

NOTA PENYELIDIKAN/RESEARCH NOTES

FRIENDSHIP VILLAGE NO. 1 BETONG, SOUTH THAILAND*

John J. Coe

PREAMBLE

In the course of research on the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM), the writer has recently had the opportunity to visit one of the CPM resettlement villages in southern Thailand. The following are some observations on this visit.

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1950's the CPM has maintained its armed struggle against Malaysia from its jungle fastness in the Betong salient in southern Thailand. During the period 1972-74, internecine disputes caused it to split into three factions, known respectively as the CPM (Orthodox), CPM (Marxist-Leninist) and CPM (Revolutionary). In 1983 the Marxist-Leninist and Revolutionary factions merged to form the Communist Party of Malaysia.

In the opening weeks of 1987 the Communist Party of Malaysia, through its military arm, the Second Military Zone of the Malaysian People's Liberation Army, entered into a negotiated settlement with the Thai Fourth Army. The substance of this agreement required the former to abandon its armed struggle and place itself in the hands of the Thai military authorities. This agreement was conditional however on a guarantee that members of the former Liberation Army would not be repatriated involuntarily to Malaysia and that they would be given the opportunity to participate in the civil reconstruction of Thailand, i.e., resettled. In accordance with the terms of this historic and significant agreement, on 28 April 1987, some 542 guerrilla fighters emerged from the jungle, laid down their arms and equipment and attended a reconciliation ceremony in a remote jungle clearing near Betong attended by the Commander of the Fourth Army and other Thai military and civil dignitaries.

As part of the resettlement programme, the erstwhile guerrillas were split up into five resettlement villages, four of which are dispersed along the Betong - Yala road and the fifth near Sa Dao. The objective of the programme is that each

* The field research on which this paper is based was made possible through the kind co-operation and assistance of the Friendship Village Community, the Thai Fourth Army and the Thai and Australian Foreign Affairs Departments.

village will develop as a self sustaining community in the 'swords into ploughshares' tradition. The Thai authorities have provided material resources and made adequate provision for the communities to establish an economic base upon which to build.

During the period 1 - 4 December 1987, as guest of the Friendship Village No. 1 near Betong, the opportunity was taken to conduct interviews and informal discussions with ex-CPM members and to make general observations on the social and material structure of the community.

This paper is a summary of these observations. Although it will contain general comment on some of the salient features of this unique community it will not contain details of interviews conducted. An analysis of these interviews will be the subject of another paper.

In this paper, the term 'Returnee' is used to denote an ex-member of the Malaysian People's Liberation Army who abandoned the armed struggle in accordance with the agreement worked out by the Fourth Army and the Second Military Zone. Under the terms of the Press Communique issued by the Headquarters of the Second Military zone "... both sides reached an agreement of total peace on 11 of April 1987."¹ The communique makes no mention of a unilateral surrender by the Second Military zone nor does it make any reference to victors or losers. In a subsequent statement to the press on 5 May, a spokesman for the Second Military Zone stressed that:

... between ourselves and the Thai authorities, the question of who are the victors and who are the losers does not exist, and the question of one side surrendering to the other is non-existent.²

Press reports about the agreement have persistently referred to the 'surrender' of the CPM to the Thai authorities. During the course of discussion with me the community were most adamant that they entered into a negotiated settlement with the Thai authorities, not a unilateral surrender. This unfortunate choice of description of a delicate agreement will be eschewed by this paper. The term 'Returnee' is therefore deemed appropriate.

In following standard terminology, the term 'armed struggle' will be used to describe the CPM's guerrilla war against Malaysia.

FRIENDSHIP VILLAGE, BETONG

The Friendship Village No.1 is the largest of the returnee communities. Located just north of the border town of Betong it is situated around the jungle clearing where the formal reconciliation ceremony took place. Home to about 250 returnees, the village nestles in a mountain valley, a cluster of thatched wooden buildings in the middle of the jungle. The Thai authorities have designed the resettlement programme around the community and around the locale in which the community operated. They have granted the Friendship Village community land in the very jungles that were once both home and operational areas to the CPM. In so doing, they have saved the community from unnecessary alienation had it been subject to massive social and environmental dislocation.

The area now bears the scars of development. Aside from the immediate and temporary village accommodation, the community has wasted no time in laying the foundations of its future. Swathes have been bulldozed into the forests, exposing bare hillsides of red earth upon which low set, grey concrete houses are being constructed. The jungle is being cast as the midwife to a new and unorthodox community.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

From a sociological perspective the Community is quite unique in that it has been effectively sealed off from the outside world for several years. Indeed, for several of its older members, for decades. It is a community that has abruptly changed its lifestyle from a high stress, nomadic, guerrilla war to a peaceful commune.

In addition to these unsettling changes, the community is trying to adapt to a country that many of its members do not necessarily call home and a country that certainly regards them as foreigners.

From a psychological perspective, the ability of such a community to adapt to these changed circumstances should be of great interest. The community's previous lifestyle, with all its concomitant tensions, facilitated the development of a very close Revolutionary Family kinship system. It was this very closeness, paradoxically, which became the *raison d'être* for the community's revolutionary spirit. Indirectly, this symbiosis between the revolutionary ideal and the revolutionary family could, in part, account for the longevity of the armed struggle.

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elected village committee, the old leadership remains the unwritten reference point for the community.

This leadership, known as the 'Leadership Structure', would appear to comprise those functionaries of the Second Military Zone residing in the village and some of the veterans. This group is treated with obvious deference by the rest of the community. In contrast to the Leadership Structure, the remainder of the community are known as the 'Grass Roots.'

The highly organised daily routine of the community and the pace of development in the village give ample indication of both the style of authority and the high degree of personal and social motivation of the community. The decision making process is extended through regular community discussion sessions and committee meetings sponsored by the leadership structure. This corporatism is reflected in the highly cohesive nature of the community.

That the Thai authorities did not totally dismantle the former social and organisational structure of the community is testimony to their sensitivity and experience in resettlement programmes. It is not unreasonable to suggest that it is easier to control a cohesive, contented group by exercising authority through existing social structures rather than trying to control a malcontent, inchoate group devoid of any self management or social discipline.

Belying the traditional view of the CPM as the octogenarian remnants of the 1948-60 Emergency period is the relative youthfulness of most of the inhabitants of the village. Although the village is home to about 50 elderly members, most of the community are in their late twenties to mid thirties. Quite obviously, recruitment levels were maintained in recent years. The community also contains some 30 physically impaired personnel, injured during the armed struggle.

Given that the community had been some 7 months out of the jungle by the time of this visit, their health, general level of fitness and the advanced age of some of their members was impressive. This can perhaps be attributed to the ascetic lifestyle of the community in general. Almost mirroring Spencer Chapman's account of life with the guerrillas during the war, the community places great emphasis on personal discipline, fitness and cleanliness.³

For example, after the 0530 whistle, it was not uncommon to see men and women doing their Tai Chi exercises before taking their morning bath. Personal discipline and physical and mental fitness is of paramount importance in jungle survival. It is interesting to note that alcohol was strongly discouraged and very few of the members smoked.

The monastic lifestyle of the community is reflected in its provisioning. Meals were prepared in the communal kitchens, the rice cooked overnight in large steaming pots covered in cloths. All meals were taken together in the Mess Hall, with the exception of the Leadership Structure, who took their meals in their quarters. The meals were simple and sustaining, consisting of rice, a vegetable dish of stir fried sweet potato leaves, known colloquially as the 'dragons moustache', fish soup, chicken or a basic meat dish with quantities of tea. Lunch, taken at 1130 hrs, consisted of biscuits and cake and a cup of Milo. Dinner and breakfast were the same.

During discussions it was frequently stressed that the CPM was a truly multi-racial Party. Observations of the community do not bear out this claim. The overwhelming majority of the population would appear to be Chinese or certainly of Chinese extraction. Traditionally the official language of the Party has been Mandarin and certainly Mandarin is the language of the community.

Women constitute nearly fifty percent of the community. They proved to be a strong source of recruits during the armed struggle and contributed an equal share of the day to day activities of the community. Marriage in the jungle was permitted. The process was straightforward. A couple would announce to the community in general that from henceforth they would be married after which they and a few select friends might retire to their quarters for a small celebration.

The question of children was however, always a problem for the community during the armed struggle. Quite obviously operational and logistical factors precluded parenting in the jungle. Children were therefore fostered out to friendly villagers. Children are conspicuous by their absence at the Friendship Village. Given that a large percentage of the community is of child rearing age, it will be interesting to see what impact this temporary sense of collective childlessness will have upon the community.

The collective emotional energies of the village seem to be expended upon the elderly and the infirm. These are looked after by the community and their contribution is measured according to their abilities. Two interviewees exemplify this spirit. One is a veteran, with some 43 years experience of the armed struggle and the other a female ordinary fighting soldier.

Mr Teck Hua was 69 years of age when he came out of the jungle in April 1987. He had been in the jungle since the commencement of the armed struggle in 1948. Prior to that he had spent the war years with the Malayan Peoples Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA). Altogether a total of 43 years under arms, Mr Teck Hua came from a family of 5 brothers and a sister. During the war all had served with the MPAJA. In 1948 his two elder brothers were arrested by the British authorities and deported to China. His younger brother was arrested and gaoled for eight years and one brother was killed in 1953 during the armed struggle.

Miss Ying Hong joined the armed struggle in 1975 at the age of 17. Two years later, as the result of an anti-personnel mine, she had her left leg amputated above the knee under the most basic field conditions. Since that time she has remained with the armed struggle, participating fully in the daily chores of the community, which included carrying her own pack during long and harassed route marches, all with the aid of a crude, home-made wooden crutch.

Both Teck Hua and Ying Hong, for variously dissimilar reasons, have a bonded affinity with the community. For one, the community has in effect become his family and his way of life, for the other, the special kinship and loyalty owed to a group that sustained her during a traumatic period in her life.

The community did not appear to be sustained by any obviously shared spiritual belief system. Although all of the interviewees had been brought up in a religious environment, only one, a Muslim, professed any faith. The point was made however in general discussions that although the Party recognised no faith, individual members were free to practise whichever faith they so chose. This was given effect by a small Buddhist shrine in the Mess Hall tended every day by an old lady.

The community has embarked upon a variety of community centred projects, foremost of which are the establishment of an economic base and the construction of permanent housing. Apart from a government grant of money and some material assistance, the community has no material resources to sustain it. As a matter of priority the community is trying to establish both subsistence and long term cash generating schemes. These include an unsuccessful fish farming project, planting of rubber trees, timber milling, concrete brick manufacture, horticulture, market gardening and chicken rearing. Quite obviously, several of these schemes will take several years to reach fruition.

At present the community is housed in 'temporary' dormitory style structures of timber, thatch and earthen floors. The village consists of several such structures, which include accomodation huts, the communal mess hall, kitchens, the medical dispensary and office hut.

The accomodation is divided into that for married couples, single girls and so on, each have a bathhouse attached. The buildings are centred around the community facilities, that is, the Mess Hall, parade ground and kitchens. The architectural style and manner of construction would appear to be a blend of the traditional kampong and the communal lifestyle of the jungle. The houses were constructed by the community, using traditional techniques well honed by years of experience.

The immediate need to construct houses led to a systematic milling operation of jungle timber. This is milled, dried, and stored on site. The milling is conducted by a mix of modern equipment provided by the authorities as well as traditional timber cutting techniques.

The authorities have also provided the village with cement and fibro-cement roof sheeting for the construction of modern and permanent housing. With considerable ingenuity the village building committee has designed a hydraulic sand sedimentation system whereby clean sand from the jungle streams is used for cement brick manufacture. The water, carrying the sand particles, is redirected along a series of wooden aqueducts into wooden sedimentation tanks. Into these the sand is silted, shovelled out, dried and processed with cement for manufacture.

Utilising their abundant timber supplies and their brick manufacturing plant, the community is building a series of new timber-framed, fibro-cement roofed brick buildings. These are of a basic design on a concrete slab and incorporate two bedrooms, a living area, a toilet and bathroom and a kitchen *cum* laundry. The windows are louvered, and the internal walls are partial height to facilitate the free passage of air. The buildings give the impression of being both spacious and cool. The total construction cost per unit is about US\$1600.

Significantly, the new houses are being built away from the present site, dispersed and tucked into the hills overlooking the valley. On completion, the new village will be a series of clusters of buildings rather than a 'centralised' village unit. This represents a departure from the present unitary nature of the village. It is interesting to contemplate the social consequences of dispersing the community into distinctly separate and modular units.

The development projects have caused some major civil engineering problems relating to drainage and erosion. Partially in a haste born of necessity and partially in enthusiasm, the community has commenced an extensive land clearing programme to accomodate its housing and agricultural projects.

Given the topography of the village and the onset of the monsoon, this clearing has created a serious problem of soil erosion. The soil of the region is the *tanah merah* (red earth) slides. This natural instability is exacerbated by any civil engineering and clearing, a point unfortunately best illustrated by the mud slides along the mountainous Yala-Betong road.

Quite obviously, any clearing programme should be undertaken within the context of adequate drainage and with provision for substantial measures to consolidate those exposed areas of earth that are going to be susceptible to slides.

In the context of the village, access roads and levelled building sites have created exposed artificial slopes, several of which are subsiding, and general clearing along the natural slopes has precipitated serious erosion problems. A comprehensive and engineered drainage and consolidation programme is quite obviously beyond the immediate resources of the community. A system of low cost, timber rivetting and terraced drains was suggested, supplemented by wire mesh and jungle ground cover to consolidate the soil. Consideration could then be given to a tree planting programme.

With reference to future planning, an appropriate conservation strategy such as minimal clearing would help to overcome erosion problems. It is moot to suggest that the community should consider re-adopting its jungle lifestyle inasmuch that it should design the village around the jungle rather than trying to shape the jungle around the village. In this way, the problems of erosion will largely be contained whilst also providing shade and shelter for the village.

Much of the food consumed by the community, especially vegetables, is produced at the village. This is supplemented by a regular grocery run into Betong by the Thai military detachment. There is a small store in the village, run by the community, which stocks a limited range of domestic essentials and the medical dispensary contains both Chinese and Western pharmaceutical goods.

One of the most obvious and forceful impressions of the village is its complete and total isolation. The only contact with the outside world is the military radio contact with Yala and the daily grocery run provided by the military.

From a material perspective, the immediate impression gained of the community is its frugality and its capacity for hard work. Within a matter of months the community has demonstrated its commitment to the future through its labour, improvisation skills and initiative. Indeed, in an interesting entrepreneurial venture, the community is restoring one of its old guerrilla camps and tunnel complexes as a tourist attraction.

Much has been achieved despite the limited resources and constrictions of time. Much of what has been achieved is due, in no small part, to the generosity of the Thai authorities. However, their subsidies cannot continue indefinitely and the community is in urgent need of alternative support.

The immediate requirements would include transport, agricultural machinery and associated hardware to enable them to further their development programmes. Members of the community made it quite plain that any such assistance would be most welcomed.

CONCLUSION

At the end of the visit the writer was asked what might be some of the problems the community would face in the future. The point was made that, being isolated for so long, the community spirit would inevitably be subjected to stresses as individual members adapt to civil society.

In the writer's opinion, the ability of the community to adapt to its new lifestyle is not only important to the security and structure of the community itself, but also to the security of the region as a whole. Should individual members be unable to cope with the change to a civil and acquisitive society, the subsequent consequences on the structure, composition and spirit of the community could be precursory to either a partial or wholesale return, disillusioned, to the armed struggle.

The present corporate structure of the community would appear to be a direct reflection of the tradition of democratic centralism which constitutes the structural heart of Marxism-Leninism. There is no doubt that, organisationally, such a structure facilitates positive decision making and tight social control. That the Friendship community should have inherited such an organisational structure is understandable and fortuitous. Judged against the results achieved, this control is a positive factor, enabling the community to proceed with the immediate and pressing problems of re-establishing itself. For how long this collective enthusiasm can be sustained is, of course, the important question.

Time will be the handmaiden to a gradual erosion of this centralised community structure and it is to be hoped that its replacement will evolve in a positive way. An appropriate structural identity might be the Israeli *kibbutz*.

The community was extraordinarily friendly and quite genuinely welcoming. It should be noted that, apart from a handful of journalists, the community has received little attention from the outside world. The returnees are in a delicate situation *vis a vis* the Thai authorities. Collectively they are most keen to "participate in the reconstruction of Thailand", emotionally many of them have close ties with friends and family in Malaysia. The community is, in many respects, a community in limbo. Although hard pressed materially, arguably its most pressing need is recognition and, psychologically, a place in the world.

The Thai authorities have handled a very delicate situation intelligently and with sensitivity. In the immediate sense, given the potential diplomatic problem with Malaysia over the issue, Thai reticence is understandable.

The unlikely agreement hammered out in the jungles of southern Thailand, has provided the opportunity for at least a substantial section of the CPM to abandon the armed struggle and begin *de novo*. The terms of the agreement will

doubtless change the character of the region, possibly putting pressure on the remaining faction to follow their erstwhile fellows into Camelot. For the immediate future, many an anxious eye will be watching to see how well the 'Revolutionary Family' adapts to its new castle.

SOURCES

The source material that constitutes the body of this paper has been, in part, extracted from field notes compiled during the period 1-4 December 1987 and contained in Field Note Book Seven and the 1987 Field Diary.

1. Press Communique by the Headquarters of the Second Military Zone of the People's Liberation Army of Malaysia on the Agreement Reached in Peace Negotiations between Delegates of the Second Military Zone of the People's Liberation Army of Malaysia and Delegates of the Thai Government. April 11, 1987.
2. Statement made by the Spokesman of the Second Military Zone of the Malaysian People's Liberation Army in News Conference concerning the Peace Negotiation. May 5, 1987.
3. Chapman, F.S., *The Jungle is Neutral*, London, the Reprint Society, 1950, Chapter Nine.

THE RENEWAL OF THE RICE HARVEST IN KAMPUNG TENGAH*

Robert R. Jay

Studies of wet rice agriculture in Asia have generally assumed full utilization of the cultivable land; local studies in Malaysia have concentrated largely in areas where this has been so.¹ The major issues that arise are the efficiency of production in the context of the national and international economies, and equity in the distribution of resources and returns. In Malaysia in recent years, a contrary phenomenon has been appearing widely throughout rural society: the large-scale abandonment of wet rice cultivation without its replacement by alternative crops. This situation is of deep concern to the government, but as yet has attracted little research attention.

In this paper I present results of research I carried out in 1987 from March to June in a rural locale of Padang Rengas, in the state of Perak on the west coast of Malaysia. Rice cultivation had been generally abandoned in this area during the 1970's, except for sporadic and largely unsuccessful efforts at renewal. A new effort was being made during the 1986-87 wet season, December to April, in one of the villages, Kampung Tengah. I was able to observe the harvest and obtain detailed records of the cultivation from the individual participants.

The widespread loss of rice production has presented the villagers with very different problems than those where full production has continued. Their very ability to gain value from working the land has been thrown into question, and their sense of the village as a viable institution has been threatened. Striving to renew the cultivation becomes much more than an exercise at retrying its economics. Moreover, radical change in the agricultural regime is closely related to powerful changes in the local social order, which in turn are connected with external factors of change from far beyond the village. The economic analysis in this paper is intended to show that a broader understanding of the villagers' actions is needed. The economics of the renewal effort are indeed important to them, but do not account for its organization nor for the energy and enthusiasm the participants have brought to it.

* I should like to thank Ibrahim Bajunid, Dr. Nancy Jay, and Jonathan Silverstone for their helpful comments and criticisms.

Among Southeast Asian nations, Malaysia has one of the more successful records of development: per capita income of M\$4,600 (1985); 41% urban population (in Peninsula Malaysia), GDP of manufacturing and construction, M\$14.4 million vs agriculture, forestry and fishing at M\$12 million and 22% of the work force in industry vs 36% in agriculture, forestry and fishing.² Moreover, a good part of the agricultural work force is producing export-oriented crops, mainly rubber and palm oil. Food production is divided between fruits and vegetables, and rice. The former, largely in the hands of Malaysians of Chinese descent, is prospering; the latter, mainly carried out by those of Malay descent, is increasingly stagnant (despite heavy investment by the government). Malay farmers, then, such as those in Kampung Tengah, are increasingly caught on the short end of development.

I spent a year doing fieldwork in Kampung Tengah in 1962-63. At the center of my interest were the relationships of kin and community as they were drawn upon for the villagers' daily work. Their major source of employment was the cultivation of crops, chiefly irrigated rice; accordingly my material was richest on the interweaving of agriculture and social relations. I returned in 1984 for three months and noticed the wide reaching changes of the past twenty five years. Among the many changes I observed was the almost total collapse of wet rice cultivation. In 1962-63, rice cultivation was flourishing. The villagers had just expanded into double cropping, and considered the profits satisfactory. Rice was becoming an increasingly important commercial crop alongside rubber production. By 1984 the production of wet rice in most of the rural area had largely collapsed; most rice fields had been out of cultivation for several years.³ Rubber production too had dropped off sharply. In 1987 I returned again to begin a restudy of those changes. This paper is a record of those changes.

Padang Rengas is located in the valley of the Kangsar River, 12 kilometers above its confluence with the Perak River at Kuala Kangsar. The valley of the Kangsar runs west to a range of steep hills through which a pass gives access to Taiping and the coastal areas beyond. The north-south trunk rail line and main highway go through the valley and the pass.

Near its head the valley widens out into a large bowl. The town of Padang Rengas lies near the mouth of the bowl and Kampung Tengah, the locale of my study, lines up the bowl a kilometer to the north.⁴ The area was surveyed toward the end of the 19th century, and large parts were alienated as free holdings to British corporations developing large rubber estates and to individual Malays, both men and women, developing small holdings of rubber, fruit orchards and irrigated rice land. Those gaining and holding title were for the most part from families of some standing and wealth, able to capitalize the work and organize the required cultivation. By the 1910's, the land alienation was completed and the current land tenure system was firmly in place. The distribution of land holdings especially near the town of Padang Rengas largely reflected the pre-

existing hierarchy among Malays of power and social standing. The configuration of land and water allowed the intensive cultivation of wet rice over the low lying areas, with the houses, gardens, and rubber and fruit trees laid out on the ridges and surrounding hills, making the area into a small but significant "rice bowl". This has resulted in a typical pattern of Malay rural production: the cultivation of wet rice (with a substantial proportion going to market), small garden crops and fruit trees, primarily for home consumption, enhanced by fishing in local streams, and the cultivation and tapping of rubber trees for daily cash income.

The villagers attributed the collapse of padi cultivation in the area to a number of factors. First, they complained about the increase in the number of padi pests, especially insects. Second, they also blamed that the development of forest reserves in the area (which led to the loss of forest cover in the hills) had resulted in the reduction of controlled irrigation supply. Third, the migration of rural youths to urban centres had seriously eroded the availability of farm labourers. Finally, the high cost of production, which was not met with an increase in padi price, had turned padi cultivation into an unprofitable venture. The crop I saw harvested in 1987 was the first effort in Kampung Tengah in three years, before which efforts to revive the cultivation had failed two years in a row. This time the cultivation had been successful, as it was also in some other renewal efforts elsewhere in this part of the valley, and there was talk of expanding the crop the following year.

Organizing the cultivation had been difficult and complex. The organization was carried out by a small number of senior farmers dedicated to restoring rice production as completely as possible. The highly egalitarian and consensual character of community action meant that complicated and lengthy negotiations on their part, in which their enthusiasm and persuasive skills were the primary levers, were needed to encourage participation of sufficient cultivators and landowners to carry through the 1987 rice crop. The land had not been cultivated for three years, so much of the operation had to be started from scratch. A series of practical problems had to be resolved.

First, sufficient landowners and cultivators had to be brought together so that a large consolidated block of irrigable land would be available and enough manpower committed to cultivate it entirely. This entailed negotiating new standard rates of return for land and labour that would induce both landowners and cultivators to participate.

Second, the size of the block had to be scaled to the limited amount of irrigation water available, yet at the same time, had to be large enough to absorb with moderate losses due to insects, animal and bird pests.

Third, the entire block of land had to be strongly fenced against water buffalo, which now wander freely.

Fourth, the plowing and seeding had to be carefully timed to match the existing ecological relations of other local plant and animal forms. For example, I was told it was now critical that the crop be transplanted when the rubber trees in the nearby hills had begun to flower. A particular kind of flying insect, highly destructive to the rice in its early stages, was attracted to the rubber trees at that time and would leave the rice alone.

Finally, transplanting and harvesting operations had also to be carefully coordinated so that no one was much ahead or behind the others. Otherwise, the plant pests and predators would move from plot to plot instead of spreading thinly over the whole block. For the same reason, pesticides had to be applied about the same time so that the pests did not simply move to plots not yet treated and then back again later.

In the end members of twenty households were recruited for the cultivation (out of seventy nine in the village), and 20 acres of land, forming an efficiently irrigable, contiguous block, were obtained from landowners. A standard rate of 20 percent of the harvest for the landowner and 80 percent for the cultivator was agreed upon (which immediately reveals the strength of labour over land in Padang Rengas now). Actual arrangements between landholder and cultivator were worked out by customary agreement between the individual families concerned, within the terms decided upon for land and labour.

The organizers, furthermore, had to develop effective cooperation with government agencies that could provide new, locally efficient high yielding seed, with instructions (the Agricultural and Extension Service), mechanical equipment and operators (the Center for Mechanized Farming), and the proper kind and quantities of fertilizers and pesticides (the Farmers Association, that provided fertilizer 100% subsidized by the government).

In this case, government support was crucial in solving the technical and financial problems. Also, the very limited scale of cultivation matched the available manpower and irrigation water. The farmers all agreed that not much more land could have been cultivated without improvement to the water supply. Yet at the same time, the small scale of cultivation increased other technical problems, in particular those posed by pests, and hindered mechanizing operations and making the crop a more economical enterprise.

A mix of collective action and individual enterprise is typical of Malay village society. Each family cultivated and harvested its own plot of land. Needed coordination of ploughing, seeding the nursery beds, transplanting, irrigating and harvesting was arrived at consensually, following the advice and lead of the

senior farmers and local extension officers of the Department of Agriculture. Joint work required, such as fencing the land against water buffalo, typically was organized consensually: the need for the work was announced by one of the senior organizers at the local mosque during a Friday service, with a time specified, and it was left to the individual cultivators to appear. No clear sanctions, however, were used against those failing to show; negative gossip was the only constraint.

The units of production typically consisted of a man who had committed himself and his family to the cultivation, assisted primarily by his wife, along with other household members who could be recruited for work. In two or three instances a woman had taken on the primary commitment, in the absence of a husband able to join. In those cases, older sons filled in as they could. It was clear from the composition of the work parties I found during the harvesting that parents had lost a good deal of their power to command their children's labour. Those already married were usually living at a distance; those still unmarried and of an age to help were in school and busy at their studies - at least that was the regular excuse given for their absence from the work. I noticed that when older school-aged children were among the harvesters, they were mostly not working very hard.

Additional labour was primarily recruited from close family members beyond the household in strong preference to other people. As such, they did not usually have to be paid any wages; they joined in through family solidarity and received some informal share in the crop. Sometimes they came from long distances, spending weekends joining the work, which they became rather festive family occasions. One son took the harvest period off from his job as a private electrical contractor in Kuala Lumpur to assist his mother getting in the crop. Though he said he had not done any harvesting work in seven years, and then only as a younger helper, he took full charge of the harvesting, doing most of it himself, with help from his mother and some of his younger brothers. Many of the units used no non-family help at all, and those who did paid at standard wage rates: \$4 per morning and \$3 to \$4 per afternoon, of about four hours each.

In contrast to my previous stay, no forms of labour exchange were being used. In 1962/63, families made regular use of exchanges of individual workers (*pinjam orang*) and of work parties (*gotong royong*). In 1987, both men and women agreed that paying wages was much easier. The old obligation on the women of the host family to provide rather lavish meals for the members of a work party was especially unlamented. Taken in conjunction with the general shortage of manpower, this change relates both to the increasing cost of such hospitality and to the difficulty families now have of raising labour from neighbors to support the work of preparation.

The stages of cultivation began with opening the land: plowing and harrowing. All the cultivators used hired tractors for this task. The heavy plowing was done by a local private tractor owner, while the second, lighter plowing and harrowing was done by a kubota (hand-operated small tractor) hired with operator from the local branch of the government Center for Farm Mechanization. Following that, each farming unit carried out the cultivation tasks individually, though keeping the timing of the successive stages in step with those of the other units.

Immediately following the plowing, seed beds were prepared for raising the seedlings, later to be transplanted in the rice plots. Men did the preparing, watering, seeding, and tending of the seed beds, women did the transplanting, the traditional division of labour. The strain of rice being grown, MR84, a new high-yielding variety, required quite precise treatment. The seeds had first to be sprouted inside damp gunny sacks, then transplanted 22 to 25 days after seeding. The timing, I was told, was critical, to within a very few days. Almost all the farming units needed extra help at this time, and drew upon women of the family, including some living at a distance, along with other local women, hired for the occasion. I was not there then, however, so do not have details on the composition of the work groups.

The crop took about three and a half months to mature, from transplanting to the harvest. During that time most farmers, I was told, weeded at least twice and applied fertilizers and pesticides as required. A first major application of phosphate fertilizer was made to the fields before transplanting (80 kg. to the acre was recommended), and smaller applications of urea (40 kg. to the acre) about three and a half weeks after transplanting and again some six weeks or so after that, in amounts proportioned to the state of the crop. It was very important, farmers noted, not to over- or under-fertilize. Pesticides were used sparingly, first a couple of weeks after transplanting, to combat insects that attack the young rice shoots just below ground level, and then later as symptoms of other infestations appeared. Herbicides to control weeds were not used, reportedly because they can damage the rice plants as well as local fish. Weeding was done by hand beginning about the time the first application of urea was made, and continued as needed and more importantly as the family had labour time to do the work. Men applied the fertilizers and pesticides, men and women together did the weeding, as time permitted.

Harvesting began during the first week in April, and stretched over three weeks. The work was very labour intensive. The rice stalks were cut by hand, with a sickle, then the grain winnowed by pounding the stalks into a large wooden tub. Men, women and even children joined in cutting the stalks, but the winnowing work, reckoned the hardest labour, was with rare exceptions all done by men.

The rhythm of the harvest was a clear statement of the reality of the manpower problems the villagers regularly cited. Over the three week harvest period, at any one time usually less than half the fields were being harvested. On weekends the

tempo picked up, as family members living elsewhere came to join the work. During the week, though, the level of activity was much reduced. Twenty five years before, several large gangs of harvesters of up to a dozen or more workers each, were regularly at work throughout the harvest period, which was completed more rapidly notwithstanding the much larger acreage cultivated. In 1987, there were sometimes no more than fifteen or twenty harvesters at work at one time.

An analysis of costs and returns will help make clear the current limits to the economic possibilities of rice cultivation for the villagers. But first I must comment on the process by which I acquired my data. I had discussed the problems of rice cultivation in detail with the Penghulu, the administrative head of the *mukim* (subdistrict), with the local officials of the Agricultural Service, and most extensively with local farmers wherever I went. I thus had gained a good deal of relevant technical and historical knowledge about the problems of rice cultivation in Padang Rengas. I needed in addition very specific data on actual cases, and especially on the social relations currently in use for its production. The 1987 rice crop in Kampung Tengah provided one such case. Collecting the data however, gave particular problems of its own.

My position in the community was that of a guest in the house of the village head, with whose family, as noted, I have had longstanding ties of friendship that began during my first stay in Kampung Tengah. Both husband and wife have farmed there their whole lives. I learned a great deal about the past and current farming situation from them, and also gained contacts with other farming families for my current research.

The main data on the current rice crop I gathered from interviews with those directly engaged in it, largely through visiting them as they worked in the fields during the harvest period. In 1962/63 I had done the same, over the entire cultivation cycle. In both cases I attempted to cover all units of production. The smaller number of units at work made that fairly easy in 1987.

I was seeking details on the relations among the members of each group found at work, its structure of leadership, the bases of remuneration, its relations with the landowner, the area of land being cultivated, the amount of time being put in (very roughly), the costs of production, and the size of the harvest. I wanted some accurate data on yield vs. cash costs and on the social relations employed in production.

The costs that I could gather were estimated cash costs. Family labour, as noted, covered most of the labour input, and was not reckoned by the cultivators as a quantifiable charge. The estimates given for the cash costs of plowing, seed, and insecticides seemed roughly accurate. My informants for these were mostly the men in charge of cultivation. Almost invariably, they themselves had sown the seed and applied the fertilizer and insecticides, so that their cash costs had simply

been the cost of the materials. Fertilizers, as noted, had been supplied free of charge; seed and insecticide costs had been fairly small, and estimates of those costs seemed consistent. The major cash costs had been for plowing and transplanting, and in a few instances, harvesting.

Plowing had been charged for at standard rates per hour. The men, thinking back, simply sought to remember how many hours they had paid for. The transactions had been relatively impersonal and there seemed no reluctance to recollect the costs. Estimates tallied reasonably well with the size of cultivation units as I was later able to measure them.

Transplanting costs were another matter. Most often the labour had been organized by the female partners, usually wives, since that work was done by women. Moreover, the labour arrangements were somewhat complicated: some workers, even close relatives, were paid wages, while household members worked without pay, as did mothers and grandmothers sometimes from outside the household. The men I spoke with seemed unclear on those wage costs, and rather reluctant to make estimates.

Weeding again was a task done largely by household labour, and variable degrees of care had been exercised, in proportion to the different amounts of time and energy the cultivators had to give to it. Estimates of cash costs were very small to zero.

I was present for harvesting. In spite of the labour intensive character of that task, only three or four units employed any wage labour. Cultivators preferred to spread out the time of harvesting instead. Transplanting had been a critical phase, requiring careful timing and quick work. Harvest time could be stretched out without much risk. So again, cash costs reported for this operation, with a few exceptions, were low to zero, and I was able to confirm them with rough accuracy.

Gaining the information I needed to calculate crop yields was more difficult. The size of its harvest was considered a rather private matter by each harvesting household. Most households were cultivating land owned by others, to whom they owed one fifth the crop, and they wished to control rather carefully the information on their crop sizes. There were other concerns also that entered variably into farmers' perceptions of harvest yields. On the one hand there was a pride on the part of households in the success of their cultivations; equally, there was a desire to appear modest in their claims, not boastful. Among several of the cultivators there were strongly ambivalent attitudes toward the government and its rice policy, which led them to denigrate it and its results. All these considerations influenced the farmers' estimates to me of their crops. My own position was situated for them as an interested outsider, yet also the guest and close friend of my hosts, whose political position was well known to be

strongly pro-government. All this added up to a complex interviewing situation between me and the various cultivating households. For a few, their enthusiasm for the enterprise clearly led them into rather excessive, even though sincere harvest claims. Others entered excessively low yield figures, a reflection in part of their jaundiced attitudes toward government optimism.

The variability of these figures was enhanced by their dependence on the farmers' perceptions of the amount of land they were cultivating. Whenever I asked a farmer how many acres he was cultivating, he looked around rather vaguely and said, "Oh, about an acre." Now in fact there were twenty households cultivating twenty acres, but the sizes of the units varied from somewhat less than three-quarters of an acre to about two acres. I discovered, or rather re-discovered that acreage figures matter very little to the farmers. Fields are calculated there in *jalu*, a strip of land lying between two irrigation dikes, subdivided into a variable number of plots depending upon the degree of slope, each plot levelled so that water may flow through it evenly and be held within it to desired depths. These vary considerably in size, yet each farmer can look at one and determine with some accuracy what inputs of labour, seed and fertilizer it requires, and what a good yield will be. Its actual acreage is irrelevant to the calculation. That being so, I found I was getting widely disparate estimates of acreages being cultivated. I was able to confirm their inaccuracy when my assistant and I used a measuring tape to measure the dimensions of each *jalu* in every field.

With those figures in hand, and crop figures from some units I could considered roughly accurate, reasonably dependable yields per acre could be calculated. While my yield figures must be considered approximate only, I feel confident they are good approximations. Reported yields varied from below 400 *gantang* (one *gantang* of freshly harvested paddy equals about 2.4 kg.) to over 600 *gantang* per acre. The highest yield I was able to authenticate was 680 *gantang* per acre. An average yield can be conservatively estimated at 500 *gantang* of dried padi per acre, or 3 tons per hectare. Since the same strain of seed under ideal water and cultivation conditions at the Agricultural Department's experimental station in Kuala Kangsar yielded 800 *gantang* an acre, it can be said that these part-time paddy farmers in Kampung Tengah did well in achieving their yields.

The farmers all claimed their primary aim was to obtain rice for home consumption (although some reported selling the smaller part of their harvest of paddy for cash). It is reasonable then to price the harvest yield at the local market price for milled rice *beras*, which was then about \$1 a kilogram.⁵ 500 *gantang* of dried paddy will produce about 840 kilograms of *beras*, for an average return of \$840 per acre.

The charge for the land was 20% of the gross yield, paid in paddy at the harvest (though actual amounts paid seemed in some cases rather less than that). This low figure, as noted, underlines the scarcity of labour in relation to available rice land *sawah*. Indeed most *sawah* was not only out of production but also had virtually no alternative use value. Deducting that charge from the gross yield gives an average of 400 *gantang* of paddy an acre for a gross return of \$670 to the cultivator and \$170 to the landowner.

Cash costs per acre for mechanized work and materials were fairly standard and averaged out as \$40 for the initial plowing (@\$28 per hour), \$25 for second plowing (@\$8 per hour), seed cost at \$9, and pesticides at \$5 to \$10, for a total of \$82.

Hired labour as noted was used very variably, primarily for the peak periods of transplanting and harvesting. Costs reported for the whole season by those using wage labour varied from around \$100 to \$25, with the mode in the mid \$30's. Since many households used no wage labour at all, a rough average can be calculated at about \$20 to \$25 per acre. Total average cash costs of cultivation per acre then ran at a little over \$100. That of course does not include the cost of unpaid family labour. This results in an average cash equivalent return for the cultivator of around \$570. Cultivating households on average were thus getting a monthly income over the four month cultivation period of \$140 to \$145 per acre cultivated.

This income is not inconsequential but clearly not enough to support a family, even over the four month period. The cultivation is therefore necessarily part time, and work must be fitted into other job routines. For the cultivators this varied from rubber tapping and odd jobs about the village to regular full time jobs in town. Although this return was not bad for part time work in the village, especially for time with relatively low opportunity costs, the consensus among the cultivators was that it did not yield a very attractive return for their labour. They all noted that when their own family labour was at the prevailing wage rate of \$7 per day, the actual profit turned out to be very low. Thus, the cultivation provided the working families with part time self-employment at low rates of return, plus a very small profit beyond that. Had it not been for the enthusiasm of the organizer and a core of the cultivators, and the social and cultural values attached to cultivating rice, it is not likely enough cultivators could have been assembled for a successful operation.

One of the technical problems is clearly the small size of the land being worked by each family. This size however is strongly constrained by the available family labour, which moreover is only available part time. The data I have gathered from those cultivating this season show very clearly that in many cases the limit of that labour was badly strained at the peak periods of labour demand.

Without more labour, or substantially increased mechanization, no expansion in paddy cultivation can be expected. However, the low wages necessarily offered will not attract additional labour, especially since manpower in this part of rural Padang Rengas is in short supply. The capital costs and expenses of mechanization, on the other hand, seem well beyond the rates of return possible, given the current economics of paddy cultivation for the area. Thus even if the water and manpower problems could be eased, it does not seem that paddy cultivation on a much larger scale would take place in Kampung Tengah and nearby villages, certainly not a return to the double cropping of rice that was being carried out in 1963.

The villagers clearly understand these limitations on any future expansion of the cultivation, as also the relatively uneconomic character of the present operation. This raises the important question of why the renewal effort is taking place at all. I shall deal with this further below.

The other main source of income in the village in 1962-63 was rubber tapping, on which I carried out a brief survey in Kampung Tengah in 1987. An analysis of its current organization and returns reveals comparable advantages and limitations for household income and helps place these two once dominant modes of production in the contemporary economics of the village.

Twenty of the twenty five or so tappers active in Kampung Tengah from the core of a producer's cooperative, a branch of the Persatuan Pekebun-Pekebun Kecil Malaysia (Malaysian Union of Small Rubber Cultivators). The cooperative is presently headed by a retired soldier who is also one of the tappers. He has attended several courses given by RISDA on improving the quality of smallholder rubber production and has done an excellent job of passing along these new techniques to the village tappers and encouraging them to add the extra effort needed to produce quality rubber. They have been consistently producing rubber graded 4 by RISDA, a creditable grade for village producers. RISDA markets the rubber for them, collecting their sheets each week by van to be graded and paid for at the purchasing station in Kuala Kangsar, the district center. Before collection, the output of each tapper is separately weighed and the amount credited to him in the headman's account book. After the sale, each one is paid according to the price per kilogram that week.

The processing of the rubber is now partially mechanized by equipment given free to the cooperative by RISDA as part of its program to upgrade village rubber production. A small diesel engine powers a set of three wringers, through which the rubber sheets are successively passed to achieve a satisfactory sheet of even thinness (the thinner and lighter the sheet the higher the grade). The cooperative is presently producing sheets of two kilograms each, well within RISDA quality limits. Marketing through RISDA eliminates the local middle

man, but requires the production of good quality rubber, so the producers benefit doubly.

Production per day per worker varies widely, even for the same worker from day to day. I was told that on average each one taps between fifteen to twenty days a month. The average production per day seems to be between four and eight sheets. Those tapping other people's trees split the cash return fifty-fifty with the owners, and their average rate of production tends to be higher than those tapping their own trees. The highest daily yield was registered by one tapper who was tapping four acres of another's trees and bringing in up to fifteen sheets a day.

The price paid per kilogram has of course varied considerably. In 1984, it ran around \$1.86 for the grade being produced and rose as high as \$1.99. In 1987 it was running between \$1.65 and \$1.70. At those prices, the tappers' average gross return, taking six sheets as the average daily yield and after deducting the fifty percent charge to the landowner, came to about \$10 for a morning's work of around six hours. Costs were very low, about \$1 a month per member for processing costs. The average return to labour is thus about \$1.70 an hour, and between \$150 and \$200 a month. Those working larger amounts of land more intensively did better, of course, and those tapping their own trees received the owner's share as well.

The organization of the work determines the size of each operation. Each tapper works entirely independently, which sets a firm upper limit on the amount that can be produced. Other constraints on production further lower this limit. Each tree should only be tapped at most every other day, and tapping cannot be done in rainy weather, limiting the work to about 15 to 20 days a month. The quality of the trees further controls production. Local smallholder rubber trees are very variable in quality. I was told that an acre could only be expected to produce at best six to eight kilograms per day, and some a good deal less. The low prices in recent years has discouraged replanting, and the subsidies offered by RISDA benefit the owner only, not the tapper. Accordingly, replanting disrupts the relations between tapper and owner, reducing the available pool of skilled tappers.

All this adds up, as with rice production, to a system which for the worker is necessarily a part time operation. His tapping, as in rice production, must be fitted into a diversified work routine, in which other demands and incentives compete for his time. In 1985, for example, construction work became available on a new highway being built through Padang Rengas and at a new cement factory, at much higher hourly rates of return, contributing to a fifty percent drop in rubber production climbed back above 1984 levels.

In contrast to rice, rubber production is a good deal more flexible in its demands on workers' time and expense. They may choose what days to work and not work, and how hard, each worker is wholly independent of others in carrying out the work, production may be suspended for indefinite periods of time, and cash costs may be kept extremely low. It is not hard to understand the economic attraction of rubber tapping for those who engage in it.

For rice production, on the other hand, I am arguing that my figures show clearly that the effort the participating villagers were making cannot be reduced to simple economic intention; the research results must be understood as revealing more than just the economic marginality of that production. Attempting to compress the renewal effort into the mold of economic action (however imperfect its rationality) produces serious contradictions.

Take for example its mode of organization. The economic rationale for concentration upon close family ties, even to those geographically distant, as against physically proximate community ties would seem to have been to minimize cash outflow. Yet the economic costs of transporting family labour from a distance, as well as the loss of income sometimes occasioned, would seem to refute that understanding (unless one is prepared to dismiss the action as irrational). Had the distantly located family members sent cash instead, it is pretty clear labour could have been hired locally at a savings. Moreover, formal communal relations of labour exchange were still well remembered and could easily have been reactivated without their more onerous conditions as solution for minimizing cash outlay.

Similar contradictions appear when the income levels of those participating are examined. The thin margins of profit and low returns to labour would seem to make sense only if those who joined had limited and low levels of alternative income. Yet in fact their income levels varied widely. I have no accurate data yet on those income levels, but some I knew were relatively prosperous through pension income, salaried jobs, remittances from successfully placed children, and in some cases from sales of land. Others were indeed young and landless, and hardworking, and their participation did make some economic sense. Yet there were also some in that condition who chose not to join.

Equal difficulties arise when "social rationality" is invoked, as when the participants' intentions are read as an effort at renewing and sustaining community. The network of reciprocities, both between equals and unequals, that in action had continually recreated community among them in the past, one would suppose to have been central in the renewal effort had the controlling intention been community defense and revival. That was not so, yet it was clear from the concerns many in the village were expressing that the very survival of the community was a strong issue among them, and it was also clear that participating was in part acting out a nostalgia for aspects of the past.

The strong focus upon solidarity among close family members would suggest that a primary, deepseated concern of those running each household operation lay in the problems of family unity. The reading would point to the progressive dissolution of family ties as the most threatening feature of social change for the villagers, and would understand the renewal effort as the participants using community and government interest in rice production as leverage for pulling family members back into a mode of local action that previously *defined* family for them. Yet it was also clear that family authority in that action was now very much weaker, and the action was not re-enacting those earlier patterns of authority. Also, the renewal effort itself had not been possible simply through activating old family ties. Collective community effort had been needed, and intentional focus upon its values and modes of organization had been required to get the effort afloat. And most of the village had not chosen to join in actively at all.

I am further arguing then that no single, unified set of factors *external to the intentionalities of the actors* can be assigned central priority for understanding how the villagers are engaging themselves in the flow of change - not "rational" economic individualism, not the mode of production, not class conflict, not modes of community solidarity, not family strategies, nor yet any mix of these.

To be able to see clearly the active, autonomous roles villagers are taking in their "development", and to do justice to their possibilities, requires close, unblinkered attention to the diverse, shifting, unfixed, seemingly contradictory intentions of the individual actors, both self-centered and collectively interested. Those intentions obviously must confront the givens of the villagers' current world, which alter their intended outcomes and the intentions themselves. At the same time, such study helps measure the ability and determination of the villagers to act creatively and autonomously in the face of change to steer it their different ways, and also helps map out some of the topography of possibilities available to them.⁶

NOTES

¹ For examples, cf. Bailey, C. (1983); Barnum, H.N. (1979); Fredericks, Kalshoven, and Daane (1980); Fujimoto (1983); Gibbons, de Knonick, and Hasan (1980); Gibbons (1984); Kasim, Gibbons, and Todd (1984); Kuchiba, Tsubouchi, and Maeda (1970); Lim, Gibbons, Elliston, and Kasim (1978, 1981); Purcal (1971).

² Figures from *Fifth Malaysia Plan: 1986-1990*.

- ³ Rice was still being intensively cultivated in an area near the head of the valley, where a World Bank funded irrigation project provided adequately controlled water.
- ⁴ A village survey of rural Padang Rengas commissioned by the Socioeconomic Research Unit of the Prime Minister's Office and carried out in 1983 gave the following figures for Kampung Tengah, including two smaller settlements attached to it administratively (figures derived from estimates by the village headmen):

Total Population (all Malays)	756
Number of families	170
Total area	768 acres
Rice fields	180 "
Rubber groves	460 "

Distribution of family income (ringgit/month):

Less than \$100	6
\$100-\$200	13
\$201-\$350	94
\$351-\$500	37
\$501+	20

All households had access to electricity and piped water. 17 automobiles and 33 motorcycles were reported. In Kampung Tengah proper in 1987 there were 79 households with an approximate population of 400.

- ⁵ At the time of the harvest, LPN, the government rice marketing board, was paying the local producers \$.44 per kg. for satisfactorily dried and cleaned *padi* delivered at an approved rice mill, plus a subsidy of up to \$.14 per kg. depending upon the quality of the *padi*. Therefore no subsidy was paid for rice held for home consumption. Pricing the crop at the local price for *beras* rather than the government price for *padi* thus yields a more consistent figure for returns to all producers, and is more in accord with their sense of its monetary value for themselves.
- ⁶ Cf. Ong (1987). Ong, in her study of young Malay women factory workers on the west coast of Selangor, also stresses the importance of attending in detail to the intentionalities of the individual actors for understanding their perceptions of themselves in the world and their actions in it, and in my view successfully demonstrates the need for that approach.

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FATWA AND ARCHAEOLOGY

Kajian Malaysia reproduces the following news items as research notes in the belief they are of interest to researchers:

UTUSAN MALAYSIA, 10 October 1988

ALOR SETAR, 9 Oktober - Sultan Kedah hari ini menitahkan supaya segala bahan arkitek di Muzium Arkeologi di Lembah Bujang, kira-kira 50 kilometer dari sini terus dipelihara dengan baik demi untuk sumber kajian sejarah negeri ini.

Menurut kenyataan yang dikeluarkan oleh setiausaha sulit baginda, Syed Unan Mahsri Syed Abdullah di sini, baginda menitahkan demikian setelah mengambil perhatian dan mempertimbangkan pandangan Jawatankuasa Fatwa Negeri Kedah.

Jawatankuasa itu baru-baru ini membuat keputusan bahawa langkah Jabatan Muzium Arkeologi Lembah Bujang membina semula dan memelihara candi-candi di Batu Pahat, Lembah Bujang adalah bertentangan dengan akidah Islam.

Baginda bertitah, kesan sejarah yang ditemui merupakan hakmilik negara yang tidak ternilai kepentingannya dan dapat memberi penglihatan terhadap perkembangan tamadun sejarah negeri.

"Sesuai kajian sejarah bukanlah sesuatu yang statik tetapi proses yang berterusan dan mempunyai kaitan dengan kesan dan bahan yang dijumpai, yang mungkin dijumpai dan bahan-bahan dari sejarah di tempat lain. Secara keseluruhan ia membawa erti bahawa sesuatu kajian itu tidak mungkin dapat disempurnakan dalam sesuatu masa tertentu," titah baginda.

Oleh itu, adalah penting pemeliharaan ini diteruskan jika dipandang dari segi kajian sejarah, tambah baginda.

Muzium Arkeologi Lembah Bujang juga dapat memberi gambaran di atas tamadun dan perkembangan Negeri Kedah Darulaman serta kerajaannya dari sudut perkembangan pengaruh Hindu sehinggalah kedatangan Islam ke negeri ini.

Di samping itu Lembah Bujang juga mempunyai kepentingan dari sudut pelancongan, titah baginda. -Bernama.

NEW STRAITS TIMES, 21 February 1989

KUALA LUMPUR, Monday - The National Fatwa Council today approved Muzium Negara's plan to hold an international exhibition on "Treasures from the Grave".

Council secretary Prof Datuk Abdul Hamid Othman said the council met for more than two hours today and was satisfied that the exhibition, to be held in November, would not deviate from Islamic teachings.

"Since there will be no bodies of people on display, we feel that there is nothing wrong with the exhibition".

Prof Datuk Abdul Hamid, however, said a special guideline would be given to the museum authorities on how the exhibition was to be carried out.

He said the museum was forbidden from highlighting the "religious aspect" of the pre-Islamic civilisation, whether in the display of graves or in the video shows.

"They must not glorify the religious aspect of the pre-Islamic civilisation. However, swords and coffins are allowed".

Muzium Negara's plan for the exhibition has aroused public concern, with some quarters regarding it as disrespectful to the dead.

Fourteen State muftis attended the meeting today with five Islamic experts called in to discuss the issue.

On the Negeri Sembilan Government's decision to appoint women bilal to handle the burial rites for Muslim women, Prof Datuk Abdul Hamid said these women would not carry out the azan (call to prayer) function, but only perform burial arrangements for the deceased.

UTUSAN MALAYSIA, 21 February 1989

KUALA LUMPUR, 20 Februari - Majlis Fatwa Kebangsaan hari ini meluluskan permohonan Muzium Negara untuk mempamerkan khazanah dari kubur tanpa melibatkan pameran mayat mumia (mummy). Ketika ditemui di pejabatnya di sini petang ini, Setiausaha Majlis, Datuk Dr. Abdul Hamid Othman berkata: "Kami tidak mempunyai masalah dengan permohonan muzium itu kerana ia hanya melibatkan pameran barang purba yang dijumpai di dalam kubur".

"Soal untuk mempamerkan mayat mumia tidak timbul kerana pihak Muzium Negara sendiri tidak mengutarakan persoalan itu di dalam permohonannya," tambahnya selepas menghadiri mesyuarat muzakarah majlis tersebut hari ini. Datuk Dr. Abdul Hamid yang juga Ketua Pengarah Bahagian Hal Ehwal Islam, Jabatan Perdana Menteri, berpendapat, kontroversi ini timbul kerana pihak akhbar dan orang ramai tidak mengetahui dengan tepat apa yang hendak dipamerkan.

Katanya, "apa yang hendak dipamerkan menurut permohonan muzium itu ialah keranda mumia bukan mayat mumia, dan barang purba seperti pinggan mangkuk dan senjata yang ditemui bersama keranda tersebut". Bagaimanapun, dalam laporan lain, Ketua Pengarah Muzium Negara, Datuk Shahrul Yub, dipetik sebagai berkata, pameran yang akan diadakan pada bulan November ini akan mempamerkan mumia yang berusia lebih dari 5,000 tahun.

Menurut beliau lagi, mayat seorang bayi yang berusia lebih dari 3,000 tahun dari zaman Firaun akan dipamerkan dalam pameran yang dijangka berlangsung selama sebulan.

Katanya, beliau dan beberapa orang pegawai muzium akan berkunjung ke beberapa buah negara di serata dunia pada bulan Mac ini untuk mengumpulkan mayat-mayat tersebut.