T. Shamsul Bahrin

The growth and distribution of the Indonesian population in Malaya

In: *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 123 (1967), no: 2, Leiden, 267-286

This PDF-file was downloaded from <http://www.kitlv-journals.nl>

THE GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE INDONESIAN POPULATION IN MALAYA*

Malaya¹ has always been traditionally regarded as the country of the Malays, yet immigrants form the majority of its population. The immigrants, in the main, originated from the two crowded Asian sub-continent of India and China, and also from the neighbouring islands which now form the political territory of the Republic of Indonesia. Whereas much has been written about the Chinese and Indian population in Malaya, the Indonesian population in the peninsula has been comparatively ignored. Because of the lack of literature on this group of immigrants and because of their close and strong cultural and ethnic relationships with the local and indigenous Malays, many people have wrongly assumed that the majority of the so-called Malay population in Malaya are either Indonesian immigrants or direct descendants of such immigrants. It is thus the aim of this paper to examine the size and growth of the Indonesian population in this country as far as records and data allow.²

* The paper was written using the following sources:

- (a) various printed census reports of Malaya and also the 1930 Census of Netherlands India whose figures on the Indonesian population in Malaya was virtually based on statistics provided by Malayan officials.
- (b) information collected through field interviews conducted in a number of Indonesian settlements in West Malaya.
- (c) the few 'incidental comments' on this community in the various literature in English and Malay, most of which was unreliable.

No attempt has been made to examine the Dutch and Indonesian sources on the subject, or to collect the data which may be available in unpublished sources (archives etc.).

¹ In this study the term Malaya refers to the states in the Malay Peninsula including Singapore (see Fig. One) and the term Malaysian, unless otherwise stated, refers to those people belonging to the Malay race.

² There is no doubt that the peoples of insular Southeast Asia have moved extensively within the region and that movements of people, both temporary and permanent, have been going on since early times between the present political territories of Malaya and Indonesia, the most obvious case being the colonization of Negri Sembilan by the Minangkabau of Sumatra. The extent of such early movements is unknown and to avoid guesswork in their numbers etc. this study is limited to the 19th and 20th centuries only. It is the writer's contention that the earlier movements were bilateral in nature and small in extent.

Fig. 1.
Malaya: Political divisions during British administration.

Before we proceed to discuss the growth of the Indonesian population in Malaya, one brief comment must be made on the sources and availability of literature and statistics on the subject. In this study the bulk of the data is derived from the various censuses and other population counts conducted in the area. Although statistics of some form are available from the first quarter of the 19th century, at least for the then colony of Singapore, the first Malayan-wide census was not

taken until 1911, and even this is by no means completely adequate for our purposes. Some of the major faults of the 1911 census were not corrected until 1931. It is worthwhile noting that this study is made in the light of some relevant limitations in the source materials used.³

19th Century Indonesian Population in Malaya.

One of the earliest, if not the earliest, reliable population count ever to be made in any of the component states of Malaya was conducted in Singapore in the year 1824, approximately five years after the official establishment of that territory as a British Crown Colony. In that count, a total of 1,851 Indonesians was enumerated as residing in that island. They included both the permanent as well as the temporary or transitory residents. The Indonesians in Singapore in that year were either Bugis or Balinese in origin. Another population count made in 1825 showed that the Indonesian population in Singapore had declined to 1,746. It was at this particular count that the Javanese were enumerated for the first time in that island. That year they totalled only 38 persons. By 1836, the total Javanese population in Singapore had increased to 903 and the total Indonesian population was 2,865. The interesting feature to observe from these early counts was the fluctuations in the size of the Bugis and Balinese communities (see Table One). These fluctuations could probably be explained by the fact that since the majority of the early Bugis settlers in Singapore were traders, they could have gone elsewhere when some of the counts were made.

TABLE ONE.
INDONESIAN POPULATION IN SINGAPORE, 1824—1836.

Community	1824	1825	1828	1832	1836
Bugis & Balinese	1,851	1,708	1,262	1,726	1,962
Javanese	—	38	355	644	903
TOTAL INDONESIANS	1,851	1,746	1,617	2,370	2,865
TOTAL MALAYSIANS	6,431	6,872	8,201	9,585	12,497
TOTAL ALL RACES	10,683	11,851	14,885	19,715	29,984

Source: H. Mariott, "The Peoples of Singapore", pp. 355-356.

³ The differences and shortcomings of the various census-takings are described when discussing the various intercensal changes in the Indonesian population in Malaya.

By 1849, the Indonesian population in Singapore had increased to 4,836 which included 769 Boyanese. When the Boyanese first arrived in Singapore is not known, but it has been suggested that they could have come *circa* late 1820s.⁴ Apart from the newly-included Boyanese, the Indonesian population in Singapore still comprised the Javanese, Balinese and Bugis, the latter being the biggest single community and the Javanese a close second (see Table Two). However, by 1881 when the Indonesian population in Singapore had increased to 10,050 the Javanese had outstripped the Bugis in number and they formed over 50 per cent of the total. In that same year even the Boyanese had slightly outnumbered the Bugis population in that island.

TABLE TWO.
INDONESIAN POPULATION IN SINGAPORE, 1849—1881.

Community	1849	1871	1881
Balinese	149	—	—
Boyanese	769	1,634	2,111
Bugis	2,269	1,996	2,054
Javanese	1,649	3,240	5,885
TOTAL INDONESIANS	4,836	6,870	10,050
TOTAL MALAYSIANS	17,036	26,148	33,102
TOTAL ALL RACES	52,891	97,111	139,208

Source: H. Marriott, "The Peoples of Singapore", p. 357-358.

In the other two parts of the Straits Settlements, Penang and Malacca, the Indonesian population was not as numerous as in Singapore. In 1871, the Indonesian totals in Penang and Malacca were 4,683 and 590 respectively, thus bringing the grand total in the Straits Settlements in 1871 to 12,143. By 1881, the Indonesians in Malacca increased to 673 but in Penang there was a marked decrease to 1,805. In both these Settlements, the Javanese were the most numerous of the Indonesian peoples. Between 1871 and 1881, the Indonesian population in these three Settlements increased by 480 persons, a relatively negligible figure.

⁴ Abdullah bin Malim Baginda, "The Boyanese in Singapore", (unpublished Thesis), University of Malaya (Singapore), 1959, p. 22.

Thus, even though the migration of the Indonesians has been recorded since early British administration in the Straits Settlements, their size was small and their growth slow compared to their Chinese counterparts.

In 1891, the area of the census count was extended to the Federated Malay States. The total known Indonesian population in that year was 16,524 in the Straits Settlements and only 3,788 in the Federated Malay States, giving a total of 20,307 (see Table Three). Apart from the numerical increases in Penang and Singapore, not many changes had taken place in the other features of the Indonesian population in the Straits Settlements.

TABLE THREE.

INDONESIAN POPULATION IN THE FEDERATED MALAY STATES
AND STRAITS SETTLEMENTS, 1891 & 1901.

State	1891	1901
Singapore	12,859	12,232
Penang	3,060	1,897
Malacca	605	407
STRAITS SETTLEMENTS	16,524	14,536
Perak	1,348	2,373
Selangor	1,416	4,442
Negri Sembilan	463	849
Pahang	556	505
FEDERATED MALAY STATES	3,783	8,169
TOTAL INDONESIANS	20,307	22,705
MALAYSIANS	445,227	528,252

Source: Census Reports of F.M.S. and S.S., 1891 and 1901.

Table Four gives the 1891 and 1901 Indonesian population in the Federated Malay States and Straits Settlements according to their island or regional communities. In both years the Javanese community formed over 70 per cent of the total Indonesian population in Malaya. The Boyanese were a poor second. All the communities showed a marked preponderance of males over females.

TABLE FOUR.
INDONESIAN POPULATION IN THE FEDERATED MALAY STATES
AND STRAITS SETTLEMENTS, BY COMMUNITY AND SEX,
1891—1901.

Community	1891			1901		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Achinese	621	456	165	1,485	1,301	181
Batak	228	124	104	228	—	—
Boyanes	3,161	2,223	938	3,509	2,307	1,202
Bugis	2,168	—	—	1,133	600	533
Javanese	14,239	—	—	17,578	12,557	5,025

Source: Census Reports of the F.M.S. and S.S., 1891 and 1901.

In the light of the available data, it can be said that by the beginning of the 20th century, the known Indonesian population in Malaya was small. Even in the absence of statistics for the other states not yet under British Administration, i.e. the Unfederated Malay States, we can exclude Kedah, Kelantan, Trengganu and Perlis as having any significant number of Indonesians. The only state that has to be considered is Johore, which in later years, proved to be an important destination for those Indonesians who migrated to Malaya. The problem here is whether this attraction was of any significance before 1900? Probably it was not, because until 1901, the majority of the Javanese migrants in Malaya were not smallholders but estate labourers and such opportunities could not have been extensive in Johore at that time. In fact, given the rates of economic development of Perak and Selangor as an attraction to immigrants from Indonesia, Johore could not have had more than a few thousand Indonesians in 1901, and even at the most liberal estimate, this could not have been more than double the 1901 Indonesian population of Selangor which totalled 4,400. Thus, numerically the migration of the Indonesians into Malaya is a recent phenomenon.

A very rough indication of the recency of this movement can be shown by an examination of the data of the year of first arrival of Indonesian immigrants as enumerated at the 1947 census (see Table Five). In that year a total of 102,545 "Other Malaysians", virtually all of whom were Indonesians, were reported to be direct migrants from Indonesia. This figure represented one-third of the total Indo-

nesian population in Malaya in 1947. Out of this total more than 50 per cent arrived in Malaya between 1911 and 1930 and another 31 per cent between 1931 and 1947. Only 13 per cent were recorded to have arrived earlier than 1910. However, in using these statistics it must be "remembered that mortality will certainly have hit the earlier immigrant cohorts more heavily than the more recent groups".⁵ It is also worth noting that the periods of maximum arrivals coincided very closely with the expansion of smallholdings and government aided rice-cultivation programmes to which sectors the majority of the Indonesian immigrants were attracted. In view of this, it is probably true to say that the migration of the Indonesians into Malaya was much greater during the 20th century than it was ever before.

TABLE FIVE.
INDONESIAN IMMIGRANTS IN MALAYA 1947
BY YEAR OF FIRST ARRIVAL.

Year	Number	Per Cent
1900 and earlier	3,369	3.3
1901—1910	9,931	9.7
1911—1920	26,247	25.6
1921—1930	27,472	26.8
1931—1935	8,515	8.4
1936—1940	13,211	12.9
1941—1947	10,238	9.9
Not Stated	3,371	3.3
TOTAL	102,454	99.9

Source: 1947, Census Report of Malaya, pp. 344-352.

Twentieth century growth and distribution of the Indonesian population in Malaya.

At the time of the first Malayan-wide census in 1911, the total number of Indonesians was recorded as 117,600.⁶ Compared with the 1901 figures, this showed a very remarkable increase especially in the States of Perak and Selangor. The 1901 Indonesian population of 2,372 in Perak had increased to 31,700 in 1911 and the comparable

⁵ T. E. Smith, *Population Growth in Malaya*, Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, 1952.

⁶ The total Indonesian population given in the 1901, 1911 and 1921 Censuses did not include the Sumatrans who were enumerated as Malay.

Fig. 2.
Malaya: Growth of Indonesian population by State, 1911-1957.

figures for Selangor were 4,442 in 1901 and 17,100 in 1911. In these two States the rapid increases were probably directly related to the above-mentioned agricultural development that took place there during the first decade of this century. In Negri Sembilan, Pahang and the Straits Settlements some increases were experienced, but not to the extent of Perak and Selangor. Similar comparisons, however, cannot, for lack of earlier statistics, be made on Johore, which by 1911 had the largest Indonesian population in any one State totalling 37,000. In other Unfederated Malay States the Indonesian population was small (see Table Six).

The Indonesian population in Malaya increased from 117,600 in

1911 to 342,600 in 1957, or in short, they had more than doubled in a matter of 46 years. This rate of increase differs from State to State and from one inter-censal period to another (see Figure 2). Between 1911 and 1921, the Indonesian population in Malaya increased by 52,600 representing a growth of 44.6 per cent. The increase was probably largely due to direct migration rather than to natural increase for, to quote an earlier figure (see Table Five) the number of people who were enumerated in 1947 as having first arrived in Malaya from Indonesia between 1911 and 1921 was 26,247 and the immigration of Indonesians into Malaya has been reported to have gone on steadily throughout the first eight years of the decade and did not appear to have been appreciably affected by the war. Between 1918 and 1920 as a result of the rising prices of rice and the declining prices of rubber, the flow of the immigration into Malaya was generally affected, and, in some areas, even drove some of the immigrant settlers who were entirely dependent on their rubber smallholdings back to their homeland.⁷ The number involved, however, was probably small compared to those that arrived during the earlier years of that decade.

TABLE SIX.

INDONESIAN POPULATION GROWTH IN MALAYA, 1911-1957.

State	Population in thousand					Percentage change			
	1911	1921	1931	1947	1957	1911-1921	1921-1931	1931-1947	1947-1957
Singapore	17.7	21.4	27.5	48.4	61.4	21.0	28.6	57.0	41.2
Penang	4.8	3.3	2.7	3.0	2.8	-32.1	18.4	11.0	- 6.6
Malacca	3.2	2.8	3.1	5.4	5.1	-12.6	12.5	73.0	- 5.5
Perak	31.7	41.4	54.7	59.9	49.5	30.5	32.3	9.5	-17.4
Selangor	17.1	25.4	56.0	80.9	92.9	48.5	120.5	44.4	14.7
N. Sembilan	3.1	3.0	5.6	6.4	7.0	- 2.9	88.4	14.1	9.8
Pahang	0.9	3.7	5.6	3.7	4.3	311.0	48.4	-33.2	14.5
Johore	37.0	66.6	120.2	101.6	113.5	80.0	80.5	-15.5	11.7
Kedah	1.8	2.8	4.5	3.9	5.1	55.6	58.7	-12.8	30.0
Kelantan	0.2	0.7	0.5	0.43	4.48	250.0	-38.9	- 6.1	- 5.6
Trengganu	0.01	0.1	0.5	0.4	0.6	900.0	294.7	-11.7	38.2
Perlis	0.05	0.03	0.07	0.08	0.1	-40.0	153.6	12.7	61.0
TOTAL	117.8	170.2	280.6	309.1	342.6	44.6	64.8	10.2	10.8

Source: Malayan Census Reports, 1911-1957.

⁷ J. E. Nathan, Malaya, 1921 Census of Population, p. 20.

During this period, 1911—1921, the numerical increase was highest in the State of Johore with a total increase of 29,600, followed by Perak and Selangor with 9,700 and 8,300 respectively. Elsewhere the numerical increase was small and in States like Penang, Malacca, Negri Sembilan and Perlis, decreases were experienced but not on such a scale as to have any marked effect on the total Malayan figures. In terms of percentage increase, Pahang headed the list with 311 per cent, but this was mainly due to its small initial total which was susceptible to great percentage changes even though the actual number involved was small. Among the four States that had large Indonesian populations, Johore was the most important with an increase of 80 per cent over the 1911 total, followed by Selangor, Perak and Singapore whose respective figures were 48.5, 30.5 and 21 per cent.

In 1931 the total Indonesian population in Malaya was 280,000, representing a numerical increase of 106,400 or 64.8 per cent over the 1921 figures. During this period the number of people who were enumerated in 1947 as having arrived from Indonesia was 27,472. Comparing the numerical increase with the number of recorded arrivals, one would tend to conclude that the greater part of the increase during the 1921—1931 inter-censal period was due to natural increases. This need not necessarily be so because there is a significant difference in the manner and procedure of enumeration between the two censuses in question.

At the 1921 and earlier censuses, nearly all the Sumatran population in Malaya were classified as Malays, and not Indonesian, thus having the direct effect of reducing the earlier totals of the Indonesians in Malaya. In 1931, this error was corrected, and the number of Sumatrans then recorded in Malaya was 40,000. If we were to exclude this figure from the 1931 total to make it somewhat comparable to the 1921 figures, then the numerical increase would be reduced to 70,400 or 41.4 per cent compared to an increase of 44.6 per cent between 1911 and 1921.

The somewhat different principle adopted in classifying the Sumatran population makes it impossible to compare with much accuracy the changes in the Indonesian population in the various States in Malaya. The effect of this discrepancy is illustrated by the much exaggerated increase in Selangor where the Sumatrans were quite numerous. In Johore, where the Sumatran population was quite small, the rate of increase showed very little change from the previous decade.

It must be noted here that the 1931—1947 inter-censal period can

be considered as having the fullest statistical data on the Indonesian population in Malaya. In both these censuses data were most nearly comparable. Between 1931 and 1947, the total increase in the Indonesian population in Malaya was 28,500, the least so far. The 1931—1947 increase is indeed small when we consider the fact that this period was extended to sixteen years instead of the usual ten. And during this period a total of 32,064 was reported to have arrived from Indonesia, and even this figure was more than the recorded increase for the period. This could mean that either there was a large emigration of the Indonesians from Malaya, or that more and more of these people were getting assimilated into the Malay society and thus being enumerated as Malay and not Indonesian.

In discussing this period (1931—1947), it must be remembered that it included the years of the economic crisis of the early thirties and that the years between 1939 and 1945 were characterized by the great hardships and chaos of the Second World War and the Japanese occupation in Malaya. Both situations provided little incentive for free migrations from the Indonesian islands into the Malay Peninsula. In actuality a number of the Indonesians who were then in Malaya chose to return to Indonesia, and this was probably one of the main determining factors that caused the low increase in the Indonesian population during this intercensal period. Although there are no official statistics to indicate such a movement, field interviews in the Muar, Batu Pahat and Pontian districts revealed that a number of the Banjarese and Bugis settlers in these areas, after failing to derive a substantial income from their cash-crop holdings in those years of chaos, and who did not grow their own food, emigrated to the East Coast of Sumatra to join their rice-growing friends and relatives there.⁸ In fact within Malaya itself, and because of the same reasons, there were similar movements of Indonesians and other Malaysians from the towns and smallholding districts into the rice-growing areas during this period.

At the State level the changes in the Indonesian population varied greatly. Johore for the first time had a decrease in its Indonesian population. There was a decrease of 15 per cent in Johore and about 33 per cent in Pahang. Numerically large increases took place in Selangor and Singapore, with total increases of 26,900 and 20,900

⁸ Some of the Banjarese and Bugis immigrants in Malaya did not come direct from Kalimantan or Celebes but went to Sumatra first. See Tunku Shamsul Bahrin, *Indonesians in Malaya* (unpublished thesis) University of Sheffield, 1964.

respectively. Whereas the increase in Selangor was probably largely due to the movement of Indonesians from the cash crop areas into the rice-growing districts of Selangor, the increase in Singapore could partly be the result of the importation of Javanese forced labour during the Japanese occupation.⁹ Although Malacca, with 73.6 per cent recorded the highest percentage increase in its Indonesian population for any one State during that period, numerically this was comparatively small.

It is most ironic to record that, with the further advancement of knowledge and the greater elaboration in census-taking, less information of the Indonesian population in Malaya can be derived from its latest census of 1957 than was available either in the 1931 or 1947 census. In the 1957 census Indonesia was taken as a single political territory and there was no attempt to sub-divide the Indonesian population according to their regional groups. As a result, only the size of the total Indonesian population is available and not their various regional communities; similarly birthplace is recorded simply as Indonesia and not according to the individual islands. These and other limitations have deprived us of up-to-date information on the Indonesian population in Malaya, and comparisons with information collected in past censuses have, in many ways, been made impossible.

Be that as it may, by 1957, a total of 342,600 persons in Malaya was enumerated as Indonesians, 31,500 or 10.8 per cent more than the previous census. How many of these were direct immigrants from Indonesia is not known, for in most of the Malayan migrational statistics, the figures on the arrivals of Malaysians "have been omitted because the data was found to be inaccurate".¹⁰ State-wise, Singapore recorded an increase of 13,000, Selangor 12,000 and Johore 11,000. Other States that experienced increases in their Indonesian populations during this period were Negri Sembilan, Pahang, Kedah, Trengganu and Perlis, but the number involved in each of these was small. The remaining States of Perak, Penang, Malacca and Kelantan experienced decreases. The Indonesian population in Perak in 1957 was 10,500 or 17.4 per cent lower than the 1947 totals.

The low rate of increase in the Indonesian population in Malaya during the 1947—1957 period can, to a great extent, be considered as a demographic anomaly. The Malay population during this period

⁹ Between 1942 and 1945 the Japanese had been said to have conscripted a total of 270,000 Javanese from Java to labour in various parts of Southeast Asia, including Malaya and Singapore. Only a few of them returned to Java.

¹⁰ H. Fell, 1957 Census of the Federation of Malaya, Report No. 14, p. 17.

increased by 33.3 per cent, the Chinese increased by 30.9 per cent and the Indians by 38.9 per cent. Excluding Singapore, the Malay population in Malaya during this period increased by 31.8 per cent as compared with an increase of only 5.8 per cent of the Indonesian population. This is indeed odd especially if we were to consider the fact that this was the period when most emigration from economically-crippled Indonesia to the relatively fast-developing Malaya ought to have taken place. This smallness of the volume of the immigration of the Indonesians into Malaya could only be explained by the restrictions imposed by the government on alien immigration. Emigration to Indonesia could not have been an important contributory factor to the above-noted anomaly. It could also be that many of the children born of Indonesian parents were enumerated as Malay and not Indonesian.

After 1957 there is hardly any way by which we can either estimate or ascertain the number of Indonesians in Malaya or the number that immigrated into Malaya. Due to stricter government controls on the movements of Indonesians into Malaya, it is most probable that the number of such immigrants is negligible; and this is probably more true after 1963 because of the enmity arising between the two nations on the subject of the formation of the Federation of Malaysia.¹¹

A further understanding of the size and nature of Indonesian immigration into Malaya can be made from an examination of birthplace statistics. In the majority of the Malayan censuses, birthplace statistics for the Indonesian population were grouped together with the Malays. Thus in 1947, the total of 107,235 Malaysians born in Indonesia included 5,666 persons who were classified as Malays. In the other censuses such a separation cannot be made. Be that as it may, birthplace data probably provides us with a much better picture of the actual volume of the migration of Indonesians into Malaya at any one time.

As shown in Table Seven, the increase until 1931 in the number of those Malaysians who gave Indonesia as their birthplace may be taken as evidence that there was still a net flow of new immigrants into Malaya. The decline from 1931 onwards can conversely be taken to mean that migration from Indonesia had either fallen or that there

¹¹ After that date the migration of Indonesians into Malaya takes an entirely new form. Whereas much of the Indonesians in earlier decades came for economic reasons, the post-1963 migrants came for military purposes and as political 'liberators'. These later arrivals do not and cannot have any major effect on the number and character of the existing Indonesian population in Malaya for the mortality rate among them is extremely high and those who have escaped deaths are virtually under restricted residence.

TABLE SEVEN.

MALAYA: MALAYSIANS BORN IN INDONESIA, 1911—1957.

Birth-place	1911	1921	1931	1947	1957
Kalimantan	—	13,862	21,535	7,786	—
Celebes	—	6,277	4,182	2,227	—
Java	—	77,546	89,735	63,678	—
Sumatra	—	50,525	32,628	17,291	—
Not specified	—	7,173	9,048	16,253	—
ALL INDONESIA	121,842	155,393	158,408	107,235	99,659

Source: Malayan Census Reports, 1911—1957.

was a greater emigration of Indonesians from Malaya back to Indonesia. That the latter was probably the actual case between 1931 and 1947 can be shown by comparing the birthplace statistics with the immigration or arrival statistics in Table Five. Between 1931 and 1947, a total of 41,064 new arrivals from Indonesia was recorded in Malaya, and during the same period the number of those born in Indonesia declined by 51,173. Ignoring for the moment, any immigration and emigration, and given a very liberal annual rate of mortality of 20 per thousand for this group of people, then theoretically, the 1931 figure of 158,408 would have been reduced to 107,800 in 1947. But since there was a recorded total of 31,964 new arrivals between 1931 and 1947, the total of Indonesians who were born in Indonesia in 1947 ought to have been 148,864. The difference between this calculated figure with the actual figure of those born in Indonesia was the probable volume of emigration of Indonesians from Malaya back to Indonesia between 1931 and 1947. This somewhat confirms the above noted information gathered in the West coastal districts of Johore regarding the returning of Indonesian immigrants to Indonesia during this period.

Distribution of Indonesian Population.

Table Six and Figure 3 illustrate the distribution of the Indonesian population in Malaya in 1947. They were found mainly in the west coast states where they formed three major concentrations, firstly in Krian, secondly the long stretch of coastal land from Lower Perak to Kuala Langat, and thirdly from Malacca right through Muar, Batu Pahat

Fig. 3.

Malaya: Distribution of Indonesians, 1947.

to the southernmost point of the peninsula in Pontian and Singapore.

To understand this general western-side distribution of the Indonesian population in Malaya, it is essential that we consider the economic motives and date of migrations in relation to the history of the economic development of this country.

The Indonesian migration was largely a late 19th century phenom-

enon, and this period coincided with the consolidation of British influence in Malaya. This was also a period of intensive economic growth in the country. Given the usual economic motives of the immigrants, we may expect to find the distribution of these people and the areas of development to be closely related.

Although the British governments or their agents acquired territory on the peninsula as early as the 18th century, the area involved was both small and limited. Until the third quarter of the 19th century, the areas under British control were confined to Penang Island and Province Wellesley, Singapore Island, Malacca and the Dindings. It was mainly in these territories that we saw the early arrival of the Indonesians, at least the Javanese, Bugis and Boyanese, for these were the places where the opportunities of work, trade and profits were available. Elsewhere in the peninsula, the Indonesians, excepting probably for a handful of Sumatran miners and petty traders, were few in number and extremely scattered in distribution.

Events in the 1870s brought about an end to the early British policy of reluctance to meddle in the affairs of the Native States. In a matter of a few years, the British established their control over the four States of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang which in 1896, they grouped together as the Federated Malay States (F.M.S.). Except for tin mining, which was almost entirely in Chinese hands at that time, economic activity was at first limited to the production of sugar and coffee. Attempts to expand the cultivation of coffee encouraged the beginning of the migration of Javanese labourers and coffee smallholders into the peninsula. Then, at the end of the 19th century, rubber was introduced into this country and its cultivation expanded greatly in the early years of the 20th century. The opportunities created by such rapid expansions encouraged the movements of foreigners into Malaya of whom the Indians, Chinese and Indonesians were dominant.¹² Also at the end of the 19th century the British administration began its first encouragement of rice cultivation in Malaya by draining large tracts of swampy lands for purposes of rice-growing. This scheme, the forerunner of many more, which was sited in Krian attracted the influx of a large number of Banjarese immigrants to that district. In this general pattern the British developed the various states they acquired, and it was to these states that the Indonesians, as well as the other

¹² See Tunku Shamsul Bahkin, Indonesian Labour in Malaya, *Kajian ekonomi Malaysia*, Vol. 11, No. 1, June 1965.

Asian immigrants rushed to take advantage of the expanding economic opportunities.

Then the question arises, why was Johore, a non-British ruled State, more attractive to the immigrants than the British administered Pahang? From the beginning of the 20th century, Johore, unlike some of the other Unfederated Malay States, had a progressive Malay government which did not take long to recognise and appreciate the development that was taking place in her neighbouring British-administered States and thus proceeded to adopt a policy of encouraging the opening up of land for agricultural purposes, both estates and small-holdings. In many respects, the opportunities available in Johore were greater than in some of the Federated Malay States .

Johore had the advantage of being more easily accessible from Singapore, a local centre for recruiting Javanese "contract" labourers and the port of entry for the majority of the Indonesian immigrants, than Pahang. Considering the extreme lack of efficient transportation facilities during the early decades of this century in Malaya in general, and across the Main Range in particular, Johore became a more natural choice than Pahang. The lack of interest shown in Kelantan and Trengganu may also be attributed to this factor. There were other contributory reasons, e.g. in the case of Kelantan there already existed localised overcrowding and emigration that required no influx of Indonesians to worsen the situation. The presence of a large number of Malay agriculturists and the lack of available land also made Kedah relatively unattractive to these migrants. Moreover, there was more than sufficient land for the immigrants in the more accessible western areas of Selangor, Perak and Johore to require these immigrants to go to the northern and eastern States of Malaya.

The marked coastal concentrations of Indonesians in the districts of Krian, Lower Perak and Kuala Selangor may not have been originally initiated by the government-constructed irrigation schemes but there is not the slightest doubt that the bulk of the later immigrants were attracted to these three districts by the opportunities available in these government-drained and irrigated areas. It was true that there were already Indonesian settlers residing in these localities before the launching of these schemes but they were relatively few. The heavy concentrations along the coastal districts of Johore were probably due to the collective factors of the availability of accessible land and the amenable attitudes of the local administration towards the Indonesian settlers.

Observations and conclusions.

Although the migration of the Indonesians into Malaya is an ancient affair, in most areas it was of no great numerical significance until after the establishment of British rule in Malaya, and even then the scale of this migration was small compared with that of the Chinese or Indians. It has also been established that the Indonesian immigrants settled in the West coast States of central and southern Malaya.

In view of these findings we will now attempt to examine the validity of C. A. Vlieland's over-emphasis on the contribution of the Indonesian immigrants to the growth of the Malay population in the peninsula. In 1934, he wrote that "less than 60 per cent of the present Malay population is over 40 years standing in the peninsula".¹³ He arrived at such a conclusion from the analysis that

The Malay population of the Federated Malay States in 1891 was 232,000 and a very liberal estimate of the natural increase of such a population in the next 40 years is 118,000. If this population had been a settled and isolated one unaffected by migration, it would have increased to about 350,000 by 1931; actually the Malay population enumerated at the 1931 census was nearly 594,000. It follows that some 244,000 of the individuals enumerated at the recent census (1931) were either new immigrants or descendants of immigrants of the last 40 years.¹⁴

On the basis of his figures and in the assumed situation of "a settled and isolated (population) unaffected by migration", let us first attempt to find out what he really referred to as a "very liberal" rate of increase. Table Eight gives the different sizes of the Malay population calculated on different annual rates of increase but based on the 1891 total given by Vlieland.

TABLE EIGHT.

PROJECTED SIZE OF THE MALAY POPULATION OF THE
FEDERATED MALAY STATES AT VARYING RATES OF INCREASE.

Year	1 %	1.1%	1.2 %
1891	232,000	232,000	232,000
1901	255,200	257,520	258,840
1911	280,720	285,484	291,016
1921	308,792	317,283	235,936
1931	339,671	352,175	365,144
Difference (1931—1891)	107,671	120,175	133,144

¹³ C. A. Vlieland, "The Population of the Malay Peninsula", *Geographical Review*, Vol. 24, January 1934, pp. 64-65.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

Thus according to the calculations in Table Eight, Vlieland's numerical increase of 118,000 is just slightly below the simple rate of increase of 1.1 % per annum. This indeed was low compared with the average annual rate of increase of 2.4 % for the 1911—1921 period and 3.0 % between 1921 and 1931 for the whole of Malaya. In fact the combined Malay population of Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Trengganu increased at the average rate of 2.15 % between 1911 and 1931. It is also useful to note that the relatively more stable population of Java grew at the annual average rate of 1.82 % between 1890 and 1930.¹⁵

Secondly, and more important, is the fact that Vlieland made the false assumption of what was true for the Federated Malay States being also true for the other States, and thus for the whole of Malaya. Hence, he confined his arguments and calculations to the F.M.S. only, but drew a conclusion for Malaya as a whole. The mere fact that he did not consider the diverse demographic and economic differences between the F.M.S. and the other States invalidates his conclusion. As already established, the migration of the Indonesians was confined to the western parts of Malaya only. The north and eastern States of Malaya, where the peninsular Malays were most numerous, were little affected. Thus, if we were to consider all these factors, then the conclusion that was drawn by Vlieland might, with the qualifications we have already made, be applicable to the Federated Malay States, Johore and Singapore, but not to the whole of Malaya.

That the migration of the Indonesians had different effects on the Malaysian population in the different States can be seen from Table Nine, which shows the proportion of the Indonesian population to the total Malaysian population.¹⁶ Between 1911 and 1957, the Indonesian population never exceeded 15 per cent of the total Malaysian population in Malaya. The highest it had reached so far was 14.5 per cent at the 1931 census. In individual States during the 1911—1957 period, the Indonesian population had exceeded 50 per cent of the total Malaysians only once in one State, namely Johore, in 1931. Elsewhere, and at other times, the Malays remained in the majority. In fact, in 1931, the States that could be considered to have a situation anything like that implied by Vlieland were Johore, Selangor and Singapore.

In conclusion, it can be said that the Indonesian immigrants compared with the other communities formed a relatively unimportant

¹⁵ K. J. Pelzer, *Population and Land Utilization*, New York, 1941, p. 58.

¹⁶ Here Malaysian population refers to the Indonesian and Malay populations combined. It does not include the aborigines.

TABLE NINE.

MALAYA: PERCENTAGE OF INDONESIANS IN TOTAL MALAYSIAN POPULATION, 1911-1957.

State	1911	1921	1931	1947	1957
Singapore	42.4	39.9	42.1	38.2	31.7
Penang	4.5	3.1	2.4	2.2	1.7
Malacca	4.0	3.2	3.3	4.5	3.6
Perak	16.6	18.8	21.4	17.1	10.5
Selangor	27.3	28.4	45.6	43.9	32.3
Negri Sembilan	4.5	3.9	6.5	5.9	4.7
Pahang	1.2	4.2	5.8	3.0	2.6
Johore	34.2	42.5	51.5	31.5	25.6
Kedah	1.0	1.2	1.6	1.0	1.1
Kelantan	0.01	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.1
Trengganu	0.02	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.2
Perlis	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.2
MALAYA	8.6	10.8	14.5	12.3	8.7

Source: Malayan Census Reports, 1911 to 1957

part of the total population of Malaya and that their contribution to the increase in the total Malaysian population so far as information is available, was not as great as has been assumed in the past.

Department of Geography, TUNKU SHAMSUL BAHRIN
University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur.

May 1966.