
CHINESE VILLAGE
POLITICS IN THE
MALAYSIAN STATE

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CHINESE VILLAGE
POLITICS IN THE
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For my mother

Happy Mother's Day.

Preface

During the Malayan communist insurgency of the 1950s, euphemistically termed the "Emergency," more than half a million dispersed squatters and small landholders, most of whom were Chinese and were thus suspected of giving aid to the predominantly Chinese guerrillas, were brought together forcibly by British and Malayan security officials into some five hundred fenced and curfewed resettlement camps. Most of these "new villages," as they were called (the name has stuck, though they are of course no longer new), have persisted as viable social units long after the fences were opened in 1958. This book is a study of the social and political life of one of these Chinese villages two decades later, as it is played out today in the context of a Malay-dominated bureaucratic state. In the town I call Sanchun, the preexisting market center and the attached new village together now house some five hundred families, over four-fifths of them Chinese—shopkeepers, wage laborers, and rubber smallholders. The local Malays and Indians are allied socially and politically with the surrounding Malay *kampongs* (villages), nearby rubber estates, and the district capital with its population of Malay civil servants, rather than with the town of Sanchun, which is essentially a Chinese community.

Most of the generalizations made about overseas Chinese throughout Southeast Asia are based on urban data, in part because in most countries Chinese are primarily urban, and in part because that is the body of data that was collected in the 1950s and 1960s. In Malaysia, however, the rural and semirural Chinese merit closer attention as an important segment of the community, both numerically and politically. Concern over governmental neglect of new villages has been a critical issue since the communal riots of 1969. In 1971 a new federal ministry with full cabinet status was established to deal with issues relating specifically to new villages, though