

CHINESE NEW VILLAGES
A CASE STUDY
OF
VAL D'OR
AND
JAWI
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CHAPTER: I

INTRODUCTION

1. Objective of Study

Malaysia is going through a rapid process of change both social and of its economy from an agricultural oriented one to a more diversified and viable one with the manufacturing sector playing a dominant role. The nation is not developing for development's sake but for creating new employment opportunities, for increasing the average per capita income and to restructure the society in the context of our national framework. It can be said that a stage has been reached in the nation's economic and social development where greater emphasis must be placed on social integration and more equitable distribution of income and opportunities for national unity and progress. This direction towards national unity is fundamental to the New Economic Policy as reflected in the Second Malaysia Plan. The Plan is oriented towards the eradication of poverty among all Malaysians, irrespective of race, and to restructure Malaysian Society in order to correct racial economic imbalances, in the context of an expanding economy, leading towards the creation of a dynamic and just society.

The whole Plan is geared towards this, thus:

"The Plan incorporates a two-pronged New Economic Policy for development. The first prong is to reduce and eventually eradicate poverty, by raising income levels and increasing employment opportunities for all Malaysians, irrespective of race. The second

prong aims at accelerating the process of restructuring realaysion society to correct economic imbalance, so as to reduce and eventually eliminate the identification of race with economic function" ^{1/}.

There is therefore, at the moment, a sincere commitment, on the part of our National leaders to eradicate poverty and to distribute the benefits of development to all Malaysians irrespective of race. What has happened is that the Chinese have been treated generally as a well off race, however this is erroneous since the actual well off group is only a small proportion of the Chinese population in Malaysia. Poverty like all illness does not discriminate by race. There is also poverty among the Chines both in the urban areas, reflected in slums and in rural areas, concentrated in New Villages. The creation of New Villages throughout the country has created pockets of Chinese afflicted by poverty. Generally the level of incomes in the New Villages is relatively very low thus giving rise to lower standards of living as compared to other areas.

^{1/} The Second Malaysia Plan.

Government Printed p.1

It is strongly felt that the poverty among the Chinese too need to be wiped out in order for these Chinese to play a more positive role in the Nation. Before we go about solving their problems we need to know of their background, the conditions under which they live and their capabilities which could be utilised for their own upliftment.

It is in this context that this study is undertaken with an approach not only to study the Chinese New Villagers but also to look at ways as to how the poverty among them can be overcome. The study will enquire into their employment pattern, income levels, education and conditions of living; in this process identifying the problems faced by these people. Next I have attempted to the best of my ability, to suggest some solutions to these problems.

2. Methodology

The study was undertaken via interviews with the help of a prepared questionnaire, which is contained in Appendix 1. In addition to that interviews were held with the relevant officials, especially of the District and State Officials.

3. Limitations of Study

Although the recommendations are made on general grounds for all New Villages, but the data and material collected and analysed are restricted to the two Chinese New Villages in Nibong Tebal, namely Jawi and Val D'or respectively.

However I believe that the general pattern of findings ^{is} ~~are~~ similar in most of the New Villages and the recommendations are broad enough to be adapted for each individual case.

4. Organisation of Chapters

To serve as a background, Chapter II deals with the origin of New Villages. This traces the events which led to the creation of the New Villages and why they were dominated by Chinese settlers.

The next chapter, Chapter III deals with the specific studies on Jawi and Val D'or. This reveals the pattern of economic activities in the New Villages, the importance of each activity and how this pattern has changed from the time the villages were squatters to the time they were grouped in villages to the present time. After looking at the economic activities I have gone into the next important aspect of the New Villagers' life, that is education. Then I have enquired into their conditions of living, followed by the political and administrative set up in the villages. The problems identified in Chapter III are attempted to be solved in a unified and comprehensive way in Chapter IV. In the last Chapter I have drawn some conclusions based on the findings and recommendations contained in the earlier Chapters.

3. ... of Tropical Geography, Vol. 11, 1968 pages 8-18

CHAPTER II

ORIGIN OF NEW VILLAGES

I. INTRODUCTION

This chapter will trace the phenomena of how immigrant labourers from China were scattered throughout the countryside of Peninsular Malaya. It will touch on the role of these Chinese in the national framework and how they became "problem squatters", and why they had to be resettled.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 All unalienated land in pre-Emergency Malaya was vested in the Malay Rulers and land titles in each State were granted only with the authority of the Ruler in Council. Furthermore, constitutionally, much of the land could be alienated to Malays only, and could not subsequently be transferred to other communities. All these restrictions made land acquisition extremely difficult for the other communities, the Chinese and Indian immigrants. The result was the development of "squattling", i.e. the illegal occupation of vacant land. There have been Chinese squatters in Malaya since the arrival of the first Chinese settlers.³ However, initially, they were few in number, till the outbreak of the First World War which dislocated trade and employment in rubber estates, which left those dependent on these industries, unemployed; the Malayan Government repatriated many of them; others turned to the land - land which they were unable or unwilling to occupy legally.

³ Sandhu, K.S. "Chinese Colonization of Malacca" *Journal of Tropical Geography*, Vol. 15, 1961 pages 6-18

These people had no legal land titles to the land they occupied. Their position was neither stable nor secure, since they lived outside the pale of the law. The Government was aware of their existence and recognised the evils of their form of land occupation. However it took no action because it did not see the urgency of the problems or saw no problems at all. It did not see the need to deal with the squatters who were virtually out of sight and who provided a useful source of foodstuffs and labour.

There are no statistics as to the number who became squatters during the economic recession caused by the First World War. It is possible that with the temporary improvement in the economic situation between 1918-1920 many reverted to their former occupations or found other jobs. However this was short lived due to the occurrence of the Great Slump. This left those with business high and dry, and brought to a standstill the industries in which others were working. The lack of profitable employment in the urban areas drove these people to the country, there to take up residence, in isolated households, in communities located on the borders of plantations, near other rural communities, on abandoned mining land, or anywhere at all - usually at quite some distance from any highway or railroad. A number of these unemployed Chinese also left the country. Once trade revived again, the number of squatters decreased.

The Japanese occupation of Peninsular Malaya drastically changed the pattern of movement of the Chinese to and from the rural areas. It is estimated that in 1940 there were about 150,000 Chinese squatters in the country; in 1945 there were 400,000.⁴

⁴ Perry Robinson, J.B. Transformation in Malaya

The following are the main causes for the sharp increase in squatters:-

- (i) natural increase;
- (ii) illegal immigration during and after the Japanese Occupation;
- (iii) movement of labourers away from moribund mines and estates; and
- (iv) migration of urban dwellers to the countryside.

Before the Second World War the official immigration policy of the Malayan Government was to improve the sexratio among the Chinese, in order to stabilise the population. As such, until 1938, there was no restriction on the immigration of Chinese women. There was a migrational gain of approximately 190,000 Chinese women during the period 1934-38. Large numbers of these women were peasant workers who entered rubber estates, tin mines, market gardening and building industries. They got married to squatters, and settled down in Malaya. As a result the Chinese, population including squatters, increased rapidly.

Illegal immigration into Malaya did not pose as a serious problem before 1941, although it is known that the Chinese trickled into the country, illegally. However it increased rapidly during the Japanese Occupation and the interim period between the Japanese surrender and the arrival of the British. The Japanese control of immigration was inefficient, and what little control they had disappeared after their surrender.

When the Japanese attacked Malaya both the rubber and tin industries were working to capacity. When the tides of the War were turning in 1943 the Japanese mobilised all their resources towards the

objective of holding what they had conquered. This meant that they had too few ships to export rubber, and their efforts to distil it into motor fuel were a failure. Rubber became almost unsaleable. The tin industry was also in trouble. The tin dredges were either sunk or out of action for want of spare parts. Many workers became unemployed. At the same time, the price of goods soared. Former sources of food, such as Indonesia, China, Thailand and Australia were cut off. The unemployed realised that their only hope of survival lay in subsistence cultivation of foodstuffs. Some of them gravitated towards the rice-producing areas. Others cultivated food crops on land that has been made available by the Japanese destruction of rubber plantations.

Conditions in the urban areas were even less tolerable. The inefficient Japanese rationing system led to high prices and black markets. Worst still, many families lost their bread winners when the Japanese conscripted labour for their construction projects. In addition to these economic conditions, there was a political persecution of the Chinese. Large numbers of Chinese, especially those between the age of 20 and 35, were killed by the Japanese. Many villages were destroyed and thousands of Chinese were moved from one area to another.

The total effect of these adverse conditions was a general exodus from the towns as people tried to avoid both starvation and the Japanese. The Japanese did not object to this exodus, since it relieved pressure on the rationing system. In fact, they encouraged movement into the country side to grow more food.

These "squatters" usually settled somewhere along the Western coast of the country in the economically most progressive areas. They settled on uncultivated land and developed it. Many times they cut into

the jungle itself and formed new areas of arable land. Though their farming was on a relatively small scale, they raised a variety of crops. Rice often formed the subsistence crop. In addition, they raised sweet potatoes, beans, green vegetables, tobacco, tapioca and bananas, any of them becoming a chief crop according to the location of the settlement and the quality of the soil. They also kept livestock - pigs and poultry. With the restoration of the machinery of trade, they switched from subsistence to commercial farming. They sold their crop to the local communities, mining camps, plantations and the nearby urban centres: in fact in some parts of Malaya the squatters became the chief source of vegetables, eggs and pork, not only for the neighbourhood but for export as well. The men of the family often engaged in second occupations, where this was possible. These second occupations were usually either tin mining or rubber tapping. Having planted their crops, the men would leave the care of the farm to the women and children and engage themselves in this second occupation.

As said earlier, these particular Chinese were a valuable asset to the country in their role as food producers at a time when the total economy of the nation had been disrupted by the war. Particularly was this role appreciated at the end of the Second World War, at which time there was a great shortage of food over the country. For these reasons, then, a very long time passed before anything was said about the conditions under which they occupied the land they farmed.

Much of the land they occupied was actually closed by law to such occupation. The land they occupied had someone who already had title, were Malay reservations; forest reserves and rubber estates.

Even when they settled on State land which was open to settlement, very few of them applied for titles from the State authorities. Only a small percentage of them even sought titles. And those who did seek found these titles difficult to secure. The best they could obtain was a TOL ⁵. Therefore the majority were illegal occupants of State land. There is no doubt that the Federation Government was concerned about this illegal occupancy of the land, and had these squatters not been such an obvious asset to the economy of the country would certainly have made every attempt to do something about the situation. But whatever its intentions were, the obstacles in the way of effective action were difficult to overcome. First of all, were the disturbances caused by the depression and the war which followed it. Then there was the fact that the Government, even in its Land Office, had little administrative control over any of the rural communities. Due to these reasons "squattering" was not restricted or controlled until their presence became a threat to the security of the nation. This was due to their role in the fight of the communist guerillas against the Malayan Government.

5/ TOL - Temporary Occupation License