

# Ninety Years of Urbanization in Malaysia: A Geographical Investigation of Its Trends and Characteristics

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## Abstract

This paper discusses the urbanization process in Malaysia from 1911 to 2000. The definition of urban areas in Malaysia is gazetted areas with a population of 10,000 or more. However, during the 1991 census, the definition of urban areas was changed as gazetted areas with their adjoining built areas that have a combined population of 10,000 and more. The topics of analysis were trends, household size, growth rates, size of urban settlement, and the phase of urban growth during the period. Further analysis included the urbanization process by the states in Malaysia and the factors that affect the development of urban growth. The city of The Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur and Georgetown of Penang were chosen on the basis of their description regarding the growth of urban population. In addition, this article also discussed the role of small towns, ethnic composition, and the impact of urban growth. The result of this study has revealed that Malaysia experienced rapid growth of urban population for the last nine decades but more importantly during the 1980s and 1990s. The level of urbanization in Malaysia has increased from around 10.0 percent in 1911 to 28.4 percent in 1970 and 61.8 per cent in 2000. The most interesting result of the study is the ethnic urban composition in Malaysia, and more than 50 percent of the urban population is Malay. The expected level of urbanization in 2010 was more than 70 percent of the Malaysia's population living in urban areas. This urban growth and development was owing to the rapid socio-economic development of the country since more than five decades. The growth of the urban population in Malaysia has created several issues pertaining to the basic needs of people such as housing, health, education, and sanitation facilities, and the most urgent problems are urban poverty and housing for the lower income group. Finally, the urban process in Malaysia will continue to a large extent, and more people will be moving to and living in major cities such as Kuala Lumpur, Shah Alam, Johor Baharu, Kuching, and Kota Kinabalu.

**Keywords:** urbanization process, role of small town, urban settlement by size, ethnic composition, Malaysia

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## 1 . Introduction

The growth of urban population and the emergence of cities are regarded as major developments of the nineteenth century (United Nations, 1973). Until 1900, 219 million, or 13.6 percent of the world's population, lived in urban areas, which had populations of 5,000 or more (United Nations, 1973). By 1950, the world's urban population had increased to 734 million; it reached 1,352 million and 3,198 million in 1970 and 2000, respectively (United Nations, 1991). Meanwhile, the urban population of developing countries had increased by 1,965 million from 286 million in 1950 to 2,251 million in 2000. In 2010, the United Nations estimated that about 56.5 percent of the world's population live in urban areas and the figure will increase to 65.0 percent in 2025. An analysis of the data indicated that by 2025, about 79.7 percent of the world's urban population will belong to developing countries. Of these, 53.2 percent will live in Asia — mainly in China (18.1 percent), India (13.4 percent), Japan (3.0 percent), Bangladesh (1.8 percent), Iran (1.6 percent), the Philippines (1.3 percent), and Korea (1.3 percent) (United Nations, 1991). From these data, the future increase in the urban population is estimated to occur in developing countries. Further, between 2000 and 2025, the world's urban population will increase to 2296 million, of which 92.8 percent, or 2215 million, will be in the developing countries and 7.2 percent or 171 million, will be in the developed countries (United Nations, 1991).

The main objective of this paper is to study the development of all settlements, towns, and cities or gazetted areas with populations of 10,000 or more in the period from 1911 to 2000. This paper aims to analyze the trend in urbanization in Peninsular Malaysia (1911-1957), Malaysia (1970-2000), and all individual states, and to assess the effects of development policies on the spatial distribution of the urban population in Malaysian states. The increase in the urban population and the expansion of cities notably influenced the urban environment and has led to the establishment of housing and recreational areas, industries, business centers, transportation and parking facilities, supermarkets, open spaces, and so on. Chamhuri Siwar (1998) stresses on the point that the rapid urbanization of Kuala Lumpur led to many national issues, especially the housing problem and the squatter problem; in the latter, the squatters were considered as "poor urban population." The increase in internal migration from rural areas to urban ones like Kuala Lumpur resulted in an increased number of migrants in the low-income group, who compete for jobs, and more importantly, for a place to live. Again, in the case of Kuala Lumpur, Hamzah Sendut (1972) stressed that comprehensive policies and programs are needed to address problems in terms of accommodation, land acquisition, traffic congestion, underemployment, slums and squatter areas, and other community-related

problems.

## 2. Sources of Data and Definitions

Any discussion on and analysis of urban growth and urbanization requires a set of reliable statistics for the total urban population obtained from population censuses. According to Domschke and Goyer (1986), the first comprehensive census in Malaysia, which was in 1891, covered the Straits Settlement of Singapore, Penang, Malacca (Melaka), and the Protected Malay States of Perak, Pahang, Negeri Sembilan, and Selangor. The second census, which covered the same territory as the 1891 census was conducted in 1901. The third census was conducted in 1911, and the area covered was enlarged to include the Unfederated Malay states of Johore, Kedah, Terengganu, and Kelantan. The first, second, and third Pan-Malayan censuses were held in 1921, 1931, and 1947, respectively. Although the first census was taken in 1891, the census of 1921 was considered the first to have a unified structure of census organization and was based in Singapore (Manjit, 1975). The last census conducted by the British Colonial Government, in 1957, covered the Federation of Malaya. Census in Sarawak was first conducted in 1939, and then in 1947 and 1960. Census in Sabah (North Borneo) was first held in 1891, and then in 1901, 1911, 1921, 1931, 1951, and 1960 (Jones, 1953; Domschke and Goyer, 1986). The first nationwide census included Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah, and Sarawak, and was conducted by the Department of Statistics, Malaysia, in 1970 (August 25). Thereafter, censuses were conducted in 1980 (June 10), 1991 (August 14), 2000 (July 5), and 2010 (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2011).

The concept of “urban” was first defined during the 1947 census, in which villages with a population of 1,000 or more were considered urban areas (Del Tufo, 1949). In the 1957 census, the definition was expanded to include municipalities, town council areas, town board areas, local council areas, new villages, or villages with 2,000 inhabitants or more (Fell, 1960). During the first nationwide census (1970), gazetted towns with a population of 10,000 or more were considered urban areas (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 1977). However, the definition of urban areas in the 1991 and 2000 census was modified, and urban areas were defined as gazetted areas, that along with their adjoining built-up areas had a combined population of 10,000 or more (Figure 1) (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 1995: 29; 2001a).

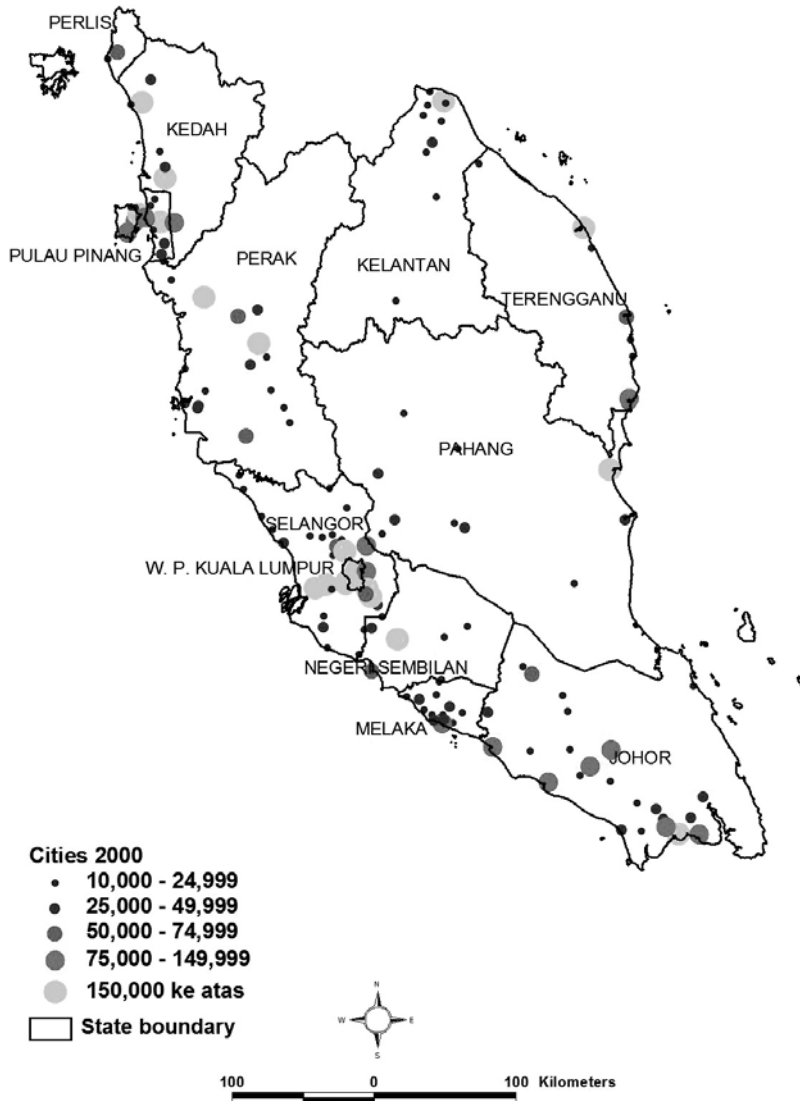


Figure 1. Distribution of Urban Areas in Peninsular Malaysia, 2010

### 3. Urbanization Trend

In most developing countries, urbanization has been spreading rapidly since the early twentieth century. An examination of data on the urbanization of Malaysia has also revealed that the number of people living in urban areas (i.e., areas with 10,000 people or

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more) has increased from 250,790 in 1911 to 13,725,609 in 2000 (Table 1). These figures indicate that in a span of 90 years (1911–2000), approximately 13.7 million people became urban residents and the expansion of urban areas, throughout the country, contributed significantly to the statistical increase in the number of cities with populations of 10,000 or more. The data in Table 1 indicate that the level of urbanization in Malaya increased from 10.7 percent to 26.5 percent in 1957. Since the formation of Malaysia in 1963, the proportion of its urban population increased to 28.4 percent in 1970 and 62.0 percent in 2000. Between 1970 and 2000, the urban population increased drastically — by 386.9 percent or 10.8 million. Urban statistics show that two-thirds of Malaysia's population live in urban areas. The proportion of Malaysia's urban population is higher than that of all other Southeast Asian countries, except Singapore. Siti Zakiah Muhamad Isa (2007) stressed on the point that the increase in urban population in 2000 was caused by both internal and international migration to urban centers as well as to the built-up areas contiguous to the core towns. She also emphasized that in the future, migrants will tend to settle at the peripheries of cities and built-up areas, while the population of core urban areas will decrease. This counter-urbanization process occurred in Georgetown, Penang; its population decreased from 219,603 in 1991 to 189,573 in 2000 (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2001a). The rapid development of housing projects in Air Itam, Gelugor, Tanjong Bunga, and Tanjong Tokong has attracted Georgetown residents and has caused them to migrate to the nearest new town in Penang. The population of Georgetown city has been gradually decreasing for the past four decades (see Table 4). But during census of 2000 it has increased again by 0.94 percent to 198,298.

### 4. Size of the Urban Household

Despite Malaysia's rapid urban population growth in the last five decades, the average household size has decreased from 5.5 in 1970 to 4.6 in 2000 and 4.3 in 2010 (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2001a; 2010). Data available up to the year 2000 showed that, in 1970, the average household size of urban areas decreased from 6.1 to 4.3, whereas in rural areas it declined from 5.5 to 4.7 in the same year (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2001). In European countries, the study of household matter as an agent of urban transformation is the key to understanding changes in the population process, such as migration, fertility, cohabitation, marriage and divorce, employment patterns, and household size and composition (Buzar et al., 2005). These topics are important facets of the urban demography transformation in Malaysia, particularly with regard to the big cities such as Kuala Lumpur, Georgetown, Ipoh, Melaka, Klang, Johor Baharu, Kuching, Kota Kinabalu, Kota Baharu, and Kuala Terengganu. The issues

covered by the abovementioned topics required immediate attention as a recent analysis reported that between 1970 and 2010, the number of households in Malaysia increased from 1.90 to 6.40 million, and about 63.5 percent of these were living in urban areas (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2001a; 2010). The government will have to take into account, apart from the number of households, other important demographic variables in order to measure the quality and characteristics of the population and to formulate long-term plans for the wellbeing of both urban citizens and the urban environment. These variables include the composition of urban areas (i.e., its breakdown in terms of sex and age), residential location, ethnic groups and their distribution, employment, occupation, industry, social and cultural roles, health status, religion, and citizenship status.

## 5. Urban Population Growth Rate

An analysis of urban population growth in Malaysia should consider the size and average growth rate of the urban population during the intercensal period. Table 1 shows that the lowest rate of increase (1.89 percent) was recorded between 1931 and 1947. According to Saw (1972), the phenomenal acceleration in the rate of urbanization during the 1947–1957 intercensal period, resulted in an increase in the proportion of urban population. The urban population comprised 26.5 percent of the total population in 1957, with an average annual growth rate of 6.0 percent. During this period, the urban population increased by 79.2 percent. Ooi (1975) describes this as the greatest increase in the level of urbanization in Peninsular Malaysia. Fell (1960), Saw (1972), and Suliman Mahbob (1986) have concluded that the single largest factor contributing to the urban development of this period (1947–1957) has been the Emergency, which caused many families in rural areas to leave their homes — voluntarily or by decree — and seek the security of towns and villages. Fell (1960) added that the expansion of manufacturing industries and of economic activities, in general, has played a very minor role in postwar urbanization.

Another spurt of growth in the urban population was recorded during the intercensal period of 1980–1991. By 1991, about 50.9 percent, or half the total population in Malaysia, lived in urban areas, which experienced the highest average annual growth rate (i.e., 6.68 percent). This extraordinary increase — recorded in the 1991 census — in the urban population was a result of the redefinition of urban areas; that is, they were defined as gazetted areas that, along with their adjoining built-up areas, had a combined population of 10,000 or more (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 1995). The overall annual growth rates of the urban population in Malaysia were higher because of rural–urban migration and urban–urban migration. Another study by Chan (1995) has emphasized that the

growth in the urban population between 1980 and 1991 has occurred due to the rapid socio-economic changes during 1980s. Immigration from other Asian countries has also possibly contributed to the increase in the urban population. This is especially evident in the results of the 1991 and 2000 censuses. During the intercensal period of 1991-2000, the proportion of immigrants or non-Malaysian citizens living in urban areas had increased from 3.5 percent to 5.6 percent. The influx of thousands of labor migrants from other Asian countries into Malaysian cities will trigger many socioeconomic, demographic, and political problems. Consequently, more resources and better logistical management will be required to ensure that these problems are addressed equitably. From the data, we can infer that the high urban population growth rate in Malaysia significantly influenced impact the growth rate of cities, especially cities with populations of more than 200,000. Moreover, without any exceptions, the growth rates of small and medium cities will be sufficient for their survival in the competition with large cities.

## 6 . Urban Settlement by Size

The increase in the number of urban settlements (as defined by size) from 1911 to 2000 is an interesting aspect of urban concentration in Malaysia. As indicated in Table 2, the number of urban centers increased from 8 in 1911 to 170 in 2000. From 1980 onwards, the proportion of settlements drastically increased by 79.1 percent. The number of cities with a population of 200,000 or more showed the most increase — from 2 in 1957-1960 to 17 in 2000. The total population of these cities increased from 551,133 in 1957-1960 and 7,250,227 in 2000, that is, an increase of 52.8 per cent. In other words, approximately 53.0 percent of Malaysia's urban population lived in cities with 200,000 or more inhabitants. The population of these cities will increase in the future. If this growth is not checked, large-scale urban projects will be needed to tackle extreme poverty, especially among the Malay and Indian communities, and to cope with other socio-demographic and environmental problems of large cities in Malaysia. These problems have been previously reported in other Asian cities (Davis, 1975; Preston, 1979). Apart from the growth in the number of large cities, the number of cities with less than 25,000 inhabitants increased from 6 in 1911 to 82 in 2000. A study by the Department of Statistics of Malaysia (2001a) showed that the number of towns with 10,000 to 24,999 inhabitants increased from 67 in the period from 1980 to 1991 to 80 in the period from 1991 to 2000, and the population of these towns has increased from 1,085,800 million to 1,321,900 million. The expansion of small towns requires increased participation by the government and the private sector. The developmental process should ensure that the inhabitants receive better amenities, services, and opportunities for employment and business, and that the infrastructure

improves. These improvements may benefit people of nearby villages, who travel to the cities everyday to sell their products in order to increase their income and improve their social status.

## 7. Phases of Urban Growth

Urban evolution and town distribution in Malaya was primarily a consequence of the British intervention in mainland Malaya around the 1850s. Hamzah Sendut (1965) attributes the spread of urbanization in Malaya to the colonization of Malaya by the British. He identifies the following four phases of development: In the first phase, during the development of Malacca, the urban population was limited to the hinterland of a few small towns, which were the primary political centers of the Malays. In this phase, Malacca was well-known in the East (Sandhu, 1961). The second phase of urban growth involved the expansion and development of Malacca City as a commercial center, along with the foundation of Penang (1786) and Singapore (1819). These cities were a product of a Eurocentric economy, in which Southeast Asian products were exported to Western markets. In the third phase, the British intervention in the Malayan mainland in the 1870s coincided with the development of tin-mining industries in the states of Perak and Selangor. Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Seremban, and other towns considerably expanded with the growth of the tin-mining industry, while Penang and Singapore became important trade centers for the British, in order for them to export tin ore and rubber products. In the fourth phase, Malaya gained independence from Britain and the former's national economy developed. The study of this phase is important to understand the major problems of the people and to formulate a targeted plan that first has to reduce the high poverty rate, especially in the agricultural sector, and later has to address disparities in the progress of different ethnic groups, regions, political subunits, and economic sectors, and between the urban and rural population (Schlegel, 1980).

Kamal Salih and Mei Lin Young (1981), however, identify two phases of the urbanization process in Malaya. The first one occurred between 1785 and 1930; the second, in which urbanization spread over Malaya, between 1931 and 1970; the latter was influenced by the Second World War. We summarize this section as follows: the foundation of Penang and Singapore negatively affected Malacca, and by 1826, her commercial prosperity had declined. Two-thirds of Malacca's population, that is, 31,000 inhabitants, were Malays. Continual development made Penang and Singapore the most important ports of that period, and all products were exported from these regions to Western countries (Purcell, 1967; Turnbull, 1972).



## 8. Urbanization by State

Table 3 shows the states of Malaysia and their levels of urbanization from 1911 to 2000. Until 1947, only two states — Penang and Selangor — recorded a higher proportion of urban population, of about 52.9 and 32.7 percent, respectively. The proportion of urban population was the lowest in Kelantan — approximately 5.1 percent. From 1948 onwards, the level of urbanization of states in Malaysia was influenced by the Emergency, which also affected thousands residing in rural areas. The increased level of urbanization in the state is apparent in the period from 1947 to 1957. During this period, Pahang recorded rapid urbanization from 0 percent in 1947 to 22.2 percent in 1957 (Saw, 1972). Although all states recorded increasing levels of urbanization, the level in Kelantan remained below 10.0 percent. In 1970, Penang and Kedah saw a drop in their levels of urbanization. In Penang, the level dropped from 56.7 to 51.0 percent; and in Kedah, from 13.3 to 12.6 percent. This decline was a consequence of the movement of people from Penang and Kedah to the urban centers of other states (Saw 1972). In Penang, the proportion of the urban population further declined to 47.5 percent in 1980. With regard to permanent out-migration, the state of Penang also had the second highest percentage of the total out-migration in the 1957, 1970, and 1980 censuses — negative 30,841, negative 20,087, and negative 20,900, respectively (Department of Statistics, Malaysia 1977; 1983). The same trend was observed in Kedah, where the permanent out-migrations was positive 6,052 (1957), negative 21,400 (1970) and negative 75,400 (1980). Perak had the highest percentage of out-migration. According to the 1980 census, no Malaysian state recorded a level of urbanization above 50.0 percent. The 1991 and 2000 censuses showed a tremendous increase in the urban population. The highest level was recorded in Penang, where it soared from 75.0 to 79.5 percent. The proportion of the urban population in Selangor doubled, from 34.2 percent in 1980 to 75.2 and 88.3 percent in the 1991 and 2000 censuses, respectively.

## 9. Factors Affecting the Development and Growth of Urban Areas

Late nineteenth and early twentieth-century studies on urban growth in Malaysia have revealed a number of factors that influence the development and growth of urban settlements. According to Hamzah Sendut (1962), a noteworthy development in the late nineteenth century was the discovery of economic minerals, especially tin. This development caused traders to establish many mining centers such as the ones in Taiping, Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur, and Seremban (Hamzah Sendut, 1962). Moreover, places like Port

Weld, Telok Anson, Klang, and Linggi became prominent tin-exporting centers. With the introduction of the rubber industry, towns such as Kulim, Alor Gajah, Segamat, Keluang, and Kota Tinggi were established. According to Cooper (1951), the growth of cities and urbanization in Malaya accelerated considerably in the period between the censuses of 1931 and 1947, and this growth was a result of immigration into Malaya, principally from China, rather than rural-urban migration within British Malaya.

The Emergency from 1948 to 1960 was the second important factor that influenced postwar urbanization; it led to the foundation of New Villages for the segregation of the villagers from the Malayan Races Liberation Army insurgents; the latter were led by the Malayan Communist Party. An early report by Sandhu (1964) revealed that the total population of the New Villages was 573,000 in 1954, and among them, 86.0 percent were Chinese; 9.0 percent, Malays; 4.0 percent, Indians and Pakistanis; and 1.0 percent, others. By 1959, 763,600 persons, or about 12.0 percent of the total population, had been relocated to 559 New Villages in Malaya in accordance with the Briggs Plan (Pryor, 1979). This was a strategy to prevent the villagers from providing food, clothing, and money to the insurgents and also prevent them from being recruited to the communist guerrillas, who operated from the fringes of the jungles (Pryor, 1979). This program was designed by the British Government in order to transfer people from rural areas closer to urban areas, with the aim of protecting them from the influence of communism, and the New Villages were ultimately absorbed by the cities. For example, Jinjang, Ampang, and Sungai Way were absorbed by the city of Kuala Lumpur (Pryor, 1979). Humphrey (1971) has described the New Villages as new urban centers that were developed by the British to provide various amenities normally associated with urban life in Malaya. This significant aspect of urban growth in Malaya has created an influx of Chinese citizens into the urban areas. The highest recorded proportion of the Chinese in the population was 62.6 percent in 1957, while Malays comprised 21.0 percent, and Indians, 12.8 percent (Kok, 1992).

The establishment of the Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) in 1956 was the third factor that influenced post-war urbanization. The FELDA aims to carry out large-scale agricultural development projects (e.g., in the rubber and palm oil industry) for the benefit of poor Malayan people. Alladin Hashim (1981) declared that under the FELDA scheme, poor landless farmers from rural areas are relocated to areas where they can settle down and practice commercial farming as opposed to the subsistence farming that they formerly practiced. This helps them alleviate their poverty. Under this program, as of April 1980, the FELDA has relocated through its various schemes, 59,000 families, which is approximately 400,000 persons or 5.2 percent of the rural population of Peninsular Malaysia. MacAndrews (1975) has concluded that the FELDA has been responsible for between 6.0 and 8.0 percent of the total internal migration in Peninsular Malaysia in the

period between 1957 and 1970. The role of the FELDA in the promotion of urban settlements is quite clear as Bandar Pusat Jengka, which was established as an urban center in 1956, recorded a population of 10,792 in the 2000 census (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2001a).

Furthermore, Ahmad Idriss (1988) pointed out three factors that contributed to the rapid increase in Malaysia's urban population after the Second World War; first, the housing program that was swiftly implemented throughout the country; second, the good intrastate and interstate transportation system; and third, excessive inter- and intra-migration throughout the country. These three factors have notably influenced the growth of the urban population, especially in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Selangor, and Johor. In the 2000 census, Selangor recorded many new towns, namely, Batu Arang, Kuang, Pengkalan Kundang, Tanjong Karang, Sabak, Bandar Baru Salak Tinggi, Sungai Pelek, Belakong, Beranang, Bukit Beruntung, and Serendah. In any event, the urbanization process and development projects for urban settlements of any size must focus on the needs of contemporary urban industrial communities, especially with regard to employment, housing, education, and recreational and other facilities.

## 10. The Cases of Kuala Lumpur and Georgetown

According to the Kuala Lumpur Municipal Council Annual Report 1959, Kuala Lumpur was founded in 1859 (Hamzah Sendut, 1972). With the economic boom and the rise in the price of tin between 1882 and 1884, the expansion of Kuala Lumpur that began in 1862, started to accelerate. Consequently, Kuala Lumpur's population reached 18,000 in 1891 (Hamzah Sendut, 1972). The city's population continued to rapidly rise; it was 46,718 in 1911; 80,424 in 1921; 111,418 in 1931; 175,961 in 1947; 316,230 in 1957; and 451,810 in 1970. In 1972, Kuala Lumpur was conferred the status of a Federal Territory. Table 4 shows the urban population of Kuala Lumpur, Georgetown, Penang from 1991 to 2010. The data show that the urban population in Kuala Lumpur increased from 46,718 in 1911 to 1,627,172 in 2010. The highest annual rate of growth was between 1911 and 1921 (5.50 percent), 1947 and 1957 (6.04 percent), and 1970 and 1980 (7.58 percent). In the period of 1911-1921, the increase was due to the immigration of foreign workers, especially from China.

The resettlement of the rural population during the Emergency of Malaya (1948-1960) resulted in the high rate of growth in the population between 1947 and 1957. The highest increase in the annual growth rate occurred between 1970 and 1980. It was caused by the internal migration of population — from rural to urban areas. According to the 1980 census, rural-urban migration accounted for nearly 16.0 percent, or 410,200, of the total

internal migration in Malaysia (954,200). These migrations occurred in the 10 years preceding the 1980 census (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 1983). Compared to the population of Georgetown, that of Kuala Lumpur rapidly increased except during the two census periods of 1980–1991 and 1991–2000, when its growth was less than two percent.

The first settlement of Penang Island was established by Francis Light Raffles in 1786, after he obtained permission to lease a piece of land from the Sultan of Kedah. This settlement was later called Georgetown after King George III (Purcell, 1965; Baker, 1991). By 1880, Province Wellesley had been ceded to Britain, which further strengthened the British presence in Penang. After the foundation of a British settlement in Penang, the number of Chinese immigrants in Malaya increased, and Penang is currently the main destination for Chinese immigrants. Here they find huge opportunities to participate in agriculture and to manage plantations. Britain had established Georgetown as an entrepot, where products from Britain and India, such as opium, textile, steel, gunpowder, and iron goods, were sold to local merchants to be distributed throughout the archipelago (Purcell, 1976; Baker, 1991). Penang developed successfully under the British rule, and it became a naval base to protect British interests from the French and the Dutch. The 1911 census revealed that Penang, inclusive of Province Wellesley, had a population of 278,003, of which 41.2 and 40.2 percent were Malays and Chinese, respectively (Purcell, 1967). The change in the population of Georgetown from 1911 to 2000 is shown in Table 4. Unfortunately, since 1911, Georgetown's annual growth rate has been lower compared to that of Kuala Lumpur. A positive increase was recorded only until 1970 and the negative increase occurred from 1970 to 2000. This change in the urban population is a consequence of the counter-urbanization process that has been taking place in Georgetown since the last three decades, and this process will continue. The highest population, approximately 234,900 inhabitants, was seen in 1957. However, this number has been gradually declining; it was 180,573 in 2000—a decrease of 23.1 percent in fifty years.

## 11. The Role of Small Towns

The most striking feature of Malaysian urban development in the last ninety years was the ever-increasing number of cities with populations below 50,000. Table 2 shows that the number of cities increased from 7 in 1911 to 117 in 2000. The figures show that the small towns, with populations below 25,000, have grown more rapidly than the ones with populations of 25,000–49,999. The number of these urban settlements soared from 6 in 1911 to 82 in 2000. This phenomenal growth of small towns in Malaysia will encourage more people to move to urban areas in the near future. Data collected between 1957 and 1970 show that the average migrant in Peninsular Malaysia was young, had higher

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education, and was skilled enough to contribute to the socioeconomic development of the urban centers at that time (Hirschman, 1975). Hamzah Sendut (1965) has discussed the growing importance of small towns, which encourage rural–urban migration, relieve the pressure on the over–urbanized large cities, spread urbanism and modernization, foster unity between urban and rural areas, and reduce the cultural gap between towns and villages.

From the perspective of population distribution policies, Richardson (1983) stressed that economic development assistance to small and intermediate cities is meant to focus on agro–processing industries, small–scale industries, and informal sector activities. He also emphasizes that the most important aspects of aid are the increase in credit and provision of technical assistance. He added that any spatial policies and strategies to develop small and intermediate cities should focus on infrastructure, public services, and educational facilities (universities and technical and community colleges). Such policies should also consider investment in transport and communication — primarily to promote travel and circular migration; they should increase accessibility to urban services and expedite the supply of agricultural products. Finally, they should assist local governments in attaining autonomy (Richardson, 1983). The implementation of such projects based on such policies can, hopefully, bridge the gap between small and big cities and divert the internal migration flow in this country to small towns rather than big cities. A recent study revealed that urban–urban inter–state migration was 64.9 percent in 2007, while rural–urban migration was only 6.8 percent (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2009).

## 12. Ethnic Composition

Malaysia’s multiethnic population makes it a unique Asian country. According to the 2000 census, the total population of Malaysia was 21,889,916. Of this total, Malay people accounted for 53.3 percent; the Chinese, 26.0 percent; other Bumiputera people, 11.7 percent; Indians, 7.7 percent; and others, 1.2 percent (Department of Statistics, 2001a). The distribution of each ethnic group varies across states. Typically, the concentration of Malays is higher in the East Coast in places such as Kelantan and Terengganu, and northwestern states such as Kedah and Perlis Peninsular Malaysia. In contrast, the Chinese generally live in the urban areas of the West Coast states such as Penang, Perak, Selangor, Melaka, Negeri Sembilan, and Johor. The population distribution pattern in Malaysia has recently changed. At present, a higher proportion of the Malay population lives in urban areas. As a result of this new pattern of ethnic composition in urban areas, different ethnic groups face many new socioeconomic and political issues in terms of property, housing, business and employment opportunities, poverty eradication, health

care, and welfare requirements.

Tables 5 and 6 show Malaysia's urban ethnic composition. Table 5 shows the ethnic composition of urban areas in Peninsular Malaysia from 1957 to 2000. One of the significant aspects of this composition is the increasing percentage of Malays living in urban areas. Table 5 shows that the number of Malays living in urban areas has increased from 21.0 percent in 1957 to 48.3 percent in 2000. The proportion of the Chinese population declined from 62.6 percent to 34.8 percent in the same period, while that of the Indian population declined from 12.8 to 11.0 percent. In many sectors, this change has had considerable socioeconomic and political implications; the Malays are now expected to participate in commercial and business activities. Hamzah Sendut (1966) pointed out the problems faced by an increasing number Malays and defined the roles they play in urban activities. Sulaiman Mahbob (1986) revealed that Malay urbanization has increased the concentration of Malays, who belong to a low-income group, in the urban areas. This process does not appropriately reduce the inequality between the Malays, Indians, and the Chinese.

Table 6 shows the urban ethnic composition of Sabah and Sarawak between 1970 and 2000. This table is based on the census questions pertaining to ethnic classification. In Sabah, the Chinese and Peribumi (a general term for Malays, which covers other Bumiputera and indigenous people) were dominant. The number of Chinese people declined from 59.7 percent in 1970 to 18.7 percent in 2000. In 1970, the Chinese formed the largest ethnic group in Sabah, with a population of 64,206 to 107,621 (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 1973). According to the 2000 census, Bajau, Kadazan, Malay, and other Bumiputera people constituted the important ethnic groups in urban areas; each of these groups accounted for 10.0-15.0 percent of the population. In Sarawak as well, the dominant ethnic group was the Chinese but their proportion declined from 67.5 to 42.2 percent. Meanwhile, the proportion of Malays residing in urban areas increased from 21.1 percent to 25.4 percent. The proportion of another ethnic group, the Iban, saw an increase from 8.0 percent in 1980 to 17.3 percent. Other ethnic groups such as the Melanau, Bidayuh, and Bumiputera comprised less than 5.0 percent of the total population. Another important aspect of demographic evolution is the increase in the number of non-Malaysian citizens in both states, especially in Sabah. The proportion of foreigners in Sabah reached 22.3 and 21.0 percent in the 1991 and 2000 censuses, respectively. In other words, we can say that in this period, a quarter of Sabah's urban population in Sabah was non-Malaysian. This important issue should be addressed wisely while considering the socio-economic and political development of the states. An emerging need is to assess the roles of these communities and their level of participation in the economic activities of the state. The extent of their occupancy in both states, especially in Sabah, needs to be determined, and a plan to deport them to their home countries needs to be devised.

### 13. The Impact of Urban Growth

Many issues pertaining to the rapid growth of the urban population in Third World countries have been highlighted; most cities have been unable to meet the growing demand for housing and urban services (Hope, 1986). Urban policies of developing countries must focus on several important issues such as poverty, congestion, unemployment, crime, illiteracy, and poor health. Many studies have described the problems that governments should tackle in order to overcome the difficulties in providing the urban population with necessities such as employment, housing, food, energy, transport, clean water, and sanitation facilities (Rogers and Williamson, 1984). Malaysia's largest city, Kuala Lumpur, requires more financial resources to implement huge projects related to transportation systems, housing, business centers, and other urban facilities. The development of Greater Kuala Lumpur, for example, required considerable funds and manpower. The government and private sectors can invest in various projects to meet the needs of the urban communities in large cities like Kuala Lumpur, Pulau Pinang (Georgetown and its suburbs), Johor Baharu, Ipoh, Klang, Kota Baharu, Kuantan, Kuching, and Petaling Jaya. Moshidi Sirat (2000) concluded that the "producer services," as a subsector of services, could play an integral role in the development of Kuala Lumpur. He emphasized that the development of producer services in Kuala Lumpur is mainly sustained through intra-metropolitan trade, including trade throughout Klang Valley. The growth of urban centers is required; that is, more amenities such as hypermarkets, hotels and catering services, restaurants, cultural centers and theatres, home cleaners, private hospitals and clinics, and recreational spaces.

In Malaysia, three highly urbanized states — Kuala Lumpur, Pulau Pinang, and Selangor — have experienced the most rapid urban growth since 1991; they were followed by Johor and Melaka. Between 1970 and 1980, the share of the urban population of all these states, except the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, had never exceeded 50.0 percent of their total population. The rapid increase in the urban population of Malaysia was recorded in the 1991 census. This was a result of the redefinition of urban areas as mentioned earlier. Increased urban population — termed by geographers and economists as "over-urbanization" — was associated with widespread unemployment and underemployment along with problems like the lack of housing facilities, decreased access to urban services, traffic congestion, and environmental pollution (Rogers and Williamson, 1984). In addressing these problems, we need to pay more attention to demographic investment along with appropriate planning for the benefit of urban dwellers and their welfare in terms of better housing, education, health care, and sanitation, especially the

provision of clean water, the efficient disposal of sewage, and a better environment.

The ongoing discussion about urban problems must include people involved in designing infrastructure and services tailored to the needs of the urban residents. Apart from socioeconomic projects, the government should address the issues of rural-urban and urban-urban migration. The government must find an effective way to spend public money while implementing projects. Urban projects — housing, education, health, and other facilities — are more expensive than rural ones. The development of housing projects for the low-income group is important because such projects increase their standard of living and help eradicate poverty. Most researchers agree that urban congestion is not a result of inadequate space or an increasing rate of urbanization, but is due to improper urban planning and the ineffectual policies of the cities concerned. The Malaysian government has implemented measures for instance, the “clinic 1 Malaysia,” which was launched in strategic urban areas nationwide — to provide the urban poor with access to health care facilities. These clinics were located near housing areas and were easily accessible to their targeted users. It is reported that by mid-2011, 27 “Clinic 1 Malaysia” have been established.

#### 14. Conclusion

As predicted, the urban population in Malaysia has increased very rapidly after 1970. Since 1947, the annual growth rate of the urban population has increased by more than 5.0 percent. The highest growth rate was recorded in big cities like Kuala Lumpur. The increase in urban population that occurred several decades ago has severely degraded the urban environment and has created socioeconomic and political issues. This increase has impeded the government and its agencies in their endeavor to deliver efficient services to urban inhabitants, who differ in terms of socio-economic statuses and political leanings. The analysis shows that the ethnic composition of the urban population has changed, with more Malays than there were in the early years of independence, when the Chinese predominated. This change will influence many aspects of the urban environment, such as housing and cultural and religious activities. The government cannot contain urbanization; instead, it needs to formulate long-term financial policies, and take housing and other amenities into account during urban planning to meet the additional needs of the growing urban population. Additionally, the government also needs to further develop small towns, especially the ones with populations below 50,000. These towns, situated at strategic locations, can become transitional towns, that is, those falling in a category between large and medium cities, and thereby reduce rural-urban and urban-urban migration. Accommodation in small towns is not as expensive as in large cities. In small towns,



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tensions among inhabitants can also be reduced, as social and neighborly relations are more pleasant and living conditions are better.

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Table 1. Urban Population in Malaysia: 1911-2000

Years	Total Population	Urban Population	Percent of Urban Population	Average rate of growth (percentage per year)		Numbers
				Years	%	
1911 <sup>a</sup>	2,339,051	250,790	10.7	1911-1921	4.98	156,980
1921 <sup>a</sup>	2,906,691	407,770	14.0	1921-1931	3.41	162,744
1931 <sup>a</sup>	3,787,758	570,513	15.1	1931-1947	1.89	359,411
1947 <sup>a</sup>	4,908,086	929,928	18.9	1947-1957	6.00	736,372
1957 <sup>a</sup>	6,278,758	1,666,300	26.5	1957-1970	4.53	1,296,495
1970	10,439,430	2,962,795	28.4	1970-1980	4.49	1,634,322
1980	13,136,109	4,492,408	33.4	1980-1991	6.68	4,770,030
1991	17,563,420	8,898,581	50.9	1991-2000	4.93	4,827,028
2000	22,202,614	13,725,609	61.8	-	-	-

<sup>a</sup>: refer to Peninsular Malaysia only.

Sources: Department of Statistics (1976: 9), Department of Statistics (1982: 92- 94),  
 Department of Statistics (2001a: 20-38), Department of Statistics (2001b: 5),  
 Department of Statistics (2005: 20), Del Tufo, M.V. (1949: 44)

Table 2. Number of Malaysian Urban Settlement by Size in Malaysia: 1911-2000

Size group of population	Number of settlements								
	1911	1921	1931	1947	1957/1960	1970	1980	1991	2000
200,000 >	-	-	-	-	2	3	5	11	17
175,000-199,999	-	-	-	2	-	-	2	2	5
150,000-174,999	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	4	4
125,000-149,999	-	-	2	-	1	1	3	2	3
100,000-124,999	1	1	-	-	-	1	-	5	5
75,000-99,999	-	1	-	1	1	3	3	6	6
50,000-74,999	-	-	1	1	5	9	8	6	13
25,000-49,999	1	2	2	8	10	11	9	20	35
10,000-24,999	6	7	11	10	25	27	36	68	82
Total of Urban Settlement	8	11	16	22	44	55	67	124	170

Sources: Del Tufo, M.V. (1949: 44), Department of Statistics, Malaysia (1977: 481-485),  
 Department of Statistics, Malaysia (2001a: 20-38)

Table 3. Distribution of Population in Gazetted Areas of 10,000 persons and Over in Malaysia: 1911-2005

State	Total Population	Urban Population	Percentage of Population 10,000 and over												
	2000	2000	1911 <sup>c</sup>	1921 <sup>c</sup>	1931 <sup>c</sup>	1947 <sup>c</sup>	1960 <sup>c</sup>	1970 <sup>c</sup>	1980 <sup>c</sup>	1991 <sup>c</sup>	2000 <sup>c</sup>	2005 <sup>e</sup>			
Johor	2,740,625	1,638,772	-	10.1	10.9	15.4	21.8	26.3	35.2	47.8	63.9	69.1			
Kedah	1,649,756	608,696	-	3.4	4.3	8.2	13.3	12.6	14.4	32.5	38.7	43.3			
Kelantan	1,313,014	431,861	4.4	3.5	4.1	5.1	9.8	15.1	28.1	33.5	33.5	36.7			
Melaka	635,791	405,917	17.0	20.0	20.4	22.8	24.0	25.1	23.4	38.7	67.3	75.3			
N.Sembilan	859,924	456,535	-	9.7	9.2	13.2	17.8	21.6	32.9	42.0	55.0	58.2			
Pahang	128,837	518,176	-	-	-	-	22.2	19.0	2.1	30.4	42.1	44.0			
Perak	2,051,236	1,207,948	11.0	13.3	14.4	17.1	25.0	27.5	32.2	53.6	59.5	65.3			
Perlis	204,450	67,080	-	-	-	-	-	-	8.9	26.6	33.8	38.9			
Pulau Pinang	1,313,449	974,779	37.3	41.8	47.7	52.9	56.7	51.0	47.5	75.0	79.5	83.3			
Sabah	2,603,485	1,182,890	-	-	-	-	-	16.9	19.9	33.2	48.3	53.2a			
Sarawak	2,071,506	963,232	-	-	-	-	-	15.5	18.0	37.5	47.9	54.6			
Selangor	4,188,876	3,483,765	15.9	23.0	24.8	32.7	43.0	26.2	34.2	75.2	88.3	92.7			
Terengganu	898,825	434,270	9.1	8.1	7.8	11.9	19.0	27.0	42.9	44.5	49.4	50.1			
W.P.K.L	1,379,310	1,297,526	-	-	-	-	-	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0			
W.P. Labuan	76,067	54,162	-	-	-	-	-	-	46.3	76.8	76.8	-			

<sup>a</sup>: include Wilayah Persekutuan Labuan, <sup>c</sup>: census, <sup>e</sup>: estimate

Sources: Department of Statistics, Malaysia (1977: 40), Department of Statistics, Malaysia (2001a: 3), Department of Statistics, Malaysia (2001b: 6-51), Department of Statistics, Malaysia. (2010: 146)

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Table 4. Population and Annual Growth Rate of Kuala Lumpur and Georgetown: 1911-2010

Year	Total Population		Annual Growth Rates (%)		
	Kuala Lumpur	Georgetown	Years	Kuala Lumpur	Georgetown
1911	46,718	101,182			
1921	80,424	123,069	1911-1921	5.50	1.98
1931	111,418	149,408	1921-1931	3.31	1.96
1947	175,961	189,068	1931-1947	2.90	1.48
1957	316,200	234,900	1947-1957	6.04	2.19
1970	451,810	269,247	1957-1970	2.78	1.05
1980	937,817	250,578	1970-1980	7.58	-0.71
1991	1,145,342	219,603	1980-1991	1.85	-1.19
2000	1,297,526	180,573	1991-2000	1.39	-2.15
2010	1,627,172	198,298	2000-2010	0.94	-

NA: Non Available

Sources: Del Tufo, M.V. (1949: 44), Fell, H. (1960: 8), Department of Statistics, Malaysia (1977: 483-485), Department of Statistics, Malaysia (1982: 92-94), Department of Statistics, Malaysia (2001a: 21- 38)

Table 5. Ethnic Composition of Urban Population in Peninsular Malaysia: 1957-2000

State	1957			1970			1980			1991			2000											
	M	C	I	O	M	C	I	O	M	C	I	O	M	C	I	O	OB	NMC						
Johore	29.9	57.4	7.9	4.8	36.9	54.7	7.0	1.4	41.6	52.4	5.8	0.2	41.2	47.0	7.1	0.3	2.2	2.2	41.7	42.6	8.2	1.3	0.7	5.5
Kedah	32.2	53.3	12.6	1.9	34.0	52.5	13.0	0.5	41.7	45.8	12.1	0.4	56.3	31.9	10.5	0.2	0.5	0.6	58.4	26.5	12.2	0.2	0.5	2.2
Kelantan	73.0	23.3	2.5	1.2	79.1	18.4	1.9	0.6	87.3	10.9	1.2	0.6	88.2	9.0	0.7	0.3	0.5	1.3	89.5	8.0	0.5	0.2	0.3	1.5
Melaka	13.4	76.1	7.0	3.5	17.3	72.6	7.6	2.5	21.2	70.4	6.2	2.2	37.0	54.6	5.2	0.1	1.6	1.5	54.8	34.0	5.2	1.2	0.8	4.0
N.Sembilan	13.8	65.6	14.1	6.5	22.3	57.4	19.1	1.2	33.2	50.6	15.4	0.8	39.4	42.1	16.0	0.4	0.9	1.2	43.2	33.3	17.8	0.8	0.5	4.4
Pahang	22.3	67.7	7.7	2.3	27.6	62.7	9.3	0.4	47.6	44.9	7.2	0.3	55.6	35.3	6.3	0.5	0.5	1.8	63.7	26.4	6.3	0.8	0.4	2.4
Perak	14.8	66.4	15.4	3.4	16.1	67.6	15.9	0.4	18.6	61.9	14.2	5.3	35.6	47.7	14.6	0.7	0.8	0.6	40.1	42.2	14.9	0.8	0.3	1.7
Perlis	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	46.4	44.1	8.9	1.5	75.8	17.6	3.4	0.2	2.2	0.8	77.5	17.1	2.0	0.2	1.8	1.5
Pulau Pinang	12.7	71.0	14.3	2.0	15.4	69.9	13.2	1.5	18.8	66.6	13.1	1.5	28.0	57.5	12.0	0.1	0.6	1.8	31.2	52.1	11.6	0.3	0.5	4.3
Selangor	14.3	64.3	16.1	5.3	21.9	59.7	16.9	1.5	31.1	53.2	14.7	1.0	43.9	35.4	15.0	0.3	2.2	3.2	47.3	31.8	13.9	1.2	1.1	4.7
Terengganu	76.9	19.7	2.5	0.9	85.9	12.8	1.2	0.1	90.8	8.3	0.8	0.1	92.5	5.6	0.5	0.2	0.2	1.0	93.2	4.7	0.3	0.5	0.2	1.1
W.P.KL	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	33.2	51.9	13.9	1.0	38.2	44.2	11.6	0.3	1.3	4.4	39.8	40.6	10.6	0.9	1.4	1.1
W.P.Labuan	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	24.4	14.3	-	20.6	10.3	30.4	33.7	14.7	-	24.4	3.4	23.7
Peninsular Malaysia	21.0	62.6	12.8	3.6	27.6	58.5	12.8	1.1	37.9	50.3	11.0	0.8	45.3	39.8	11.0	0.4	1.2	2.3	48.3	34.8	11.0	0.1	0.7	4.3

M: Malay, C: Chinese, I: Indian, O: Other, OB: Other Bumiputera, NMC: Non-Malaysian Citizens

Sources: Data of 1957, 1970 and 1980 adjusted from Kok, K.L. (1992: 40-66), data of 1991 calculated from State Population Report (13 states), data of 2000 from Department of Statistics, Malaysia (2001b: 5-51)

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Table 6. Ethnic Composition of Urban Population in Sabah and Sarawak: 1970-2000.

		Sabah						Sarawak							
1970		1980		1991		2000		1970		1980		1991		2000	
Ethnicity	%	Ethnicity	%	Ethnicity	%	Ethnicity	%	Ethnicity	%	Ethnicity	%	Ethnicity	%	Ethnicity	%
Malay	4.6	Peribumi	60.7	Malay	7.6	Malay	16.3	Malay	21.2	Malay	19.9	Malay	24.4	Malay	25.4
Chinese	59.7	Chinese	37.3	Chinese	24.2	Chinese	18.7	Chinese	67.5	Chinese	62.3	Chinese	48.6	Chinese	42.4
Indian	-	Indian	1.2	Kadazan	3.5	Kadazan	10.8	Melanau	2.4	Indian	0.6	Iban	14.1	Iban	17.3
Other Bumiputera	10.2	Others	0.8	Bajau	12.5	Bajau	13.8	Dayak	5.9	Melanau	4.4	Melanau	4.3	Melanau	4.1
Other Indigenous	9.6			Dusun	4.2	Murut	1.0	Other Indigenous	0.9	Iban	8.0	Bidayuh	4.2	Bidayuh	4.2
Indonesian	7.7			Murut	0.7	Other Bumiputera	12.1	Others	2.1	Bidayuh	2.3	Other Bumiputera	2.3	Other Bumiputera	2.6
Others	8.2			Other Bumiputera	10.4	Others	6.3			Other Indigenous	1.6	Others	1.0	Others	0.5
				Others	2.4	Non Malaysian Citizen	21.0			Others	0.9	Non Malaysian Citizen	1.1	Non Malaysian Citizen	3.5
				Indonesian	12.2										
				Other Non Malaysian Citizen	22.3										

Sources: Department of Statistics, Malaysia (1973: 124-127, 140-143), Department of Statistics, Malaysia (1984: 193, 229-230), Department of Statistics, Malaysia (1995: 76-88), Department of Statistics, Malaysia (2001b: 5-51)