

# THE CITY IN THE VILLAGE

THE *IN-SITU* URBANIZATION OF  
VILLAGES, VILLAGERS AND THEIR LAND  
AROUND KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

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# Introduction

## Scope of the Study

WHAT is happening in regions that retain a 'rural' aspect around the growing cities of Asia and other parts of the developing world is part of the urban transformation, and must be viewed and studied in this context. When 'rural' incomes increase, the increase is due largely to urban employment of temporary absentees. Dependence on classically 'rural' sources of income may be in decline in the presence of such transformation. A dual view is as important in planning as in research, for 'rural' solutions will not work in areas already in large measure 'urban'; nor are the problems simply those of urban planning, for most of the land is still under rural uses, or at least preserves a rural aspect.

This study is concerned with both land and people, and the area of study is around the city of Kuala Lumpur. The central concern is embodied in the title of the book: what happens to 'villages, villagers and their land' as the city moves into the villages, absorbs the energies of the villagers and changes the value and ownership of their land? These questions could be asked over a much larger area than the immediate environs of the city, i.e., within 40 kilometres of the centre, for villagers and the use of their land are affected by urban forces at much greater distances. So far as is possible, this wider framework of change is kept in mind, but resources—as well as the nature of the data which was required—restricted our inquiries to the more immediately impacted 'inner-rural' periphery of the city. The same constraints, as well as a preference for a micro-study method, demanded a concentration on selected communities within this inner zone, rather than an attempt at wide coverage.

## Plan of the Book

The authors collaborated closely in the writing of this book which proceeded through three stages: first in early 1989 when Brookfield, A. Samad and Zaharah teamed up in Kuala Lumpur, Bangi and Seremban;

then in mid-1989 when Samad was a Visiting Fellow in Canberra; and finally in October 1989 when all three authors met in Kuala Lumpur and Bangi to finalize the drafts of Chapters 1–6 and to write the concluding chapter.

The book is thus organized into seven chapters, each focusing on a major or critical aspect of the study. The first chapter is devoted to setting out the context within which four village communities have come increasingly to be influenced by the growth of the Kuala Lumpur conurbation. The growth of the conurbation and its economic and social differentiation are described, and relevant aspects of Peninsula-wide change discussed, especially in the rural economy. Chapter 2 sets out a further important element in the context of change. The current Malaysian land tenure and transfer system was set up by the British colonizers with the specific object of creating an organized land market. Adopting an approach pioneered in the Australian colonies, this system offered an extremely fine mesh of surveyed title to every small block of land, though it stopped short of giving full recognition to fragmentation. At a later stage, some areas of Malay land were reserved from the general land market, and the four areas selected for our study were included in these reservations. This history and practice is set out.

In Chapter 3 the empirical material on the four communities is introduced. The main concern of this chapter is with land-use change through time, and especially through the period since 1966. Land-use change is discussed in the context of urban and regional planning. This leads into Chapter 4, which continues the study of land by examining tenure and transfer, and the effects of substantial purchase of land by outsiders, mainly urban, in a rapidly rising land market. This chapter is based on examination of data from the title and transfer records held in the district land offices. It leads to some important interim conclusions about what is happening to people, as well as to the land, in these urbanizing villages.

Chapters 5 and 6 focus more specifically on the people, using data from questionnaire surveys carried out in 731 households in the four villages during 1986, together with supplementary information. Chapter 5 examines demographic characteristics of the population, and its employment. Chapter 6 follows with an analysis of inequality, based on profiles of the relatively affluent, a middle group and the poor in each village. The final chapter opens with some discussion of responses to a set of questions designed to evaluate attitudes to land—the traditional basis of Malay well-being—in relation to a set of modern alternatives, then returns to the more general issues of *in-situ* urb-

anization, and concludes with a discussion that should be of relevance to Malaysia's planners.

### **Some Problems and Limitations**

Like almost any research task, this one grew and changed as it went along, adapting to new insights and findings along the way. However, it was impossible to go back and pick up all the pieces we might have collected had we known at the outset what we were going to find. Many of these findings emerged only as the data were analysed, after coding and recoding. One early and seemingly inefficient stage in data processing was to set out manually, in tabular form, part of the data on each household, before coding. This became invaluable when, with some recoding and checking of questionnaire forms still incomplete, all the questionnaire forms that remained in Kuala Lumpur, together with a part of the land-title data sheets, were destroyed in error during an unsupervised office move at Universiti Malaya.

But for the initial manual analysis of important parts of the data, this event would have left only a limited part of the questionnaire material in usable form. Some gaps in data could not be overcome. They apply to Sungai Pencala, and especially Sungai Serai, and particularly to the demographic material discussed in Chapter 5. More generally, data gaps are marked in omissions from some of the tables, and are signposted in the text. Fortunately, however, large parts of the data had already been checked and entered into the computer before this occurred, and the main surviving problem has been an inability to return to the questionnaire forms to check apparent coding errors that emerged in analysis; in consequence some data sets have been rejected. All computer work was done at the Australian National University.

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## Chapter 1

# Problem, Context and Approach

### The Problem

THE rapid expansion of cities in the developing world is being achieved primarily through the incorporation of large numbers of rural people into the new urban milieu. Most of these people are migrants, whether 'circular'—retaining a base in the rural areas, and returning to it—or permanent. The manner in which these migrants are absorbed into the city, especially as squatters or as occupants of the great shanty towns that house as much as half the population of some Latin American cities, has been the subject of a large literature, and also of a debate over interpretation: are these people 'marginalized' members of the capitalist system, oppressed and powerless, or are they an integral part of the evolving urban fabric (for example, Dwyer, 1975; Jocano, 1975; Lloyd, 1979; Lomnitz, 1977; Mangin, 1967; Peattie, 1968; Portes, 1972, 1979; Roberts, 1978; Turner, 1968)? The debate in much of this literature turns on the structure of society as a whole, on the formation and role of classes and the conflict between them, and on the expansion of capitalism. This book draws on the literature above, but does not seek to enter the general argument.

### *In-situ Urbanization*

The modern transport revolution has extended the scope of urbanization deep into the countryside. Around almost every major Asian city, large numbers of commuters travel daily to work in urban areas from villages, by bus, car, motor cycle and bicycle. In terms of time occupied in the journey to work, the range extends as far as in Western countries, which have more fully elaborated public transport and highway systems; many people spend two or three hours a day travelling between village home and urban work. The 'rural-urban divide' has been blurred by this process, which paves the way for the transformation of rural villages into urban suburbs, as more and more village people find



city or other urban-related work, as industry spreads into the surrounding countryside in search of cheaper land, and as villages become part of the urban living space and fill up with outsiders as settlers, tenants or squatters. Expanding cities have been swallowing rural communities for two centuries; many suburbs in European cities still preserve the rural road patterns; some still have 'village greens' turned into urban parks, and retain a few of the old rural houses. In Asian cities many rural communities have more recently been swallowed up by the city, becoming the older urban *kampung* (villages, including squatter communities) of Jakarta, Bandung, or Surabaya; crowded urban areas still preserving some trace of their rural origin and usually lacking the full range of city services. Some have been swept away altogether in the interests of urban renewal and more 'rational' urban planning (Abeyasekere, 1987).

This phenomenon, termed '*in-situ* urbanization' in this book, has received much less attention than squatting, or even commuting. The manner in which village people, remaining where they are, become town dwellers, and in which their land becomes urban rather than agricultural, has rarely been subjected to close examination as a problem in its own right, especially in a developing-country context. One reason is that, except in the immediate periphery of cities, it is essentially a very modern phenomenon, closely related to the recent rise of mega-cities and to the transport revolution that has made blurring of the rural-urban divide possible. In one of a small number of studies, in the environs of New Delhi, Soussan (1980: 36) proposes a simple model of what might happen around rapidly growing cities: an agriculturally based community becomes an enclave within the city through transitional processes which include increasing population density and in-migration, decreasing agricultural activity, increasing urban employment, and construction and reconstruction of dwellings in the village area. But while the starting and finishing points are clear, the stages in the transition are not. In the New Delhi case, two of the most important changes were the in-migration of large numbers of new urban workers seeking low-cost accommodation as tenants, and demand for space from small-scale industrial enterprises. Some villages became local service centres for surrounding urban developments.

A similar role for peri-urban villages in providing rental accommodation for urban workers has been encountered in other parts of the world. Changes in society, politics, income and welfare were the central focus of two early studies on peri-urban villages in Papua New Guinea: that of Belshaw (1957) on Hanuabada, now deeply incorporated into the capital, Port Moresby, and that of Epstein (1969) on Matupit,

a short distance from the major town of Rabaul. In the latter village, 40 per cent of the adult male population already worked for wages in the 1960s, entrepreneurship was important, and the urban market absorbed much of the rural produce; none the less, Epstein still found it possible to analyse economy and society in the traditional context of a rural community. More recently, Rutz (1987) has described the problems of conflict between traditional reciprocity, landlordism and commercialization in a group of villages now included within the urban area of Suva, Fiji. The élites have become a bourgeoisie and the commoners a working class, but strong elements of rural tradition remain, and play a vital role in the creation of a modern urban society.<sup>1</sup>

### *The Environs of Kuala Lumpur*

In the Kuala Lumpur metropolitan area of Malaysia, where up to a third of the total population lives in squatter settlements, there have been a large number of studies of low-cost housing and of squatters in particular, paralleling those carried out in many other countries (for example, Azizah Kassim, 1985; Johnstone, 1976, 1983). Much less has been written about the tenement-dwelling tenants who, in modern Asian cities as in nineteenth-century European cities, crowded into housing blocks at a very high density. Literature on Malay *kampung* in the near vicinity of the city is even more scant, except in student theses. One significant study, which provided baseline data for one of the communities studied, is that of A. Maulud bin Mohd Yusof (1976). This book does not offer a comprehensive review of the literature on Kuala Lumpur or on Malays in and around the city; most of what it has to say breaks new ground and does not draw on previous research.

In the expansion of Kuala Lumpur from a small town of under 100,000 people as recently as the 1920s into a developing mega-city of 2.5 million in the 1980s, many small Chinese mining and commercial settlements have been swallowed up. Even 'new villages', such as Damansara in the northern part of Petaling Jaya, into which rural Chinese were concentrated during the 'Emergency' of the communist insurrection between 1948 and the late 1950s, have become crowded enclaves within a matrix of suburban housing estates. Within the urban area, some tracts of reservation land have become urban settlements, the largest of these being Kampung Baru, close to the city centre. Along the Klang Valley, a few Malay villages on the edge of former tin mines have become the cores of modern squatter settlements. All alluvial valleys in the basin in which Kuala Lumpur lies were thoroughly worked over by the tin mining which was responsible for the original