

## PLOVER COVE VILLAGE TO TAIPO MARKET: A STUDY IN FORCED MIGRATION

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This paper is a preliminary report of a research project which aims to trace the impact of migration from rural, semi-isolated villages to a major market center upon the lives of the villagers. The current paper will discuss only some methodological considerations and preliminary data analysis based upon the results of interviews with household heads and housewives; later work will report other phases of the study.

There are six villages and two hamlets under question, although at the time of the resettlement of the population one of the hamlets had already been largely deserted. The reason for the resettlement was the intention of the Hong Kong government to build a major fresh water reservoir by damming the inlet of a large bay (Plover Cove) and impounding water therein.† The villages along the coast line of the bay would eventually be inundated and had to be evacuated. With this in mind the government constructed a large redevelopment project with multi-storied buildings, playgrounds, and a government subsidized school on reclaimed land in Taiipo Market. This development was given directly to the displaced villagers as partial compensation for their homes and land. The buildings were completed and the removal accomplished by December of 1966, and this study began almost one year later, November 1967. The total population of the villages was 1,041 at the time of removal, distributed through the villages and hamlets as shown in Table I. Approximately 41% of the people were not residing in the villages at the time of removal. Of these, 108 (10.3%), mostly men, were working abroad, and the remainder were residing in other parts of the colony. As later data will show, not all of the villagers chose to move into the resettlement blocks‡

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† See, *inter alia*, the twelve pages of photographs "Winning a Reservoir from the Sea" between pp. 180-181 of *Hong Kong 1967*. (Hong Kong, Government Press, 1968), and text at pp. 167-168 of that Report and pp. 171-172 of the Report for 1966. *Ed.*

‡ This description of the Plover Cove re-housing estate does not follow the Hong Kong usage, in which "resettlement blocks" refer to Government-owned low-cost housing administered by the Resettlement Department of the Hong Kong Government. *Ed.*

although all were compensated as if they would. In addition, due to the method of figuring compensation,<sup>1</sup> some families which had moved from the villages earlier but were still entitled to compensation chose to move into the new blocks and be reunited with their families.

The population is Hakka speaking, and the villages had been continuously occupied for between 100 to 300 years. There are genealogies available for each of the villages, boasting a minimum of eight generations and a maximum of ten. Although the analysis has still to be done, we shall eventually try to tie the genealogies to one another (there was much inter-marriage) and to other kinship groups in nearby villages in an attempt to understand the historical development of the villages. The genealogies, for the most part, are simple listings of male ancestors but the growth and decline of the population at various times may possibly be linked to external events.

### *Methodology*

The research thus far has been using a mixed strategy of data gathering, ranging from the use of historical data,<sup>2</sup> cartographic analysis of lands held and farmed, the use of informants from the villages in long and detailed interviews which try to reconstruct the traditional life patterns and circumstances of the villagers, systematic observation in various situations, and detailed interviews of a randomly drawn sample of the villagers seeking information about their perceptions of their new and old life and changes in it.<sup>3</sup>

The first methodological problem we encountered was the simple one of drawing a sample for the detailed interviews with household heads. The alternatives were to do a census of the entire resettlement area (a costly affair and one which would have created awareness among the villagers of our intentions and may have solidified resistance to being interviewed), or to find a list of villagers from some other source and sample on the basis of that list. We explored the possibilities of finding a complete list of flats and owner-occupants, but no office of government nor other agency had one that we could locate. We then turned to the new government school and got the list of all of its students and their parents. Since the school was established to provide primary education specifically for former village children we felt that the listing so

obtained would be a good sample of households with young children — but not of all households. Accepting that limitation, we sampled from this list with the intention of “snowballing” our sample as we continued the work.

The purpose of the household head sample was primarily for the gathering of research data but secondarily it was concerned with increasing the spread of our total effort. We had early decided to study the reaction to the resettlement of several segments of the population, divided by social status, and we used the household heads as our data source for the other statuses. We were concerned with studying families across the entire age dimension and settled (because of the known patrilineality of the Chinese family) for asking complete information about all of the members of the household head's family. The groups we were primarily interested in were: Household heads; Housewives; Children; Aged; Young Unmarried Adults; and other Household Heads without school age children. We assumed that resettlement would have different impact on different status groups and therefore each of these needed separate examination.

Once having assembled our list of household heads and randomly sampled from it, we faced our second major methodological difficulty: information contagion within the resettlement area. We developed and pretested our basic instruments on other Hakka speaking people, and then devised a plan for “sweeping” the resettlement area for all of our primary interviews in the shortest possible time to limit the spread of the news that research was going on and the communication through the gossip of the villagers of the content of our instruments. Two days (using sixteen interviewers) was the allowed time for the collection of the scheduled 35 interviews. More than half were completed within the first evening. The schedule itself is a bulky one, with 129 questions, not all of which, however, would be administered to any one respondent. We had trained our interviewers to be prepared to administer it in an average of 45 minutes. As it turned out, the average time for Household Head and Housewife interviews was 58 minutes (N=35). The schedules had been prepared in English, translated and practiced in Cantonese, and frequently had to be administered through the use of a translator; a total of 14 translators were used, most frequently the children or other relatives of the household head.

Generally speaking the interviewees were cooperative, although suspicious of the interviewers. There were refusals, of course, but we fulfilled our scheduled interviews in all but one old village group where we were completely unsuccessful except for being able to interview (in lieu of his ill father) a twenty year old son.<sup>4</sup> That our failure rate should be so high in the one village is worthy of considerable note but thus far no satisfactory reason has been ascertained. Among the other villagers the male respondents were more reluctant than the females, whom we interviewed when no male was available. Due to the suspicion which we encountered in our first interviews, we modified our research plan and decided to shift temporarily away from interviewing housewives, and begin instead with the interviewing of children at the school (and at other schools where children of these families studied).<sup>5</sup> We interviewed the children on the school grounds during recess periods in one day, and hoped that the children would tell their mothers of this unusual event, thus making access to the mothers easier during the next interview wave. The strategy worked very well and the cooperativeness of the women whom we interviewed during the following week was very good.<sup>6</sup> Table I summarizes the number of interviews accomplished in each village during this early phase of the research. It does not include the numbers of children, and other status group members not discussed in this paper as most of this interviewing is still going on.

TABLE I

NUMBERS OF RESIDENTS LIVING IN OR OUT OF VILLAGE  
(Before Resttlemnt and the Sampling of the Villagers)

Village*	Where Living:		Households Sampled Interviews with:		
	Out	In	Two Respondents	Wife Only	Husband Only
Siu Kau . . . . .	41	73	2	3	0
Tai Kau . . . . .	48	97	3	2	0
Kam Chuk Pai and Tai Lung . . . . .	161	107	2	4	1
Wang Leng Tau and Nai Tong Kok . . . . .	98	125	5	2	0
Chung Mei . . . . .	22	62	0	3	0
Chung Pui . . . . .	73	134	5	2	1
<b>TOTALS</b> . . . . .	<b>443</b>	<b>598</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>2</b>

\* These place names are in Cantonese romanisation and, together with their Chinese characters, can be found in the Hong Kong Government's publication *A Gazetteer of Place Names in Hong Kong, Kowloon and the New Territories* (Hong Kong n.d. but 1960) at pp. 193-194.

The data presented above is based upon information gathered from 35 households currently living within the new housing area, supplemented by information from depth interviews with some respondents. Of these 35 households, in 17 we interviewed both husband and wife, in an additional 16 we were able to interview only the wife, and in only two cases did we interview only the husband. In all cases we will only use one respondent from each family for this analysis.

### *Willingness to Move and Present Happiness*

The villagers report that they were overwhelmingly favorable to the idea of moving when it was first presented to them, although there were significant numbers who showed some reluctance. It would be tempting to conclude that life conditions in the village, which were undeniably harsh and economically marginal, had created this willingness, but such a conclusion may not be justifiable. It is quite possible that this retrospective happiness is an attempt to lessen psychological dissonance in the present: at least the prospect should be entertained. But with this reported willingness to move is a similarly reported unhappiness with living in the resettlement area. A majority of these respondents avow they are now unhappy and would prefer living in the villages. Closer examination of the data reveal that twelve people (9 males and 3 females) prefer living in the resettlement area, 16 (6 M., 10 F.) preferred the village, and 7 were unwilling to choose or liked both equally (5 M. and 2 F.). The women are by far the more traditionally oriented and prefer the village despite the fact that their lives in the resettlement area are probably physically easier. The difference becomes more impressive when male employment figures are examined: five of the six males who would prefer returning to the village are currently unemployed. The ownership of additional flats, *per se*, in the resettlement area seems to have little or nothing to do with contentment, and one might be tempted as a result to say that the current dissatisfaction stems largely from non-economic grounds. This would be premature as there are many economic problems revealed in the interviews, but economics does not seem to be the only central issue. Supporting this preliminary conclusion are two other pieces of information: of the six men with no schooling, three preferred the village while of those men with schooling of any kind only 3 of 10 preferred the former life

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and two of these had been tutored and had no formal school experience. Ability to speak Cantonese, the *lingua franca* of Hong Kong, also made a strong difference: where the interviewer needed a translator, preference for the village was stronger.

This point is even further brought out with the combination of several indicators which enable us to look at the population of people who have high income drawn from at least two sources. We define in these terms those families where the husband is working and there is rent from one or more flats, or there is a husband working plus income from some other worker, or there is rent from four or more flats and the wife is working at home industry. There are thirteen such families not all of which enjoy very high income but undoubtedly have other fortunate social characteristics, such as involvement in family economic affairs by both husbands and wives and probably, therefore, better social relationships within the family. Only one of these families indicate that they were happier in the village. The rest of these data are summarized in Table II. It would be unreasonable to conclude

TABLE II  
MULTIPLE SOURCES OF HIGH INCOME  
BY WHERE HAPPIER  
(Village or Resettlement Area)

<i>Where happier</i>	<i>Multiple source high income*</i>	<i>Not multiple source high income</i>
<i>Village</i> - - - - -	1 (male) 0 (female)	5 (males) 10 (females)
<i>Resettlement area</i> -	6 (males) 2 (females)	3 (males) 1 (female)
<i>Both, same, don't know, no answer</i> - -	2 (males) 2 (females)	2 (males) 1 (female)

\* Rent (1 or more flats) plus husband or other worker, or 4 or more flats plus wife or wife doing home industry.

therefore that happiness in the resettlement area is purely an economic phenomenon. All of these families have the motivation and energy to have a source of income, sometimes two, other than rent, and although our data are not yet adequately analyzed to explain this difference between families, the source of the motivation would seem to be the variable working here.

All of this information would seem to reveal that those adult villagers least privileged in education, least worldly in language abilities, least able to secure employment, tended to look towards the village as a less complex, simpler and more satisfying way of life, despite the nearness to markets, entertainment, availability of amenities and transportation which the new site offers. The urbanness of the site seems to demand a kind of flexibility and adaptability which many of these rural people have not yet acquired. Several housewives, for example, displayed a basic inability to adjust to the simplest of economic demands of city life — they were upset by and complained about the monthly water and electricity bills and spoke longingly about conditions when one's amenities (meager as they may have been) were available for anyone who wanted them without incurring future debt. There is a strong feeling from the data that putting all of life on a money basis has severely damaged the villagers' confidence in their own ability to cope with the world, even in a situation where money from rental of property is available to the villagers and they have become (by Hong Kong standards at least) rich and self-sufficient. This feeling of inadequacy comes out most clearly in the women's responses to a question concerning what occupations they would most like to have if they had the proper qualifications: most cannot even conceptualize themselves as qualified and as a result did not attempt to answer the question. Several others (after saying they didn't know) continued by pointing out, "I am only an illiterate woman and have to look after the children." The men are not substantially better off: one man who had been a soldier would like to be a general officer, but the others want to be small business men, truck drivers, assistant supervisors, and so on.

### *Urban Villagers*

The response to these problems of inadequacy has been the cloistering of the villagers by self-selection into a largely isolated and (thus far, at least) non-integrated part of the urban commu-

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nity. They have not become, in any meaningful sense, urban residents. They are now basically urban villagers<sup>8</sup> living in a ghetto rather far removed from contact with their new physical neighbors in Taipo market, no less in any other part of the urban world of Hong Kong.

This is an interesting finding insofar as these villagers, although physically isolated while residing in Plover Cove, were never psychologically isolated. The usual family travelled to Taipo once a week to buy necessary supplies and to cash the never ending string of checks and postal money orders which sons and husbands have been sending and still do send from Britain. For about 11 percent of the villagers resided in Britain at the time of resettlement, according to the District Office census.

The basic isolation of the villagers is further revealed in their responses to a series of questions about their present social contacts. In almost all cases they indicate that their friends come from the resettlement area or from small villages in the Sha Tau Kok area, most of which are related through marriage to these villagers. Indeed some of the villages (Tai Kau, Kam Chuk Pai, Wang Ling Tau, and Chung Mei) appear to have had their origin in the migration from a multi-surname village in the Sha Tau Kok area, Wu Kau Tang\*. Returning to these villages in the New Territories essentially represents returning to visit relatives and seems to confirm the general impression that it is relatives which are counted as friends for the majority of the villagers. Few of the villagers put it as cogently as one woman: "my friends are my relatives." One interviewer noted in another case, "She told me that she had no good friends. She didn't know how to discriminate between relatives and friends, she thought that they are the same." In response to the question as to whether they had made any new friends or not, 21 respondents indicated no, and only 8 said that they had made new friends who were not neighbors in the same building. Three indicated they had made friends among their new neighbors.

This should not be interpreted as meaning that the villagers have little social contact of any kind — there is lively social activity of an informal kind in the resettlement area. Only one person indicated that she never chatted with her former villagers,

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\* See *Gazette* p. 193.



while 21 said that they chatted "very often." Thirteen indicated they also talk very often with new neighbors and tenants. Early in the research project we had done a great deal of intensive non-participant observation and had noted that it was a rare thing to see a woman, or a man for that matter, walking alone towards the market. In addition to the frequent social interaction on the streets, in the market and around the resettlement area, there is a lot of informal visiting in apartments, but most of it only if the people involved knew one another prior to resettlement. Table III summarizes this data, but it is incomplete in that it fails to show that twice as many (24) villagers see their former intimate friends in their homes than out of them (12).

TABLE III

WHERE CHAT WITH NEW NEIGHBORS AND TENANTS\*  
BY KNOWLEDGE OF PRESENT NEIGHBORS  
BEFORE REMOVAL

	<i>Inside*</i> <i>flat</i>	<i>Outside</i> <i>flat</i>
<i>Knew present neighbors before removal?</i>		
<i>Did know</i> - - - - -	16	10
<i>Didn't know</i> - - - - -	3	4

#### *Village Power Structure*

Evidence from these villages tends to indicate that, before removal, decisions by individual families were taken by the father of the family, when he was present, with occasional reference to elder male members of the village in a rather loose but nevertheless effective decision-making process. The villages each had village heads who were not elected, but nominated to their positions by consensus of the family heads—the source of their power seems to have been wealth and age. The dissemination of information in the villages verified this—21 villagers asserted that "gossip" was their sole source of news about important happenings in the village or the world. Nine said that more formal village contacts (village representative or village meetings) were involved

\* Where respondent replied that visiting took place both inside and outside, the reply was scored in the Inside category.

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and only two cited news sources outside of the village (district officer or reading notices). Since resettlement the pattern has shown a slight tendency to change, with more formal and less village-oriented communication patterns beginning to appear. Gossip still has the dominant place (20 respondents), but village officials decreased in importance by half (5 respondents) while the same number of respondents report reliance on the more formal government sources. For the first time, two villagers report dependence upon formal communication — newspapers and radio.

These are admittedly small differences but they show a constant trend away from the informal communication (and power) pattern of the small village for a small minority of the village population: were it not for the high loading in the sample of illiterate and house-bound housewives who have little opportunity for other sources of communication, the difference would probably be both more dramatic and more impressive. Also, the presence of older males in the resettlement area is substantially lower than it was in the village. Although our figures are still tentative, there seem to be 12 older people (grandfathers and grandmothers of the present school children) from our sample now living in the resettlement area but there are at least four others who formerly lived in the villages that have chosen to move to other villages in the New Territories rather than move in with their families. This is a significant change in the "density" of old people and must be accompanied by a diminution in the authority of the aged, although at this stage, so soon after removal, it would be difficult to analyze with any great specificity.

*Employment*

Twenty of the thirty-five households reported on in this paper have no employed head of household — the families are living on rental incomes or other sources of income, including household industry and remission of funds from working relatives either overseas or in Kowloon. In detail, 12 families have both rental income and income from the husband being employed either operating his own store or business or as a wage earner. Five families have both rent and household industry providing income, and six families derive income from both rent and the wages of a non-household head employee. These families represent the most prosperous part of the village population, having multiple sources

of income. Twelve families have only single income sources, two from non-household head workers, four from rent only and six from wages earned by the household head, either in his own shop or through employment. Of the twenty unemployed household heads, 9 are seeking employment, the others seem to be contented with their unemployed status. An additional four women are looking for jobs.

Unemployment not only has implications for family income, however; it also has great relevance to the quality of the life which the villagers are now living. The data shows rather clearly that, lacking employment, the men of the villages have found few outlets for their energies other than gambling, going to the movies, and going out to eat with other unemployed men. All of these activities require money which for men in their status must come from sources which diminish the funds available for schooling of children, food, monthly bills, and so forth. Little wonder, as shown above, that the housewives (who bear the burden of household management) show such marked preference for living under the old conditions in the villages. In a style of life in which money income is a requisite for continuing family life the inactivity of the husband is a burden: in the village it (when it occurred) had probably been only an annoyance. This is clearly shown among the four women looking for work, three of whom are trying to earn supplementary income when they have a working laborer husband, but no rental income, while the fourth has rental income, but her husband is not employed. In large measure, the burden of economic support of the family has been placed on the females by the resettlement: it is certainly not unusual for Hakka women to carry this burden, but to carry it in an urban environment and a money economy appears to have created quite a stressful situation. We can assume that more wives would be looking for employment were it not for the presence in the home of young children preventing active employment. Those wives who are working are employed doing home industry (plastic assembly dominates). This is low paid labor but, because all of them are illiterate, possibly the best source of employment available.

### *Summary*

We have tried to present a short summary paper concerning the experiences after resettlement of a group of formerly isolated

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Hakka villagers: although the data presented are only roughly analyzed certain conclusions can be tentatively drawn.

Although the villagers were for the most part not reluctant to move, their initial experiences in the resettlement area have distinctly dampened their enthusiasm. Although there is some evidence to indicate that their enthusiasm diminished under the impact of economic hardship in a money economy, it is undoubtedly premature to make that judgment as many lines of investigation and possible explanatory variables have not as yet been investigated. It does appear that those people who have resolved their economic difficulties are significantly happier in the resettlement area than those who have not. Similarly, a large part of this happiness is probably due to individuals with better education and broader life experiences being better able to cope with the complex social situation in which they now live. Most of the villagers, however, have chosen as yet to shun the larger social scene and continue living as villagers in an urban setting.

A great part of the burden of adapting to the new situation seems to have fallen upon the women in their role as housekeepers and major providers for the needs of their families. Many of the husbands seem content to leave the financial problems to their wives and spend their days in non-economically productive ways. This burden causes the wives to be the most unhappy within the resettlement area.

Projecting from these basic conclusions, it would seem legitimate to indicate that there are potentially serious problems which may arise in the resettlement area. The government (which won overwhelming approval in its handling of the resettlement) seems now to be facing a severely dislocated rural population which already shows signs of structural problems in the economic sphere, which may soon spread to other aspects of social life, such as family organization and social control over children. The primary cause seems to have been failure to recognize the human problems of environment change, as opposed to the financial and physical problems. Future major resettlements should undoubtedly be planned in conjunction with various social welfare agencies who, with some time to accomplish their work, may be able to prevent the kind of demoralization which is beginning to appear in the Taipo Market resettlement. Perhaps it is not too late to accomplish some remedial work with this population even now.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Not to be discussed here but in future work.

<sup>2</sup> Some of it very generously made available by the District Officer's Office, Taipo, which had charge of the resettlement efforts.

<sup>3</sup> I must express gratitude to those students of mine at Chung Chi College, Chinese University of Hong Kong, who suffered all of the indignities of field work while gathering the basic interviews. Without their help this project never could have been accomplished.

<sup>4</sup> He was not included in Table I as a household head because of his unusually young age.

<sup>5</sup> We were fortunate in having outstanding cooperation from the Principal at Lok Heung School, Mr. Wong (黃文輝), as well as the teachers and children.

<sup>6</sup> Of course, the technique of saturating a neighborhood with interviewers which we used continually in this research program never works perfectly. In each status group some people were not home or could not be located and call-back was necessary in a few cases. We are still calling-back for some of these interviews.

<sup>7</sup> The quotation represented here was made in Hakka, translated into Cantonese, and then into English. Its literalness is open to question.

<sup>8</sup> To borrow Herbert Gans' term.