age-Specific Fertility Rate, 2001–10  | 154 |
| 8.5  | Relative Contribution of Each Age Group to Gross Total Fertility, 2001–10                           | 155 |
| 8.6  | Total Fertility Rate for Three Main Ethnic Groups, 1991–2011  | 156 |

|      |   |     |
|------|---|-----|
| 8.7  | Total Fertility Rate by State, 2011   | 158 |
| 9.1  | Annual Average Deaths and Crude Death Rates, 1970–2011  | 162 |
| 9.2  | Infant and Neonatal Mortality Rates, 1970–2011  | 163 |
| 9.3  | Age-Specific Death Rates by Sex, 2011   | 164 |
| 9.4  | Principal Causes of Death, 1988–2008  | 166 |
| 9.5  | Abridged Life Table for Malaysian Males, 2011   | 168 |
| 9.6  | Life Expectancy at Birth by Sex, 1991–2012  | 169 |
| 9.7  | Life Expectancy at Birth by Sex and Ethnic Group,<br>1991–2012  | 170 |
| 10.1 | Labour Force Participation Rates by Population Aged 15–64<br>by Sex and Citizenship, 1980–2010                                | 175 |
| 10.2 | Age-Specific Labour Force Participation Rates by Sex,<br>1980–2010  | 177 |
| 10.3 | Age-Specific Labour Force Participation Rates of Citizen<br>Population by Sex and Ethnic Group, 2010                          | 180 |
| 10.4 | Distribution of Employed Persons Aged 15–64 by<br>Three Broad Sectors of Economic Activity, 1980–2010                         | 182 |
| 10.5 | Distribution of Employed Persons Aged 15–64 in Top Ten<br>Industries by Sex, 2010   | 184 |
| 10.6 | Percentage Distribution of Employed Citizens Aged 15–64<br>in Top Ten Industries by Citizenship and Urban/Rural<br>Area, 2010 | 185 |
| 10.7 | Percentage Distribution of Employed Persons Aged 15–64<br>by Sex, Citizenship and Urban/Rural Area, 2010                      | 187 |
| 10.8 | Percentage Distribution of Employed Citizens Aged 15–64<br>by Ethnic Group, 2010  | 189 |
| 11.1 | Future Population, 2010–40  | 193 |
| 11.2 | Future Population by Four Broad Age Groups, 2010–40   | 194 |
| 11.3 | Future Citizen Population by Ethnic Group, 2010–40  | 196 |

# List of Figures

|      |  |     |
|------|--|-----|
| 5.1  | Changing Rank Order of States, 1970–2010                     | 92  |
| 6.1  | Age Pyramids, 1970–2010                                      | 107 |
| 6.2  | Age Pyramids of Citizen and Non-Citizen Population, 2010     | 108 |
| 6.3  | Age Pyramids of Ethnic Citizen Population, 2010              | 110 |
| 10.1 | Age-Specific Labour Force Participation Rates, 1980 and 2010 | 178 |



## Foreword

Demography is both destiny and social structure. Understanding the patterns and dynamics of population reveals key directions of social change and describes the way a society is organized. This is demonstrated amply by Professor Saw Swee-Hock's magisterial *The Population of Malaysia*.

First published in 2007, Professor Saw's account has proven an indispensable resource to policy makers and social scientists alike. It is crucial for understanding modern Malaysia, but also to bringing Malaysia effectively into comparative analyses. This last is all the more important because Malaysia is an increasingly prominent country in Southeast Asia and on the global stage. Indeed, one might suggest more broadly that the demography and social science of Southeast Asia has become more globally significant as the region develops and increases its global economic participation and leadership, and as it integrates in pursuit of both security and prosperity.

Moreover, Malaysian population dynamics are not simply a local example of general global trends. Malaysia has very specific population patterns that add distinctive purchase to comparative accounts. Its blend of internal and external migration, for example, and the relationship of this to ethnic and religious identities, labour force and economic growth, and national integration shed light on global issues but also help to give the country its own identity — and to some extent issues to address.

As Professor Saw shows, Malaysian population patterns are the result both of planning — including explicit population policies —

and unplanned social dynamics. Professor Saw situates these in historical and indeed geographical perspectives that are both useful. Understanding the ways in which Malay, Indian and Chinese populations have interrelated with each other and the land and the organisation of production and trade over centuries is crucial background to understanding not just ethnic or religious patterns today, but basic demographic patterns like population distribution and labour force participation.

In its new addition, Professor Saw's account remains both an authoritative source and an accessible overview. It has been brought up to date with new data and new insights. I am happy to recommend it.

*Craig Calhoun*

*Director*

*London School of Economics and Political Science*

*September 2014*



## Preface

This book, a project of the Malaysia Study Programme in ISEAS, is a sequel to my earlier book on *The Population of Peninsular Malaysia* published in 1988. The book was based on materials derived from the early population censuses and other related sources pertaining to the eleven states in West Malaysia. It was not possible for me to include Sabah and Sarawak at that time because of the paucity of comparable data for these two states in East Malaysia. The situation improved significantly following the formation of Malaysia on 16 September 1963 when a wide range of pan-Malaysia statistics began to be made available from the four Population Censuses conducted in 1970, 1980, 1991 and 2000 and from other sources dealing with births and deaths, marriages and divorces, labour force, etc. The emergence of favourable conditions have allowed me to complete in 2006 an entirely different book covering the whole country, and hence *The Population of Malaysia* as the new title.

The second edition of the book has been substantially revised and expanded to take advantage of the new data that can now be obtained from the latest Population Census conducted in 2010 as well as from other relevant sources since the original version was published. One of the major changes introduced was the splitting of the original chapter on Fertility and Mortality into two separate chapters, each subject being discussed in greater detail as more information is at our disposal. The last chapter on Future Population Trends has also been revamped to include the results of the latest official population projections. The chapter on External Migration, a topic that has a lasting impact on the population dynamics of the multi-ethnic country, has been enlarged to include more materials. Finally, a Foreword written

by Craig Calhoun has now been included. I hope readers of the new edition of the book will find it more useful and illuminating.

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of numerous institutions and individuals for helping me to access the research materials. My thanks go to the University of Malaya Library, the National University of Singapore Library, ISEAS Library and the London School of Economics Library where I visited during my frequent trips to London. My special thanks go to the Malaysian Department of Statistics for willingly supplying the necessary statistics and information. I would like to thank Tan Chin Tiong, Director of ISEAS, for his support and hospitality, and Ng Kok Kiong, Head of ISEAS Publications Unit, for overseeing the publication of the book. To Craig Calhoun, Director of the London School of Economics, my grateful thanks for penning the Foreword. Needless to say, any opinions and shortcomings in the book are my own.

*Saw Swee-Hock*  
*August 2014*