

THE CHINESE NEW VILLAGES IN MALAYSIA: IMPACT OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES AND RESPONSE STRATEGIES*

马来西亚华人新村人口变迁的冲击与对策

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Abstract

Sixty years after their creation as "military" hamlets, the New Villages of Peninsular Malaysia have become the permanent settlements of former rural Chinese inhabitants. The physical layout of these villages has remained largely intact but their demography has undergone constant and significant changes. It is the need to respond positively to the changing scenarios that constitutes a serious challenge to the New Villages to function meaningfully in the future.

The paper deals firstly with the nature of demographic changes caused by population growth or decline and its movements, and then on the impact of these changes on family size and structure, the age structure and "sustainability" of the villages. Several response strategies to improve the viability of the villages are discussed. These pertain to research for planning purposes, the need for improved economic capability of the villages, the strengthening of family values, and the introduction of more efficient land use.

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摘要

六十年前成立的“军事”村落，如今已成为马来西亚半岛乡区华裔居民的永久“新村”。新村的外形保持原状，但是人口却不断地在变迁。当前面对的挑战是如何积极地应付这些变迁，使新村成为“有意义”的聚落。

本文首先讨论人口增长或下降和人口移动引起的人口变迁的情况，接着讨论人口变迁对家庭大小及其结构、村民的年龄结构以及新村的“可持续性”的影响，最后探讨提升新村为有活力的住宅区的若干应付对策。这些对策包括进行研究以作为新村规划的用途、提升新村的经济能力、巩固家庭价值观及提高土地利用效率。

Introduction

Peninsular Malaysia (formerly the Federation of Malaya) has more than 400 "New Villages" (NVs). They are unique settlements that were deliberately created as a countermeasure to an "incident" of history rather than through the spontaneous process of pioneering by the village inhabitants themselves. Hence, unlike other settlements, NVs are special by virtue of their origins, physical layout and their assumed identity as Chinese settlements.

The end of World War Two in Malaya ushered in a period of intense political struggle that locked the forces of colonialism and anti-colonialism in a deadly contest. The anti-colonial forces were the remnants of the resistance guerillas of the Japanese Occupation period of 1941-45. Many of them were, or presumed to be, communists. Many colonial and occupied territories throughout the world were then swept by the fury of nationalist assertion to free themselves from subjugation, and the contest in Malaya was in effect part of the regional struggle for independence (see Short 1975). One of the lasting outcomes of this confrontation was the creation of the NVs which now stand as a permanent legacy to this bitter episode of the nation's past.

The special origins of the NVs are attributed to a key strategy of the British colonial administration to re-assert political control over Malaya. One of the core military actions adopted was aimed at isolating the scattered and often armed anti-colonial units. Hence a countrywide move was set in motion to "resettle" widely dispersed inhabitants in the rural areas. The targeted population was primarily the Chinese many of whom were identified in an official report as "squatters" who occupied state and private land (Newbould *et al.* 1949). The resettlement programme was "the gathering together under administration and

protection of families who are, or may be, subject to bandit influence" (Webber 1951: 155). The word "bandit" was the official description for anti-colonial bands against whom the British administrators were waging an armed conflict to win the "hearts and minds" of the people. Four basic aims were identified for the resettlement programme. These were to insulate the "Communist gunmen" from their main source of supply and to protect the squatters from coercion; to establish a degree of security that would give people the confidence to supply information about the enemies; to break up the cells and organizations of the enemies, and to force them to attack security forces on the latter's ground (Stead 1955: 647). In a hasty military operation, the colonial government succeeded in relocating half a million rural inhabitants into more than 400 compact villages between 1949 and 1954 (see Dobby 1952/53 and 1953; King 1954; Markandan 1954; Corry 1955; Stead 1955; Hamzah 1962; and Sandhu 1964a and 1964b; Nyce 1973).¹

As the NVs were deliberately "planned" to meet military contingencies, they were compact and crowded with supposedly "temporary" wooden houses laid out in a haphazard manner, enjoyed few amenities, had little land, and supported by a narrow economic base. Setting aside the political and military dimensions of the NVs, the act of relocating almost the entire rural Chinese community into new settlements was itself a massive operation of great significance. Had it not been the special historical circumstances that provided the excuse for the exercise of coercion, resettlement would not have been possible without causing intense social and political resentment or unrest. The majority of the villages were sited at the outskirts of state or district capitals and other towns for easy access and control. This strategic location would protect the NVs against subversive infiltration or attack. From a socio-economic perspective, the unprecedented resettlement was a social "revolution" that transformed widely scattered rural communities into semi-urban ones. It also instantly transformed illegal "squatters" into house owners holding legal leasehold titles to the land and enjoying access to water and electric supplies, or even to a village school. The semi-urban location also brought the Chinese into close contact with modern development through the urban economy.

Like other communities in present-day Malaysia, the NV community has experienced drastic demographic, social, and economic changes during the past fifty years. This paper focuses on specific issues relating to demographic changes. Two major aspects will be addressed. The first deals with specific changes and their resultant impacts from different perspectives. The second concerns possible strategies as a response to these changes.

Basic Characteristics of New Villages

Various estimates of the number and population of NVs have been made. They vary in number from 439 to 600 and in population from 458,000 to 600,000 (Sandhu 1973: lxiv). An early official report revealed that when resettlement was completed by 1954, an estimated 543,555 people had been resettled in 451 NVs. Several of these NVs and a portion of the population were Malays. By and large, the population would represent 29 per cent of the total Chinese community in the Federation of Malaya in 1947 (Corry 1954: Appendix A). The federal Ministry of Housing and Local Government, in a compilation in 2002, shows a list of 452 NVs under its charge (《星洲日报》/ *Sin Chew Daily*, 4 March 2002).

Expectedly, the distribution of NVs reflected that of the Chinese in each state (Table 1). According to the 1947 census, three-quarters of the Chinese lived in the states of Perak, Selangor, Johor and Penang. Most of the NVs are therefore found in these west coast states (Fig. 1). Perak, formerly the world's tin-mining centre and a major producer of rubber, has the largest number of NVs in the country. Next is Johor, another agricultural state that is most accessible to the urban centre of Singapore. Selangor and the federal capital city of Kuala Lumpur also featured

Table 1: Population of New Villages, 1954 and the Federation of Malaya, 1947

| State | Number of New Villages | Population of New Villages (1954) | As % of Chinese Population in the State | Population of Chinese (1947) | As % of Chinese Population in Malaya |
|-----------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Johor | 88 | 117,281 | 33.1 | 354,770 | 18.8 |
| Kedah | 34 | 21,162 | 18.3 | 115,928 | 6.1 |
| Kelantan | 14 | 11,680 | - | 22,938 | 1.2 |
| Melaka | 17 | 9,555 | 9.9 | 96,144 | 5.1 |
| Negeri Sembilan | 37 | 29,040 | 25.4 | 114,406 | 6.1 |
| Pahang | 67 | 46,444 | 47.7 | 97,329 | 5.2 |
| Penang | 9 | 12,221 | 4.9 | 247,366 | 13.1 |
| Perak | 124 | 198,109 | 44.6 | 444,509 | 23.6 |
| Perlis | 1 | 500 | 4.2 | 11,788 | 0.6 |
| Selangor | 46 | 97,112 | 26.8 | 362,710 | 19.2 |
| Trengganu | 2 | 451 | 2.8 | 15,864 | 0.8 |
| Total | 439 | 543,555 | 28.8 | 1,884,534 | 100.0 |

Source: Corry 1955; Fell 1960

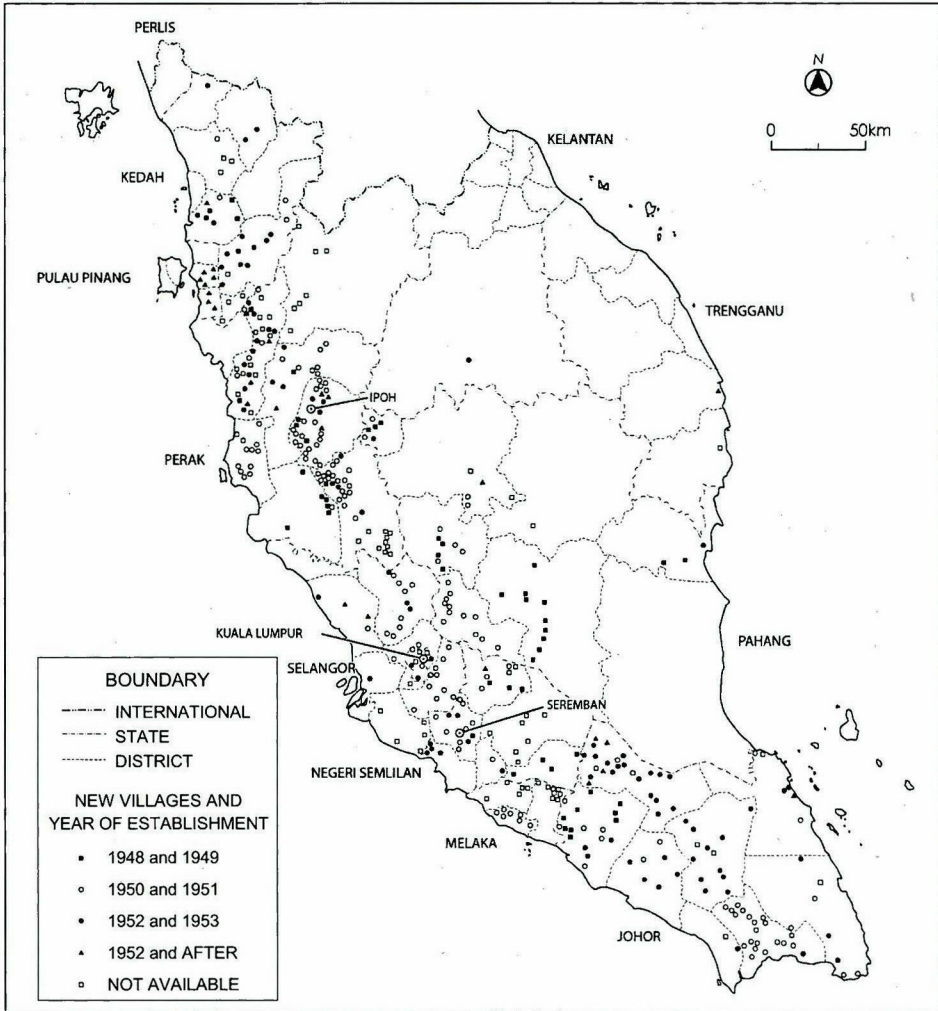


Fig. 1: Distribution of New Villages by Year of Establishment

Source: Voon and Khoo 1986

prominently, notably in the number of large NVs. Perak alone accounted for a third (36.4%) of the initial population in NVs, Johor had a fifth (21.6%) and Selangor slightly less (17.9%). In all, they accounted for three-quarters of the entire NV population. In the highly urbanized state of Penang (including Province Wellesley, now known as Seberang Perai), the small rural sector was easily re-grouped into a small number of NVs.

The largest NVs are found in the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. At the time of inception, more than half the NVs in Perak, Johor and Selangor had more than 1,000

inhabitants each (Fig. 2). The largest, situated just north of Kuala Lumpur, had 13,000 people, and 11 others had more than 5,000 (Table 2).

Although NVs are identified with the Chinese community, a considerable number was dominated by Malay residents. In Kelantan, all except one were Malay New Villages. Official statistics compiled in 1986 confirmed this generally overlooked aspect of ethnicity. Of the 333 NVs for which statistics are available, 26 were exclusively Malay NVs and in 22 others the Chinese made up less than half the inhabitants. Contrary to common perception, only 53 out of 333 NVs, or 16 per cent

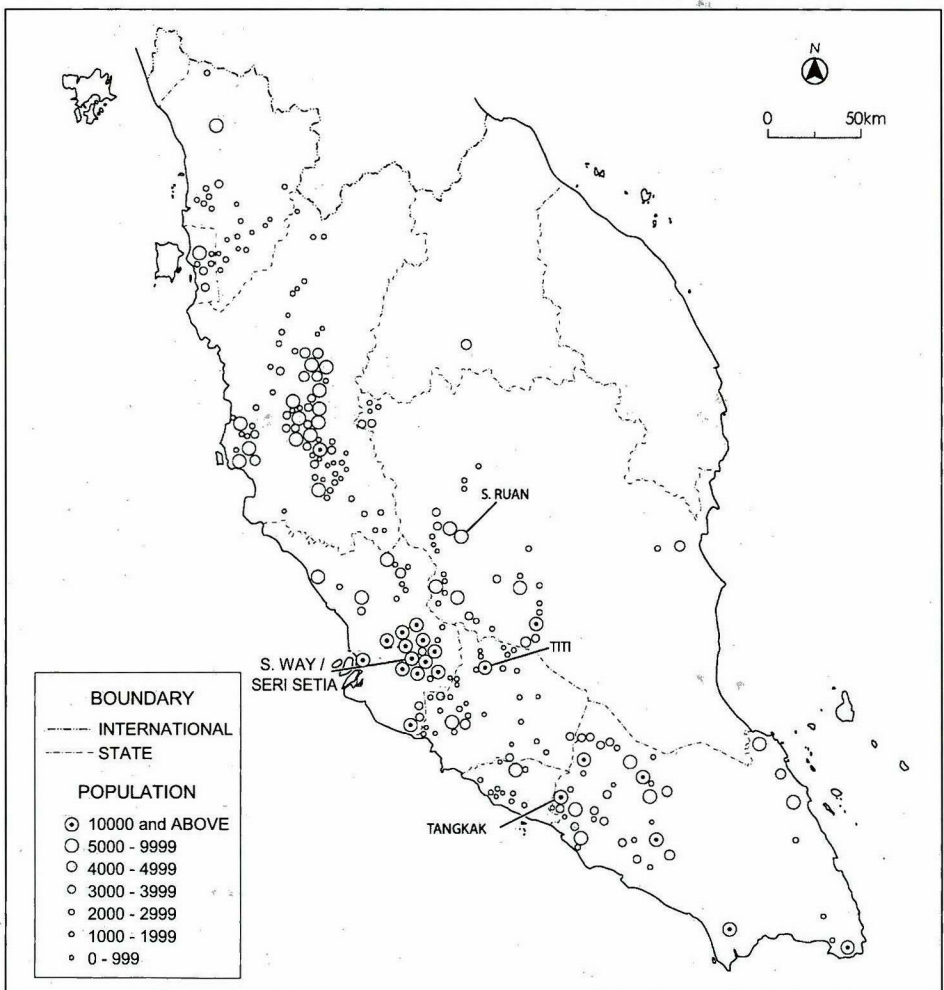


Fig. 2: Size Distribution of New Villages, 1986

Source: Voon and Khoo 1986

Table 2: Distribution of New Villages at the Time of Establishment by Size Category

| State | 0-99 | 100-499 | 500-999 | 1,000-4,999 | 5,000-10,000 | 10,000 and above | Total |
|-----------------|------|---------|---------|-------------|--------------|------------------|-------|
| Johor | 0 | 18 | 26 | 48 | 2 | 0 | 94 |
| Kedah | 3 | 23 | 13 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 44 |
| Kelantan | 0 | 9 | 5 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 18 |
| Melaka | 0 | 11 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 17 |
| Negeri Sembilan | 0 | 17 | 13 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 39 |
| Pahang | 7 | 36 | 19 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 77 |
| Perak | 2 | 36 | 23 | 60 | 5 | 1 | 127 |
| Perlis | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Penang | 0 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 8 |
| Selangor | 0 | 15 | 10 | 20 | 3 | 1 | 49 |
| Trengganu | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Total | 12 | 169 | 116 | 169 | 10 | 2 | 478 |

Source: Sandhu 1973: xlv-xlvi

of the total, were completely "Chinese". A fair description of NVs in 1985 was that the Chinese comprised more than half the population of NVs in the majority of cases (285 or 85.6 per cent), and in 257 NVs (77 per cent), the inhabitants were overwhelmingly Chinese (Table 3).

Table 3: Percentage of Chinese Population in New Villages, 1985

| State | 0% | 1-24% | 25-49% | 50-74% | 75-99% | 100% | Total |
|------------|----|-------|--------|--------|--------|------|-------|
| Johor | 0 | 2 | 4 | 9 | 34 | 1 | 50 |
| Kedah | 0 | 0 | 4 | 4 | 8 | 8 | 24 |
| Kelantan | 17 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 22 |
| Melaka | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 7 | 4 | 13 |
| N Sembilan | 5 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 29 | 8 | 44 |
| Pahang | 4 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 35 | 5 | 49 |
| Penang | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 6 |
| Perak | 0 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 58 | 19 | 85 |
| Perlis | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Selangor | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 24 | 7 | 35 |
| KL | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Trengganu | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Total | 26 | 11 | 11 | 28 | 204 | 53 | 333 |

Source: Kementerian Kembangan Negeri dan Luar Bandar (Ministry of National and Rural Development) 1986

NVs are distinguished by their physical compactness and the almost complete dominance of residential use. At the time of establishment the number of house lots in the states other than Perak was estimated at 57,700. Based on the estimated NV population of 345,446 persons in these states, the average number of occupants per lot was 6 persons (Corry 1955: 24 and Appendix A). More than fifty years later, the latest official estimate for Perak is 47,000 "lot-owners" in 134 NVs, or an average of 350 such owners per village (*The Star*, 1 January 2009).

The typical layout of a NV is shown in Figure 3. The shortage of land has meant that each village is built with a maximum number of houses within its boundary. Unoccupied land was quickly taken up by subsequent arrivals to the villages. Besides houses, buildings for other purposes are conspicuously lacking. Most NVs could only boast a community hall. The better served villages would have a primary school and limited recreational facilities. Hence the hallmark of the average NV is the high population density and unfavourable man-land ratio.

Demographic Changes

From their inception, NVs were faced with problems of various kinds. Following the development in the Malaysian economy during the past half a century and the emergence of new social trends in the country, the NVs have consequently experienced various changes of which the most conspicuous are demographic. These changes are caused by trends within the villages and those associated with the restructuring of the economy. Two forms of demographic change that are most obvious are those concerning the population size of NVs and its movements.

Changing Population Size

Demographic changes in NVs are caused by declining birth rates and out-migration. Both impact directly on the population size of NVs. The change in population numbers shows two different trends. The first is rapid increase in population in the early stage (1950-70s) followed by subsequent decelerating growth and even stagnation. The other is rapid initial growth followed by a decline in absolute terms.

During the initial period of resettlement, the population structure of NVs was characteristically youthful, with children in the 0-14 age group comprising four out of every ten persons. High birth rates and large family size were the norm then. Up

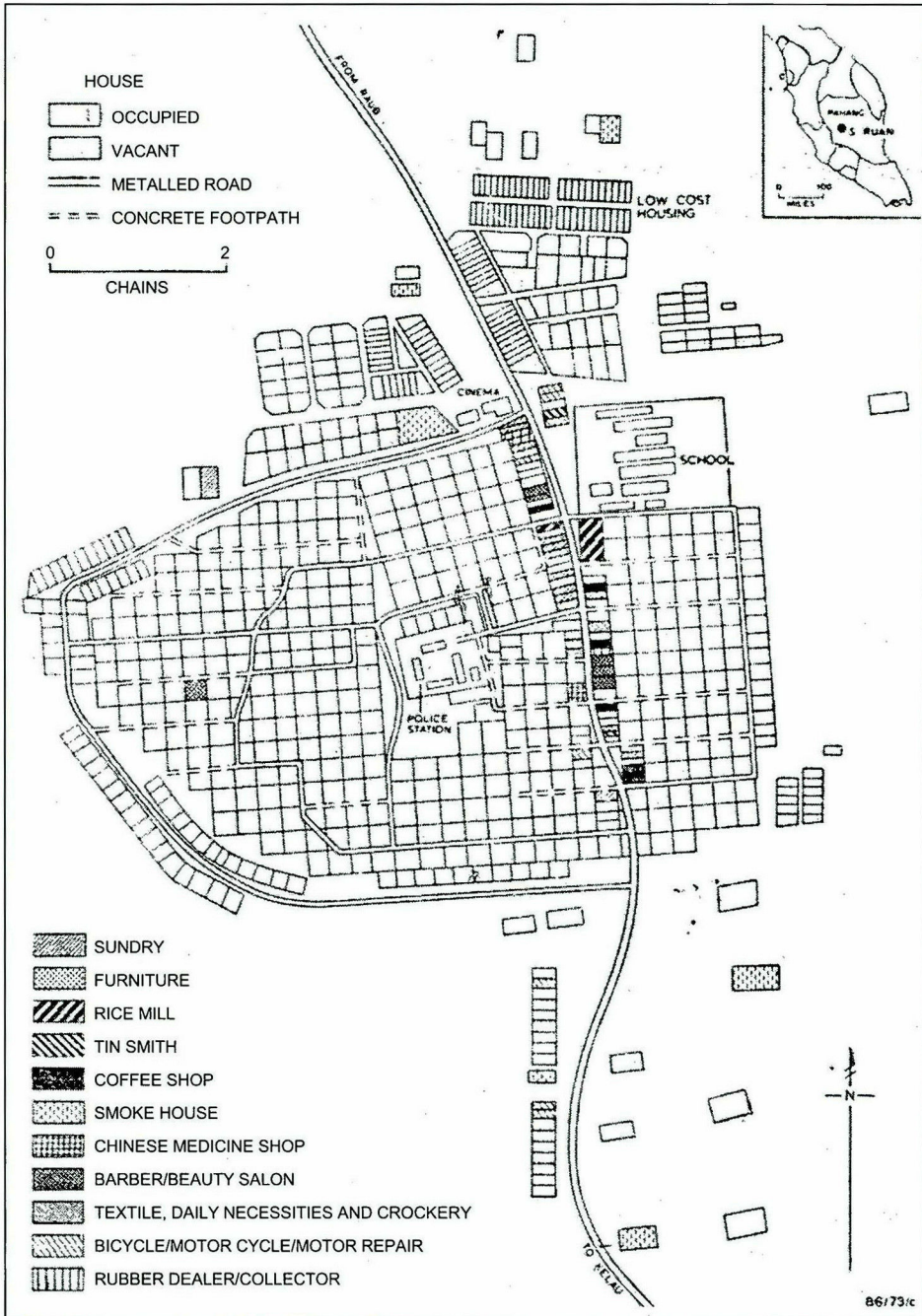


Fig. 3: Layout of Sungai Ruan New Village, Pahang, 1973

Source: Khoo and Voon 1975

to 1970, the NVs had increased their total population by 77 per cent, reaching 98 per cent in Selangor/Kuala Lumpur. After 1970, improved education among NV residents and the growing influence of the urban and industrial economy were beginning to bring about a discernible slowing down in the birth rates. The average annual growth rate of NVs was 4.2 per cent between 1954 and 1970, 3.2 per cent between 1970 and 1985, but only 0.2 per cent between 1985 and the early 1990s (林廷辉与宋婉莹 / Lim Hin Fui and Soong Wan Ying 1996). In the period up to 1995, out of 346 NVs for which statistics are available, 261 experienced an increase in their population whereas 85 others suffered an absolute decline (Table 4).

Table 4: Population Change in NVs between the Year of Establishment and 1995

| State | Population Increase | | Population Decrease | | Not Available | | Total |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|-----|---------------------|-----|---------------|-----|-------|
| | NV | % | NV | % | NV | % | |
| Johor | 66 | 79 | 12 | 14 | 6 | 7 | 84 |
| Kedah | 11 | 33 | 16 | 48 | 6 | 18 | 33 |
| Kelantan | - | - | 1 | 100 | - | - | 1 |
| Melaka | 13 | 68 | 3 | 16 | 3 | 16 | 19 |
| Negeri Sembilan | 28 | 64 | 5 | 11 | 11 | 25 | 44 |
| Pahang | 28 | 51 | 12 | 22 | 15 | 27 | 55 |
| Perak | 74 | 55 | 32 | 24 | 29 | 21 | 135 |
| Perlis | - | - | - | - | 1 | 100 | 1 |
| Penang | 9 | 10 | - | - | - | - | 9 |
| Selangor | 27 | 64 | 4 | 10 | 11 | 26 | 42 |
| Trengganu | 2 | 67 | - | - | 1 | 33 | 3 |
| Federal Territory (Kuala Lumpur) | 3 | 100 | - | - | - | - | 3 |
| Total | 261 | 61 | 85 | 20 | 83 | 19 | 429 |

Source: Compiled from 林廷辉、宋婉莹 / Lim Hin Fui and Soong Wan Ying 1996

Population Movements

Changes in population numbers are also the result of population movements. Many NVs and small towns are the primary sources of Chinese out-migration to the cities. At the same time, some NVs situated on the periphery of these cities have also acted as destinations for some migrants.

After the lifting of the Emergency in 1960, some families decided to move back to their original places of residence.² More important was out-migration from NVs for purposes of employment or education. This movement began as early as the

1960s (see Khoo and Voon 1975). From the 1970s onwards, the outflow gathered momentum as the young generation looked to the towns in search of personal advancement and to advantage of opportunities arising from the processes of urbanization and industrialization as well as the expansion of higher education.

The 1970s marked the gradual shift from agriculture and mining towards industrial development. Rural-urban migration became a social process the effect of which was to reshuffle the distribution of population and hence labour resources on a regional basis. Caught in this process of flux were large numbers of Malay and Chinese youths living in areas that were lagging behind the emerging urban-industrial centres in the more prosperous parts of the country.

During the 1980s and 1990s, economic restructuring accelerated with increasing inflows of foreign direct investments. Following the rise of the Japanese economy in the 1960s and 1970s and the subsequent emergence of Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan, collectively known as the Asian Newly Industrializing Economies, Malaysia and other Southeast Asian countries followed suit with strategies to stimulate development along the pattern of these successful economies. In what has often been described as the "flying geese" pattern of East Asian development, the Malaysian economy has since been radically transformed by the entry of major multinational corporations as they reacted positively to the rise of East Asia and the inexorable march of globalization. Internally, the transformation of the Malaysian economic landscape was accompanied by a population re-distribution leading to increased demographic regionalization centred around the federal capital.

Basically, population movements are a reflection of rational and personal decisions made by large numbers of persons in pursuit of personal interests. These movements help to transfer excess labour resources in economically lagging areas to more prosperous ones. NVs themselves play a passive role in this process. This is so because agricultural-based occupations that have sustained the livelihood of the first-generation inhabitants of NVs no longer appeal to the young. The marginalization of the agricultural sector becomes more acute as alternative activities fail to develop. As the village economy is "hollowed" out, dependence on remittances from village migrants increases.

The outflow of the younger sections of the population is rapidly undermining the viability of NVs both economically and socially. As industries and commerce congregate in the major towns and as few among those who receive their education in the cities return to their villages, out-migration will continue unabated. This age structure of many NVs clearly reflects the demographic effects of this process.

Impact of Demographic Changes

The impacts of demographic changes that are taking place in NVs have serious consequences that spread well beyond the confines of the villages. Among these are four that are of immediate concern.

Population Decline

Declining birth rates and the out-migration among the young have led to a trend of depopulation in some NVs. Available statistics show that 56 NVs suffered population decline from the 1970s onwards, and 29 more suffered the same fate from the 1980s (Table 5).

Table 5: Population Decline among New Villages, 1970-95 and 1980-95

| State | Rate of Decline 1970-95 (%) | | | Rate of Decline 1980-95 (%) | | | Total | Total NVs | % |
|--------------|-----------------------------|-------|-------|-----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-----------|-----|
| | 0-24 | 25-49 | 50-99 | 0-24 | 25-49 | 50-99 | | | |
| Johor | 5 | 1 | 1 | 4 | - | 1 | 12 | 84 | 14 |
| Kedah | 1 | - | 3 | - | 5 | 7 | 16 | 33 | 48 |
| Kelantan | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | 1 | 1 | 100 |
| Melaka | 1 | - | 1 | 1 | - | - | 3 | 19 | 16 |
| Negeri | 2 | 1 | 2 | - | - | - | 5 | 44 | 11 |
| Pahang | 4* | 4* | - | 4 | - | - | 12 | 55 | 22 |
| Perak | 13 | 6* | 8** | 4 | 1 | - | 32 | 135 | 24 |
| Perlis | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 0 |
| Pulau | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 9 | 0 |
| Selangor | 1 | 2 | - | - | 1 | - | 4 | 42 | 10 |
| Trengganu | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 3 | 0 |
| Kuala Lumpur | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 3 | 0 |
| Total | 27 | 14 | 15 | 14 | 7 | 8 | 85 | 429 | 20 |

* Includes 1 from the year of establishment

** Includes 2 from the year of establishment

Source: Compiled from Corry 1854; 林廷辉与宋婉莹 1996

This declining trend has continued in recent years, and statistics confirm the belief that the desertion of NVs has intensified. During the inter-censal period of 1991-2000, available statistics for 82 NVs in Perak show that their combined

population fell from 97,214 to 75,272 or 22.6 per cent (DOS 2008). A distinctive feature of this exodus is that it is not confined to specific villages or areas but affects practically all NVs in the state. It is fair to assume that this trend is generally true for all NVs except those located outside Kuala Lumpur or in south Johor to which the exodus from economically lagging states is directed.

The population of NVs increased threefold from 573,000 to 1.68 million between 1954 and 1995. Since then, it had declined considerably, reaching 1.26 million in 2002 or a 25 per cent drop in the seven-year period (Lim and Fong 2005: 55). Assuming that this was due entirely to out-migration, it would mean that, on average, 60,000 people moved out of NVs each year between 1995 and 2002. In 2001 alone, of the 723,989 internal migrants in the country, 116,562 or 16 per cent were Chinese, of whom 83 per cent moved to urban destinations (DOS 2002: 31 and 33). A comparison between this total number and the annual decline in the population of NVs may indicate that half the in-migrants were probably from the villages. If this trend were to persist in the foreseeable future, there would be long-term negative implications on the future prospects of NVs.

One of these implications is the demand and supply of enrolment capacities in Chinese primary schools. Primary education in Malaysia is available in three language medium, namely, Malay (national language), Chinese and Tamil. The first is identified as "national" schools and the other two as "national-type" schools. In general, despite easy access to national schools, nine out of ten Chinese families opt to enroll their children in the local Chinese schools.

However, out-migration and reduced births have led to a secular decline in the enrolment of many village primary schools. Available data for January 2003 show that 124 or 12.7 per cent of Chinese primary schools in Peninsular Malaysia had fewer than 50 pupils each, and another 126 schools had fewer than 100 pupils (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia 2003). The excess of enrolment capacity is common in areas of depopulation and most acute in Perak, Johor, Kedah, Pahang and Negeri Sembilan. The first three states accounted for 69 per cent of the smallest schools. All except parts of Johor are economically falling behind Selangor/Kuala Lumpur and Penang. The "under-sized" schools are non-existent in Kuala Lumpur and Kelantan (where there are few Chinese primary schools) and are relatively uncommon in Selangor and Penang. The existence of under-utilized schools is a "luxury" that the Chinese community can hardly afford. This wastage of community resources will likely worsen and so will the strain on the resources of existing schools in densely-settled urban centres (see Voon 2007).

The exodus of rural youths and the regional concentration in urban centres

have increased the pressure on existing urban schools to accommodate an increasing cohort of school-going children. Chinese education is a political issue and approval for new Chinese primary schools is rarely granted. In this respect, the redistribution of population in favour of urbanized areas and the transfer of demand for enrolment in schools from villages and small towns to these areas have serious social consequences for the Chinese community and nation.

The pressure on school enrolment is the result of the spatial disequilibrium between supply and demand. There are two dimensions to this issue. The first is that the existing 1,288 Chinese primary schools, with an average enrolment of 466 pupils, are technically sufficient to accommodate the present number of 600,000 pupils. The second is that the cause of the disequilibrium between supply and demand for admission is the failure of official planning to foresee problems arising from population redistribution. While school enrolment capacity is fixed, the demand is governed by spatial shifts in population. Unfortunately, no effective mechanism by which to correct the imbalance between supply and demand has been worked out.

The extent of the disequilibrium is reflected in the existence of "midget" and "giant" schools. In 2003, while 250 (25%) of 979 Chinese primary schools in Peninsular Malaysia had fewer than 100 pupils each, there were 175 (18%) with more than 1,000 pupils. Among the super-large schools, 48 had more than 2,000 pupils each. These schools were found in Selangor, Johor, Kuala Lumpur and Perak, and it is in these states, together with Penang, that the largest urban centres in the country are found. Indeed, a school in Skudai, on the outskirts of Johor Bahru city, and another in Kepong, just north of Kuala Lumpur, had to accommodate close to 5,000 pupils each. In Kuala Lumpur, with only 40 Chinese primary schools to meet the needs of a Chinese community of 560,000 persons, 29 (73%) of the schools had enrolments of more than 1,000 pupils and ten (25%) of these schools had more than 2,000 pupils. In Selangor 42 out of 103 schools (41%) were in the 1,000-pupil enrolment category and 19 of these were in the super-large class (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2003). It is this intense pressure on the existing enrolment capacity of urban schools that is the serious concern of the Chinese community over the access to education in the local Chinese primary school. This concern increases with the appearance of more and more urban neighbourhoods with young families and in-migrants.

Declining Family Size

The NV population in the 1950s was young and family size was large. Children (0-14 years) made up more than 40 per cent of the population, as in Rasah and Titi NVs in Negeri Sembilan, as was also the case for the Chinese population of the Federation of Malaya in general (Hamzah 1961; Siaw 1983; Fell 1960).

The average size of Chinese families in the 1950s tended to be larger than that of the national average. In 1957, the average Chinese family had 5.5 persons compared with 4.7 persons for the entire Federation; 56 per cent of Chinese families had five or more persons, and a third had at least seven persons (Fell 1960). Among the NVs, various studies in the 1970s showed that the average Chinese family was 50 per cent larger than the national average. The generally larger Chinese family had remained common up to 1980 (DOS 1983). Table 6 shows that NV families had an average of 6-8 persons in the late 1960s and 1970s. These figures would confirm that the Chinese still held dear to the traditional idea of the large and extended family, maintained by generally high birth rates. In the 1950s and 1960s when family planning was unheard of or still in its infancy, it was not unusual for an average couple to have ten or more children.

Table 6: Average Family Size of Selected New Villages, 1968-77

| Area | Number of Family | Year | Average Size |
|---|--------------------------|------|--------------|
| Rubber Smallholder Families, Bentong District (a) | 205 | 1968 | 7.7 |
| Sungai Ruan New Village, Raub (b) | 81 | 1972 | 7.4 |
| Meng Kuang New Village, Pahang (c) | 167 | 1973 | 6.2 |
| Perak/Melaka (d) | selected New Villages | 1973 | 8.0 |
| Tangkak New Village (e) | 71 | 1977 | 8.3 |

Sources: a. Voon 1972; b. Khoo and Voon 1975; c. Cheng 1976;

d. Kementerian Perpaduan Negara 1973; e. Voon and Khoo 1980

At the time of establishment until the 1970s, the labour-intensive rubber smallholding industry and the narrow economic base of the towns had kept internal population movements to a minimal. Since then, declining birth rates and out-migration had given rise to smaller Chinese families. In 2000, the average Chinese family size was between 4.2 and 5.1 persons (DOS 2001). This trend is equally obvious in some NVs. The Repas NV in Bentong averaged only 4.1 persons

per family in 2001, or smaller than the national average of 4.6 persons (DOS 2005: 123).

Distortion of Family Structure

Up to the 1970s, the traditional extended families were common in the NVs. Families with three or four generations living under the same roof were the norm. The family members normally consisted of the parents, married sons and their spouses and children, including on occasions some relatives. This may also be due to poverty and the shortage of land for married children to establish their own households. Smaller nuclear families comprising married couples and their unmarried children were very much less common then.

At the time of independence in 1957, 12 per cent of Chinese households in the Federation of Malaya were single-member families, 32 per cent had two to four members, 48 per cent five to ten members, and 8 per cent had 11 or more members (Fell 1960). Field investigations in Tangkak NV in Johor and the Simpang Empat squatter settlement near Ipoh, Perak, in 1977 showed that single-member families were rare and 2-4 member families were relatively fewer than the national average. In contrast, families with five to ten members or more were far more common, and made up 56 per cent of the total (Table 7).

Table 7: Family Size of Selected Settlements, 1977 and 2001, and Federation of Malaya, 1957

| Family Size (Persons) | Tangkak NV (1977) | | Simpang Empat (1977) | | Repas NV (2001) | | Federation of Malaya (1957) |
|-----------------------|-------------------|------|----------------------|------|-----------------|------|-----------------------------|
| | Number | % | Number | % | Number | % | % |
| 1 | 1 | 1.4 | 0 | 0 | 22 | 13.5 | 11.8 |
| 2-4 | 9 | 12.7 | 10 | 22.7 | 78 | 47.9 | 32.1 |
| 5-6 | 18 | 25.4 | 20 | 45.5 | 40 | 24.5 | 21.6 |
| 7-10 | 28 | 39.4 | 10 | 22.7 | 19 | 11.7 | 26.6 |
| 11-15 | 13 | 18.3 | 4 | 9.1 | 4 | 2.5 | 6.6 |
| 16 or more | 2 | 2.8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.6 |
| Number of Families | 71 | | 44 | | 163 | | - |
| Average Size | 8.3 | | 6.1 | | 4.1 | | 5.5 |

Source: Voon and Khoo 1986; Fell 1960; Repas NV Office 2001

There is insufficient information to allow a proper assessment of the current situation. One particular source concerning Repas NV in 2001 points to drastic changes in the structure of its families. Among the 163 households in the village, 22 or 13.5 per cent consisted of single-member families, almost half had two to four members and only 13 (or 14 per cent) had seven or more persons.

Out-migration of the young was the major cause of the diminishing size and changing structure of NV families. The direct result of the desertion of NVs by the young is the distortion of the structure of families as they leave their children or elderly members behind.

From the 2001 statistics for Repas NV, it is clear that many families have acquired an unusual structure. For instance, the 22 single-member households were split equally between male and female members. All the females were 56 years of age or older, and three of the males were in the same category. Furthermore, there were 25 households in which there were two elderly persons or a grandparent living with a grandchild. Among the 21 households with two members each, 19 had at least one elderly person aged 56 years and above. Of these 19 households, 13 consisted of elderly couples, two comprised a grandmother living with a grandchild. Among three-member households, three elderly couples were looking after their grandchildren. There were also two households in which grandparents lived with two or three children (Table 8).

Table 8: Households with Elderly Members and Children, Repas New Village, 2001

| Family Size | Household with One Elderly Person | Household with Two Elderly Persons | Household with One Child | Household with Two Children | Household with Three Children |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | 22 | - | - | - | - |
| 2 | 6 | 13 | 2 | - | - |
| 3 | - | 3 | 3 | - | - |
| 4 | - | 1 | - | 1 | - |
| 5 | - | 1 | - | - | 1 |
| Total | 28 | 18 | 5 | 1 | 1 |

Note: Table does not include households in which the elderly live with working family members

Source: Repas NV Office 2001

Changing Age Structure

Falling birth rates and out-migration have also accelerated the ageing process. The Chinese community is ageing faster than other communities and the NV community is even more so. The changing shape of age pyramids of the Chinese from the 1950s onwards paint a picture of a society moving from youthful to middle age. In this process, many NVs have reached the stage of "old age".

Figure 4 shows the age pyramid of the Chinese in the Federation of Malaya in 1957. The structure was that of a young population, in which children aged 0-14 years comprise a high proportion of 44 per cent, whereas only 3.3 per cent were aged 65 years and above. In contrast, those in the working age groups (15-59 years) formed more than half the population. In the same year, half the population of Titi NV were children and 4.5 per cent were 65 and above (Fig. 5).

Figures 6 to 9 portray the ageing process of the NV population in the 1990s. Although the working of this process is basically identical, there are certain differences between NVs in rural and urban areas. From the examples of Titi, Sungai Ruan, Tangkak and Sungai Way (also known as Seri Setia) NVs, it is possible to detect three patterns of ageing.

The first pattern is that of the urban village of Sungai Way that is situated

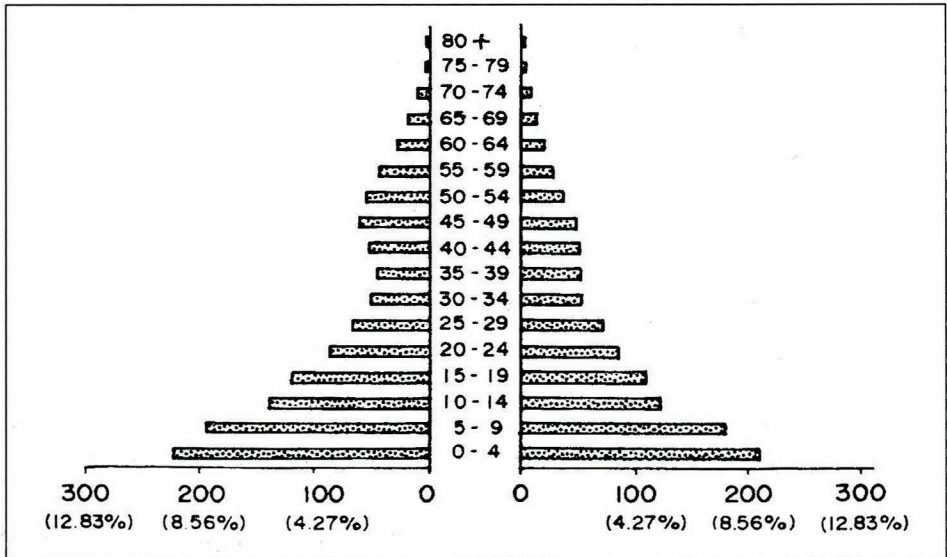


Fig. 4: Age-sex Pyramid, Federation of Malaya, 1957

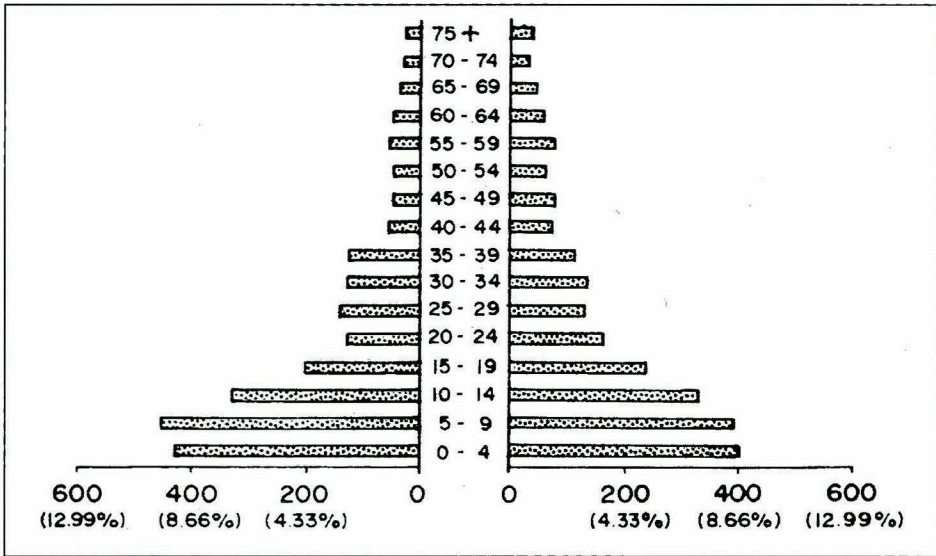


Fig. 5: Age-sex Pyramid, Titi New Village, 1957

outside Kuala Lumpur (Figures 6a and b). The quickened pace of ageing of its population in the 1990s has produced a "top heavy" age-sex pyramid. The characteristically large proportion of those in the 20-29 age cohort and the "pot belly" shape are the result of the in-migration of young people from rural NVs and small towns. During the 1990s too, the proportion of children declined from 20 to 15.6 per cent, while that of the elderly aged 60 and above rose from 9 to 15 per cent. The middle portion of the working population aged 15-59 years was as large as 70 per cent.

The second pattern is represented by the semi-urban village of Tangkak (Figures 7a and b). The distinctive feature of the age-sex pyramid is the bell-like or "trumpet" shape caused by the gradual decline in the proportion of children. The working-age cohort is still substantial and remains at about 60 per cent of the total village population.

The third pattern is that of the rural Titi and Sungai Ruan NVs (Figures 8a and b, and Figures 9a and b). Outwardly, the shape of the age-sex pyramids is the mirror image of the urban NVs. The middle portion comprising the 20-29 age cohort is particularly inconspicuous, caused by an exodus to escape the unemployment trap of their villages. The reduction in the number of young people has thereby statistically inflated the proportion of children as well as the aged.

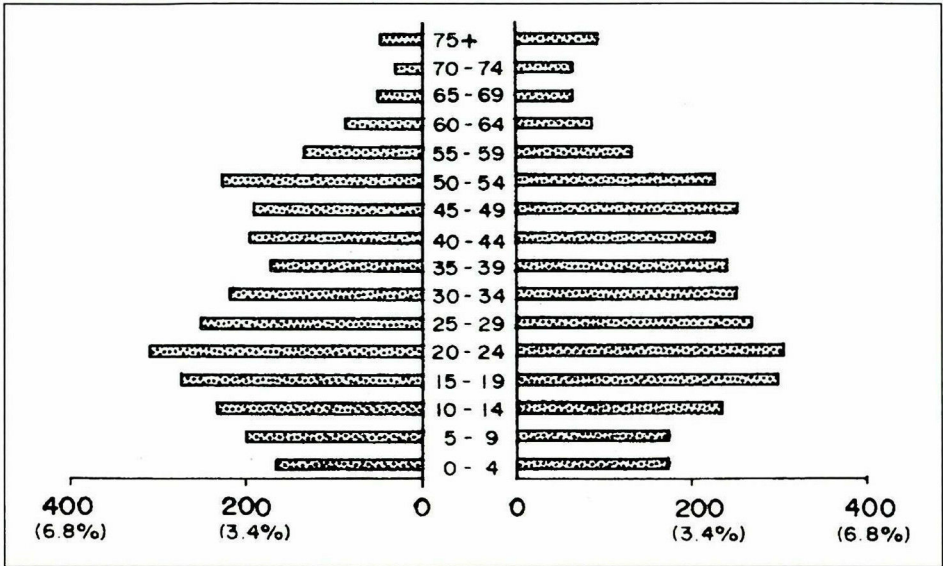


Fig. 6a: Age-sex pyramid of Sungai Way New Village, 1991

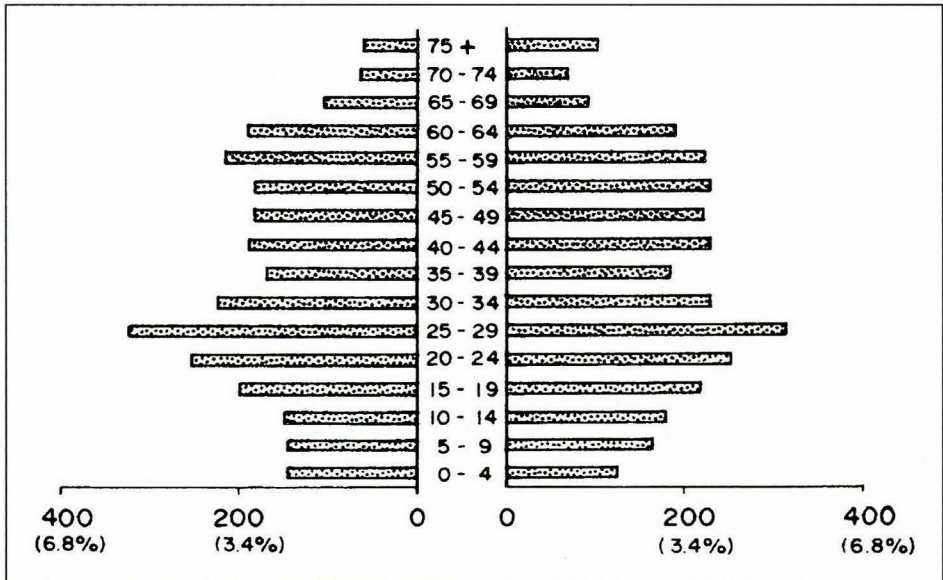


Fig. 6b: Age-sex pyramid of Sungai Way New Village, 2000

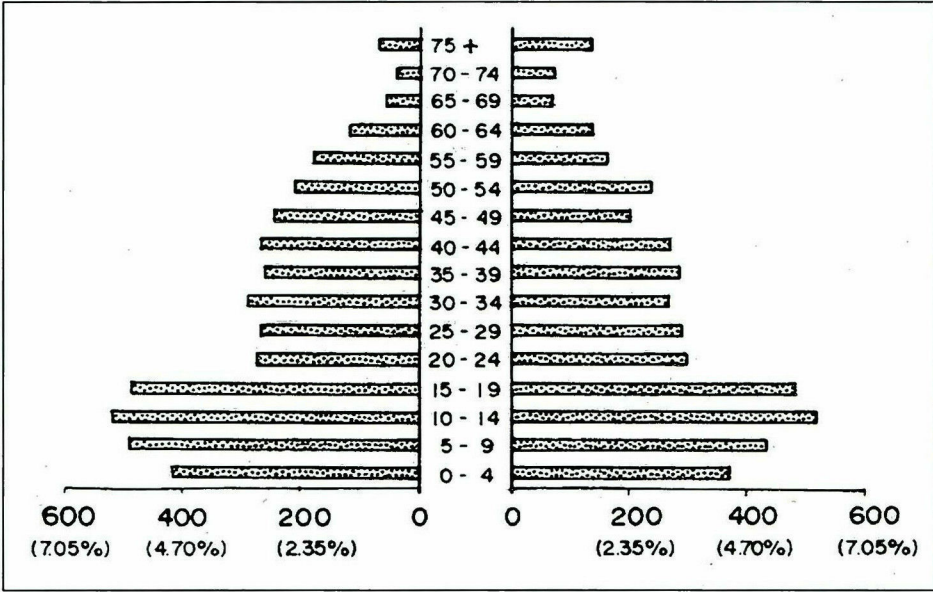


Fig. 7a: Age-sex pyramid of Tangkak New Village, 1991

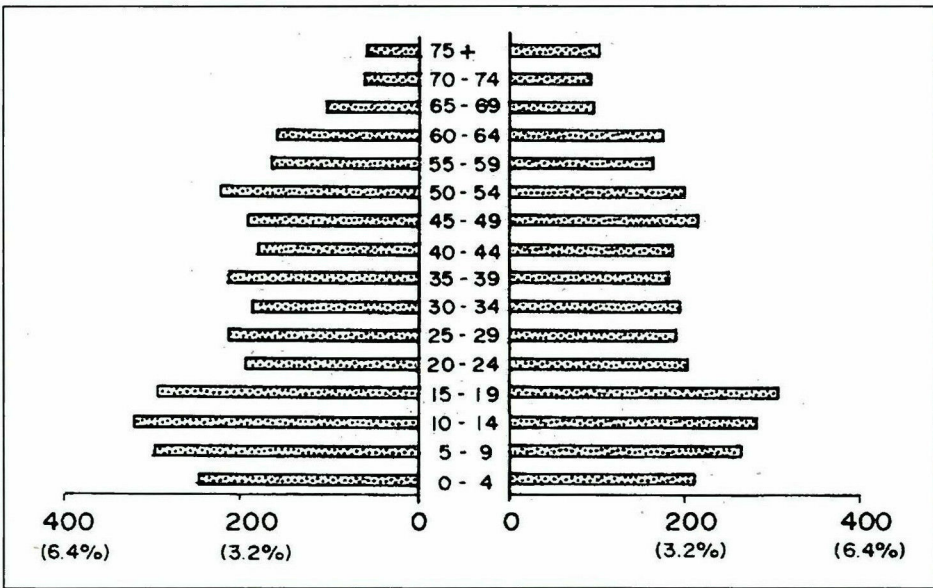


Fig. 7b: Age-sex pyramid of Tangkak New Village, 2000

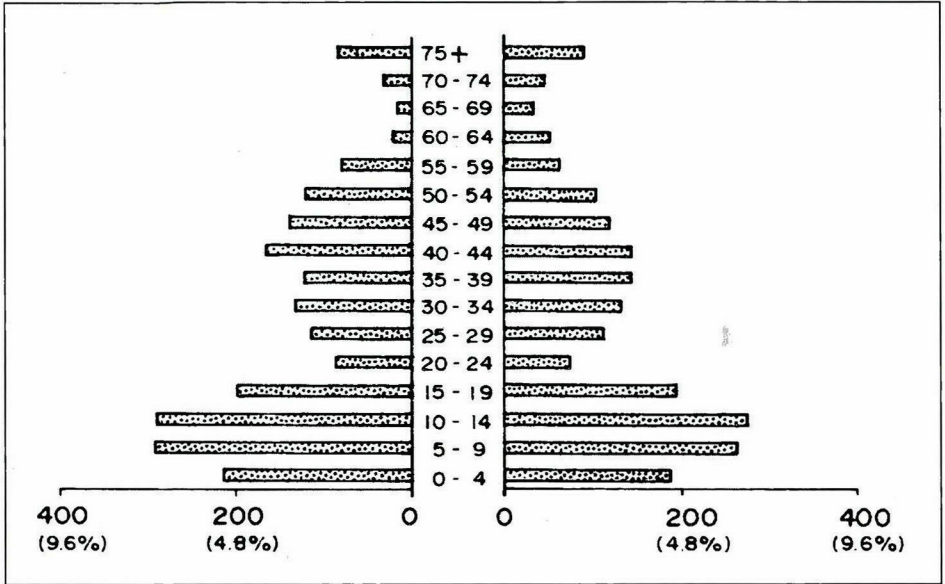


Fig. 8a: Age-sex pyramid of Sungai Ruan New Village, 1991

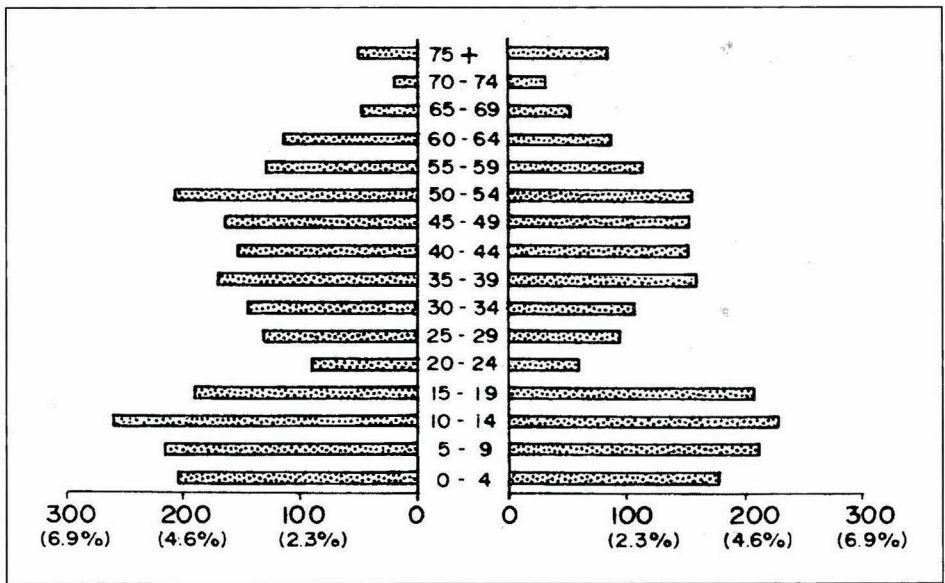


Fig. 8b: Age-sex pyramid of Sungai Ruan New Village, 2000

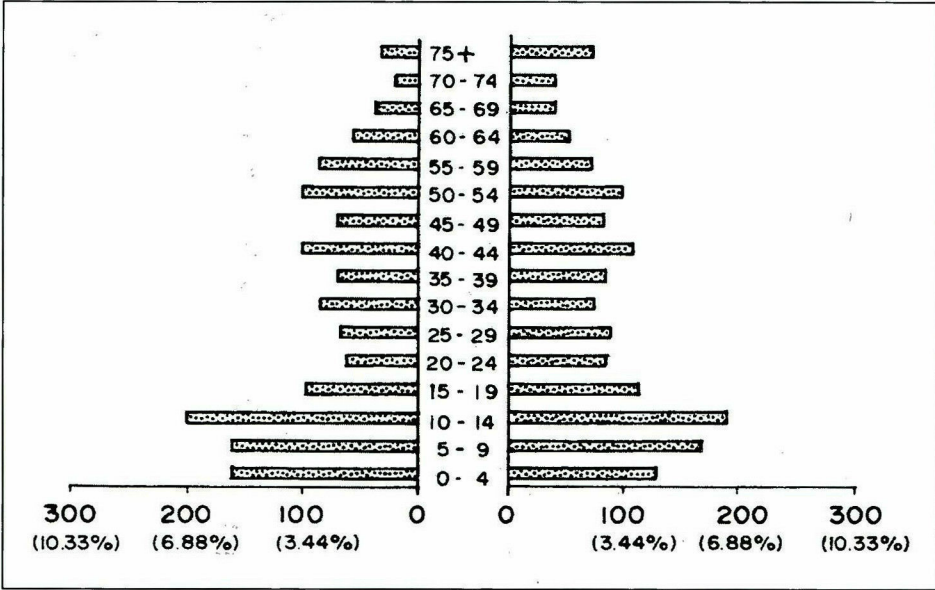


Fig. 9a: Age-sex pyramid of Titi New Village, 1991

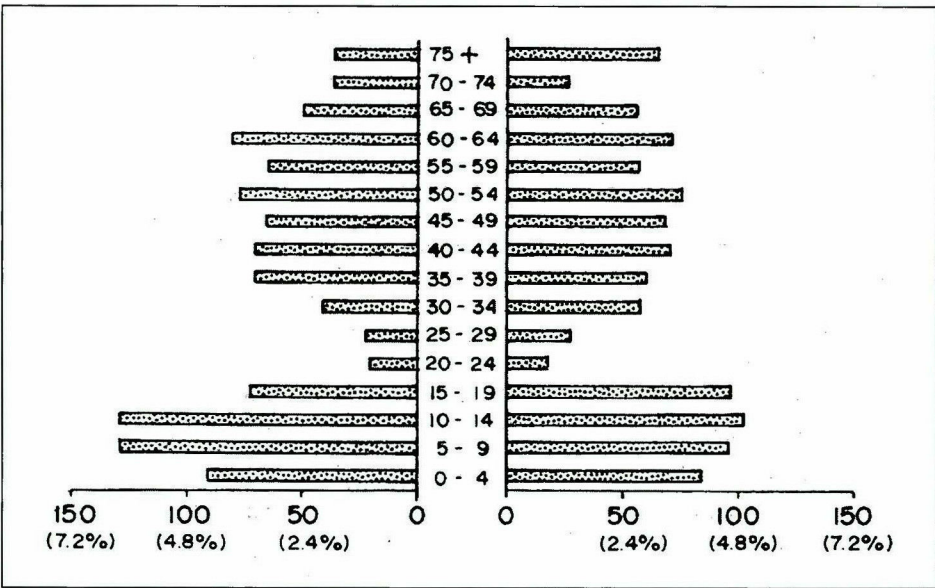


Fig. 9b: Age-sex pyramid of Titi New Village, 2000

In NVs that are found outside smaller towns, such as Repas NV, the situation seems to be even more serious. In the context of the rapid loss of the economic appeal of agriculture that had supported the income and employment of many NVs, the relative decline in the number of children and young people is clearly evident. The corollary is therefore the increased weight of the aged in the entire population.

From the above examples, it is envisaged that NVs will experience different patterns of change in their age structure. The overall trend, however, is that ageing of the NV population will intensify, and one of the primary causes is the continued diminution of the share of young people in their population.

The stage of population ageing may be measured by an Index of Ageing. This Index is based on the ratio between the number of persons aged 60 and above for every 100 children. In Titi NV, this ratio was 13:100 in 1970 but rose 2.5 times to 45:100 in the year 2000 (Siaw 1983: 159; DOS 2003). For Sungai Way NV, the number of the aged doubled from 45 to 97 for every 100 children in the 1990s alone. In other words, this village had as many old people as there were children in 2000. If many NVs are becoming "old folks" or "retirees" settlements, the worsening of the Index of Ageing is likely to accelerate in the near future.

Weakening Social "Sustainability"

The desertion of NVs by young people and the stagnation of birth rates have their negative social and economic impacts. The most serious and long-term impact is the "sustainability" of the NV communities in social and economic terms.

With a serious shortage of the young and vigorous section of population, NVs will invariably suffer for want of social life and continuity of dynamic leadership. At the same time, this weakness will undermine the ability of NVs to adapt and adjust to new ideas and advancements especially in modern communication. Most NVs have failed to restructure their economic base from a dependence on agriculture to manufacturing. More often than not, the change has seen a viable agricultural base going into stagnation and decline. The failure of NVs to develop an alternative economy brings to question their future prospects as viable settlements. That the young generation is giving up rubber tapping and other traditional occupations is almost unavoidable. The crucial issue is that no viable alternatives have been developed to replace what is being lost.

Overall, without the support of an energetic and committed community of young people, participation in village social life will dissipate, personal networks will weaken, and community life will suffer. In the absence of continuity and

renewal, the phenomenon of "hollowing out" of many NVs will become an unavoidable reality. As dependence of NVs and small towns on remittances sent by those who are no longer village residents increases, these NVs will become mere appendages to some distant urban centres.

Response Strategies to Demographic Changes

The NVs were created by the previous colonial administration but have now become the "step-child" of officialdom. After more than half a century of existence, and despite being the special responsibilities of a ministry at the federal level, they have received scant attention and often seen as the concern of the Chinese community rather than that of the nation. This has become the popular lament of the public and the press (see, for example, 《星洲日报》/ *Sin Chew Daily*, 28 October 1985 and 4 March 2002; *NST*, 24 Sept. 1985 and 13 May 1986). They are indeed a component of national life with its specific features and problems. Whether it is from the perspective of their locations at the urban fringe or the nature of their existence, NVs occupy a half-way stage between the urban and rural. Some have become "urbanized" while others are semi-agricultural. Yet the majority are neither towns nor agricultural villages as they do not possess the complete infrastructure of the former nor the land and lifestyle of the latter.

Inevitably, NVs are caught in a state of change. Whether it is the population, society or economy, change has been inevitable. How the government and the NV community itself respond to various changes has become an oft-debated issue. Hitherto the need to confront rapidly shifting scenarios has not been heeded in a way that may turn the NVs into modern settlements to cope with the demands of the twenty-first century. Sorely lacking are the committed efforts to seek solutions that are capable of transforming NVs into modern and viable settlements. Efforts towards this end will require strategies that have hitherto been overlooked.

Research and Planning

Being military hamlets, NVs were not designed as modern settlements that had the benefit of proper planning. The only "planning" involved was that of a nationwide operation to implement the resettlement project hastily. On the ground, "planning" was concerned with considerations of location, actual siting and layout, and the form of the village itself (see Hamzah 1966). More often than not, it was a

case of "too much hurry to rush people away from the Communists' reach" and "too little planning on the sites to which they were taken". The consequence was that "new slums developed" (Stead 1955: 648).

Any attempt to formulate response strategies to the problems of NVs will have to begin with detailed investigations to understand the specific conditions and peculiarities of individual villages. NVs are different not just in their locations but more crucially in their social and economic characteristics and hence their problems. More basic data other than what is already known have to be assembled and analysed to give deeper insights into core issues and problems. It is only with adequate and updated data that meaningful policies and strategies can be drawn up for action.

One of the first steps in any investigation is to complete a typological study of all NVs. The purpose is to devise an objective classification of NVs according to a set of standard criteria. Based on the classification, NVs would be assessed in a more scientific and standardized manner and consequently as an aid in the search for effective policies and strategies. Among the basic statistics that are relevant to the typological study will include the following:

- 1: location of NVs and their spatial relations with urban areas,
- 2: demographic characteristics such as population change, age structure, family structure, population movements,
- 3: economic conditions such as occupations, agriculture, industries, services, and sources of income,
- 4: educational conditions such as educational levels, schools, or dropout rates,
- 5: conditions of land and land use, the environment and resources,
- 6: infrastructure such as amenities, recreational and cultural facilities, and
- 7: others such as social problems, attitudes towards change, among others.

Improving Economic Capabilities

The economy of NVs at the time of formation was primarily agricultural and many villagers depended on their rubber holdings for a living, or worked as rubber tappers in estates or smallholdings. Some villagers produced vegetables for the urban markets, and others worked in tin mines, timber camps, or in fishing and stock rearing. In a few NVs especially outside Kuala Lumpur, the people found employment in the engineering and metal trades or as shopkeepers, hawkers, tailors or clerks. Some worked in small-scale industries making food and beverages and various simple manufactured items (see Corry 1955; Clarkson 1968; Nyce 1973).

While out-migration from NVs enables the young to improve their economic prospects and to broaden their outlook, it also robs the villages of the talented and those in the prime of life. At the same time, the growing concentration of population in major urban areas leads to various problems as well as widen regional disparities. The question is, can out-migration from NVs and their negative impacts be sustained on the long-run? Granted that out-migration cannot be avoided, it is nevertheless necessary to reduce the outflow. But to retain able-bodied members, it is necessary to raise the economic, social and educational capabilities and opportunities of NVs and small towns.

In the economic sphere, the rubber smallholding industry has long lost its appeal as an occupation as well as a major source of income. However, certain forms of agricultural production are still attractive and would yield attractive returns under modern modes of production and management. Investment in high-value items such as flowers, fruits, fish and livestock farming are possible avenues for viable professional careers for the young and enterprising. These activities have low demands on land but will need the support of sufficient capital, technologies, and management.

In the areas of small-scale manufacturing or tourism, official strategies need to incorporate NVs into the government's development blueprint. It is time to discard the traditional attitude of leaving the NVs alone or letting them grope the way out of their dilemma. It is also timely to entice outside interests such as business enterprises or other bodies to initiate and participate in the economic and community develop projects of NVs. The Japanese model of "one village one product" has been mentioned as a possible development strategy. Despite official attempts to emulate this idea, the outcome has left much to be desired.

In the age of modern information technology (IT) in which physical space is no longer an obstacle in the performance of information-related activities, it is necessary to bring IT and Internet technologies to the NV youths. With sufficient training, they may not have to abandon their villages to work in the cities. Genuine efforts from the government, community or business sector are essential to encourage and motivate this linkage between IT and the NVs. With the advent of IT and the compression of space, out-migration will no longer be the only option for access to urban-based employment. Integration of this type will contribute significantly to reduce differences between well-endowed urban centres and deprived rural areas.

Strengthening Family Values

One of the means by which to entice the young to stay back in small towns and NVs is to "urbanize" these settlements and to raise their economic vigour and appeal. This is also a necessary approach in efforts to revitalize the NVs. The 20-50 age cohorts constitute the life and energy of a community and their participation in social life is indispensable to the healthy growth of a settlement. How to infuse more life into a community will depend on sound leadership and official support.

The family is the basic unit of organization of a community. Under the impact of economic development and globalization, the family is losing its traditional role and value, and family solidarity is losing its grip on the younger generation. Affected too are traditional culture and values towards the family and person-to-person relations. Yet in an ageing society, the care for the elderly is even more important than ever before. In short, the fewer young people abandon their families to seek opportunities elsewhere, the more complete their families, and the greater care the children and aged will receive.

The NV communities are not only ageing but constitute concentrations of low income groups with little access to retirement benefits. Adding to these burdens is the lack of social facilities and community support. Hence the care for the elderly is entirely the private responsibilities of individual families. In this context, the practice of filial piety will have a decisive impact on the quality of life of or care received by the elderly.

In preparing for the arrival of the advanced ageing society, the local Chinese organizations will have ample opportunities to re-invent themselves by engaging in meaningful community work and social support. The Chinese community has a fairly well-developed network of organizations numbering more than 7,000 throughout the country (see 文平强 / Voon Phin Keong 2005). They range from the local to nationwide organizations based on affiliations of dialects, clans, surnames, occupations, social or cultural affinities. Collectively they can exert an enormous influence to promote the idea of a caring society and to contribute to various ways by which the needs of elderly persons may be met through an organized network of community support.

Improving the Quality of Land Use

For some time after the creation of the NVs, they were considered as providing "the prototypes for a healthier and satisfying way of living" (Hamzah 1966: 69). But

after close to 60 years during which the physical layout of NVs has become more elaborate but remained basically unchanged, it is time to redefine the original rationale that had justified the forced resettlement of people into the NVs.

The problems of NVs are multi-dimensional and impinge on the spheres of social, economic, and political life as well as issues pertaining to landownership of house lots, the imbalance in the supply and demand for places in the village schools, and the increasing likelihood of social "decay" rather than vitality of the average village community.

The land use of a settlement is an important determinant of the quality of life of its people. The subjugation of the needs of the village inhabitants to those of a military contingency has condemned the NVs to a physical "mould" that has become "fossilized" in layout and pattern. Physically, NVs are packed with houses often arranged in disorder. At the time of resettlement, speed rather than physical planning and orderliness was the primary consideration. Consequently, the original layout has persisted until today, and signs of change for the better are nowhere evident. The most conspicuous feature of the typical NV is the presence of houses and the absence of vacant spaces. The entire village is a dismal depiction of densely-packed dwellings to the exclusion of other land uses. The community hall and primary Chinese school are often the only non-residential uses of the village land. Land that is devoted to cultural, commercial or recreational uses is practically non-existent.

One may wonder if the current physical layout and land use of NVs would remain unchanged as in the past 60 years. In 1986, a research report mentioned the need for the redesign of the layout of NVs (Voon and Khoo 1986). Occasional reports have publicized official intentions to revitalize NVs by various means such as upgrading existing buildings into multi-storey structures or turning the villages into "suburban areas or self-contained housing estates" (*NST*, 20 Sept. 1985 and 12 May 1986).

Provided that the rights of NV residents to their land and other private and community interests are fully protected, and with the mutual consent of the residents, there is a case to support efforts to upgrade and diversify NV land-use patterns by incorporating specific areas for residential, commercial and/or industrial, cultural, educational, recreational and leisure uses. These new land uses will be planned according to appropriate models that would provide for a systematic and efficient utilization of the land resources of NVs. The best manner by which this objective may be achieved would involve mutual consultation between NV residents, participating private or commercial interests and relevant official

authorities.

A 1985 official document reveals that in 302 NVs for which statistics are available, the combined land area amounted to 4,080 hectares (10,079 acres), or an average of 13.5 hectares per village (33 acres) (Kementerian Pembangunan Negeri dan Luar Bandar 1986). The redesign of scarce land resources, hitherto locked up for the single purpose of dwelling, may be released for additional forms of productive and innovative uses. The current restricted use of available land is "wasteful" in that land is not fully utilized to meet urgent social and economic needs of the village community. Only by freeing the land to rebuild settlements that integrate cultural and material life into a systematic whole, and in which land is used with maximum efficiency and esthetics, will the NVs become modern settlements of high residential desirability. If NVs are able to escape the present trap of outdated land use, they may be transformed into modern settlements that satisfy the varied demands of society rather than serving the sole purpose of dwelling. Any change towards this end would certainly require a drastic shift in the attitude and lifestyle of village residents from landed properties to high-rise living. In this through such fundamental changes that NVs will evolve into attractive places for modern living, employment, and cultural fulfillment.

Conclusion

The resettlement of rural Chinese inhabitants into NVs was a central strategy in the British military master plan to beat off the determined efforts of anti-colonial forces in Malaya at the end of the Japanese Occupation. The NVs have fulfilled their military objective and have since continued to shelter the village community for more than 50 years. More so than the cities and small towns, the NVs have been seen to as a "bastion" of Chinese settlement.

The NVs have served their role eminently in the colonial plan for political survival. Today, they are left more like a neglected step-child than as a testimony to the struggle for building a democratic way of life in the formative stage of nationhood. Many NVs are losing their social and economic vigour, and can only watch the twentieth-first century go by. While the NVs had indeed offered "a great social opportunity" for the inhabitants, it had been lamented that it was "a pity that better use is not being made of it" (Stead 1955: 642). Unless innovative policies are adopted to reinvigorate the NV communities, it is almost certain that more will join the ranks of slumbering historical memorials to the original military strategy that

they had served so successfully.

The problems of NVs are many and complex. Failure to overcome these problems would lead to the inevitable marginalization of hundred of NVs economically and culturally. The need to transform the NVs into modern settlements that are fully integrated into mainstream society looks increasingly like a strategy than an option. Only then will NVs develop into delightful townships with which residents would be proud to identify. The most logical approach to the modernization of the "outdated" settlement is to redevelop it into a modern one that can meet the needs of the age.

By virtue of their location close to the towns or in readily accessible areas, the NVs indeed present a "great social opportunity" as had been envisaged by some at the time of their establishment. Rather than left to serve as "dormitories" and settlements of an ageing society, they possess the potentials, if fully integrated into the economy as an important component of the national development agenda, to mature into a dynamic player in national social and economic life. After more than half a century of neglect and the failure to make "better use" of the potentials of NVs, it will benefit the village community, government and other relevant parties if they recognize that these villages can be an active participant in national development beyond their silent role as a pawn in the colonial struggle for supremacy.

Notes

- 1 The New Villages also attracted the attention of German scholars such as Kühne, 1969.
- 2 "Emergency" regulations were imposed by the government in its fight against the "communist". Among the restrictions were the imposition of daily curfew hours and the strict control on population movements into areas outside the villages.

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