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# GOVERNMENT AND VILLAGE: REACTIONS TO MODERN DEVELOPMENT BY LONG-SETTLED COMMUNITIES IN THE NEW TERRITORIES OF HONG KONG

## *Introduction*

It is well known that Maurice Freedman's contribution to our understanding of traditional Chinese rural society was grounded in part in a visit he paid to the New Territories of Hong Kong in 1963.[1] It may be appropriate, therefore, for me to base my contribution to a volume of essays dedicated to Maurice's memory upon observations made in that same area, where my position as an officer of the Hong Kong Government has given me the opportunity to stay for a longer period than is usually available to a field anthropologist.[2] Also, through my post, I have been one of the agents of the changes brought about through government

1. See Freedman 1979 [1963]. The New Territories, originally and into the 1920s known as 'the New Territory', comprise some 373 square miles of mainland and islands leased to Great Britain by China under the Convention of Peking, 9 June 1898. They were not occupied until March 1899.

2. I was re-posted to the New Territories Administration in January 1975 and served in the Tsuen Wan District as District Officer and then as Town Manager and District Officer, Tsuen Wan from June 1976 until February 1982. An account of the New Territories Administration is most conveniently found in the official Hong Kong annual report or year-book.

action since Maurice's visit.[3] Drastic and exceedingly rapid as they have been, however, these changes in themselves are not my theme. Rather, I wish to use an examination of some of the development processes that accompany and make them possible to try to throw further light on the nature of village society in this part of South China as it exists now and, as befits my training as a historian, as it existed in the past.

I have chosen for my text, so to speak, the following extract from a letter addressed to the District Office, Tsuen Wan:

> The grave of our ancestor Yau Hong-Lam was located in Kwai Chung. Because of Government development in that area, the Authorities concerned served us a notice for the removal of this grave. Accordingly we had the remains exhumed and removed temporarily. To fulfil our filial piety, we have toiled for some nine years to look for a suitable grave site. At long last, we have now located a site in Sheung Fa Shan area. We shall be grateful if permission could be granted for us to build a grave for the burial of our ancestral remains.[4]

The original grave was cleared in 1960 and the above was written in 1969. It could well have been written today by other local villagers. The letter's contents and the spirit which motivated them have encouraged me to bring together material on the behaviour of villagers and their leaders as I have observed them in the course of development work and to view them retrospectively. More specifically, I shall here be concerned with what *redevelopment* (with its interference with the long-familiar landscape through massive site formation and engineering works) and *village removal* (with its traumatic effect on the village community and village leadership) have to tell us about certain aspects of village society in this part of South China now and in the past.

This is possible because these momentous events expose the enduring values which motivate the lineage and the village community. They also bring to the fore popular religion, with its various formulae for dealing with crisis situations. Neither phenomenon is readily observable in normal times, and the process of removal and redevelopment extending over several years provides a rare opportunity for the interested observer (in my case, as stated above, also a participant) to cover situations outside the

3. Besides general development, the principal feature of New Territories development since the 1960s has been the New Towns Programme, to which in recent years have been added additional market town and new town projects. An account of the New Towns Programme is given in the published annual Hong Kong review of 1978.

4. Chinese letter to the District Office (file not now available). Tsuen Wan District is described in the *Annual Departmental Report of District Commissioner, New Territories* (hereafter *ADR/DCNT*) 1963–4, para. 49, as follows: 'Area 26 square miles, population (1961) 84,823, including the industrial complex of Tsuen Wan, Kwai Chung and Tsing Yi Island, as well as Ma Wan Island and the north-eastern part of Lantau. The District Office is accommodated in the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank Building in Tsuen Wan.'

ordinary.[5] It enables us to chart the reactions and responses to persons involved in change and, in this way, to estimate how traditional South China rural society might have operated. This is possible because, in my assessment, many of the responses seem to be more or less intuitive, being grounded in the cultural, economic and social background of the people rather than rationally worked out to meet a new situation.

In reviewing the material accumulated from watching village leadership at work during five years of intensive re-development of former village land, the following questions come to mind. First, to what extent does concern for ancestors and lineage solidarity show itself in the village societies of present-day Tsuen Wan, especially in the removal and re-siting of whole communities of long-established villages? And how, and in what context, is it manifested and its nature revealed? Secondly, what can we learn about those aspects of traditional religious beliefs and practices, essentially those with a protective role, which relate to the whole lineage and the village community? And thirdly, to what extent did the village leaders unavoidably involved in development and removal *themselves* show an interest and concern in lineage renewal and the ritual protections of their community; and to what degree can they be said to have represented and acted upon general, i.e. consensus feeling rather than their own sentiments?

Before examining lineage solidarity and community religion, it is first necessary to set the scene. The sections that follow deal with the nature of Tsuen Wan and with local change since 1899.

## *Tsuen Wan New Town and District*

Tsuen Wan is one of the administrative districts of the New Territories. Before 1898 it was a largely self-managing rural sub-district with about thirty villages and a number of community temples located in the main clusters of settlements, in Tsuen Wan itself, Kwai Chung and Tsing Yi. Its population was then around 3,000,[6] mostly Hakka villagers who lived by quasi-subsistence two-crop paddy farming and also engaged in fishing, grass cutting, pineapple cultivation (a specialised local crop) and miscellaneous local manufactories like bean curd, bean stick, soy sauce,

5. Most published accounts of the village communities of Hong Kong do not cover those in the process of removal for development. For one which touches on aspects of re-siting see Berkowitz 1968; see also Berkowitz and Poon 1969; and Berkowitz, Brandauer and Reed 1969.

6. In 1911 it was 2,982. See the report of the census of that year in *Sessional Papers* 1911, p. 103 (21) and (36). Background information on the Tsuen Wan sub-district is contained in Hayes 1983.

preserved fruit, distilling and the like. By 1941, when the Japanese captured Hong Kong, its population had risen to about 5,000 with the introduction in the 1930s of industry (principally bulk fuel storage and some manufacturing) and the creation of a new market street.

The local villages generally contained between one and several hundred persons in one or more lineages. Their founding ancestors came to Tsuen Wan mainly in the early eighteenth century, but there were both earlier and later arrivals. They were all Hakka speakers, though some with a Hoklo or Cantonese origin became absorbed into the main group of inhabitants (nowadays all speak Cantonese also). The families usually owned some land and several houses, unless foolishness or bad luck had deprived them of their property. Each lineage had an ancestral hall—the bigger ones having quite large ones—and all had a number of land-owning lineage trusts. All save the smallest had a considerable number of graves distributed in many locations, responsibility for which was handed down from their ancestors. The lineages had had varying fortunes during their stay in Tsuen Wan. Some prospered and greatly increased in numbers, some remained static for many years, others declined or even disappeared. From the opening years of this century some of the lineages contained a number of Christians, some of them leading villagers of the area.

After 1945, the population grew steadily with the large-scale establishment of textile industries from Shanghai and an influx of other refugees from China. This in time converted much of the village and town area and their surroundings into a vast squatter colony. Since the late 1950s, planned development has gradually replaced the huts and older structures. The pace was especially rapid in the 1970s. Tsuen Wan today is an important industrial town with a population of about 700,000 inhabitants and nearly 10,000 registered factories, a work-force of over 200,000, and one of the largest modern container terminals in the world.[7]

Throughout this development process, the centrally located villages of Tsuen Wan have, one by one, been re-sited to areas on the fringe of the expanding town, and their former paddy fields, long since used for a variety of other purposes, have been 'resumed' to permit redevelopment.[8] The same process affected Kwai Chung and Tsing Yi.

7. The Tsuen Wan Project Manager's careful estimate of the population of the town and district in March 1981 was 682,000. The figures for factory registrations and the work-force are provided by the Labour Department's Tsuen Wan Office.

8. Resumption is the legal process whereby land in private ownership is recovered by the Crown. Provisions for resumption are contained in the Crown Lands Resumption Ordinance Cap. 124 of the *Laws of Hong Kong*, which are published by the Government Printer, Hong Kong. There is, in addition, provision for resumption under the Mass Transit Railway (Land Resumption and Related Provisions) Cap. 276, a piece of special legislation enacted for the acquisition of land for the major new transport system undertaken since 1975. This includes the recent extension from West Kowloon to Tsuen Wan.

*The District Administration, New Territories*

The District Administration has for long been the land and political authority for the New Territories. Thirty years ago, when village removals were being conducted for the Tai Lam Chung and Shek Pik water schemes and general development had not yet begun, its staff was small in number. There were no more than 110 officers of all grades on 1 April 1957, with twenty to thirty persons in each of the (then) three District Offices, plus a small headquarters staff (*ADR/DCNT*, 1959–60, table at para. 294). Tsuen Wan did not have a separate District Officer until later that year, and his office did not move out to the town until 1959. By then, this was an urgent need. The size of the population and pace of development required staff to be located on site in order to achieve full understanding and liaison with the affected parties, government engineers and private developers, and to advise and guide other departments more effectively. Moreover, the removal of old villages to new sites was about to begin and could not be accomplished successfully without achieving a closer relationship with their residents based on mutual trust and co-operation.

These pressures were felt in all districts, though not to the same extent. Consequently, the staffing of the District Administration of the New Territories as a whole was greatly increased; by 1964–5, it was six times its former strength (*ADR/DCNT*, 1964–5: para. 28 and table XI). Nowadays, besides the recovery of land for development, its subsequent reallocation, and rural and urban land management, the Administration's responsibilities include providing the initiatives and leadership in community building-work and co-ordinating services and management with the help of the specialists of the main government departments.

*The Progress of New Town Development, 1960–1980*

(a) Tsuen Wan and Kwai Chung

By early 1975, when I took up my duties in Tsuen Wan, the process of new town development had advanced considerably.[9] All save one of the central Tsuen Wan villages south of Castle Peak Road had already been

9. A good idea of what had been done to implement the town layout and what still remained to be done is contained in the brochure *Tsuen Wan New Town*, published by the Government Printer for the New Territories Development Department (Public Works Department) in 1977 (revised edition, 1980).

removed, and most of the Kwai Chung villages had also been re-sited in the 1960s.[10]

In the Tsuen Wan town area, this still left the three villages immediately north of Castle Peak Road, but these were not to remain for much longer. The decisions taken in 1977 to extend the Mass Transit Railway to Tsuen Wan and to re-site the combined depot and large commercial-residential property development to be associated with it in North Tsuen Wan had two major consequences for ongoing development.[11] First, the sheer size of the enlarged programme and the extra public works required to make it operative meant accelerating the clearance and development of the whole of the North Tsuen Wan area. Secondly, though the villages and hamlets in the area were only marginally affected by the railway line for the Mass Transit Railway Extension, they were totally involved in the associated redevelopment. We concluded that they ought to be moved as early as possible because of the likelihood that, if they were permitted to remain, their ownership of land and long residence and—associated with these—accrued traditions and beliefs relating to the local landscape would adversely affect the smooth progress of clearance, site formation and construction of the railway and related projects.

The work of village removal proceeded on schedule. Various hamlets were moved in 1978 and 1979, the village of Sam Tung Uk was cleared by March 1980, and the eastern portion of Muk Min Ha was cleared towards the end of the year.[12] As usual in such exercises, removal was an arduous and very time-consuming business even with the high degree of co-operation and assistance the Administration received from the village leaders and the rural committee.

### (b) Tsing Yi

The island of Tsing Yi is also part of the Tsuen Wan New Town layout, and engineering investigations and planning for development there have been proceeding for many years. On Tsing Yi, progress with development

10. Some account of these earlier removals can be found in, e.g., *ADR/DCNT*, 1962–3, paras. 65–74; 1963–4, paras. 68–79; and 1964–5, paras. 64–8. See also Boxer 1968.

11. Government planning had placed it originally in Kwai Chung, but the need for container-port facilities and other considerations prompted a change of location.

12. Regrettably, these events are not yet recounted in any published official report, because owing to pressure of work no annual departmental report has been compiled by the New Territories Administration since that for the financial year 1972–3. Apart from village removals, a very large number of persons had to be removed and rehoused, amounting to some 25,000 persons (6,900 families), as well as 518 factories and workshops and 154 shops and miscellaneous undertakings (District Office and Housing Department reckoning).

has not been so smooth as in Tsuen Wan, owing largely to its former isolation and the conservative, less accommodating attitudes that have therefore been preserved. Change and modernization could scarcely begin until construction of the Tsing Yi bridge at the beginning of the last decade. In addition to the long-settled village population, there were also three recognizable groups of 'outsiders'. First, there were the vegetable farmers and livestock rearers who were being slowly absorbed into the older community; secondly, there were the boat squatters who came in great numbers into the shallow lagoon area and another inner anchorage in the north-east of the island; thirdly, there were land squatters on a large, private lot belonging to a non-resident 'outsider'. All three groups were located away from the villages and generally kept apart, each managing its own affairs. They did not create many problems for the villagers, who mostly retained their fields and the ownership of permanent buildings in their own hands. This separation was assisted, even largely required, by language differences, since the boat squatters were mainly Cantonese speakers and the land squatters mostly Hoklo people from north-east Guangdong. So despite these various incursions, the local community of Hakka was not overpowered by numbers to the same extent as the Tsuen Wan local community had been from the late 1940s onwards. Instead, it kept to itself, remained very traditionally minded, and was largely insulated from change, though subject to rifts both inside and between its lineages arising out of past squabbles.[13]

This conservatism was reflected in problems encountered during development. In 1975, decisions to remove three of the seven villages on the island had already been taken. Their sites were not needed for development, but their traditional *feng-shui* prospect[14] included a large area of hill land which was required to be excavated for development platforms and roads and, in the process, it was used to provide fill for major reclamation schemes in Tsing Yi Bay and Lagoon. Village removal was the only practical way of obtaining access to this important area, and three new villages were completed and occupied by 1979. However, this

13. In the case of the 'Four Village Removal' (see next paragraph), great difficulties were experienced with one village in particular, as well as with obstinate parties in others. Disputes or difficulties of one kind or another affected 45 out of 135 building lots and hindered their voluntary surrender and exchange for entitlements to new houses. The whole village of San Uk Tsuen was affected by an internal dispute within its single lineage, which had prevented the appointment of new managers to its two ancestral trusts for twenty-three years. The dispute also held up successions to properties of persons long deceased, one of them as far back as 1942. Much time and effort were needed to sort out these problems with the help of the Tsing Yi Rural Committee. Such difficulties are commonly encountered in all village removals, though mercifully not to the same degree.

14. *Feng-shui* 風水 is the system of calculations surrounding the belief that the disposition of dwellings and graves in a landscape determines the fortunes of the inhabitants and their descendants. It is usually translated as 'geomancy'.

was not the end to our problems, since removal again proved to be necessary for the other four villages on the island: they objected to the intended large-scale cutting and excavation of hill slopes so long as they were living in their old locations facing on to the hillsides in question. Thus, over four or five years, the sustained and concerted opposition of the village community hindered development work, and it was impossible to make real progress without first removing and rehousing all the indigenous residents. This exercise was eventually completed. The population of the four remaining villages moved into temporary accommodation in public housing in 1980 to stay there until new homes were ready.[15]

## *The Rural Institutions*

### (a) Village representatives

It is necessary at this point to say something about rural institutions. Village representatives and rural committees play a leading role in the government's relations with the older New Territories communities and are especially important for liaison and assistance during development. Village representatives are required and registered by the New Territories Administration. Under what are still called (after the then District Commissioner) 'Barrow's Rules', drawn up in 1948, villages may have up to three representatives, according to the number of households. Village representatives can hold office for as long as they are acceptable to their fellows, are not convicted of a criminal offence, and remain capable of doing their duty. Their names are reported to the District Officer who, after a police check, will confirm appointment by the issue of a special identity card. Although representatives are deemed to be elected, in fact elections are seldom held. By traditional practice, most village representatives come forward by consensus or on co-option by serving representatives.[16] Many of the local leaders have held their positions for

15. The narrative was continued in the *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. XX (1980) and can now be found in Hayes 1983. It should be noted that this voluntary removal on *feng-shui* grounds only brought forward a move that would have become necessary at a later stage to implement the development layout. It would not have been possible to retain the villagers in their old location owing to the raising of the development over the village levels that is ordinarily necessitated by civil engineering works and planning considerations.

16. *Annual Report of the District Office, New Territories* (*ARDONT*) 1947–8, para. 9, and established practice in the New Territories Administration. For the Qing and pre-war background to village leaders, see Hayes 1977: 116–22 and Hayes 1983.

decades, as it is usual for them to continue in office until old age or sickness require their replacement.

(b) Rural committees

Like the village representatives, who carry forward an office that had long existed in the countryside, rural committees were another new growth from an old root. The areas they serve are mostly the old sub-districts of the New Territories, and their ancestry can usually be traced to the informal groups of senior leaders who managed local affairs in their immediate areas. None the less, the rural committees have a more formalized existence than the traditional village leaders. They are elected every two years from among the village representatives of their areas by secret ballot under the supervision of the District Officers. They have constitutions approved by the District Administration and are registered with exemption under the Societies Ordinance.[17] Their chairmen and vice-chairmen also form the major part of the electoral college of the Heung Yee Kuk, a statutory body at the highest level of New Territories political life (*Laws of Hong Kong*, 1964 ed.: Cap. 1097). They have, in short, a legal existence.

The Tsuen Wan Rural Committee was established in 1948, taking over from a more informal grouping of senior leaders styled the Chuen On Kuk, which met in the local community temple whenever there was a need to consider a problem or take action. As stated briefly above, the Committee has played a major role in the post-war development of Tsuen Wan. In the refugee influx after 1949, few government departments were located in the town and no new organizations had yet arisen in the new population, with the result that the Committee became the focal point for all assistance and relief, providing a nucleus to which other willing parties, including the local monasteries, could direct their support (Hayes 1980: 308–16).

Yet more important, then and later, the Rural Committee kept the community spirit of Tsuen Wan alive through initiating various social and recreational activities. It participated in a wide range of activities with the District Office and other bodies, carrying out a programme of traditional charitable undertakings as well as absorbing and acting upon new ideas. The Committee's public spirit and high calibre and wide interests of its leaders have been of the utmost value in helping to bring the continually growing community through years of change. Of more direct relevance

17. For the establishment of rural committees, see *ARDONT* 1947–8, paras. 9–11, and *ADR/DCNT*, 1948–9, paras. 11–14; also relevant paragraphs in subsequent reports and the summary in *ADR/DCNT*, 1954–5, paras. 42–50.

for the purposes of this article, the Rural Committee has greatly assisted villagers and Government alike in the essential task of re-siting the old settlements in order to facilitate redevelopment of the central areas.

The Tsing Yi Rural Committee, with its smaller numbers and isolated situation, had fewer problems to face until recently, but it has also assisted with the development programme and supplied leadership and resources for community buildings following the influx of new residents and undertakings.

(c) Village removal committees

A third rural institution with a bearing on development, and one peculiar to village removal, is the village removal committee. When village removals are announced by the government, most villagers, even where the village belongs to one lineage, are very reluctant to entrust their business to the village representatives alone and usually form a village removal committee with up to ten members. In a single-lineage village, the members come from different branches of the same lineage. In the case of a multi-lineage village, the committee comprises members of the various lineages, their respective numbers usually fixed in proportion to their share of the village population. In either case, the intention is that the committee should be broadly representative of all interest groups in the settlement. In Tsuen Wan, all villages under notice of removal and re-siting have formed village removal committees. These deal directly with the District Office on the one hand and with their fellow villagers on the other. It is usual for the village representatives to belong to their committees, though not necessarily as chairmen, or even as the leading or predominant influence.

## *The Subject-Matter of Village Removal*

Village removal is generally the most arduous and time-consuming aspect of all land resumption and clearance work in Hong Kong. This is basically because we are dealing with long-settled villagers whose rights are, in a sense, protected by the provisions of the Convention of Peking and the various administrative proclamations made at the time the New Territories were taken over by the Hong Kong Government at the turn of the century. In practical terms, this has meant that all pre-1898 villages are re-sited at public expense when their sites are needed for public purposes, usually in connection with development and the implementation of

planning layouts.[18] The repositioning is undertaken in accordance with the Hong Kong Government's village removal policy, approved by the Executive Council and revised from time to time with its approval, subject to provision of the necessary financial resources by the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council. The list of subjects connected with village removal are numerous, but the main items can be categorized as follows:

1. resumption of agricultural land belonging either to individual villagers or to lineage trusts in exchange for cash or letters of exchange;[19]
2. exchange of new houses for old houses in building status;[20]
3. negotiations over the degree of recognition and repositioning to be given to old houses on agricultural land;
4. the removal, compensation and occasional re-siting of individual and lineage graves;
5. the re-provisioning and re-siting of ancestral halls;[21]
6. the re-provisioning and re-siting of village shrines;[22]
7. the provision of land for village expansion.

Of the above, items 1 and 4 are encountered from the start of the development of any area of old settlement, but the rest do not normally arise until the village itself has to be removed. They then form the basis for a list of removal conditions that are discussed at great length at

18. Re-sitings began in the pre-war period. The village of Shek Lei Pui was moved to Shatin for Kowloon Reservoir Extension in 1923, and the Shing Mun villages removed to a number of locations in 1928 for the Jubilee Reservoir Project. See *Sessional Papers* 1924 (report of Director of Public Works, Q146) and 1928 (District Officer/North's Report, 'Move of the Shing Mun Villages').

19. There are two means whereby landowners are compensated for land required for development purposes. Letters of exchange are more popular than cash, as they can be sold to development companies for higher sums. Speaking to the Heung Yee Kuk about the development of the New Territories, the Secretary for the New Territories said that 'in 1961 the land exchange system was introduced to solve the conflict during the process of development between landowners and the Government and to give landowners a share in the increasing land prices brought about by development' (*South China Morning Post*, 6 May 1981).

20. Upon the takeover of the New Territories, the Hong Kong administration followed the practice of the Qing government in dividing land into building and agricultural status, with different levels of Crown rent. These were fixed during the land survey and settlement of titles to land between 1900 and 1905. A full register can be found in the documents styled Block Crown Leases kept in each District Land Registry.

21. The ancestral hall of a lineage is locally styled a *ci-tang* (祠堂). It can be either the main hall or a branch hall, that is, a hall dedicated to one of the sons of the foundi.g ancestor in a particular location.

22. Most local village shrines are earth gods styled Bo-gong (伯公) and Da-wang-ye (大王爺) with occasional Fu-de-gong (福德公) as well. Each village usually has two or more of these shrines.

frequent and often difficult meetings between the District Office and the village removal committees, and usually extending over several years.[23] These matters will be examined in later sections of this paper.

## *Development and Removal from the Village Viewpoint*

### (a) Development and the landscape

Having described the general background to the removal negotiations, I now turn to look at the situation from the village point of view. How, for instance, did the indigenous inhabitants, born and brought up in central Tsuen Wan, view development and removal?

After forty years of development, the local villagers' social and economic status had broadened and by 1975 showed much diversity. Though only a few men over the age of 45 had received more than a primary education,[24] some with better opportunities and abilities had branched out into business and real estate and, by degrees, had become quite prosperous. These persons normally started their careers in a subordinate government post, as a clerk in the post office or other service department, for example. Other villagers, with less education and capacity, were engaged in miscellaneous jobs in and around the town. By the mid-1970s, none of the village men and few of the women were still farming. A number of male villagers were abroad, but usually their families were still living in the villages.

Over the years, as more and more tenants and numerous miscellaneous commercial and industrial undertakings had been brought into village houses, the number of native residents had slowly declined. However, it must be emphasized that this influx, and the proportion of new tenants to

23. Because of the extensive and often complex land work and the long negotiations over village removal, a large number of staff have to be employed on this work. These constitute a complete project team comprising one or more administrative officers and a considerable number of land executives and land inspectors headed by Senior and sometimes Chief Land Executives, plus supporting staff. (Information on these grades can be found in the Hong Kong Government's published Staff Lists. The 68th issue for 1978 gives details of senior staff employed with the New Territories Administration in the land executive and other grades at pp. 184–90.)

24. Before the war, an Anglo-Chinese primary and secondary education could be obtained only in Hong Kong or Kowloon. I do not know the total number of children sent there from Tsuen Wan, but I have met a few men who received an Anglo-Chinese education (meaning instruction in both English and Chinese) and were then able to find clerical work in the Kwong Wah Hospital in Kowloon, the District Office New Territories, etc.

old residents, mattered very little in village removals. Under the terms of the government's village removal policy, only the residents (in other words the villagers 'proper') had an entitlement to removal terms. The rest (the incoming tenants) were rehoused in public housing estates or temporary housing areas.[25]

If they had looked round North Tsuen Wan from their village homes, resident villagers would still, in the mid-1970s, have seen a familiar landscape. Though covered for years with a rash of temporary and semi-permanent buildings spread over former paddy fields and vegetable slopes, its contours and stream courses had not otherwise changed. Patches of cultivation here and there were still tended by immigrant farmers, and the place was still more or less recognizable, except that the groups of trees near villages and beside stream courses had been thinned out or entirely removed by periodic fires in the encircling squatter areas, and the streams themselves had become polluted.

Thus all the traditional elements of the landscape remained, and with them the body of ideas related to it. At Sam Tung Uk, for instance, all villagers were aware that a dragon's pulse extended from the Tian Hou 天后 Temple north-west of the village to their settlement, taking tangible form in a number of scattered black boulders linking the two places. The village itself was built on a lucky site. Originally a small hill in the ownership of another Tsuen Wan lineage, it had been purchased by the founders of the village (who had already been settled elsewhere in Tsuen Wan for over a generation) on the advice of a geomancer. He had advised that the site must be lowered before the new village could be constructed, and family tradition has it that four years were spent on this toil before the houses were completed in 1786.[26] The site had brought good fortune, but less favourable locations nearby had resulted in ruin for the neighbouring Deng lineage of Shek Wai Kok and Ngau Kwu Tun, whose numbers had dwindled sharply since the turn of the century. This was known to all and was ascribed to the adverse geomantic influences of the landscape. Some

25. The New Territories Administration is sometimes blamed for giving over-favourable treatment to indigenous villagers and not treating other resident landowners on equal terms. This reproach is basically justified, but it may not be realized that the differentiation arises principally from the protected rights of the village population as described above, which, together with its large numbers, wide ownership, strong community organizations and established political status, makes it necessary to negotiate village removals on the basis of mutual agreement and general satisfaction. There has been some adjustment in that pre-1941 landowners, whatever their origin, qualify for village removal terms, but otherwise these are denied to other owners, who are obliged to take cash or letters of exchange for all their landholdings, including their buildings, subject to appeal to a government-appointed Lands Tribunal. This is an over-simplification of the compensation system, but it is sufficient to indicate basic differences in the treatment of these groups.

26. An account of Sam Tung Uk Village, obtained from family records, is given in *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. XIV (1974), pp. 232–4.

lineages, it was known, had not acted wisely in this respect. The Muk Min Ha people, for instance, had allowed the *feng-shui* hill behind their village to be interfered with before the war in connection with private development projects; excavations of soil had taken place, trees had been cut down, and new buildings had been placed on its summit. These events, which took place in the 1930s, had led to quarrels inside the lineage and to the removal of some of its members to adjoining fields, where they built new houses for themselves. Forty years later, the split had still not been healed, and this group insisted upon separate re-siting to a new village under their own officially recognized village representative.

The lower parts of Tsuen Wan were also held to be favourable. A village leader from the adjoining area of Kwai Chung once pointed out to me the geomantic features that had led to the prosperity of Hoi Pa, its market village, to the success of a local resident from the adjacent village of Sha Tsui (Yeung Uk) in the imperial examinations, and to the relative wealth of other families who had prospered in business for the same reasons. It is noteworthy, too, that the powerful Deng family of Kam Tin, a very large and widely settled lineage of landlord-scholar officials settled in the New Territories for nine hundred years, had buried one of their founding ancestors at an auspicious site in the western part of Tsuen Wan Bay.[27] Much more recently, in the pre-war years, several large Buddhist monasteries and other religious institutions settled in Tsuen Wan, attracted by its former quiet beauty and, no doubt, by the favourable *feng-shui*.[28]

The development process cut sharply into this accumulation of history and folklore and the centuries-old linkage of land and people with their associated memories of good and bad influences. Resumptions of private fields apart, the changes in the face of the local landscape were of great concern for each individual and his community. Brought up to be aware of *feng-shui*, the excavations and works aroused the villagers' fears, and often their ire, through interfering with the long-familiar terrain, which was to them more than just a landscape, because it was also the all-important geomantic and cosmological context of their lives and fortunes (Hayes 1983: 146–52, 269–70).

27. For the Deng family grave, see *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. XVII (1977), pp. 179–85. Some of the local religious institutions are described in this *Journal*, Vol. XIX (1979).

28. The papers connected with the foundation of one of them, Yan Cheung Villa, now deposited in the Chinese Library, University of Hong Kong, contain a *feng-shui* map of the site.

(b) Community aspects of village removal

From the lineages' point of view, the matters of foremost importance in removal were always concerned with *feng-shui* and therefore with the actual location of the new villages and the determination of sites for the rebuilt ancestral temples. Faced with this fact, the significance of which was invariably underestimated by officers new to this work, the staff of the District Office found that they had to cope at each removal with a number of items of common interest as well as a mass of individual situations and requests.

In the three village removals for the Mass Transit Railway, the District Office first had to agree with the village removal committees on the location of each re-site area. This is sometimes difficult because officials' ideas, founded on planning provision and engineering constraints, are not always found to coincide with the views and opinions expressed by the villagers. For instance, the Muk Min Ha Committee did not like the initial site suggested to them on the grounds that it faced on to the open mouth of a new culvert. This, they thought, would affect their *feng-shui*, whilst the stream itself, which ran to their front, would lead away their wealth. This made them generally uneasy and fearful for their future and led them to request another location on the same hillside, but more to the west. Fortunately it was possible to meet this request.

Once a site has been found, the next matter is to determine the orientation of the rows of new houses. This is necessary in every case. The Sam Tung Uk re-site village had to face the same direction as the former village. Completed in 1786, this had been oriented by a geomancer at 256°, thus facing SSW. The village removal committee was unanimous in requesting the same orientation for their new village, on the grounds that the lineage had prospered in the old place and wished to continue to do so in future.

Once this matter has been settled, the ancestral hall has then to be sited within the general location. Its orientation may differ from that of the main village, and the site has to be actually pegged out. Moreover, no house must be built behind or in front of it. The committees of the two main villages of Sam Tung Uk and Muk Min Ha were quite explicit on these points when locating their new ancestral halls.

The design and construction of ancestral halls are a matter for specialists. Generally, because of their susceptibilities in these matters, villages are allowed to draw up their own plans and specifications. These are checked by the District Office's Works Section, and agreement is reached on the sum to be provided for construction. Anything too fancy is at the villagers' expense. Villagers can be extremely particular about the materials to be used for new ancestral halls. Wherever possible, some also like to incorporate some of the materials from their old

buildings, especially the granite work of the main doorway.

I recall special problems with Sham Tseng Village, a few miles west of Tsuen Wan, which had to be moved for the construction of the Tuen Mun Highway in 1975–6. The village removal committee was quite adamant about the standard to which it expected the new hall to be built. They were deaf to my suggested comparisons with buildings erected for two other lineages at lower cost, deprecating the one as facile and the other as invidious; and in the end, they did produce a superior building, partly at their own charge.

The ceremonies connected with the opening of new *ci-tang* (ancestral halls) are also taken very seriously. The ancestral tablet(s) from the former building have to be moved at a special time chosen by a geomancer. This can be at literally any time of the day or night. At Sham Tseng, it took place at 1 o'clock in the morning. Earlier that night, the villagers had walked uphill in the dark a mile and a half along a rough footpath to their old village and escorted the ancestral tablet to the new building. All the necessary rituals also had to be performed under the direction of a geomancer, with Taoist priests in attendance. The villagers themselves had no special skills in these matters, and, as one of them told me, there was no possibility that anyone would know because their old ancestral hall had been constructed and dedicated many generations before, hence the need for specialist advice (Hayes 1985: Section B). It was also the local practice to have virtuous and fortunate men to assist with the ceremonies on behalf of the village. This requirement, I was informed, was usually considered met by inviting 'elderly villagers with large families of sons and grandsons' to carry out the duty.

I understand from land staff of the New Territories Administration that all these requirements were made known and practised in the various village re-siting exercises that took place in Tsuen Wan District in the 1960s. Thus, in both the most recent and the earlier removals, the choice of sites for removed villages and new ancestral halls and the performance of the associated rituals connected with them have been taken very seriously. This can only reflect the importance long attached to these things by village people.

One other local aspect of village removal should be mentioned: the fact that the re-siting process was used to regain the original lineage composition of the settlements. Under the approved village removal policy, all owners of building lots acquired before December 1941—this being the date of the Japanese invasion and wartime occupation of Hong Kong—are eligible for re-provisioning with new houses at government cost. However, when negotiating the village re-siting, the village removal committees have invariably requested the District Office to locate the new house entitlements of pre-1941 'outsider' owners in another part of the re-site area. I refer here to two categories of person: indigenous residents

of Tsuen Wan or other districts of the New Territories who had moved into villages not their own and persons from Hong Kong or Guangdong who had somehow purchased village property before the war. At both Sam Tung Uk and Muk Min Ha-Pak Tin Pa, a number of outsiders had purchased village property in the years between the New Territories lease and the Japanese occupation, and some local people had bought houses in other villages over the whole period since 1899. The 'outsiders' in both categories were less numerous than the settled lineages, and this 'purification' drive by the original residents is an interesting phenomenon. It indicates that it takes a long time for outsiders to be fully accepted, even where they are owners through purchase from village families, and that the reservations made about their presence are strong and lasting enough for indigenous villagers to seize the opportunity to restore the situation should it ever arise. Apparently the same reservations do not apply to tenants, since it is certain that much of the new domestic accommodation will be rented out, together with all the commercial ground floors.

Lineages generally seize the opportunity to make as much out of village removal as they can. This is not surprising, given the fact that they lose all their agricultural land by the resumption process and retain only their houses—or, more accurately the re-site houses exchanged for their old building lots and the structures on them—under the government's village policy. Segments that have earlier broken off from the lineage or village seek to establish themselves as separate settlements. This happened with Pak Tin Pa, a branch of Muk Min Ha from which it split after the quarrel in the 1930s; and with Tai Wong Wu on Tsing Yi, which claimed an earlier separate existence from Tai Wong Ha, of which it has long formed part. Yet another hamlet that had been deserted by its owners, who had long been living in the urban area (Fung Shue Wo on Tsing Yi), requested the continued recognition of its separate existence and its own village representative. Also, small lineages, especially those which have lost property over the past thirty to fifty years, seek to make it up by obtaining house sites by sale or concessionary terms during removal, especially if they have considerable numbers of sons and grandsons and can therefore qualify for extra sites under the government's small house policy (though this additional land is given very sparingly and only where need is shown).[29]

29. The small house policy was introduced in 1972, by mutual agreement between the Hong Kong Government and the Heung Yee Kuk, to replace an established but looser system of granting land to villagers. It was devised to meet the complaints of the indigenous residents that, with the spread of development in the New Territories, it was becoming difficult for residents to obtain permission to build additional small houses. These houses were intended to be built within the village environment and to remain in the ownership of village families. The houses on this land must be constructed to a certain size and pattern that, by inter-departmental agreement, are exempt from the Buildings Ordinance, i.e. can be erected by a contractor without passing plans through the Building

*Lineage and Family Aspects of Development*

(a) Ancestral graves

I now turn to the subject of graves and the attitudes taken towards them within local lineages. Briefly, there is no sign that lineages are taking less interest in graves than previously, though the situation varies from lineage to lineage and branch to branch, depending upon the attitude and capability of their leaders, the degree of interest shown by them and the pressure brought to bear by fellow members. This variation has always been evident as far as I can see. I can recall, from Tsuen Wan and elsewhere, many graves which, for one reason or another, were not being maintained and in some cases not even honoured by descendants, the reason for this state of affairs sometimes being made known to us and sometimes not. For example, the Ou-yang of Wai Kek in Kwai Chung did not worship at one particular early ancestor's grave which was held to have brought ill fortune on the clan one hundred years ago, and the Chen lineage at Sha Lo Wan on Lantau had blocked off the tablet at the grave of one of their most important early members for *feng-shui* reasons.[30]

These variations in worshipping at individual ancestral graves notwithstanding, the general tendency has been for lineages to remain very concerned about graves. As indicated at the beginning of this article, they usually make every effort to relocate important graves belonging to lineage or branch ancestors when these are affected by development. The Chen of Sam Tung Uk outdid the Fan of Kwan Mun Hau in this regard. They spent twenty years in relocating one of their important graves, moving the urns (*jin-ta* 金塔) containing the bones from place to place on

Ordinance Office of the Public Works Department. In practice, the concession was abused by many villagers, particularly in those areas where small houses represented a class of rural housing much sought after by urban Chinese and certain Europeans. It has been gradually brought under increasing restrictions which include a five-year non-assignment clause for houses built on private agricultural land and a prohibition on assignment for those on Crown land unless the full market premium is paid on the transfer of ownership. In many places, it is now confined to those villagers who genuinely need space for family expansion. Both need and abuse are largely due to the great pressure on land in the New Territories, especially round the new towns and market centres.

30. Further enquiry would be sure to produce some very interesting situations. I can recall three local cases from my experience in Tsuen Wan. In one, it is alleged that a branch of a mainland lineage, on the advice of a geomancer, secretly adjusted the direction of the memorial tablet during one of the periodical repairs to an ancestral grave, with spectacular results for the one and catastrophic results for the rest. In another, seen recently at Chuk Ko Wan, north-east Lantau, the dates of birth of two persons named in the preamble to the tablet had been deliberately removed with a blunt instrument, presumably for geomantic purposes, and on advice by either the family or another lineage. In the third, also on north-east Lantau, the tablet had been covered over with stones for *feng-shui* reasons, according to descendants.

literally a trial-and-error basis before finding a good site at Ha Tong Lek in a remote place in the hills. They might have been forgiven for thinking that this would not be further affected by development, but regrettably the transmission system for the China Light and Power Company's new power-station at Tap Shek Kok in Castle Peak came through the area and a large pylon on its pad was due to be located directly behind the grave. When this was communicated to the Chen after becoming known during one of my visits along the line of the transmission system, their concern and annoyance were made very plain. The whole story of their efforts to relocate this ancestor's grave, and the time and money spent to provide a worthy substitute, all came out.[31] They also mentioned how they had had to deal carefully with owners of an adjacent grave dating from 1804 at the new site belonging to a clan located in the Yuen Long District, and that at its request they had had to relocate some concrete tables and benches put up for use during worshipping periods.

The same care and attention was taken by other local lineages when major graves had to be removed for development. This applied even in the case of local Christian families whose conversion had taken place over seventy years ago when a chapel was established in Tsuen Wan. Whatever their pastors may say, Christianity does not apparently extinguish local villagers' beliefs in *feng-shui* or inhibit them from hiring geomancers.

From noting the concern and careful attention that still motivates lineages nowadays, one can deduce the importance of this subject in former times. It is no surprise to learn that in the nineteenth century and before, feuding clans sought to destroy the important graves of their opponents and thus secure their downfall by wrecking or at least injuring their *feng-shui*. It was also the practice of the imperial government to take up the ancestral graves of any persons convicted of rebellion against them, as in the notable case of Hong Xiuquan, the leader of the Tai Ping Tian Guo (1851–64). Early in the rebellion, soldiers were sent to his home area for this purpose, i.e. 'to upset their geomantic order and thereby disrupt the good fortunes of the clan' (Jen 1973: 353).

31. Another re-sited grave of this lineage, at Yuen Tun above Tsing Lung Tau, has again been the subject of expenditure much in excess of the government allowance and shows the care and importance attached to the graves by present-day descendants. At the same time, acquaintance with the lineage's older graves shows that elder generations took precisely the same attitude. This is exemplified by the grave of the first ancestor of Sam Tung Uk and Kwan Mun Hau villages which, along with later graves, is located at Ngo Tei above Tso Kung Tam, Tsuen Wan. This grave is large and well decorated, and the memorial tablet gives many details of the family's history at the time the grave was inscribed in 1842.

(b) Lineage trust property

It has always been the practice for lineages to retain as much property as possible in common ownership, as *zu* 祖 or *tang* 堂 under the charge of managers, to provide income for ancestral worship and repairs to ancestral halls and graves. It was intended that this form of holding would help to prevent the sale or mortgage of ancestral property by feckless parties. The practice was strongly reinforced by British legislation after the lease of the New Territories. The New Territories Ordinance of 1910, despite many later amendments, still retains authority for the Assistant Land Officer (District Officer) to give or withhold consent to any proposal to sell or mortgage lineage trust properties (*Laws of Hong Kong*, Cap. 97, New Territories Ordinance, Section 15).

On the other hand, lineage property, mostly of agricultural status, had inevitably been adversely affected by the increasing amount of land which has had to be resumed for development. After resumption, the lineages (like any other landowners) are left with a holding of the government's 'letters of exchange' in lieu of their original land; but 'letters of exchange' are easier to sell than lineage land, and the situation is worsened when, as usually happens, pressure is brought to bear on the elders or managers by younger members. With the major aim of getting rich quickly by whatever means they can, they frequently demand not only that letters of exchange be disposed of for cash, but also that lineage property of all kinds be sold to one or other of the many development companies which are constantly (and aggressively) in search of land for building projects and must build up portfolios of exchange entitlements to obtain it from the government. This situation threatens all lineages, large and small alike.

(c) Village expansion areas

These may be described as additional reservations of land to provide house sites for the further development of re-sited villages at the time of their construction and occupation.

Land in Tsuen Wan New Town is in short supply for all purposes. The villagers knew this and therefore included a request for extra sites within the village removal terms. Until these were settled, they declined to move from their old houses. Their insistence was given added weight by the fact that no sites for small houses had been sold to these villages after statutory town planning was applied to Tsuen Wan in the 1950s. Consequently, there had to be a great deal of negotiation on this point, especially with regard to the location and number of sites to be given. In the mainland Tsuen Wan villages, the members of the removal committees, being realists, have agreed that three grantees will share one house site. This will

provide each of them with one self-contained floor of 700 sq. ft. On Tsing Yi island, on the other hand, where the land situation is less tight, one site has been provided per grantee. In all cases, the grantees are male villagers over eighteen years old at the time of the village removal who have not already had their 'once-in-a-lifetime' concessionary grants of land under the small house policy for indigenous villagers (see n. 29 above).

It will be immediately apparent that these additional areas are being provided on a 'once-for-all' basis, with little or no prospect of further land being made available. As a result, the question of expansion areas becomes even more crucial, and village leaders find themselves under increasing pressure because of it. Most villagers usually wish to have the land immediately, giving little thought to the needs of those who come after them. Village leaders appear to be able to exercise little or no control over their fellows in this matter and have to accept the immediate taking-up of all expansion sites, whether they think it wise or not.

### *Popular Religion and Associated Community Concerns During Development*

It is now the time to turn to another community aspect of redevelopment and village removals: the ritual and religious requirements made known by the village populations in the course of the development work. In our experience, these are as much a part of the process as are land resumption, house exchange and compensation. Here we have to consider on the one hand, protection from disturbance to the local environment caused by nearby excavations and construction works, with their imagined injurious effect upon the hitherto favourable influences associated with it, and on the other hand, ensuring that the sites chosen for the new villages are kept free of harmful activities by unquiet human spirits. Both topics relate to the villagers' concern for safety from harmful influences, for protection which they are convinced can be obtained by ritual means long practised in the past.

The concern for safety through ritual protection is a relatively straightforward matter. When it appears that engineering works are going to interfere with, and indeed destroy, *feng-shui* features in the area, there is always a request for the performance of a *dun-fu* 蹲符. This is a form of ritual protection carried out by a Taoist priest. It takes the form of calling down a multitude of gods to enlist their aid in protecting the site.[32]

32. A *dun-fu* ceremony held at Sai Kung in 1960 is described in the *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. XI (1971). Another *dun-fu* is described in this *Journal*, in Vol. V (1965), pp. 122–4. See also Hayes 1983: 165–78, 271. The total number of

In the second category, that of ensuring that new village sites are free from evil influences deriving from restless and perhaps harmful spirits, it is first necessary to note that the re-site areas chosen for villages removed for the Mass Transit Railway extension and other development are located on hillsides above the town. These were previously the sites of numerous graves which have been removed by the descendants of the persons buried there or, in cases where graves are unclaimed, by the Urban Services Department of the Hong Kong Government. In addition, and of more concern to local people, bones are often discovered in the course of excavation work from graves which may no longer be recognizable because the descendants have died out or gone away. The village community shows a traditional regard for the well-being of the by now unquiet spirits whose remains have been uncovered in this unseemly way, and it has been usual for the rural committee, acting on behalf of the general village community of Tsuen Wan, periodically to remove such graves and bones. The remains are placed in urns which are then put into a formal grave and worshipped yearly by leaders of the rural committee. I can think of at least three such 'communal' graves erected by the Tsuen Wan Rural Committee in the post-war years.[33]

Some readers may ask whether the action taken in re-siting graves and the performance of village and community rituals recounted above relate exclusively to families and villagers affected by development. They may question whether their performance was prompted by the availability of government funds for compensation and replacement purposes. In fact, it is not true that care and attention to such matters stems only from government actions with the aid of public funding. A case in point is the reconstruction of the ancestral hall of the Zeng lineage of Sheung Kwai Chung. Their old hall fell down a few years ago. The family is not wealthy, since its village has been excluded from the new town development area, and its members do not qualify for the greatly increased levels of compensation now being offered. None the less, its leaders went to great pains and much expense to construct a new and larger ancestral hall and decorate it as carefully and extensively as possible. Other recent examples come to mind, both with regard to ancestral halls and to paying

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occasions on which *dun-fu* and *nuan-fu* 暖符 (renewal) ceremonies were performed on Tsing Yi Island between 1975 and 1980 is stated to be 51. These ceremonies were required to be carried out at each ancestral hall and shrine and on the *feng-shui* hill which gave rise to the need. They had to be renewed every six months to continue their effective protection. The number of occasions on which these rituals were performed for the same period in Kwai Chung, Tsuen Wan is estimated to be 26.

33. Such graves are styled *yi-zhong* (義塚). For another, earlier example from Hong Kong, see Hayes 1977: 62, 218. Such graves are, in fact, quite common, being part of the charitable work of older Hong Kong associations; their published bulletins are a useful source for further information on this.

for occasional, unexpected ceremonies to avert or neutralize bad influences. The continuance of the regular long-established ceremonies on behalf of the village and sub-district community provides additional evidence that the necessity for these practices is deep-rooted and, in the instances related to development, does not rely upon the provision of public funds. Moreover, the earlier compensation levels were low and probably barely adequate for the purpose.

One of the interesting aspects of this attention to geomancy and ritual in accordance with traditional ideas has been the fact that, as remarked above, few if any villagers or their leaders have any skill in these matters themselves. They are dependent upon specialists such as geomancers and Taoist priests to perform the detailed work that the course of development and the re-siting of villages require. This dependence is not something new: as far as I can tell, it has always been a feature of village life and has applied as much to members of the elite as to ordinary villagers and townsfolk, save perhaps in those cases where a scholar (or an educated villager) was interested in, say, geomancy and divination (Hayes 1985).

### *Geomancy and Ritual: The Adherence of Leaders and Led to Old Practices*

I have raised the question of the extent to which village lineage leaders were genuinely motivated by traditional ideas and requirements and the degree to which they merely reflected the views of all, or a vocal portion of, the body of villagers. I cannot answer my own question in full with complete certainty, but I can give some indicators. First, my acquaintance with village leaders is such as to lead me to say with confidence that they are all greatly concerned with *feng-shui* considerations in so far as these relate to their own and their descendants' happiness and prosperity. Anything which threatens this, actually or potentially, is a matter for anxiety. Some evince this interest to an extreme degree, but all are concerned. Sooner or later, in my experience, some matter will come up which exposes this general and particular interest. Examples of the latter have been quoted above, and an instance of the former occurred recently. In the last few years, the hinterland behind Tsuen Wan has become largely taken up with gazetted country parks many parts of which, being afforested, need careful fire-prevention precautions and control.[34] One method favoured by the authorities is not to allow village burials or the re-siting of graves in these areas. To offset this prohibition, they excluded

34. The Country Park Authority was established in March 1976. See the Annual Departmental Report of the Director of Agriculture and Fisheries 1967–77.

a large area of hillside just above the town from the park system so that it could be used for these purposes. However, during a site visit with members of the Tsuen Wan Rural Committee to examine the area, it became clear that they did not favour it, on the grounds that local opinion, based on long experience, did not regard it as a good *feng-shui* area. We then, with their help, looked at somewhere else.

So far as the views of the body of villagers are concerned, I am on shakier ground. My work brings me into contact with leaders, but it does not provide me with similar opportunities to contact the masses. However, the leaders are, after all, dependent on consensus (see Hayes 1977: 226). Being obliged by long practice to communicate with them and receive their views, they give every indication that they are swayed by the views and opinions of their fellows. It is thus unlikely that they are acting without regard to received village opinion. Moreover, apart from being part of a closely knit society, they are subject to near and often compelling pressures from their immediate families, especially wives and mothers. It would appear that the women are greatly concerned with such things, being in some respects (as had often been noted by social scientists) more conscious of ritual and obligation to the past and future than their menfolk.

And the young, the reader may ask? I am even less able to speak for them than the general body of adult men and women. I hardly saw those from the Tsuen Wan villages, most being at work or abroad; and the inference I drew was that, if interested at all, they were prepared to leave it to their elders. There was, however, one case on Tsing Yi that gave direct proof of young persons' concern that the cosmological balance of their environment should not be upset; and though this was a place which, as I have said, preserved its isolation and conservatism for longer than the mainland portion of the District, it may be significant. This incident arose in connection with the demolition of houses in the three old villages after their residents had moved to new re-sited houses. A contract for the demolition was fixed by my staff with the agreement of the rural committee, but when the contractor attempted to take his bulldozers on to the site he was stopped by the young men. The rural committee reported that they could not control them, and I therefore arranged to see them. They had been very belligerent and would not let the village elders come to see me on their own. However, when I ascertained that it was not the demolition that was in question but the route taken by the bulldozers over a *feng-shui* hill, I requested that an alternative way into the village be found. This resulted in an immediate change of attitude—it happened, in fact, before my very eyes.

In this connection, one had also to take into account that although traditionally subject to the control of their elders and brought up to obey other older people, like the schoolteachers and masters of martial arts to

be found in most villages, it was the young whose spirit, physical strength and keen sense of village honour led them into fights and helped perpetuate feuds. It is the more interesting that in the Tsuen Wan case they were not more outwardly in evidence in the business of village removal.

### *Villagers and Their Leaders during Village Removal and Development*

#### (a) The body of villagers

My experiences have given me a good opportunity to assess the character of the older type of villager, especially those having land or houses resumed by the government. I certainly have vivid recollections of a number of persons with whom I have had personal dealings over such matters.

The average old villager was not very political, but there was, instead, an individual obstinacy that, where it came into play, seemed grounded on an unerring sense for any 'unfairness' in the government's compensation scheme. Village proprietors of the old type were mostly men of little education but, deeply attached to their family holdings, they were quick to bring up and maintain opposition on this count. This was the easier for them since, untrammelled by the government's categorization of land into different statuses and its clear-cut delineation of compensation in accordance with that classification, they could point, say, to a long series of resumptions of agricultural land with structures on it for which no compensation had been given for either the buildings or the loss of rentals obtained from them. The reason for this state of affairs was that after 1954, on account of the development plans for the New Town, the Administration refused to approve conversions of land from agricultural to building status either by free building licence or by the payment of a premium as hitherto. Many villagers felt that they had been discriminated against by this policy and continued to expect that this would be taken into account in later negotiations over rehousing and compensation during the removal process—which, of course, was not possible, however sympathetic individual officials might personally feel.[35]

35. Villagers' refusal to accept government policy or administrative rulings extended to court decisions in property disputes. The Kwu Hang villagers had taken an internal dispute to court, but the losing parties steadfastly refused to recognise that the District Office had to allocate houses in accordance with that decision. In another incident, some Kau Wah Keng villagers refused to recognise a Supreme Court decision over the sale of lineage trust property and for years continued to expect the District Office to ignore it, refusing to participate in village removal negotiations until this was done.

Thereupon the villagers exposed their second principal characteristic: a passion for compromise. This was the desired and socially acceptable answer to any situation involving them in feelings of 'unfairness'. It provided the dissatisfied person with a tangible advance on his or her entitlement and demonstrated publicly (to those who cared to know or would be told in triumph) that the officials had recognized the basic rightness of their stand. To villagers, a willingness to compromise was an expected ingredient of the official make-up, one that could perhaps be cajoled into activity by reminding an official that he was the 'father and mother' of the people.[36] They did not, or would not, believe that an official could not compromise, and in the case of failure, their resentment was further stocked up by the loss of face occasioned by an open (and therefore known) but fruitless approach.

One further characteristic must be mentioned, one that was experienced in direct ratio to the reasonableness and flexibility of the officials, being less when these were high and vice versa. This was the sense of drama, the operatic quality to be found in many village people, that at once heightened and yet relieved the tension in disputed situations. If the matter was serious, its dramatization could lead to rash actions and enhance difficulties; but theatrical behaviour could also assist by making people laugh at obvious nonsense and so help to expose salient points and separate what was important from what was not.

As regards attitudes towards the government, I think it is less material to think about the Hong Kong Government in particular than any other government. Here we have to take into account the (in my own experience) highly pragmatic approach adopted by village communities, especially their leaders. Provided that needs are satisfactorily met, usually by compromise, they are not—nor perhaps ever were—too worried about the nature of the government in question.[37] It is worth remembering here that during the period of major local settlement, over the past six hundred years, Chinese villagers have had to deal with two alien dynasties, the Yuan and the Qing; whilst many, even most, Chinese district magistrates

36. This phrase has been in popular use in China for a very long time (see Watt 1972: 89–90 for its origins and ibid.: 85–6 for the Qing period, with relevant notes). It is often extended by local people and outsiders (when it suits them) to indicate the desired relationship between themselves and the Hong Kong Government's local officials.

37. The importance of compromise and its origin in Confucian ethics is covered in Cohen's interesting article (1966: 1206–9). Where, in a different context from village removal and development, it was exercised in settlement of a dispute, part of the system was not to press too far one's being in the right. Cohen cites Jean Escarra: 'To take advantage of one's "rights" has always been looked at askance in China. The great art is to give way (*rang* 讓) on certain points and thus accumulate an invisible fund of merit whereby one can later obtain advantages in other directions.' The article gives an interesting affirmation of the attitudes which I have experienced so frequently in the course of my work in Hong Kong for over twenty-five years.

in imperial times did not speak the local languages owing to the 'law of avoidance' that prohibited officials from serving in their own province. And in the last hundred years Guangdong villagers have had to deal with British, French and Portuguese administrators in Hong Kong, Kwang Chau Wan and Macau, and for a time with foreign officials of the China Imperial Maritime Customs' local posts and patrolling launches. Village leaders, then, have for long had to be concerned more with the nature of the person with whom they have to deal than with his native language, colour or creed: always prepared to make some allowance, provided that they were not faced with impossible requirements or did not have to experience too great a gulf in understanding between themselves and their rulers. Village people have also been accustomed to leading a life that in the past comprised many hazards due to the uncertainty of crops and livelihood and much insecurity, leading to an enforced reliance on self-management and, until recently, cautious and distant relations with government. This was so whether it was their own or, since 1899, the British district administration.

These realities, and the general background, have created deep-seated, conservative attitudes towards authority in general that, in my experience, still have to be kept in mind when dealing with these people today.

(b) Village leaders

With regard to their own leaders, that is to say, those villagers sitting on the village removal committees or holding posts on the rural committee or as village representatives, these are expected to operate on the basis of equality within the lineage or within the village. Villagers may not have taken much interest in how the leaders arrived in their positions other than by their silent assent, but once in office they expect them to pay attention to any legitimate and justifiable complaint and to do something about it. The leaders themselves are well aware of their position, and few of them will openly turn down requests, unless, of course, they are ones which have been previously handled and are not capable of a satisfactory outcome by reason of their extreme nature or because the problem cannot be solved owing to factors outside their control. Nonetheless, there is normally a fine balance between leaders and led, marked by a distinct awareness of a general obligation created by membership of the same lineage or village or by closer kinship, specific personal obligations and the like.

Village leaders are seldom in a position to lay down the law. They have to act in accordance with the consensus of lineage and local opinion. Capable men may be able to influence opinion, but in my observation it is a tedious process. This may not always be apparent to government

officers, especially those, Chinese or European, with no experience of a rural situation. Yet it is vital for government officers too to know what the consensus is and, in general, to move along with it if they can, also doing their share of the influencing where this is required.

Here it must be realized that the village leaders' approaches to the District Office, whether for general or individual concerns are but the tip of the iceberg, there being much business that is brought to and settled by them that seldom troubles us.[38] I have in my mind the direct, sometimes heartfelt expressions of weariness made to me by a number of them. The full extent of their difficulties is not known to me, nor its precise nature, but it is clear that they are obliged to listen and do what they can. This is required to be done even negatively, as by a show of sympathy not really felt.

## *Conclusion*

Because of the complex nature of both the physical development of Tsuen Wan and the traditional social background, this paper has, of necessity, contained a little of everything. I have tried to indicate the nature of the development and to chart what has been shown as the unvarying response of village communities to the process: first, the real anxiety generated by interference with the landscape, and second, the concern for the location and layout of new villages. I hope I have been able to demonstrate how strong a feeling exists for ancestors and lineage solidarity, and how this is not something artificial generated by the development process, partly out of fear of adverse consequences and facilitated by the funds provided by the government for the re-provisioning of graves, ancestral halls and village institutions. I have tried, too, to explain how the leaders' actions are based on their own view of these situations and their requirements, but that they do seem to follow the consensus view, something which has always been of great importance in village communities in this part of China.

In the face of this evidence of the continuity of basic values among the traditional communities of the Tsuen Wan District, one is left wondering what effect modernization has really had to date. Does it require more than one or two generations to weaken these deep-seated attachments to traditional views? How much has this process of weakening and change to do with education? Has the relative absence of higher education in Tsuen Wan until after the Second World War had something to do with the

38. Lists of individual and group cases are contained in the reports (in Chinese) printed by the Tsuen Wan Rural Committee at the time of its elections of new office-bearers every two years. See, for example, those for 1978 and 1980, copies of which have been placed in the Chinese Library, University of Hong Kong.

retention of these old ideas by the present body of adult villagers? May we expect the process of change to accelerate with the greatly improved educational facilities and opportunities of today, aided by the now total change in the physical and economic background to village life? To what extent will the universal education of females change the situation in the next decade, having regard to the conservative role of women in Chinese households and the fact that, in the villages, daily religious practices were usually left to them? Is wealth, even modest affluence, a catalyst?

Conversely, and in contrast to this line of questioning, with its assumption that change is inevitable, does change itself bring out the innate strength of the traditional value system? And if so, are we perhaps in this instance arguing a special case, one in which, if villagers wish, the Hong Kong Government is willing to re-provision the village in all particulars? Is it, then, the *chance* of re-provisioning that has revived these old ideas, which have been taken down, dusted and put to use in re-establishing the old communities in their new locations? Here we have to take into account the record of village removals undertaken in other parts of the New Territories during the period under review in Tsuen Wan. There have, for instance, been seven village removals in Shatin New Town since 1973 and another three in Tuen Mun New Town, besides various removals since 1956 undertaken for water schemes. By all accounts the attitudes and expectations described in these pages are typical of those encountered elsewhere in the New Territories. It would be interesting to compare these findings with changing circumstances in Taiwan, for instance, or in mainland China, where it seems that many of the old beliefs publicly suppressed out of political fear are appearing again, though with altered values and different controls.[39, 40]

39. In this connection, it will be of no little interest that the very large mainland portion of the most important land-owning lineage in the New Territories recently petitioned His Excellency the Governor and the District Office in separate letters protesting against what they erroneously believed was the intended resumption of one of the graves of their founding ancestors that had been located in Tsuen Wan for the past eight hundred years. In support of their claim, they enclosed copies of the relevant section of their clan genealogy and wrote in terms no less outraged than if they had been resident in Hong Kong.

40. The former New Territories Administration is no longer a separate department but has been merged with the former Department of Home Affairs to form a combined City and New Territories Administration. Its officers are no longer the Land Authority in the New Territories (though they still perform residual functions covering succession to property, trusteeship and the managerships of lineage trusts) since a separate Lands Department was established on 1 April 1982. This change means that while the District Adminstration assists in development clearances and with village removals and re-sitings, its District Officers no longer play the leading role which gave me the opportunity to observe matters in detail. For those who are interested, up-to-date descriptions of the two departments and their functions can be found in the latest Hong Kong annual year-books published by the Government Printer.

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# PART TWO

## Religion, Myth and Ritual