

Proceedings

Editor's Introduction

The Seminar on the Problems of Rice-Growing Villages in Malaysia was jointly organized by the Faculty of Economics and Administration, University of Malaya and the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University. The main objective of the Seminar was to provide a forum for researchers from the Center for Southeast Asian Studies to report and review their extensive work on Malay rice-growing villages undertaken over nearly ten years. The Seminar also provided an opportunity for Malaysians, including policymakers, researchers, and development implementors to discuss and critically analyze the findings of foreign scholars on Malay rice-growing communities. The hope of the organizers of the Seminar was that it would contribute to a better understanding of the problems of Malay rice-growing villages as well as assist policymakers, planners and administrators in expanding their experience, knowledge and consciousness of the ecological, sociological, anthropological and educational dimensions of rural development in Malaysia.

It can be said, in retrospect, that the degree of intellectual interchange provoked by the six papers presented justified the effort involved by the two institutions in organizing the one-day Seminar at the University of Malaya on 14th December 1977. Participation in the Seminar was deliberately limited to those who could contribute meaningfully to the discussion. Several institutions were represented in the Malaysian delegation, including the University of Malaya, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and Universiti Sains Malaysia, Muda Agricultural Development Authority (MADA), Kemubu Agricultural Development Authority (KADA), Federal and State Departments of Agriculture, Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute (MARDI), Farmers' Organization Authority and Malaysian Centre for Development Studies. Apart from the Japanese delegation from the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, participants came from the International Development and Research Centre (IDRC), Asia Regional Office in Singapore, Agricultural Development Council (A.D.C.), University of the Philippines, Association of Development Research and Training Institutes of Asia and the Pacific (ADIPA), National Taiwan University and Thammasat University. The wide cross section of institutions and disciplines represented contributed in no small measure to the invigorating discussions generated.

In organizing the material for this special volume of *South East Asian Studies*, the proceedings start with the full introductory remarks given by Professor Datuk Mokhzani

Abdul Rahim, the Seminar Chairman and also Deputy Vice Chancellor, University of Malaya and Professor Shinichi Ichimura, Director of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University. This is followed by six papers presented by Japanese participants together with comments by Malaysian counterparts at the back of the respective papers: that is, Fukui and Takaya's joint paper on ecological features is discussed by S. Jegatheesan; Kuchiba's paper on socio-economic changes by Mohd. Nor Ghani; Maeda's paper on the family and circle by Mohd. Dahlan Hj. Aman; Tsubouchi's paper on changing functions of religion by Afifuddin Hj. Omar; Mizuno's paper on rural economic conditions by Madya L. J. Fredericks; and Murata's paper on rural education by Abu Bakar Mahmud. At the final place, the proceedings give the summary of arguments evoked during the session of general discussion.

The first paper jointly presented by Fukui and Takaya is "Some Ecological Observations on Rice-Growing in Malaysia" which is an expanded version of their brief paper presented at the Seminar. The paper touches on the ecological aspects of the major rice-growing zones in Malaysia and raises the agronomic possibility that ecological manipulations to increase aggregate rice productivity would require improvement in the essentially perhumid conditions prevalent. Jegatheesan's discussion of the paper then follows.

Kuchiba's paper entitled "Socio-Economic Changes in a Malay Padi-Growing Community (Padang Lalang) in Kedah" reviews his long association with Padang Lalang situated in the Muda area. Some of the observations made by Kuchiba were controversial enough to stir discussion; this included the view that Malay rice farmers are strongly individual rather than community-oriented. This, while allowing for unhindered adoption of new technologies, does not augur well for the creation of efficient farmers' institutions. Furthermore, expectations, perceptions and functions of leadership have tended to change over time and have contributed to some degree of factionalism in Malay villages. Mohd. Nor Ghani in his discussion abstracts the implications of Kuchiba's paper for policymakers involved in rural development. The third paper is by Maeda whose anthropological studies in Melaka have converged into the paper "the Malay Family as a Social Circle" presented. His extensive paper brings out the idea that the basic unit in Malay village social structures is the family circle, not the family as such. This family circle and the household (its residential, economic expression) is "not a fixed and definite, boundary-maintaining group but ... [is] a very fluid one in terms of its membership" (p. 67). From this, through an analysis of cultural traits, Maeda points out that conformism is a characteristic of Malay society. Paradoxically, however, because group conformism or societal equilibrium does not relate to a formal system as such; individualism is also a distinct characteristic. Community is not a reflection of a permanent system of inter-individual cooperation; rather it is a "gathering of settlers" or a framework for religious or political administration.

Maeda's views are vigorously analyzed by Mohd. Dahlan, a fellow anthropologist, who concludes that the writer's findings must be vigorously assessed before acceptance. Tsubouchi rounds off this anthropological-sociological section with his paper on "the Changing Function of Religion among Rural Malays". His major findings are that the pressures of modernization on Islam are conspicuous in the decline in the educational role of religious schools (*madrassah*) among rural youth; the reinforcement of ties between religious teachers and the older generation in *pondok* schools, and a re-interpretation of religious edicts pertaining to divorce. Affuddin Hj. Omar makes his views clear not only on Islam's changing role but also on the papers by Kuchiba and Maeda.

In the section on economics, Mizuno's paper on "Comparative Analysis of Rural Development: Rice-Growing Villages in Thailand and Malaysia" attempts to summarize data from six rice-growing villages in Thailand and three in Malaysia. An attempt is made to classify these villages into ecological groups on the basis of income, production and socio-economic data. Mizuno's paper is carefully examined and reviewed by Fredericks who feels that certain methodological weaknesses are evident and a definite need is apparent to relate micro level village studies to the broader environment both for academic and policymaking reasons.

The last paper presented by Murata is on "Education and Rural Development: a Comparative Study of Thai and Malay Villages". Once again educational curricula and farmers' expectations are examined on a cross-cultural perspective. Not unexpectedly, farmers in both countries have a high job expectation for their children who have received formal education. Also not surprisingly, the rural educational curricula are not agriculture-oriented and hence contribute to rural-urban drift of farm youth. Murata identifies three main problems of educational programs in rural Thailand and Malaysia: the lack of educational opportunities available to rural populations, lack of relevance in school curricula to the rural environment and the lack of positive contribution of current rural education programs to rural development. Abu Bakar Mahmud in his discussion agrees substantively with Murata's findings and postulates that education, to have a meaningful role in rural development, must itself have an "enhanced" or holistic content and not be limited primarily to the eradication of illiteracy.

The summary of the discussion that follows the papers and discussants' reports is an abbreviated and highly edited version of the actual general discussion that took place after actual presentations and during a period set aside for that purpose. The editor has chosen, not necessarily by a perfect method, to structure the discussion under major heads including: problems of rice-growing in Malaysia, education and rural development, the problem of generalizing and making comparative studies on the basis of limited village studies, and some anthropological observations on Malay family and community structure. The editor apologizes in advance if views have been mis-represented but

has adopted, in anticipation of criticisms, the style in which no speaker is mentioned specifically.

It remains for me, as editor, to thank all concerned with the organization of the Seminar, the paper-writers and discussants and the participants for contributing materially to its success. To the organizers, the Faculty of Economics and Administration, University of Malaya and the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University an enormous debt has been incurred. Finally, to the Center for Southeast Asian Studies our appreciation for permitting the publication of the Seminar Proceedings in this issue of *South East Asian Studies*.

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