

Distribution and Demography of the Orang Asli in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT: *This article discusses the Orang Asli demography found in various parts of Malaysia. The importance of this article relates to the knowledge context of Orang Asli as a minority who are still backward with regards to their unique distribution and demographic profile as compared to the Malay or other communities in the urban areas. They live in deep interior rural areas and are far away from modernization. As such, articles on this community become paramount to create awareness amongst people on their existence and challenges*

Keywords: *Demography of Orang Asli, Distribution of Orang Asli, Minority Ethnic, Orang Asli*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Orang Asli (OA) are called by various names, depending on the characteristics of the livelihood of the OA concerned. According to him (at that time), the aboriginal tribes have no proper native name on their own and therefore suitable designations have had to be found. According to him too, the other name for the OA that is recorded in the literature is Kensi. At that time, the Malays referred to the OA by many names, like Orang Utan (jungle men), to differentiate them from the Malays who were called Village Dwellers [1]. Along the Perak River, they are called the Tanjong People (men of the river reaches). They are also called Hill People because they lived far away from the Malay villages, usually on the hills. In Kelantan, they are also called Land People, meaning big forests. In the east coast and along the Pergau River, they are also referred to as bush men as they live on the fringes of the Malay villages. The OA are also called Sakai, but, the word Sakai is not liked by the OA [1]. The OA are also called Pangan (eaters of raw food), wild people, Scaled-people, Orang Mawas (ape-like people), Mantra or Orang Asal[2]. According to [3]:

“... the Malays referred to them as Sakai, but since that term carries the connection of “slave” the government now uses the term “Orang Asli” which in Malay has the literal meaning of “original people”.

According to [4], the terminology OA as an ethnic category of race only came about after 1960. According to him, during British rule, many negative adjectives were used to refer to the OA with the purpose of discriminating them. Positive words like Orang Asal and later Orang Asli were used by the British only after the Emergency (1948-1960) to persuade the OA to assist the British to combat communists threat [4]. Historians and anthropologists are of the opinion that the OA in Peninsula Malaysia originated from Northern Thailand, Burma and Cambodia and they moved to Peninsula Malaysia between three to eight thousand years ago, before the Malays. Whereas, the Proto-Malays originated from the Indonesian islands [5], the Orang Kuala and the Orang Seletar are believed to have originated from the Riau-Lingga islands.

According to [6]:

“Most of them descend from the Hoabinhians, stone tool-using hunter-gatherers who occupied the Peninsula as early as 11,000 B.C”.

However according to [7]:

“The Orang Asli are believed to be descendants of the first settlers on the Malay Peninsula. They are believed to have settled there earlier than the Malays, who are the core of the Bumiputra (meaning original settlers, literally “sons of the earth”).

[8] states:

“The Malays claim political supremacy over the Chinese and Indians in Malaysia because of their earlier arrival in the country. Yet such claims conflict with the position they have taken with regard to the earlier settlers, the Orang Asli. The question of where to position the Orang Asli in respect to national unity is of prime importance

for the Malaysian government’s Orang Asli policy. The government considers the most appropriate path to take is to classify them as Bumiputra in preparation for their eventual assimilation with the Malays”.

According to [9]:

“Orang Asli are the original inhabitants of the Peninsula, the first people; Malays are the usurpers. It was Orang Asli who first inhabited the land. Malays came later and called it “Malay land”.

[2]points out that:

“Linguistically, some of the northern Orang Asli groups (especially the Senoi and Negrito groups) speak languages, now termed Aslianlanguages, that suggest a historical link with the tribal people in Burma, Thailand and Indo-China. The members of the Aboriginal-Malay tribes, whose ancestors were believed to have migrated from the Indonesian islands to the south of the Peninsula, speak dialects which belong to the same Austronesian family of languages as Malay, with the exceptions of the Semelai and Temoq dialects (which are Austroasiatic)”.

In the [10], Orang Asli Act 1954 (Reviewed 1974), Phase 3(1) defined as OA:

- (a) any person whose male parent is or was, a member of an aboriginal ethnic group, who speaks an aboriginal language and habitually follows an aboriginal way of life and aboriginal customs and beliefs, and includes a descendant through males of such persons;
- (b) any person of any race adopted when an infant by aborigines who has been brought up as an aborigine, habitually speaks an aboriginal language, habitually follows an aboriginal way of life and aboriginal customs and beliefs and is a member of an aboriginal community; or
- (c) the child of any union between an aboriginal female and a male of another race, provided that the child habitually speaks an aboriginal language, habitually follows an aboriginal way of life and aboriginal customs and beliefs and remains a member of an aboriginal community..

II. DEMOGRAPHY OF THE ORANG ASLI

The OA in the Peninsula are divided into three main races that is, Senoi, Proto-Malays (Original Malays) and Negrito and each has six different ethnic groups (Table 1). According to data obtained from the Department of Orang Asli Affairs (DOAA) or Jabatan Kemajuan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli[11], there are around 178,197 OA in Peninsula Malaysia. As for race composition Senoi are the largest at 97,856 (54.9%), then the Proto-Malays at 75,332 (42.3%) and the least are the Negritos at 5,009 (2.8%) (Table 2).

Table 1.OA in Peninsula Malaysia

Race	Senoi	Proto-Malay	Negrito
Ethnic Group	Semai	Temuan	Kensiu
	Temiar	Semelai	Kintak
	Jahut	Jakun	Jahai
	Che Wong	Kanaq	Lanoh
	Mahmeri	Kuala ^a	Mendriq
	SemoqBeri	Seletar	Bateq

Note: ^aalso referred to as Orang Duano or DossinDolak or Orang Laut who are spread along the beaches of Johor (Rohani&NurHidayah 2010).

Source: JAKOA (2011).

Around 70 percent of OA live in Pahang and Perak. From the percentage of distribution according to states, the most number of them are in Pahang, 67,506 (37.9%), then Perak 53,299 (29.9%), Selangor, 17,587 (9.9%), Kelantan 13,457 (7.6%), Johore 13,139 (7.4%) and Negeri Sembilan 10,531 (5.9%). The population of OA is less than one percent in Malacca, Terengganu and Kedah. There are no records of OA (Senoi, Negrito and Proto- Malays) in Perlis, Penang, Sabah, Sarawak, Federal Territory (FT) Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya and Labuan. Senois are the most in Perak 50,281 (51.2%), in Pahang 29,439 (30.1%) and in Kelantan 12,047 (12.3%). The Proto-Malays are mostly settled in Pahang 37,142 (49.3%), Johor 13,083 (17.37%) and Selangor 12,511 (16.6%). Whereas, for the Negrito Race, most of them are live in Perak 2,413 (48.2%), Kelantan 1,381 (27.6%) and Pahang 925 (18.5%). In the State of Pahang, the most number of OA are the Proto-Malays (55%), then the Senoi race (43.6%), whereas the Negrito race only 1.4 percent.

Table 2. Distribution of OA According to Race and State 2010

	TOTAL		Negrito			Senoi			Proto-Malays		
	No	% race according to State ^a	No	% race according to State ^a	% State according to race ^a	No	% race according to State ^a	% State according to race ^a	No	% race according to State ^a	% State according to race ^a
Pahang	67,506	37.88 (1)	925	18.47 (3) ^b	1.37 (3) ^c	29,439	30.08 (2)	43.61 (2)	37,142	49.30 (1)	55.02 (1)
Perak	53,299	29.91 (2)	2,413	48.17 (1)	4.53 (2)	50,281	51.38 (1)	94.34 (1)	605	0.80 (6)	1.14 (3)
Selangor	17,587	9.87 (3)	3	0.06 (6)	0.02 (3)	5,073	5.18 (4)	28.85 (2)	12,511	16.61 (2)	71.14 (1)
Kelantan	13,457	7.55 (4)	1,381	27.57 (2)	10.26 (2)	12,047	12.31 (3)	89.52 (1)	29	0.04 (8)	0.22 (3)
Johore	13,139	7.37 (5)	1	0.02 (7)	0.01 (3)	55	0.06 (7)	0.42 (2)	13,083	17.37 (2)	99.57 (1)
N Sembilan	10,531	5.91 (6)	-	-	-	96	0.10 (6)	0.91 (1)	10,435	13.85 (4)	99.09 (1)
Malacca	1,515	0.85 (7)	1	0.02 (7)	0.07 (3)	28	0.03 (8)	1.85 (2)	1,486	1.97 (5)	98.09 (1)
Terengganu	893	0.50 (8)	34	0.68 (5)	3.81 (3)	818	0.84 (5)	91.60 (1)	41	0.05 (7)	4.59 (1)
Kedah	270	0.15 (9)	251	5.01 (4)	92.96 (1)	19	0.02 (9)	7.04 (2)	-	-	-
TOTAL	178,197	100.00	5,009	100.00		97,856	100.00		75,332	100.00	
% race from the total average ^a	100.00	-	2.81	-	-	54.91	-	-	42.27	-	-

Note:

^a calculated by researcher based on the information from the source below ; ^b % distribution of race according to state, for example, no. 3 means the third largest Negrito race is Pahang, the largest (1) is Perak, 2nd; largest is Kelantan and so on until 7 or 8

^c % distribution of states according to race, for example, no. 3 means in Pahang, the Negrito race is the largest after the Senoi race (2nd) and the Proto-Malays (1)

Source: JAKOA (2011)

In 2010, the OA represented 0.8 percent of the total population of Peninsula Malaysia and 0.6 percent of the total population of Malaysia. In 2010, the total population of Malaysia was 28,334,135 and the total population of the Peninsula was 22,569,345 [13]. From a comparison of the OA with the non-OA, there are eight OA for every 1,000 non-OA in the Peninsula and six OA for every 1,000 non-OA in Malaysia (Table 3). From the average, the total number of OA represents 4.5 percent of those from Pahang and 2.3 percent from Perak. Even though the third largest number of OA are in Selangor, from the total percentage from the States, the third largest state is Negeri Sembilan and they represent one percent of the total population of the State. In the other states, the OA represent less than one percent of the State. From the average of OA-non-OA, for every 1,000 people who were not from the OA race, the OA totaled 47 in Pahang, 23 in Perak, 10 in Negeri Sembilan, nine in Kelantan, four in Johor, three in Selangor, two in Malacca and one in Terengganu. The least number of OA are in Kedah (0.01% of the total population in that state). In Kedah, the OA are only one to every 10,000 people..

Table 3. Average Number of OA in the States, 2010

	Total population ^a	Total Orang Asli ^b	% of Orang Asli from the total population	Average number of Orang Asli for every 1,000 people who are non-Orang Asli	Average number of Orang Asli for every 10,000 non-Orang Asli
Pahang	1,500,817	67,506	4.50	47	471
Perak	2,352,743	53,299	2.27	23	232
Selangor	5,462,141	17,587	0.32	3	32
Kelantan	1,539,601	13,457	0.87	9	88
Johore	3,348,283	13,139	0.39	4	39
N.Sembilan	1,021,064	10,531	1.03	10	104
Malacca	821,110	1,515	0.18	2	18
Terengganu	1,035,977	893	0.09	1	9
Kedah	1,947,651	270	0.01	0	1
Perlis	231,541	-	-	-	-
P.Pinang	1,561,383	-	-	-	-
FT KL	1,674,621	-	-	-	-
FT Putrajaya	72,413	-	-	-	-
PENINSULA	22,569,345	178,197	0.79	8	80
Sabah	3,206,742	-	-	-	-
Sarawak	2,471,140	-	-	-	-
FT Labuan	86,908	-	-	-	-
MALAYSIA	28,334,135	178,197	0.63	6	63

Source: ^a Statistics Department of Malaysia (2011)

^b JAKOA (2011)

According to JAKOA’s records, the population of the OA has increased (Figure 1). In the 30 years between 1980-2010, the population of the OA has increased from 67,014 to 178,197 that is by 166 percent compared with the population of Malaysia which increased by 106 percent in the same period of time. The population of Malaysia in 1980 was 13,745,241 million and 2010 was 28,334,135 million [13]. From the average yearly growth of the OA, the average has decreased by 3.3 percent for the years 1991-2000 to 3.0 percent for the years 2000-2010 [calculated using the average annual population growth = $1/n [\ln (P_{t+n})/P_t] \times 100$, where n=number of years between t years and t+n, P_t = total population in the year t, P_{t+n} = total population in the year t+n, ln=original logarithm]. Even though the average growth has decreased, it is much higher from the previous 2.0 percent for the years 2000-2010.

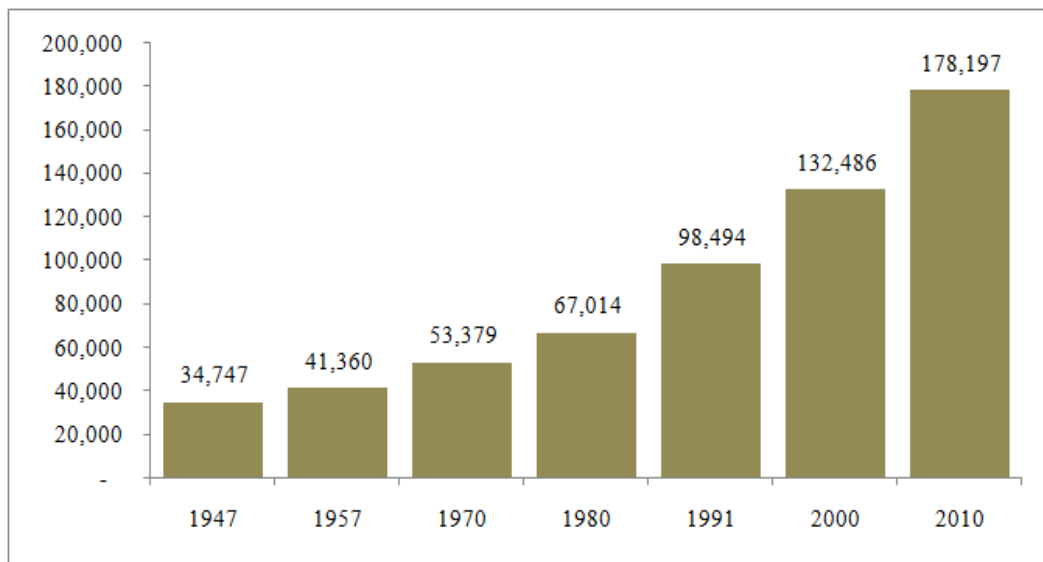


Fig. 1. Number of OA 1947-2010

Source: JAKOA (2011)

The average population growth of the OA is calculated based on the number of OA for the year 2000 and 2010 from the [12] and the average rate of annual population growth in Malaysia based on information from the population and Housing Census of Malaysia 2010 [13]. The decrease in the average growth rate is attributed to the decline in the fertility rate when the standard of living of the country rose in line with the demographic transition theory. The decrease in the rate of population growth shows that the country is evolving towards reaching the developed status. As in other countries, the number of OA who live in the towns also has increased (Table 4). The average percentage of OA who live in urban areas increased from only 1.6 percent in 1970 to 11.3 percent in 2000. Around seven OA villages are located in urban areas like BatuBerangkai, Kampar, Perak; Sungai Ruil in Cameron Highlands, Pahang; Bukit Lanjan, Damansara, Tanjung Sepat, Kuala Langat, Selangor [14].

Table 4. Percentage of OA According to Stratification

Strata	1970	1980	1991	2000 ^a
Town (population < 9,999)	1.6	3.8	8.9	11.3
Small town (population 1,000 – 9,999)	2.4	2.9	2.4	3.0
Rural area (population > 1,000)	96.0	93.3	88.7	85.7

Note; ^acomplete data of the Orang Asli population from the latest Population and Housing census, 2010 has still not been made available by the Statistics Department of Malaysia.

Source: Norfariza (2008)

Until 31st December 2010, there were around 36,658 OA families in Peninsula Malaysia that is, an increase 24,368 families in 2000 [12,[15]. In the same year, there were also 852 OA villages. These villages are classified into three based on their location and criteria as in Table 5. Through the resettlement of the OA project, the number of OA villages located deep in the jungles has decreased and now more OA villages are living on the town fringes. The age of the OA population is classified as the young age structure. In 2000, around 45.6 percent of the OA were under the age of 15 years compared to 36.6 percent for the total population in Peninsula Malaysia in the same year. The average age for the OA is 16.7 years when compared with the total population in Peninsula Malaysia, which is 23.8 years (Table 6).

Table 5.Category of the OA Village

Category of the Village	Number	Criteria
Interior	327 (38%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be contacted via laterite roads, jungle pathway or waterways • Does not have clean water supply, 24 hours electricity supply and other basic facilities • No fixed source of income
Bordering the towns	519 (61%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close to Malay villages • Can be contacted through premix roads • Have basic facilities, clean water supply, 24 hours electricity supply • Have land development projects and fixed source of income
Town	6 (1%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have complete facilities • No land development projects

Source: JAKOA (2011)

Table 6.Comparison of Age Indicators of the OA, 2000

	Orang Asli	Total Population in Peninsula Malaysia
Average Age	16.7	23.8
Average number of dependants	91.2	58.8
Average number of dependant children	87.2	51.5
Average number of dependant elders	4.0	6.4

Source: Norfariza (2008)

The young age structure results in whole average number of dependants and the average number of dependant children for the OA to be high when compared with the total population in Peninsula Malaysia. Whereas the low life span results in the average number of older dependants to be low when compared with Peninsula Malaysia. The average number of women OA indicates a normal trend; otherwise the number of males is higher than the females. In 2000, the average number of women OA was 102 (102 males for each 100 women). Whereas, for the whole of Peninsula Malaysia, it was 103 and the average of women was at 65 and it indicated there were more women than men (because the women lived longer than the men). On the other hand, for the OA, at age 65 and more, the average age of the OA is 126 compared with the whole of Peninsula Malaysia which is 85. The average number of men who are more than the women also explains why at the same age (65 and more), 30.8 percent of the OA male population become widowers compared to the 14.6 percentage for the total in Peninsula Malaysia. Whereas for the women, for the same age, 54.4 percent of the OA becoming widows is around the same as in Peninsula Malaysia, which is 55.9 percent [15].

The OA marriage is at a younger age when compared with the others in Peninsula Malaysia. In 2000, the minimum age of marriage for first timers from the OA community was 25 for the men and 22 for the women as compared with 29 for men and 26 for women for the whole of Malaysia. Around 0.9 percent of the OA marry at below 15 years, especially the women. About 0.5 percent of the men and 1.3 percent of the women OA marry when below 15 years [15].

III. CONCLUSION

Nowadays, a small number of the OA community who live in the towns and fringes of towns, are now being influenced by materialism and individualism compared with those who live in the interior areas. The rural OA still strongly hold on to family ties and subsistence living balanced with a traditional livelihood. The OA also have a rich knowledge of carpentry, weaving and traditional medicine-making. However, the intellectual property of the OA is not in place and is slowly dying-off. The traditional knowledge of the OA is also not sufficiently recorded in documents. The knowledge of this treasure has much intellectual value and has to be patented and commercialized. Every race has its own valuable knowledge and skills. With this in mind, the *Focus Group* on the Development of the OA that was established in July 2010 suggested that the Government develop a Traditional Knowledge Digital Library and have a development concept that will involve academic researchers, JAKOA and the OA community.

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