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Population Policies and Programmes in Singapore

Second Edition

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Saw Swee-Hock

**Population
Policies and
Programmes
in Singapore
Second Edition**

First published in Singapore in 2016 by
ISEAS Publishing
30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace
Singapore 119614

E-mail: publish@iseas.edu.sg
Website: bookshop.iseas.edu.sg

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ISEAS Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Saw Swee-Hock, 1931–

Population Policies and Programmes in Singapore.

Second edition.

1. Birth control—Singapore.
2. Fertility, Human—Singapore.
3. Singapore—Population policy
4. Singapore—Population

I. Title

HB3645 A3S272 2016

2016

ISBN: 978-981-47-6219-9 (soft cover)

ISBN: 978-981-47-6231-1 (hard cover)

ISBN: 978-981-47-6220-5 (E-book PDF)

Typeset by International Typesetters Pte Ltd

Printed in Singapore by Markono Print Media Pte Ltd

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Foreword

All countries are shaped by demography. Few, however, are as aware in which demography shapes their destiny as Singapore has been at every phase of its independent existence. Initially, Singapore's leaders focused on reducing fertility as a key element in its development strategy. A comprehensive population control programme was introduced and effectively administered, as described in the second edition of the authoritative book on *Population Policies and Programmes in Singapore*, by Saw Swee-Hock. Indeed, so effective was the population control effort that within a few decades, Singapore switched to being concerned about low fertility and began to introduce some of the world's strongest pronatalist policies.

Few, if any, other countries have moved as rapidly from efforts to limit fertility to pronatalism. That Singapore did so is testimony not only to the success of its early efforts, but also to the success of economic development itself. For family size and fertility behaviour change not only in response to policy but also to economic conditions. And fertility behaviour becomes a part of the broader culture and social structures. This is one of the reasons Singapore has found it harder to increase fertility in recent years than it did to reduce it earlier. Singapore achieved very positive increase in gender equality that affected everything from marriage patterns to women's work. It developed a culture of conscious choice about fertility and of high investments seeking high achievements from small numbers of offspring.

All this is especially interesting because Singapore was among the global pioneers in integrating family planning into the pursuit of

economic growth. It became a model for the later, larger-scale and more draconian policies of the People's Republic of China.

In this book, Professor Saw reproduces a 1986 speech from Goh Chok Tong that uses the metaphor of a "long march" drawn from modern Chinese history. Singapore has seen two long marches. The first began with a struggle for survival and became a struggle for prosperity as an independent nation. The second was to determine what kind of "mature" country Singapore wanted to be, shifting gears from managing the challenges of pure necessity to making choices based on values. When Goh gave his speech, the second long march was prospective; Singapore was twenty-one years old and just embarking on re-assessment of its policies as it entered a stage of greater maturity. But now, after Singapore's recent magnificent fiftieth anniversary, we can see that the second long march becomes a continuing series of policy re-evaluations and social change.

As Professor Saw shows in this book, family planning and population dynamics more generally have been central to every phase of Singapore's history. Successful family planning was key to Singapore's remarkable growth during the first long march. A shift from limiting to supporting fertility was basic to the next long march. But this has not ended history! It has given Singapore still more choices to make.

The choices before Singapore are not just about numbers of people, fertility, or age structure. Singapore has a new and different relationship to migration, to cultural diversity, and to investing in the education of its peoples. But to understand each of these, as well as the continued basic question of prosperity, understanding population patterns and dynamics remain crucial. And that understanding is not just technical to be found in statistical analysis of current data. It is also necessarily informed by an understanding of Singapore's history, including the history of its population policies. Professor Saw has provided an independent guide to that history, and to making informed choices for the future.

Professor Craig Calhoun
Director
London School of Economics
May 2016

Preface

Population Policies and Programmes in Singapore is a vastly expanded version of my earlier book published some twenty-five years ago by Oxford University Press under the old title of *Population Control for Zero Growth in Singapore*. This revised edition of the book has been divided into two distinct sections — Part One: Anti-natalist Period and Part Two: Pronatalist Period. The former deals with the period when the main concern was the need to lower the high and above-replacement fertility in the early years, and the latter covers the more recent period when the focus of attention was centred on preventing fertility from continuing to move forward at a level too low below-replacement fertility. The chapters included in Part One have been reproduced, with some revisions, from my earlier book, while Part Two contains the new chapters and appendices.

The enlarged book has therefore been structured in such a manner as to present a comprehensive account of the initiatives undertaken by the government to influence the course of fertility, and hence the rate of population growth, in the island state of Singapore during the last four decades or so. The book may be viewed as a case study of the public policy of a country in the area of population with regard to fertility and population growth. Hopefully, the book will enable the people of Singapore to comprehend the fundamental population issue of the day and to recognize the rather low below-replacement fertility, coupled with its adverse consequences, that will persist during their whole lifetime. More specifically, the book will be useful to married couples with children or planning to have babies since it constitutes a convenient source of detailed information on all the existing pronatalist incentives, financial or otherwise, that they are entitled to claim.

In the preparation of the two editions of the book, I was fortunate to receive the valuable assistance of many organizations and individuals. My thanks go to the Government Statistics Department, the then Family Planning and Population Board, and the Family Planning Association for supplying me with statistical data and other relevant materials. My research has been enormously facilitated by the conducive facilities offered at the London School of Economics Library, the National University of Singapore Library, and ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute. I wish to thank Mr K. Kesavapany, Director of ISEAS, for his generous hospitality and for providing me with a research assistant, Mr Benjamin Loh, while I was deeply immersed in writing the latest edition of the book. My thanks are also due to Mrs Triena Ong, Managing Editor of ISEAS Publications Unit, for her tireless effort in bringing out this book so expeditiously. Finally, I am indebted to my wife, Cheng Siok Hwa, for reading and commenting on the manuscripts of both editions. Needless to say, any opinions and shortcomings in the book are entirely my own.

Saw Swee-Hock
February 2005

The second edition of the book has been brought out to incorporate the new developments in population policies and programmes that have taken place in Singapore since the original version was published some twelve years ago. Seventeen chapters have been included in this edition, with fourteen updated chapters and three new chapters. The new ones are Chapter 15 Immigration Policies and Programmes, Chapter 16 Demographic Trends and Consequences, and Chapter 17 Epilogue. A Foreword by Craig Calhoun has also been included.

I would like to thank Tan Chin Tiong, Director of ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute for his support and hospitality, and Ng Kok Kiong, Head of Publications Unit at the Institute, for overseeing the publication of the book. To Craig Calhoun, Director of the London School of Economics, my grateful thanks for penning the foreword.

Saw Swee-Hock
April 2016