

I. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family:

Language/society name: Malay (alternate names include Colloquial Malay, Local Malay, Malayu) (1)

Language family: Austronesian (1)

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com):

ISO 639-3: zlm (3)

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

Malay is primarily spoken in Malaysia, and can also be found in parts of Sarawak, Canada, Indonesia (Sumatra), Myanmar, Singapore, United Arab Emirates, United States (1).

Coordinates: 2 30 N, 112 30 E (7).

1.4 Brief history:

Malaysia, the main geographic location for Malay speakers was first colonized by the British in the late eighteenth century. Brits tricked or forced Malay leaders to giving up power to take advantage of some of the area's resources like tin. Japanese control and takeover of the country during World War II led to an anti-colonialism movement that eventually led to Malaysian independence in 1963. The country has and continues to struggle with how to best represent the diverse population and variety of cultures represented, including Malay, Chinese, and Indian (6).

Before being converted to the Islamic faith in the fifteenth century, many Malay people followed a Hindu belief structure (10).

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

Control by British colonizers set up a divided country, especially economically. British colonizers built reservations and set aside land to be used for growing rubber trees that was reserved solely for Malay people (6).

The country of Malaysia also sits near an area known as the "golden triangle" and is a hot spot in the opium trade. Drug possession carries with it a death sentence throughout the country, however (6).

1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

The country is traditionally divided into east and west territories, separated by a mountain range in the center of the peninsula. Malaysia has a tropical; annual with monsoons from February to October (7).

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density

Malaysia had an estimated population of 70 million in 2010, 60 percent of which identifies as Malay (6).

II. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

Rice, noodles, Roti canal (a round flat bread made with wheat flour) (3)

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

Chicken, seafood, eggs (3)

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

The most well-known or widely recognized weapon from traditional Malay culture is the *keris*, a specific kind of edged weapon. Swords, daggers, and spears were most likely also used, but little is known or has been studied with these weapons (8).

2.4 Food storage:

N/A

2.5 Sexual division of production:

Traditionally, labor was divided among ethnic lines rather than sexual ones. Malay people typically did much of the agricultural work, while other groups like the Chinese worked in factories and more urban areas. Men and women both worked in the fields, and did fairly equal jobs or tasks. Now though, class and citizenship status are replacing ethnicity as a determining factor in who does what with food and other good production (6).

2.6 Land tenure:

Ethnic differences also play a large role in how land is divided amongst the different cultures that call the area, occupied in part by the Malays, home. Traditionally, the Indian and Chinese families in the country have dominated more urban areas, leaving the Malays to work in more rural areas, especially in the times of British colonization when colonizers set up reservations for Malay workers to grow and harvest rubber. This land was

available solely for the Malay, many of whom still feel they have claims to the land to this day. Since the 1970s, there's been a concerted effort to increase the Malay presence in these same areas through the construction of Islamic buildings and more opportunities for Malay workers (6).

2.7 Ceramics:

Rather than traditional ceramics made from clay or other earth-based materials, the Malay people have long taken advantage of natural tin reserves found throughout their lands and produce some of the world's finest pewter. The world's largest pewter factory can still be found in the area today, and is still family owned and operated after almost 200 years since it first opened its doors (9).

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

N/A

2.9 Food taboos:

Pork is never used for religious reasons (3).

Women are encouraged to watch their consumption of jackfruit and durian during the first few months of a pregnancy to prevent blood clots (11).

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

Information on specific watercraft could not be found, but traditional Malay people most likely wound up in Malay after traveling through fierce ocean water by sturdy boats, and were also known to be great fishermen (10).

III. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

Male: 164.7 centimeters (17)

Female: 153.3 centimeters (17)

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

Male: 61.7 kilograms (17)

Female: 55 kilograms (17)

IV. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

N/A

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

N/A

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

Average birth rate as of 2005 was 3.07 births per woman (7).

Traditionally, most women became extremely disinterested in having more children or putting a significant amount of space between their next child after the fifth birth (11).

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

Exact inter-birth interval could not be found. Interesting information related to family planning was available, however. Few women were interested in western methods of family planning even into the 1970s, choosing instead to rely on abstinence during certain portions of a woman's menstrual cycle or traditional spells thought to prevent conception (11).

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

In accordance with Malaysian law drafted and passed in the 1980s, men may not marry under the age of 18, and women cannot marry under the age of 16 unless special permission is granted (4).

Traditionally, boys and girls began looking for a spouse as early as age 16. All women were expected to marry by age 20 (10).

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

An exact percentage could not be found, but people can get remarried after a divorce only if specific procedures structured around the Muslim faith are followed (4).

Traditionally, both men and women could get divorced. Women often divorced their husbands, according to observations made by British colonizers in the 1800s (10).

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

Polygamy or polygyny is banned based on Malaysian law, which is closely tied to various aspects of the Muslim faith. Men can petition the court for

a polygynous marriage, however if certain policies and procedures are followed (4).

Traditionally though, men were allowed up to four wives and could divorce and replace them at any time. If a man had enough resources, it was fairly likely he'd take advantage of this and have multiple partners, but usually wouldn't max out and try to support four wives all at one time (10).

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:

A groom must pay the *mas kahwin*, a payment made to the bride or her family. Traditionally, this payment was made in actual gold, but is now made with modern currency sometimes used to purchase gold to symbolize tradition (2).

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

The biggest concern in terms of inheritances is land. Most Malay people still feel a distinct connection to lands specifically designated for them by the British, and, for this reason, rarely treat land simply as acres for sale, even if they or their family members don't plan to live on the land. Gold is also valued as an inheritance (6).

Traditionally, land was split evenly amongst sons and daughters. More recent Islamic law though, dictates that daughters are now to receive half-shares (15).

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

A child is said to get their sense of self-control and rationality from their father, and "bodily emotions and hungers" from their mother (11).

Parents are treated with the upmost respect from their children. Total loyalty and obedience are expected in daily life (13).

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

Malay attitudes towards homosexuality follow a "don't ask, don't tell" policy. While Islamic law makes it clear that homosexuality isn't widely accepted, most people are fairly unwilling to actively seek out those who engage in homosexual relationships and activities and somehow punish them (14).

Islamic law known as the *hadith* expressly prohibits cross-dressing because it promotes "gender ambiguity" and challenges the basic assumption that everyone has one single sex. Behaviors that force others to question one's gender, especially a man's senses of masculinity are frowned upon (14).

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

N/A

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized?

A child is said to develop in the father's brain before passing on to the father's eyes, affectionately known as *cahaya mata* or the light of his eyes. The eyes are usually thought of as the baby's first physical feature. The baby then moves down to the father's chest, where emotions are typically held. After experiencing his rationality and emotions, the baby then enters the father's penis, and is then transferred to its mother (11).

4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”)

More information exists regarding the mother's role after her child is born. Mothers are expected to dress a certain way, eat foods that will help them regain strength, and keep from doing certain jobs or tasks that are labeled as “bad luck” to protect their newborn (6).

The mother is a “nesting place” for the baby, a scenario traditional Malay midwives compare to a seed taking root in fertile soil. While the baby gets the “four elements of life” during its journey through the father, it would be incomplete without a chance to grow inside its mother (11).

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?

Conception is not an incremental process, but the development of a child is. Each parent contributes different things to the child and has a unique role to play in its development, described in greater detail in questions 4.13 and 4.14 (11).

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

With such a strict Islam code of law, any sort of affair outside of a marriage is extremely rare, as most acts of promiscuity are actively punished and publicly denounced (15).

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)

N/A

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

Traditionally, unmarried girls were encouraged to avoid relationships or contact of any sort with men unless they were closely related. After marriage however, they gained many more freedoms (10).

Now, women enjoy more sexual freedoms and can pursue things like divorce, but are still somewhat restricted by different Islamic laws and practices. Malay Muslims are not as traditional, nor do they have as many restrictions as many Muslims living in areas like the Middle East (10).

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

N/A

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

The father, the maternal grandmother, the paternal grandmother, or a sister would become responsible for raising children (4).

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

Based on 2005 data:

Under 15 years: 1.06 male(s)/female

15-64 years: 1.01 male(s)/female

65 years and over: 0.79 male(s)/female

total population: 1.01 male(s)/female (9)

4.22 Evidence for couvades

N/A

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)

All children fathered by one man, even if they have different mothers, all take the father's last name. This is viewed as slightly more permissible than one woman sleeping and having children with multiple men (15).

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

One's own generation is usually considered more important than past ones. That is, one's siblings are more valuable or important to someone than their ancestors. That being said, elders are still important and children are instructed on the proper way to address people with regards to age hierarchy (6).

4.24 Joking relationships?

N/A

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations

Descent typically follows a patriarchal descent pattern as dictated primarily by religious customs and practices (15).

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

Laws have been passed banning marriages between a parent and child, a child and grandparent, siblings, aunts, uncles, or cousins (4).

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

Malay weddings involve several stages. First, families embark on a *merisk* where the potential groom's parents "investigate" his hopeful bride-to-be. This is followed by a *pertunangan* or an official engagement once approval has been made. Then, the groom signs an *akad nikah*, a formal marriage contract between the two families. The groom is also responsible for providing the bride's family with a *wang belanja* to provide gifts and monetary support for his bride's family. He also must pay a *mas kahwin*, a payment that goes directly to the bride. Finally, a formal ceremony known as a *persandingan* takes place to seal the marriage. Guests receive a *bunga telur*, a flower and egg to symbolize fertility. After the actual marriage ceremony, (the *bersanding*) everyone celebrates with a feast called the *makan beradab* (2).

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?

All children fathered by a certain man take that man's name as their own. Women also adopt the name of their husband (15).

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)

It's preferred that marriages remain between two members of the Malay community. Marriages between a Malay and an Indian or Chinese citizen are rare. Marriages between a devote Muslim and someone of another faith are also rare, and come with complex rules as to how the marriage will be recognized by the government and in the community (6).

Traditionally, many marriages were arranged with members of outside groups like the Thais (10).

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?

Once a man and woman are identified as being interested in getting married, the groom's parents traditionally sought the help of relatives and close friends to "investigate" the groom's selection. If approved, the

woman receives an engagement ring and a ceremony is planned for anywhere from six months to two years after an agreement is reached (2).

Marriages, at least the first one or two, were traditionally arranged, at least in part, by one's family (10).

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

N/A

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

N/A

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

Malaysia is a unique country because the country has never suffered from a military coup, unlike most nearby nations. The highest ranks in the country's military are held exclusively by Malays (rather than those of Indian or Chinese descent), making "ingroup violent death" unlikely (6).

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

Malay warriors traditionally learned the art of *silat*, a method of self-defense that doesn't rely on weapons and is one way of protecting one's self against both types of killing (9).

Malay men traditionally lashed out at perceived insult by harming or even killing the one delivering the verbal blow. If they could not find this person in an adequate amount of time, it was reported by British settlers in the 1800s that they'd settle for killing someone who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time as a substitute (10).

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

Malaysia has maintained one of the highest police forces per capita since the days of British colonization. Police activity tends to focus on commercial activity, however (6).

4.18 Cannibalism?

N/A

V. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

N/A

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

The Malay were not seasonal people, and established permanent settlements (12).

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):

Before colonization and domination in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Malay were governed by the Malacca sultanate. Leaders known as *rajās* typically treated their subjects fairly poorly, subjecting them to laws often made at personal whim based on personal desire (10).

Today, a king is in charge of Malaysia's government. This is a position that rotates every five years amongst nine different Malay leaders. The king also gets to choose a prime minister that represents the top party in parliament. The parliament is divided into two chambers, the Dewan Rakyat and the Dewan Negara. The United Malays National Organization has dominated both chambers and thus, has dominated Malaysian politics since independence was granted in the 60s (6).

5.4 Post marital residence:

The couple lives in a house independent of their parents/in-laws (2).

Emphasis is placed on the nuclear family, and is reflected in housing arrangements. A married man still living with his parents is considered someone with lower social status (15).

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

In the 1400 and 1500s, the two biggest enemies (and biggest sources of concern when it came to defending and maintaining boundaries) were the Portuguese and the Chinese. Attacks by these groups forced the Malay to move settlements around and undertake various missions to protect the governing court (10).

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

Women are responsible for cooking and cleaning within a household. Men tend to have more power than women as demonstrated by a larger percentage of males holding the positions in society associated with the most power. Women are beginning to take on a stronger role, with the emergence of several women in notable fields like politics (6).

Etiquette and “rules” for social exchanges are usually organized along religious and age lines. With other Malays, typical Arabic greetings are used in association with most Malays’ Muslim faith and beliefs. With strangers however, things become more complex and hesitant if religion doesn’t serve as a common link between the two parties (6).

Malays were also traditionally known for being intolerant when insulted. Often times, an insult, especially from an outsider, was cause for bloodshed (10).

Boys traditionally were allowed to pretty much do as they pleased, and viewed the world through a lens that could be described as “naïve.” Around the age of 16, they typically began to lose this jaded nature and began taking a turbulent path towards adulthood. Girls remained in the same state as boys only until around age 5, when they were then expected to learn how to perform basic domestic tasks, and may obtain basic reading and writing skills as well. Unmarried girls were expected to avoid contact with all men except those they’re fairly close to, usually kin (10).

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

Visitors are treated with the upmost respect, with hospitality serving as a top priority for many Malay families. Visitors are sure to receive VIP treatment (10).

Typically, physical contact between opposite sexes is frowned upon and is something to be avoided based on Islamic rules and practices. Contact is okay in certain circumstances though, usually between certain relatives or a husband/wife, etc. (12).

5.8 Village and house organization:

Traditionally, extended families lived together, a characteristic one might expect of a group of people with a history rooted in agriculture. Life was centered around the *kampong*, or village (9). These kampongs existed as part of various *sultanates*, a way of organizing Malay territory similar to provinces or states in many countries today (12). As Malaysia began to modernize however, it became harder to keep one’s entire family under one roof. Most families still gather together during holidays, however (6).

Kin is treated with the upmost respect, and family members commonly protect their family members, not hesitating to make one member’s problem a problem the whole family shares and acts on (10).

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

N/A

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

The Malay sleep in houses constructed on pilings four to eight feet high with thatched roofs. These houses can be found along the coast, or rivers. Wealthier families have tiled roofs instead (12).

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

Based on Islamic faith traditions, a Malay person usually thinks about themselves in relation to others and their connections to other individuals. That is, rather than focus on themselves and personal needs, wants, or desires, a Malay is constantly expected to think about how their behavior looks in the eyes of others and behave in a socially acceptable manner all the time (5).

Typically, Malay class structure is based things like political connections, special skills or talents (especially English language skills) and how wealthy one's family is or was (6).

Older and younger siblings are distinguished between in Malay culture (16).

5.12 Trade:

Malaysia has, for the most part, always been fairly significant in terms of trade. Today, it's one of the 20 largest countries in terms of imports and exports and trades primarily with Japan, Singapore, and the U.S. Primary trade exports include rubber, palm oil, and petroleum (6).

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

Malay people tend to dominate more elite positions in politics and the military as compared to other ethnicities (6).

VI. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

The Malay people base a lot of their culture and spend their lives living as devoted Muslims, meaning the time allocated to religion is fairly significant. Rejecting Islam as a faith also means rejecting one's identity as a Malay (5).

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

The government regulates many mosques throughout Malaysia, and Muslim credentials are often a source of bragging rights for prominent leaders in the Malay community (6).

Some traditional Malay healers and healing practices are still used in conjunction with modern medicinal practices (6).

A magical artisan known as an *empu* is the only one allowed to create special blades known as *kris*. The whole process can take months, since work can only be done on days deemed favorable by the *empu*, and the delicate, detailed process that goes into each and every *kris*.

6.2 Stimulants:

Accounts from British settlers in the 1800s state that traditional Malay people never drank "intoxicants" and rarely smoked drugs like opium (10).

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):

Major rituals are known as *adats*, and mark all of the changes a person goes through in his or her life described above (birth, engagement, marriage, death) (5). Another huge milestone is the pilgrimage to Mecca requested at some point in the lifetime of all devout Muslims (6).

6.4 Other rituals:

In keeping with Islamic faith expectations, most Malays pray five times a day to their god, Allah. They also only eat food that's halal and fast during Ramadan (5).

The left hand is the hand typically used to clean the body, so it's considered impolite to use it in giving or receiving gifts, handling money, eating, giving directions, or pointing at someone or something (6).

Other important holidays are also celebrated, most of which are marked by Muslims around the world. These include a holiday to mark the birth of the prophet Muhammad and Ramadan (6).

6.5 Myths (Creation):

Before the British began colonizing the area where the Malay can be found, rulers largely supported a wide variety of fables and legends, some of which are still told in Malay society today (6).

The *orang asli*, (original people) believed the country's jungles were a playground of sorts for good and bad spirits alike. They also believe that a person's soul travels around when the person is asleep, and that dreams

are actually memories of these travels. There's also a lot of legends and folklore surrounding the powers of the *kris*, a traditional weapon (9).

Many natural features are also explained through myths (9).

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

The ancient art of *batik*, where things like shirts, sarongs, cloth, dresses, and other fabrics are painted with wax then dyed has existed in Malaysia for many years (6).

Performance arts are strictly controlled by the government today. All film and play scripts must get governmental approval before being filmed or performed. Malay people also enjoy popular music, and several Malay singers have emerged over the years. Music and shows from all over Asia are also popular (6).

Many modern cultural products (television shows, leisure activities, etc.) include reminders to participate in daily prayers (6).

Kites called *waus* are also common crafts found in Malay society (9).

A document known as the *sejarah melayu* is recognized as the most classical example of Malay prose ever written, and provides great documentation of Malay life before colonization by the Portuguese in 1511 (10).

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

Women are expected to be extremely modest in society, especially if they're not married yet. They're encouraged to be extremely bashful when dealing with the opposite sex, and avoid contact or direct exchanges as much as possible. They're also expected to dress more modestly. Once married however, a woman is able to enjoy many more sexual freedoms, though she still does not have as much freedom as males traditionally enjoy. Malay is a more tolerant Islamic culture, and doesn't limit the rights of women as much as other Islamic societies found in regions like the Middle East do (15).

6.8 Missionary effect:

N/A

6.9 RCR revival:

A heavy focus on industrializing the country and remaining a strong, competitive trading partner means the arts have fallen to the wayside for

quite some time. Recent efforts have been made to revive traditional arts and other cultural practices however (6).

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

The Malay are quite fascinated by the idea of spirits and spooks both as a source of comfort and a source of fear. Dead relatives' graves are marked with the customary twin tombstones commonly found in Islamic cemeteries, and are considered sites of mystery (6).

The dead are buried soon after they pass away, and the funeral becomes a community event where everyone's invited to mourn the dead by saying the appropriate prayers and preparing the body for burial. Emotional displays are kept to a minimum however to avoid angering or upsetting the decision that's been made with regards to the deceased's afterlife and whoever it is that dictates their next resting place (6).

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

N/A

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

There is some evidence/support for teknonymy (16).

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)

Islam is the dominant, official religion throughout Malaysia, with a strong correlation with Malay culture for nearly 500 years. The biggest sources of tension is how much the government should interfere with religious practices or pass policies that enforce different elements of Islamic faith (6).

VII. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

N/A

7.2 Piercings:

Traditionally, a boy would get his ear pierced when circumcised (10).

7.3 Haircut:

Up until the last several years, women were not required to cover hair, even if it was long (making it an "erotic feature") with a traditional head scarf or other head covering (15).

7.4 Scarification:

N/A

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

N/A

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

Henna is a common adornment in weddings. A ceremony known as *Adat Berinai* or “staining of the couple’s hands” takes place to ward off evil spirits and other troubles that could plague the marriage (2).

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

N/A

7.8 Missionary effect:

Christian missionaries gave up fairly early in terms of attempting to woo Malay people away from Islam, perhaps sensing that, while devout, the Malays are also extremely tolerant of other faiths (10).

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

N/A

VIII. Kinship systems**8.1 Sibling classification system:**

Siblings are some of the most important ties a Malay person maintains in his or her lifetime. Preference is given for lateral relationships over ties to dead relatives or ancestors, and is the backbone of Malay social construction (16).

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

N/A

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

N/A

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

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