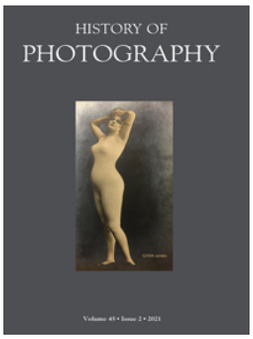

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Humanising the Squatter: Photography in the Service of Resettlement in Emergency-era Malaya

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Humanising the Squatter: Photography in the Service of Resettlement in Emergency-era Malaya

Jeremy E. Taylor

This article explores the ways in which photography was used by the colonial state in Malaya to promote the supposed success of resettlement – the counter-insurgency scheme through which around half a million people were forcibly moved into camps, later renamed 'New Villages', during the Malayan Emergency (1948–60). While this study engages with the ways in which the racialised category of the 'squatter' – that is, rural Chinese who were the main object of resettlement – was reflected in official photography, it also argues for the need to consider such photography within broader developments in photographic practice and consumption in Southeast Asia during the early 1950s. These include the role of local Malayan photographers as part of the state propaganda apparatus and the emergence of Humanist photojournalism as a mode of expression in the same period. In doing this, the article suggests that the interaction between colonial photography and commercial photojournalism in Malaya complicates the extant literature on the 'colonial gaze' while contributing to an emerging body of research on the tensions between colonialism and Humanism in early postwar photography.

Keywords: *Malaya, photography, counterinsurgency, Humanism, Malayan Emergency (1948–60), resettlement*

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The Malayan Emergency, from 1948 to 1960, during which an anti-colonial insurgency led by the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) was defeated by British and Commonwealth forces allied to local Malayan elites, has become the subject of renewed scholarly interest in recent years. Monographs on the topic have been published, conferences and exhibitions have been organised, and films and television programmes have been produced.[1] In the extant literature on the Emergency, resettlement – the policy through which the colonial authorities forcibly moved around half a million people into 'resettlement camps', renamed 'New Villages' in 1952, in order to deny MCP fighters access to food and other supplies – has tended to be examined through one of two lenses. On the one hand, resettlement has been highlighted in the literature on military history as a 'successful' example of counter-insurgency, insofar as it severed links between rural communities and insurgents.[2] On the other, resettlement has become the subject of critical and often reflective scholarship which emphasises the cruelty inherent in this policy, and the suffering that was experienced 'behind barbed wire' in late-colonial Malaya.[3]

1 – Recent books include Karl Hack, *The Malayan Emergency: Revolution and Counterinsurgency at the End of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022). Recent exhibitions include Sim Chi Yin, *One Day We'll Understand*, 2015-⟨http://chiyinsim.com/one-day-well-understand/⟩. Films include, *Xin Cun* [The New Village], dir. Wong Kew-lit (Yellow Pictures, 2013).

2 – For a summary of research produced in this vein, see Karl Hack, 'The Malayan Emergency as Counter-Insurgency Paradigm', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 32, no. 3 (2009), 383–414.

3 – Tan Teng Phee, *Behind Barbed Wire: Chinese New Villages During the Malayan Emergency, 1948–1960* (Petaling Jaya: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, 2020).

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However, for the most part, little scholarly attention has been paid to the manner in which the colonial state sought to use photography as a tool of resettlement, despite the extensive use of this medium by the colonial authorities when promoting the supposed benefits of the scheme. To be sure, depictions of the New Villages produced during the Emergency have been explored by a handful of cultural studies scholars and film historians. In most cases, however, this has focused on the moving image, with the output of the colonial Malayan Film Unit inspiring a particularly lively body of enquiry.[4] This and other scholarship has provided important insights into colonial propaganda centred around resettlement which inform discussion in this study.[5]

This article seeks to address this gap in the literature, while also engaging with a significant number of official and officially sanctioned photographic images of the very people who were actually 'resettled' – rural Chinese residents of Malaya who were categorised by the colonial state as 'squatters'. Specifically, the article seeks to explore not just the manner in which resettlement was depicted in Emergency-era photography, but how such depictions reflected wider photographic trends, both locally and internationally, in this same period. For example, the article will demonstrate how the ambiguities inherent in postwar Humanist photojournalism – a form which developed independently from, but at precisely the same time as, the Malayan Emergency – represented an important variable in the production and circulation of resettlement photography. The fact that this form was embraced by both celebrated British photojournalists and official photographers, as well as by a small but prolific community of often unidentified Malayan photographers who were employed by the colonial authorities to produce much of the photography of resettlement, disrupts the very notion of a 'colonial gaze' in Malaya. Indeed, it suggests that Humanism provided a visual space within which photographers and editors at either end of pan-imperial information networks could work separately but in parallel to develop an image of the 'squatter' that was racialised and stereotypical while also aspiring – counterintuitively – to a distinctly Humanist 'poetry of the streets' in Malaya's New Villages.[6]

Most of the images that I refer to in this article are held at institutions in the UK, while the publications, ranging from newspapers to government reports, in which the images were circulated are held in libraries and archives around the world. The provenance of such images, however, is far more diverse than the archives suggest. Thus, while my analysis of such images, and the wider context of their production and deployment, will engage with established concepts such as 'the colonial photographic archive',[7] I will also suggest that the Malayan case problematises the notion, still prominent in so much of the academic literature, of the colonial gaze,[8] without necessarily negating the very real control over depictions of the squatter that colonial information officers and editors exercised. Despite its creation in the context of late-colonial violence, the photography of resettlement reveals a complex network of influences and connections which challenge the tendency in some of the recent literature to frame the conflict as one between British authorities and 'Chinese Communists'.[9] By combining close readings of a number of photographs themselves with archival research on the production and distribution of those photographs in Malaya and the UK, I will suggest that the photography of resettlement reflects the long reach of postwar Humanism into photographic practice in Malaya at a time when commercial and amateur photography was booming in the region, as much as it reflects British attempts to visualise a colonial 'Other'. In this way, this article contributes to an emerging critical literature on the intersection between international photographic practice and decolonisation in the extra-European context in the early postwar years.

4 – Representative examples include Tom Rice, 'Distant *Voices of Malaya*, Still Colonial Lives', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 10, no. 3 (2013), 430–51; Wai Siam Hee, 'Anti-Communist Moving Images and Cold War Ideology: On the Malayan Film Unit', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 18, no. 4 (2017), 593–609.

5 – On propaganda in the Emergency more generally, see Kumar Ramakrishna, *Emergency Propaganda: The Winning of Malayan Hearts and Minds* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

6 – Peter Hamilton, '"A Poetry of the Streets?" Documenting Frenchness in an Era of Reconstruction: Humanist Photography, 1935–1960', *French Literary Studies*, 28 (2001), 177– 229.

7 – Annie E. Coombs, 'Photography Against the Grain: Rethinking the Colonial Archive in Kenyan Museums', *World Art*, 6, no. 1 (2016), 61–83.

8 – For a recent reflection on this concept, see Stefanie Michels, 'Re-framing Photography – Some Thoughts', in *Global Photographies: Memory – History – Archives*, ed. by Sissy Helff and Stefanie Michels (Bielefeld: transcript, 2018), 9–17, ⟨https://mediarep.org/handle/doc/2112⟩.

9 – Caroline Elkins, *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2022), 461–79.

Photography and Counterinsurgency in Malaya

The British government declared a state of emergency in Malaya in June 1948 following the killing by MCP activists of a number of European planters there. Inspired by communist successes in the Chinese Civil War and reacting to British attacks on Malayan communist activists, the MCP had commenced an insurgency against British rule with the ultimate aim of driving the British from Malaya and establishing a postcolonial, multiethnic and socialist Malaya. The British preference was for an orderly withdrawal from the region, and the transformation of colonial Malaya into a 'Southeast Asian dominion' that would remain loyal to British interests while sitting firmly within the anti-communist bloc during the Cold War.[10]

In the early years of the Emergency, British and Commonwealth forces battled communist guerrillas in the jungle, while the MCP sought both moral and material support from squatters – communities of rural Chinese who lived and worked land on the 'forest fringe',[11] often holding temporary or no leases. It was the support that the MCP received from such communities which led the authorities to radically change strategy in early 1950. With the appointment of Harold Briggs as Director of Operations in April that year, a new approach would be implemented in order to break support for the MCP amongst rural communities. The subsequent Briggs Plan entailed the forced resettlement of such communities, representing hundreds of thousands of people, into government-designated resettlement camps – spaces that would not only enable the colonial state to disrupt connections between rural communities and the MCP, but also 'enhance [the] visibility' of rural communities themselves and make thorough colonial surveillance of them possible.[12] The haste with which such resettlement was undertaken in 1950 and 1951 prompted a shift of focus on the part of the colonial authorities in 1952, with resettlement areas being renamed 'New Villages', and the colonial authorities adopting what Zhou Hau Liew has called 'optimistic developmental narratives of resettlement'[13] – narratives that stressed the supposed benevolence of the government in saving rural communities from the MCP threat, and transforming them from Chinese squatters into loyal Malayan villagers.

Resettlement also resulted in the creation or growth of new political groups in Malaya – such as the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA), created specifically as a body for anti-communist Malayan Chinese who would assist the government's resettlement programme[14] – and touched virtually every section of Malayan society. In addition, there was a distinctly transnational element to resettlement, with American agencies such as the United States Information Service (USIS) assisting British propaganda efforts as part of the wider Cold War battle against communism in Asia,[15] international Christian missionary societies lending support to resettlement[16] and both real and imagined mainland Chinese influence via print media and broadcasting in rural areas.[17] Resettlement would continue well into the mid-1950s, with some half a million, predominantly Chinese, rural people eventually moved into the New Villages.[18]

While little has hitherto been written specifically about photography and resettlement, the use of photography by the colonial authorities in other parts of Emergency-era Malaya is not a new field of research. In her study of the 'long history of entanglement' between photography and counterinsurgency, for example, Susan Carruthers has written perceptively on the appearance, or lack thereof, of MCP fighters in the photojournalism of the time, showing how the politics of visuality in Malaya presaged many of the same debates around war photography that emerged following the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.[19] The research on colonial anti-MCP propaganda has similarly touched on the 'photographs of smiling and happy SEPs [surrendered enemy personnel]' that were reproduced on

10 – Karl Hack, *Defence and Decolonisation in Southeast Asia: Britain, Malaya and Singapore, 1941–68* (London: Routledge, 2001), 304.

11 – Zhou Hau Liew deconstructs the categories of 'squatter' and 'forest fringe'. Zhou Hau Liew, 'Ecological Narratives of Forced Resettlement in Cold War Malaya', *Critical Asian Studies*, 52, no. 2 (2020), 286–303 (289).

12 – Mareen Sioh, 'An Ecology of Postcoloniality: Disciplining Nature and Society in Malaya, 1948–1957', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 30 (2004), 729–46 (737).

13 – Zhou, 'Ecological Narratives', 289.

14 – Tan Miau Ing, 'The Formation of the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) Revisited', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 88, no. 2 (2015), 105–24.

15 – Ian Aitken, 'British Governmental Institutions, the Regional Information Office in Singapore and the Use of the Official Film in Malaya and Singapore, 1948–1961', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 35, no. 1 (2015), 27–52.

16 – Lee Kam Hing, 'A Neglected Story: Christian Missionaries, Chinese New Villagers, and Communists in the Battle for the "Hearts and Minds" in Malaya, 1948–1960', *Modern Asian Studies*, 47, no. 6 (2013), 1977–2006.

17 – Jeremy E. Taylor, '"Not a Particularly Happy Expression": "Malayanization" and the China Threat in Britain's Late-Colonial Southeast Asian Territories', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 78, no. 4 (2019), 789–808.

18 – Karl Hack, 'Detention, Deportation and Resettlement: British Counterinsurgency and Malaya's Rural Chinese, 1948–60', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 43, no. 5 (2015), 611–40; David Baillargeon, 'Spaces of Occupation: Colonial Enclosure and Confinement in British Malaya', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 73 (2021), 24–35; Tan, *Behind Barbed Wire*.

19 – Susan L. Carruthers, 'Why Can't We See Insurgents? Enmity, Invisibility, and Counterinsurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan', *Photography and Culture*, 8, no. 2 (2015), 191–211.

leaflets that British troops dropped in the jungle.[20] References to the publication of graphically violent images of MCP fighters as 'withered corpses by the jungle path' can also be found in recent writing on the Emergency, a good deal of which focuses on the production of trophy photographs of mutilated insurgents taken by Commonwealth troops,[21] or on the targeted use of photographs of dead insurgents in government-produced propaganda leaflets in the first years of the conflict.[22] There have also been studies of the photographic intelligence that was produced by the Royal Air Force (RAF) in support of counterinsurgency operations, including the uses of military airborne photography 'to identify and confirm insurgent camps; the planning of ground operations, ambushes and escape routes; the briefing of troops; and substantiating inaccuracies on local maps'.[23] More recently, the work of individual photographers who were active during the Emergency, but whose work was often strikingly silent on the conflict itself, have been published. For example, Brendan Luyt has detailed the role of the Singapore-based doctor and curator Carl Gibson-Hill in producing colonially sanctioned landscape photography of Malaya in the 1950s.[24]

The overarching message that this growing literature delivers is that the control of photography, photographs and photographers represented an important element of counterinsurgency in Malaya. Despite the emphasis in the extant research on written propaganda, cinema and the spoken word,[25] control of the still image was a central concern for various groups involved in resettlement programmes in ways that have often been overlooked in the past. At a practical level, for example, the Emergency-era requirement, introduced in 1948, that all Malayan residents carry national registration cards which included photographic portraits resulted in a surge in business for commercial photographic studios.[26] Unsurprisingly, this also made studio photographers across Malaya, and particularly in rural areas where resettlement was taking place, the target of MCP attacks, as insurgents sought to make the production of registration cards impossible.[27] At the same time, officials who oversaw resettlement worried about the circulation of photography within the New Villages, supplying photographic portraits of Queen Elizabeth II and the sultan of each of Malaya's states to New Villages from 1952 onwards, for example.[28] Also, in a classic example of the photograph-as-exchange-commodity phenomenon that has become so important a thread in the scholarship on visual anthropology,[29] Malayan elites used photographs as gifts through which to curry favour: London's National Army Museum holds an album of photographs that was presented to 'the Lady Templer' [*sic*] – the wife of Gerald Templer, High Commissioner of Malaya from January 1952 to October 1954 – by a commercial, Kuala Lumpur-based photographic studio as a 'farewell gift' on the occasion of her departure from Malaya, for instance.[30]

The Production and Circulation of Resettlement Photography

Given the importance of the still image to the prosecution of counterinsurgency in Malaya, one might expect to find a highly centralised system of control of the production and publication of photographs. Contrarily, however, no single institution was responsible for the production, editing, publication or distribution of photographs depicting resettlement and the New Villages – or, for that matter, any other aspect of the conflict. Rather, a network of official and commercial agencies in London, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and elsewhere took part in such efforts, and images produced in the period between 1948 and the mid-1950s often moved between these different agencies themselves. Photographs taken by unnamed Malayan-based press photographs might eventually appear on the pages of London

20 – Christopher Hale, *Massacre in Malaya: Exposing Britain's My Lai* (Stroud: The History Press, 2013), 350.
21 – Souchou Yao, *The Malayan Emergency: Essays on a Small, Distant War* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2016), 41. The cover of this book features such an image.
22 – Hack, *Malayan Emergency*, 319–21.

23 – Roger Arditti, 'The View from Above: How the Royal Air Force Provided a Strategic Vision for Operational Intelligence during the Malayan Emergency', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 26, no. 5 (2015), 764–89 (esp. 778).

24 – Brendan Luyt, 'Producing Malaya: The Photography of Carl A. Gibson-Hill', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 92, no. 1 (2019), 1–20.

25 – Alexander Nicholas Shaw, 'Propaganda Intelligence and Covert Action: The Regional Information Office and British Intelligence in South-East Asia, 1949–1961', *Journal of Intelligence History*, 19, no. 1 (2020), 51–76.

26 – 'The Photographer Replies on Registration', *Straits Times*, 23 November 1948, 6.

27 – 'Bandits Kidnap Cameraman: Bid to Sabotage Registration', *Morning Tribune* (Singapore), 15 October 1948, 1.

28 – D. J. Staples, 'Supply of Flags, Portraits and Maps for Village Halls in New Villages', 1 December 1952, Box 7, 16593, J. L. H. Davis Papers, Imperial War Museum, London.
29 – As per *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images*, ed. by Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (London: Routledge, 2004).

30 – Photograph album of 40 photographs, 1954, presented to Lady Templer by Mrs Chew Lan Ying, Dragon Photo Service, as a farewell gift upon the occasion of F.M. Sir Gerald Walter Robert Templer and Lady Templer leaving Malaya, 1974-10-12, National Army Museum, London.

newspapers, for example, while British photographers produced images which would appear in publications by Malayan government departments, political organisations and overseas missionary groups.

One hub in this transnational network of colonial-era photography was the Central Office of Information (COI). Founded in April 1946, this London-based government agency was responsible for providing 'information material of many kinds for the use of information officers in the field at the request of the Foreign, Commonwealth Relations and Colonial Offices'.[31] To this end, the COI would 'periodically send […] a photographer and a writer on a tour of a group of territories' so that it could 'supply its services with photographs'.[32] The COI had, in fact, done precisely this just prior to the outbreak of the Emergency, when one of its photographers, Richard Stone, had been sent to Malaya to 'build up an official library' of photographs of the territory.[33]

The COI would remain an important distributor of official images of Malaya for the British and international media. However, many of the photographs that were held in the COI library in London were not produced by the COI itself, for the library collected images 'from every possible source', including 'photographic news agency services, newspapers, periodicals and private commercial photographers'.[34] Moreover, the colonial authorities in Malaya did not always choose to use images from the COI for their own local purposes. Even after the declaration of the Emergency in 1948, when one might expect to see a rapid increase in the supply of COI images to Kuala Lumpur, 'smaller orders [for COI material] than ever before' were made by the Malayan colonial authorities.[35] Nonetheless, the COI continued to both disseminate and produce photographs of the Emergency. John Jochimsen, head of the COI's Photographs Division, even undertook a six-week tour of Malaya in 1954,[36] during which he produced 'picture features' of the country, followed Gerald Templer 'on a public relations drive' and spent time 'on a patrol with a party of troops round a village that had been closed off with barbed wire to stop the inmates giving food to the terrorists' [*sic*].[37]

In addition to figures such as Jochimsen, press photographers from London-based pictorials such as *Picture Post* played the role of quasi-official cameramen in the earliest years of the conflict. Some of the most regularly reproduced and iconic photographs of the Emergency – that is, those still habitually used today by the international press, academic publishers and authors seeking to illustrate studies of the Emergency – were, in fact, produced by Fleet Street photographers such as Bert Hardy, for example.[38] Other photographers associated with *Picture Post*, such as the former army photographer Charles Hewitt, were commissioned to visit Malaya to 'report firsthand on the war against Communism and the attempt to build up a democratic way of life'.[39] The images that such individuals produced of British troops engaging with rural Chinese communities while searching for MCP 'bandits' came to be circulated widely.[40]

More importantly, however, a collection of 'ancillary institutions' in the region 'became involved in the postwar propaganda campaigns aimed at Malaya and Singapore', employing their own local staff to produce information and propaganda for colonial purposes.[41] For example, locally recruited but 'official' photographers were employed by Singapore's Public Relations Office and the Malayan Department of Public Relations (DPR) – organisations tasked with 'wholesale channelling of [colonial] government information to the public'.[42] There was also the Malayan Information Agency which, prior to the Emergency, had been mainly charged with promoting Malaya as a site of trade and commerce.[43] This became the Federation of Malaya Information Services (FMIS) during the Emergency.

At the outset of the Emergency in 1948, the DPR was responsible for producing and circulating various forms of visual information widely, including

31 – Central Office of Information, *Annual Report of the Central Office of Information for the Year 1949–50* (London: COI, 1950), 13; David Welch, *Protecting the People: The Central Office of Information and the Reshaping of Post-war Britain, 1946–2011* (London: British Library, 2019).
32 – Central Office of Information, *Annual Report*, 15.
33 – 'Visual Publicity About the Colonies', unattributed and undated memorandum (ca. 1949), Central Office of Information: Standard Overseas Photographic Services, Policy and Finance, CO 875/28/1, The National Archives, London.
34 – Central Office of Information, *Overseas Photographs Service* (pamphlet) (London: COI, ca. 1950), np.

35 – Barbara Fell (COI) to K. W. Blackburne (Colonial Office), 12 November 1948, Central Office of Information: Standard Overseas Photographic Services, Policy and Finance, CO 875/28/1, The National Archives, London.
36 – 'Six Week "Shoot" in Malaya', *Straits Times*, 27 March 1954, 5.
37 – John Jochimsen, *80 Years Gone in a Flash: The Memoirs of a Photojournalist* (London: MX Publishing, 2011), 159–70 (161).
38 – One example is Roger C. Arditti, *Counterinsurgency, Intelligence and the Emergency in Malaya* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). The cover image of this book is a Hardy photograph.
39 – Tom Stacey, 'Air Rescue in Malaya', *Picture Post*, 58, no. 8 (21 February 1953), 7–8 (7).
40 – 'Ace Photographer Says – Planters are Tough', *Sunday Tribune* (Singapore), 27 February 1949, 2; '"Post" Men here to Cover Troops', *Sunday Tribune* (Singapore), 4 June 1950, 3.
41 – Aitken, 'British Governmental Institutions', 29.
42 – Rachel Leow, *Taming Babel: Language in the Making of Malaysia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 139.
43 – Rizwanah Souket and Syed Arabi Idid, 'The Early Days of Public Relations in British Malaya: Winning the Hearts and Minds of the Empire', *Public Relations Review*, 46, no. 2 (2020), 101894.

photography.[44] In fact, the DPR and its sister organisation, the Public Relations Office in Singapore, provided such an adequate level of service in terms of photographic production by 1949 that the COI specifically listed Malaya as one of the few colonial territories that could claim 'reasonably adequate services of their own' by this time.[45] For most of the Emergency period, it was Malaya-based offices such as these which supplied the COI with up-to-date photographs of Malaya rather than the other way around: the Malayan government's chief press officer saw 'very little value' in using COI pictures in Malaya itself.[46] With the appointment in 1950 of Harold Briggs as Director of Operations in Malaya, the local management of information was overhauled, with the Department of Information (DOI) taking on the task of promoting colonial policies to both local and international audiences.[47]

To be sure, British officials managed such organisations. When it came to the work of actually producing photographs, however, they employed Malayan-based, Asian photographers rather than British photographers. As with local photographers working in late-colonial contexts elsewhere, such individuals have been overlooked in the academic literature. Just as the names of colonial African photographers 'have often been replaced with anonymous bylines like "photographer unknown"',[48] so too have the identities of Malayan-based photographers been obscured by the attribution of their work to the generic phrases 'DPR photo' and 'FMIS photographer'. In retrospective histories of Malay(si)an and colonial photojournalism that have been published recently, such non-attribution has been reinforced, with images of New Villagesproduced at the time and now held in the archives of Malaysian newspaper groups remaining unattributed,[49] or references to unnamed 'Chinese photographers' being made.[50]

While this distinction between 'named' British photographers – attached to the COI, *Picture Post* or news agencies – and 'unnamed' Asian photographers in Malaya may well reflect broader issues around colonial racism, it was also indicative of the risks facing locally based photographers who were associated with the state. In a recent oral account provided by the family of one photographer employed by colonial Malaya's information services from the late 1940s onwards – Michael Wong Swee Lim – the targeting by MCP fighters of state-employed photographers like Wong emerges as a constant theme.[51] Wong was one member of an entire cohort of Malayan photographers who were employed by the DPR's Press Division or the FMIS. At the outset of the Emergency, only a handful of photographers were employed by the DPR. These included Wong Khye Weng, who would be transferred to the Malayan Film Unit in late 1949, and Ng Weng Hong, whose 'photographs showed the massive effort to relocate people in the rural areas under the New Villages scheme'.[52] Another example was Tang Wah Choong who, in May 1950, became the first official photographer to be tasked with photographing the Mawai Resettlement Camp – a camp that was originally designed as a 'model resettlement community' before being closed down within two years.[53]

While the number of photographers attached to such organisations would increase by the mid-1950s, there were never enough skilled photographers employed by the colonial state to fulfil the demands of the state and its clients, including the COI. As a result, local commercial photographers – some attached to Malayan newspapers, others to photographic studios – were habitually commissioned to undertake work for the colonial state on an ad hoc basis. One example was the prolific Ng Beh Leow, a photographer employed by the *Malay Mail* and later associated with the *Straits Times*, whose images can be found amongst some of the main collections of Emergency-era photographs held in London archives today.[54] Ng was unusual, however, in having his name associated with his photographic output, for the work of many other private photographers was unattributed and remains so today. Herein lies another major reason for the difficulty in tracing

44 – Leow, *Taming Babel*, 139.

45 – 'Visual Publicity about the Colonies'.

46 – R. N. Lindsay (Chief Press Officer) to A. D. (Field), 9 July 1953, 'Correspondence with COI on Picture Sets', 1957/0672877W, Arkib Negara Malaysia (ANM), Kuala Lumpur.

47 – Tan, *Behind Barbed Wire*, 109.

48 – Olubukola A. Gbadegesin, '"Photographer Unknown": Neils Walwin Holm and the (Ir)retrievable Lives of African Photographers', *History of Photography*, 38, no. 1 (2014), 21–39 (22).

49 – A number of photographs of resettlement dating from the mid to late 1950s featured in *Photojournalism and the Imaging of Malaysia, 1957–2007* are marked 'photographer unknown', for example. *Photojournalism and the Imaging of Malaysia, 1957–2007: Milestones in the Last 50 years of Malaysia*, ed. by Eddin Khoo (Kuala Lumpur: Petronas, 2007).

50 – Jochimsen, *80 Years Gone in a Flash*, 181.

51 – 'Lin bo guzao Yong xiangji ningzhu Malaixiya, Wong Ruilin' [Olden Days with Uncle Lin: Gazing at Malaysia through a Camera, Michael Wong], YouTube video, 56:08, 'Let's Show' Facebook channel (Malaysia), 29 August 2020, ⟨https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=search&v=371979887319692⟩ [accessed 30 November 2021].

52 – Zaini Mohd Said, 'Capturing it on Film for History', *New Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur), 18 March 2007, ⟨http://lib.perdana.org.my/PLF/News_2007/30-Mar-2007/NST/Others/NST-18032007c.pdf⟩; Movement Order for Photographers, 1957/0673324W, ANM, Kuala Lumpur.

53 – 'Photographic Coverage of Mawai Settlement', 17 May 1950, Request for P.R. Photographer, 1957/0672815W, ANM, Kuala Lumpur.

54 – Peter Moss, *Distant Archipelagos: Memories of Malaya* (London: iUniverse, 2004), 75. A number of Ng's photographs can be found in the following collection: Fifty seven photographs, fifteen mounted on sheets photographed by Ng Beh Leow, Kuala Lumpur, Malaya, 1957 (c) collected by Maj A. I. McGregor, Royal Army Ordnance Corps, 1984-10-162, National Army Museum, London.

the provenance of many colonial-era photographs of resettlement – colonial organisations such as the DPR and the FMIS often did not name the 'local photographers' they commissioned to produce the photographs through which resettlement was marketed to the world, with the output of such individuals simply being added to a body of unattributed 'official photography'.[55]

This practice of contracting out colonial photography to press and commercial photographers based in Malaya left an indelible mark in the style, composition and content of many of the very images that were sent back to the COI or distributed directly by the Malayan authorities to other clients abroad. This porous boundary between commercial and official photography in colonial Malaya meant that new modes of photographic practice that were developing beyond the reach of the colonial state, and beyond Malaya, were brought into the resettlement fold. Separate from but parallel with the Emergency, for example, was the rise of photography as a middle-class, amateur pastime in late-colonial Malaya – a local manifestation of what Karen Strassler calls the 'notable flowering of amateur [photographic] activity all over Asia' in the postwar decades.[56] This was encouraged by the colonial state, even while that same state strictly controlled photographic practice in resettlement areas. The Singapore Camera Club was established in 1950, for example, and organised the *Pan-Malayan Photographic Exhibition* from 1953 onwards.[57] The British Council in Kuala Lumpur hosted annual exhibitions organised by the Federation of Malayan Pictorialists – a group which fostered Humanist street photography, reportage and pictorialism by Malayan-based photographers.[58] A number of official and press photographers who produced resettlement photography were directly linked to such organisations: Wong Khye Weng was awarded a certificate of merit at the first Malayan Photographic Exhibition in Kuala Lumpur in 1950, for example.[59] Similarly, the commercial photographic studios that were operating to satisfy non-official interest in private photography throughout Malaya in this period, such as Messrs Lido Photo Company in Penang, were commissioned to work for local information officials when no official photographers were available.[60]

All of this occurred precisely as the published pictorial was also growing in popularity as a medium for photojournalism amongst Malaya's urban reading public. As Tim Harper notes, Malaya's publishing and print media industries developed rapidly in this period, exposing Malayan consumers to 'periodicals from abroad' while also witnessing the founding of 'new women's, students' and vocational magazines',[61] including pictorials. As a consequence, the Humanist photojournalism that was dominating international pictorial publishing via *Life* and *Picture Post* – resulting in what Andrew Blaikie calls 'the moment of photojournalism'[62] – and which would ultimately peak with Edward Steichen's USIS-financed *Family of Man* exhibition between 1955 and 1962,[63] was widely circulated in Malaya at precisely the same time as the New Villages were being photographed.

Pictorials featuring the work of Asian exponents of Humanist street photography such as the Hong Kong-based Fan Ho – known as the 'Henri Cartier-Bresson of the East' – were published in Singapore,[64] while regional pictorials produced by USIS, such as the English-language *Free World*, which began publication in 1952 and published photography by independent Asian photographers as well as by government agencies, including the FMIS,[65] and the Chinese-language *World Today* and *Four Seas Pictorial*, published in Hong Kong by USIS, celebrated Humanist depictions of life in non-communist Asia,[66] thus exposing the Malayan reading public to an international photojournalistic aesthetic that was Humanistic yet entirely within the bounds of colonial sensitivities.

The photography of resettlement thus needs to be understood in a wider context in which attempts to visually document and promote the supposed successes of the colonial state – the colonial gaze – developed in tandem with the rapid

55 – Sanction to Engage Local Photographers to Take Photographs for P.R., 1957/0673062, ANM, Kuala Lumpur.

56 – Karen Strassler, *Refracted Visions: Popular Photography and National Modernity in Java* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 45.
57 – Charmaine Toh, 'Pictorialism and Modernity in Singapore, 1950–60', *Southeast of Now*, 2, no. 2 (2018), 9–31.

58 – *Members' Exhibition of Pictorial Photography, 1958*, ed. by Federation of Malayan Pictorialists (Kuala Lumpur: Federation of Malayan Pictorialists, 1958).
59 – 'First Malayan Photo Exhibition Opens at KL Today', *Singapore Standard*, 30 August 1950, 11.
60 – Ng Boon Khai (Information Officer, Penang) to the Director, Information Services, Kuala Lumpur, 20 October 1951, Sanction to Engage Local Photographers to Take Photographs for P.R., 1957/0673062, ANM, Kuala Lumpur.
61 – T. N. Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 285, 287.
62 – Andrew Blaikie, 'Photography, Childhood and Urban Poverty: Remembering "the Forgotten Gorbals"', *Visual Culture in Britain*, 7, no. 2 (2006), 47–68.
63 – On this, see the *Family of Man* special issue, ed. by Katherine Hoffman, *History of Photography*, 29, no. 4 (2005), 317–77.
64 – 'He Fan: FRPS' [Fan Ho: FRPS], *Nanyang huabao* 2 (August 1957), 49. See also 'Mesmerizing Old Photos Provide Rare Glimpse of Old Hong Kong', 27 June 2017, M97 Shanghai blog, ⟨https://www.m97gallery.com/single-post/2017/06/27/mesmerizing-vintage-photos-provide-rare-glimpse-of-old-hong-kong⟩.
65 – 'Roughly two features a month [from the FMIS] appear in Free World' claimed 'Information Services Report, January 1953', 4, Information Services Report, 1953 (Monthly), Selangor Secretariat, 1957/0302893, ANM, Kuala Lumpur.
66 – Wang Meihsiang, 'Images of a Free World Made in Hong Kong: The Case of the *Four Seas* Pictorial', *Journal of Chinese Studies*, 64 (2017): 255–83.

expansion of amateur photography and photojournalism in Malaya, much of it informed by international trends and practices.

'What is the Squatter like as a man?'

> What is the squatter like as a man? It is difficult of course to generalise, but I think the average squatter is a typical peasant such as might be found in any country whether in Europe or Asia or elsewhere. On the good side he is reasonably honest, most hospitable and, as we all know, incredibly industrious. On the bad side, he is suspicious of outside interference, he finds all forms of control irksome, he is pig-headed, and he has an ingrained conviction that he knows best.[67]

Understanding the squatter – the 'typical peasant' who was the focus of resettlement – preoccupied an inordinate amount of time for colonial intelligence operatives in Malaya such as John Davis, who, at the time of writing the afore-cited account, was serving as a Chinese Affairs officer in the state of Perak. Not all assessments shared the sentiments expressed by Davis in this 1950 text – some officials were far more dismissive of the 'simple-minded and illiterate folk, desperate after being resettled'.[68] However, all agreed on the need to define, document and understand a group of people who were both familiar – that is, peasants – and different – that is, 'Chinese'. On the one hand, colonial officials approached the rural communities that they were resettling as 'transient people without history'; by moving such people, the state was also transforming them into Malayan New Villagers.[69] On the other, however, the state racialised its understanding of such people, stressing their Chineseness and often attributing certain behaviours or attitudes to their ethnic origins, thereby underlining 'the centrality of "race" as the key organising principle of Malayan society'.[70]

This racialised understanding of the squatter was reinforced by an entire field of ethnographic-cum-political study in late-colonial Malaya referred to as 'Chinese Affairs'. Chinese Affairs was developed in order to help 'control the rural Chinese more closely',[71] and to aid the process through which they could be resettled and 'Malayanised' – 'turned into Malayan [rather than Chinese] peasants'.[72] Despite its immediate aims to aid in resettlement and solve Malaya's 'Chinese problem', Chinese Affairs drew on a body of knowledge about Chinese communities in other parts of the British empire, and in pre-war China itself.[73] This included documenting all aspects of Malayan Chinese culture and behaviour, as well as appearance. Colonial texts are full of references to what the Chinese apparently looked like: '[T]he Chinese looks you in the face and is erect in carriage', surmised one British army training manual, for example.[74] Officers such as the afore-cited John Davis compiled accounts of how Malayan Chinese ate, dressed and behaved.[75] Leon Comber, a Chinese-speaking officer in Malaya's Special Branch, published an entire series of quasi-ethnographic books on topics ranging from Chinese ancestor worship to Chinese magic in Malaya.[76]

Many of these same discussions about how the Chinese squatter behaved, dressed and appeared were articulated in the photography of resettlement that was circulated from at least 1950 onwards, as photographs produced by the colonial state and distributed by organisations such as the COI focused with an almost ethnographic fascination on the figure of the squatter, even while highlighting the squatter's inherent poverty. Significantly, however, many of the photographs that were chosen by colonial or imperial authorities to showcase the squatter focused not on what the squatter was like as a man, but as a woman and child. Indeed, portraits of squatter mothers and children in the process of actually being resettled emerge in the 'colonial photographic archive' as a recurrent theme.

67 – John L. H. Davis, untitled radio broadcast script, 21 February 1950, Folder 11, Box 09/4/6, 16593, J. L. H. Davis Papers, Imperial War Museum, London.

68 – Ng Chow Hong, 'Report on Chinese Affairs', 30 July 1952, 1957/0567698, ANM, Kuala Lumpur.

69 – Zhou, 'Ecological Narratives', 291.

70 – Amrita Malhi, 'Race, Space, and the Malayan Emergency: Expelling Malay Muslim Communism and Reconstituting Malaya's Racial State, 1945–1954', *Itinerario*, 45, no. 3 (2021), 435–59 (436).

71 – Department of Information, *Communist Banditry in Malaya. The Emergency: With a Chronology of Important Events, June 1948–June 1951* (Kuala Lumpur: Federation of Malaya Department of Information, 1951), 27.

72 – D. Gray (Secretary of Chinese Affairs) to W. J. Watts (Secretary for Chinese Affairs, Kedah), 17 December 1951, File 1, MSS. Ind. Ocn. s. 320, W. J. Watts Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford University.

73 – On the development of the photographic image of the Chinese 'coolie', for example, see Sarah E. Fraser, 'Chinese as Subject: Photographic Genres in the Nineteenth Century', in *Brush and Shutter: Early Photography in China*, ed. by Jeffrey W. Cody and Frances Terpak (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press and The Getty Research Institute, 2011), 91–109.

74 – *Army Education Third Class Certificate. General Studies Assignments, Part 2: Malayan Background* (n.p. 1954), 10, Box 5 (3/19), GB0099 KCLMA, Papers of Dennis Edmund Blaquière Talbot, Liddel Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College London.

75 – Such as can be found in J. L. H. Davis, 'Talk on Malays and Chinese to FARELF Training School, March 1957', Folder 5/15–5/16, Box 09/4/3, 16593, J. L. H. Davis Papers, Imperial War Museum, London.

76 – Leon Comber, *Chinese Ancestor Worship in Malaya* (Singapore: Donald More, 1954); Leon Comber, *Chinese Magic and Superstitions in Malaya* (Singapore: Donald Moore, 1955).

Figure 1. Unknown photographer, 'Squatters or country people living in isolated jungle areas', ca. 1950. Royal Air Force, *Campaign in Malaya: Photographs* (London: RAF, ca. 1950). AIR 20/10664 (1), The National Archives, London.

Figure 2. Edgar Ainsworth, 'The Market Garden of the Tropics – Malayan Pineapples', 1931. Ink on paper, 102 × 152.5 cm. Empire Marketing Board Collection, 1935.693, Manchester Art Gallery © Manchester Art Gallery/Bridgeman Images.

Figure 1, a photograph featured in an RAF album from 1950 in which it is captioned with the phrase 'squatters or country people living in isolated jungle areas', is a typical example of the obsession with squatter mothers and children. The unnamed and unidentified women and children pictured in this image – perhaps part of a wider group of people who have been cropped out of the frame, as the inclusion of the shirtless non-Chinese boy and the protruding hand at the far left of the image would suggest – are chosen to represent an entire sociocultural category: the 'squatters or country people'. They wear conical bamboo *douli* hats, a recurrent prop in British colonial depictions of 'the Chinese' in Malaya that can be found in pre-war colonial propaganda (figure 2, for example),[77] although they lack almost any other material possessions with the exception of an umbrella which is being

77 – Fraser, 'Chinese as Subject', 94.

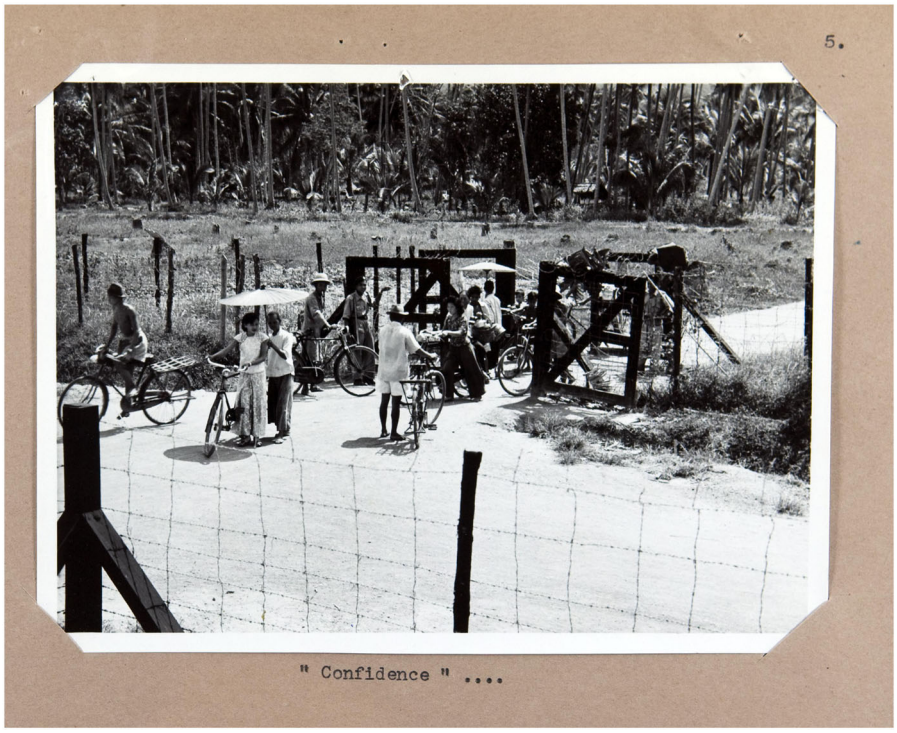

Figure 3. Unknown photographer, 'Confidence', ca. 1950. Royal Air Force, *Campaign in Malaya: Photographs* (London: RAF, ca. 1950). AIR 20/10664 (5), The National Archives, London.

Figure 4. Unknown photographer, 'Helping Granny – a Happy Scene in the Security of a Resettlement Area', ca. 1950. In 'New Villages in Malaya, circa 1952 [*sic*]'. Cellulose acetate. Ministry of Information Second World War Official Collection, K 13787, Imperial War Museum, London.

used as a parasol, another recurrent symbol which appears in other photographs included in this RAF album, such as figure 3 (a photograph which was used in other publications, in which it was credited to the DOI).[78] They wear simple and untidy clothes. They appear to squint against the sunlight, with two of the children and the woman at the back of the group staring back at the photographer, but the other two adults and children looking in different directions at persons or objects that are outside the frame, suggesting a sense of confusion.

78 – Such as Kathleen Carpenter, *The Password is Love: In the New Villages of Malaya* (London: Highway Press, 1955).

Such photographs may well have served as counterweights to the photographs of communist 'bandits', both dead and alive, who, as Susan Carruthers reminds us, were overwhelmingly presented as adult males.[79] They may have also reflected British colonial fears about the supposed fecundity of Chinese women in Malaya – a topic that is now being explored by gender historians.[80] Yet they presented the squatter woman and child as members of a distinct community, literally cropped from other communities in late-colonial Malaya, which was apprehensive about its forced resettlement and in need of the benevolent assistance of the colonial state so that it could raise itself out of poverty.

A similar example is shown in figure 4. Dated as a 1952 photograph in the Imperial War Museum catalogue today, this unattributed photograph was published in the 1950 *Federation of Malaya Annual Report* under the caption 'Helping Granny – a Happy Scene in the Security of a Resettlement Area'.[81] Given its appearance in a 1950 Malayan government publication, the photograph was most likely produced by a local photographer employed by an agency such as the DOI or commissioned by such an office. Showing an older lady squatting next to a tub that appears to have been recently filled with water from a camp tap, and washing clothes therein – perhaps one of the most universal of domestic tasks – this photograph's focus on the two male children who, unlike the older woman, are looking in the direction of the photographer, suggests a clear juxtaposition between the two generations: a *samfu*-clad 'granny' with her hair pulled back in a bun faces away from us even as two boys in the clothes of the modern Malayan villager – shirts and shorts – look happy and healthy in their new home.[82] Given the use of the image to illustrate government propaganda around resettlement, readers might surmise that such individuals are 'helping granny' not just with laundry but with the very process of resettlement. The image also contrasts the generally unkempt appearance of the children and the older woman, which it centres, with the geometric lines of the camp roofing in the background and the drain over which 'granny' is crouched.[83]

In the same Imperial War Museum collection can be found a photograph of 'a typical squatter family having a meal while "in transit"' (figure 5). In this image, the poverty of the squatter family is the focus of an apparently unstaged photograph, again almost certainly the output of a Malayan-based photographer, although it is not attributed as such, with very little to suggest a Malayan context. While the theme of laundry might have generated a sense of everyday familiarity around the 'Helping Granny' image, the eating of a family meal in this image included details that marked the squatters as distinctly Chinese – chopsticks and rice bowls – yet also as peasants. The 'squatter family' pictured here shares with the laundrywoman and her grandchildren a decidedly untidy appearance – patched items of clothing, bare feet and ungroomed hair.

We can see similar evidence of a colonial interest in the dining habits of squatters in the 1951 propaganda film *A New Life: Squatter Resettlement* (1951), which told the story of the transformation from squatter to New Villager by focusing on the family unit, and by filming squatter domestic activities. The film was produced by the Malayan Film Unit – the unit to which the former DPR photographer Wong Khye Weng had been transferred in late 1949. The film ends with 'a sequence of long shots of a family happily sitting down together to eat'.[84]

This intertextual focus on dining squatters almost certainly reflected debates around the importance of food control in the resettlement camps and New Villages, for one of the defining features of the resettlement scheme as a whole was the disruption of MCP access to food supplies from rural communities.[85] Yet it also became a central theme in other forms of visual propaganda, with depictions of well-fed Chinese families within resettlement camps being contrasted with the

79 – Carruthers, 'Why Can't We See Insurgents?'

80 – Such as Kate Imy, *Losing Hearts and Minds: Race, War, and Empire in Singapore and Malaya, 1915–1960* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, forthcoming).

81 – *Federation of Malaya Annual Report, 1950* (Kuala Lumpur: Government Press, 1951), 8.

82 – Newspaper editors who used photographs of squatter children stressed the supposed willingness of their subjects to engage with photographers: 'Happy to leave their communist infested squatter areas', reads the caption to a Public Relations Office photograph published in early 1950, 'these Chinese smile for the cameraman …'. Untitled image in *Indian Daily Mail* (Singapore), 24 January 1950, 4.

83 – On the geometry of the camps/New Villages in photographic accounts of resettlement, see Sioh, 'Ecology of Postcoloniality', 737.

84 – Hee, 'Anti-Communist Moving Images', esp. 600.

85 – On food control during the Emergency, see Hack, 'Malayan Emergency as Counter-Insurgency Paradigm'.

Figure 5. Unknown photographer, 'A typical squatter family having a meal while "in transit"', ca. 1950. In 'New Villages in Malaya, circa 1952 [*sic*]'. Cellulose acetate. Ministry of Information Second World War Official Collection, K 13809, Imperial War Museum, London.

Figure 6. Unknown artist, 'Propaganda Pamphlet, Malaya', 1953. Ink on paper. Psychological Warfare: Far East and SE Asia (pp 22 to 41G), FO 1110/534, The National Archives, London.

supposed plight of the quintessential MCP 'bandit with torn clothes, ribs sticking out and generally starving'[86] which adorned colonial leaflets designed to encourage communists to surrender (see, for instance, figure 6).

This obsession with squatter dining would continue well into the 1950s, outlasting the focus on food control of the early Emergency years, as depictions of squatter families eating together, always with chopsticks, became a common theme in resettlement photography, often overlapping with the 'mother-and-child' trope. Images produced in this period would even be deployed to illustrate empire-wide notions of 'Chineseness' beyond Malaya. Figure 7 is part of the COI collection of photographs that has been deposited at The National Archives in London.[87] On the reverse side of the image is a caption which reads 'a neighbour takes charge of the baby while the small-holder and his wife take their mid-day meal'. The photograph is listed as part of a series of images that were produced to promote Malaya's

86 – D. W. Stewart, 'Propaganda', 31 July 1951, SCA PHG 92/1951, Publicity and Propaganda – General, 1957/0470985, ANM, Kuala Lumpur.

87 – The photograph is numbered D.35533 (13) in 'Malaya: 135 Photographs Compiled by the Central Office of Information Depicting Agriculture and Food Production', INF 10/206, Part 4, The National Archives, London.

Figure 7. Unnamed British official photographer, 'A neighbour takes charge of the baby while the smallholder and his wife take their mid-day meal', ca. 1954. In 'Malaya: 135 Photographs Compiled by the Central Office of Information Depicting Agriculture and Food Production', D.35533, INF 10/206, Part 4, The National Archives, London.

Figure 8. Unknown artist, 'Meal time in a New Village Home'. In Joan Chamberlin, *People from China: Pictures of Malaya and Hong Kong* (London: Edinburgh House Press 1958), 8–9. © British Library Board (General Reference Collection, 12839.h.34).

pineapple industry and is filed alongside others that may have been taken by the COI's John Jochimsen during his visit to Malaya in 1954, although it is listed in The National Archives collections as being simply a 'British official photograph'. Significantly, the image managed to combine visual markers of the poverty of the squatter family, surrounded by rudimentary and ramshackle furniture and utensils, *and* material evidence of their 'Chineseness', from chopsticks to Chinese calendar art. In doing so, it apparently captured something fundamentally representative of 'the Chinese', at least as far as British educators in the 1950s were concerned. A line drawing entitled 'Meal time in a New Village Home' which was featured in a 1958 book for 'colouring, cutting out, flannelgraph use and other activities' by Joan Chamberlin under the title *People from China: Pictures of Malaya and Hong Kong*, was based directly on this COI photograph (figure 8). The text accompanying the drawing in Chamberlain's book reads much like a Chinese Affairs-inspired description of squatters: 'They eat the rice with chopsticks from cheap china bowls bought at the store in the village'.[88]

The use of resettlement photography to illustrate pan-imperial educational texts on 'the Chinese' also hints at the ethnographic potential of such images. The squatter might well have been a peasant 'such as might be found in any country',[89] but images which pictured the squatter next to visual markers of ethnicity or culture would also ensure that they be understood as Chinese. One of the defining features of many of the photographic depictions of squatters that were published from the very start of resettlement, for example, were the symbols of 'peasantness' such as simple and poor-quality household goods as well as material markers of

88 – Joan Chamberlin, *People from China: Pictures of Malaya and Hong Kong* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1958), 8–9.
89 – Davis, untitled radio broadcast script.

Figure 9. Unknown photographer, 'Incident at Kebun Bahru, Malaya, c. 1952 [*sic*]'. Cellulose acetate. Ministry of Information Second World War Official Collection, K 15034, Imperial War Museum, London.

Chineseness such as chopsticks, items of clothing such as conical *douli* hats and *samfu*, and Chinese art or calligraphy. These could be used to create a visual distinction between Chinese squatters and other communities in Malaya. Figure 9 is part of a series of images produced by unnamed photographers in Malaya who were either employed or commissioned by the FMIS, and which was assessed to be 'one of the best features of the month' in March 1953 by officials in Kuala Lumpur.[90] It shows a 'young orphan' called Puah Kang Swee in Kebun Bahru Village, shortly after his parents had been allegedly killed by MCP fighters; noticeably, the orphan and his new adoptive father are literally framed by material markers of their Chineseness on the timber of their New Village home, including a spring couplet featuring Chinese script on the doorframe, and Chinese advertising and calendar art (*yuefenpai*) on one of the inner walls of the house. Like the new generation of New Villagers depicted in 'Helping Granny', they are clothed in the short-sleeved cotton shirt of the modern Malayan villager – suggesting they are in the process of being transformed from squatter to New Villager.

90 – 'March 1953 Report', Information Services Report, 1953 (Monthly), Selangor Secretariat, 1957/0302893, ANM, Kuala Lumpur.

Material markers of Chineseness could just as easily be attached to New Villagers in outdoor settings. The aptly titled *New Village in Malaya* (figure 10) is a collection of photographs taken by uncredited photographers in the village of Pokok Assam in northern Malaya which was published by the COI in the same year as the portrait of the orphan Puah Kang Swee was taken. The cover of *New Village in Malaya* shows a photograph of three resettled women and their children at the gate of a village: one Chinese, one Indian and one Malay. If a potential reader was in any doubt about the racial identity of any of the women on the publication's cover – even despite the three being dressed in ethnically specific outfits – then they needed to look no further than the extended subtitle that was superimposed over the women themselves: 'Over 500 New Villages in the Federation of Malaya Shelter Chinese, Indian and Malayan [*sic*] Families Once at the Mercy of the Communist Terrorists'.[91]

91 – Central Office of Information, *New Village in Malaya (Set of 12 Plates)* (London: COI, 1953).

This 'parent and child' theme – in which visibly poor yet clearly Chinese squatter adults, usually mothers, are shown holding infants – would remain a regular

Figure 10. Unknown photographer, Cover of *New Village in Malaya (Set of 12 Plates)* (London: COI, 1953). LOT 7301 (G), Prints and Photographs Reading Room, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

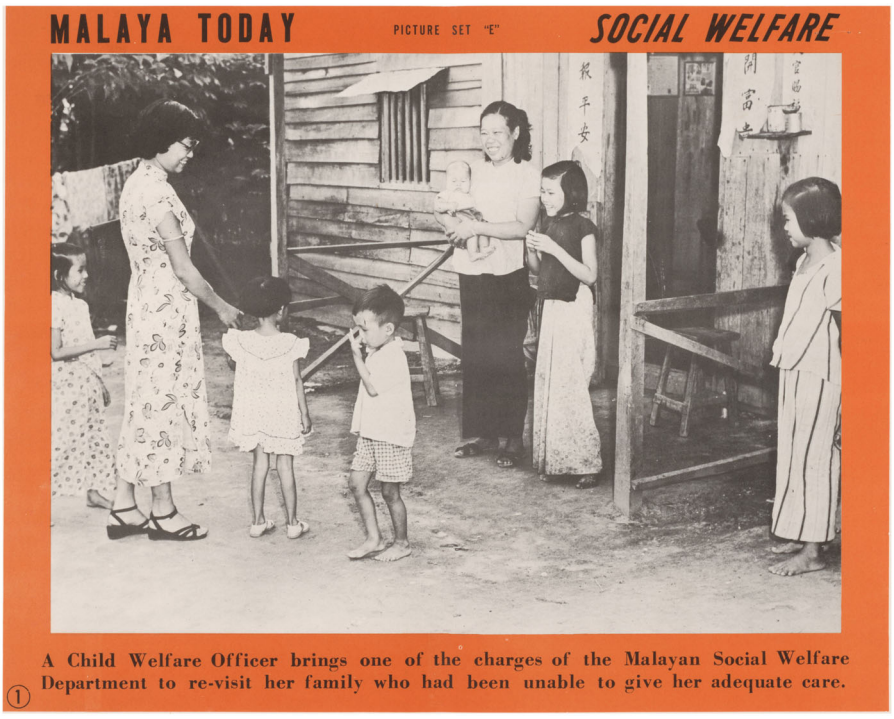

Figure 11. Unknown photographer, 'Malaya Today (Photo Poster Set "E")', ca. 1955. USIA Poster, file number 306-PPA-82, National Archives, College Park, MD.

feature in photography produced through until the mid-1950s. It was found in photographic features in regional outlets such as the *Straits Times*,[92] and would be used by USIS anti-communist propaganda celebrating resettlement's supposed success in defeating communism (figure 11), much of which was sourced directly by American editors from the FMIS.[93] It reached its apogee, however, in a series of photographs credited to the DOI, thus almost certainly produced by Malayan-based photographers, and published in Kathleen Carpenter's 1955 ode to Christian missionary work during resettlement – *The Password is Love*. This book features

92 – Harry Miller, 'Resettling 500,000 Squatters', *Straits Times Annual* (Singapore), 1 January 1952, 76–77.

93 – 'Information Services Report, February 1955', Information Services Report (Monthly), 1974/00575, ANM, Kuala Lumpur.

Figure 12. Charles Hewitt, 'A village scene in Malaya as the country builds a democratic way of life during the war against communist rule', 1953. Original publication: *Picture Post* – 6422 – 'Air Rescue From Malaya', pub. 1953. Photograph by Charles Hewitt/Picture Post/Hulton Archive/Getty Images.

images of squatter women and children at various points of the resettlement process – and reproduces photographs that had appeared in other collections, such as a cropped version of figure 3 that had appeared in the aforementioned RAF album. In most cases, the squatters were framed by the meagre household objects they brought with them from their defunct villages, and the squatter women themselves gradually transformed from 'resentful and suspicious' new arrivals into compliant mothers at New Village clinics, rearing a new generation of 'would-be scholars' at village schools – while never losing the visual markers of their ethnicity.[94]

Be it in missionary publications such as Carpenter's book, RAF albums or Malayan government propaganda, images of the resettled squatter were remarkably consistent, and reflected a wider colonial discourse which emphasised class (peasant), race (Chinese) and gender. The paternalism and ethnography that were at the heart of Chinese Affairs influenced the ways in which such images were contextualised through captioning, ensuring that such photography sat coherently within a wider set of media, from promotional literature to newsreels, which promoted the apparent benefits of resettlement to an often sceptical international audience, and which sought to make the scheme appear both justified and even desirable.

94 – Carpenter, *Password is Love*. References to squatters being 'resentful and suspicious' or 'would-be scholars' are taken from the captions of unnumbered photographs included in this book.

Emergency Humanism

In terms of composition and subject matter, a distinctly Humanist style can be detected in many of the squatter photographs already examined, from 'Helping Granny' to 'A Neighbour Takes Charge of the Baby'. Taken out of their immediate Emergency context, and stripped of their explanatory captions or titles, many of these images look unremarkable as products of early to mid-1950s photojournalistic reportage. At the most basic level, a focus on the squatter family, particularly squatter women and children engaged in mundane activities, from washing laundry to eating a meal, paralleled the tradition of French Humanist photography which 'emphasized the dignity of the photographed subject, while celebrating everyday life

Figure 13. Charles Hewitt, 'A young woman labouring in Malayan village', 1953. Photograph by Charles Hewitt/Picture Post/Hulton Archive/Getty Images.

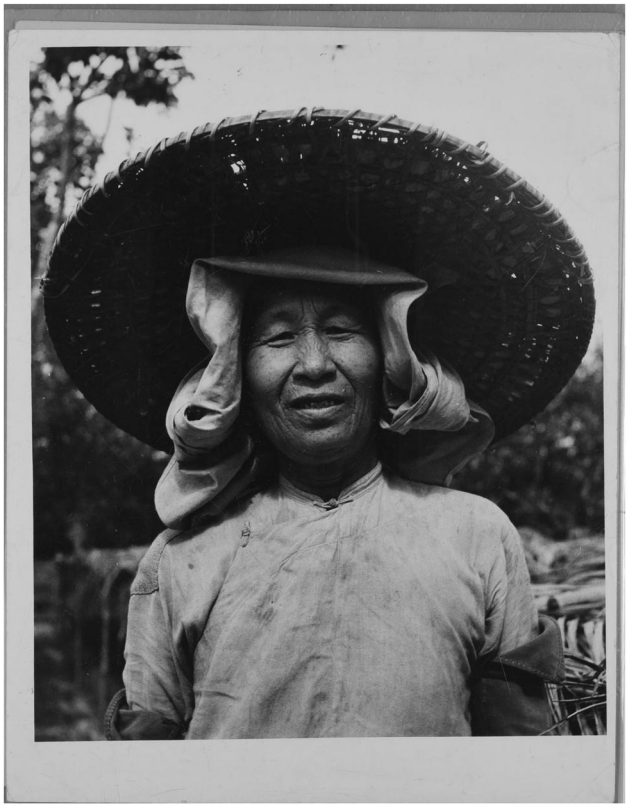

Figure 14. Unnamed British official photographer, 'Close-up of Chinese woman weeder', ca. 1954. In 'Malaya: Agricultural Research', D.72365, INF 10/211/35, The National Archives, London.

and shared human experiences in a humorous, empathetic, and poetic light'[95] – the much lauded 'poetry of the streets'.[96] Yet in their focus on the everyday and familial, such images also appear to have chimed with notions of universality that underpinned the most famous of American articulations of Humanism – *The Family of Man*.[97] As the literature on Humanist photography suggests, the belief in a supposed oneness of humanity that could be celebrated in depictions of common experiences – eating, washing, child-rearing – was a central theme of this exhibition, as was the 'documentary aesthetic' which found fascination in spontaneous moments of the lives of socially marginalised groups and individuals.[98] The fact that British photographers who worked in this style while exploring life in British cities for *Picture Post* were sent to Malaya to photograph resettlement – Charles Hewitt, for example – was no coincidence. While a number of the images that Hewitt produced in New Villages during his February 1953 visit to Malaya were never actually published, Hewitt had been sent to the country to produce a feature in support of the Emergency for *Picture Post*.[99] The resulting photographs bring the Humanist quality often associated with *Picture Post* to the New Village context, yet they also look remarkably similar to the output of Malayan photographers, including those commissioned by the colonial authorities, at precisely the same time, underlying the extent to which a Humanist aesthetic was no longer the monopoly of London-based photographers (see, for instance, figure 12). Hewitt's 'A Young Woman Labouring in a Malayan Village' (figure 13), for example, shares many of the same traits as images such as 'Helping Granny' or 'a typical squatter family having a meal while "in transit"', photographs that were almost certainly taken by Malayan photographers rather than by COI personnel, including markers of both the 'peasantness' and 'Chineseness' of the photographer's subject. The image is imbued with a sense

95 – Cécile Bishop, 'Race as Aesthetics? Denis Colomb in the Caribbean', *French Studies*, 72, no. 1 (2017), 53–72 (47).
96 – Hamilton, 'Poetry of the Streets?'

97 – Eric J. Sandeen, 'The International Reception of '*The Family of Man*', *History of Photography*, 29, no. 4 (2005), 344–55, ⟨https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03087298.2005.10442816⟩; see also Rob Kroes, 'Projecting National Identities Through Cultural Diplomacy: The Case of *The Family of Man*', in *The Dynamics of Interconnections in Popular Culture(s)*, ed. by Ray B. Browne and Ben Urish (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 205–20.
98 – Hamilton, 'Poetry of the Streets?'.
99 – Stacey, 'Air Rescue in Malaya'.

of sympathy and perhaps even admiration that is more in keeping with the reportage associated with *Picture Post* and Humanist photography more generally. Perhaps ironically, given the underlying reason for resettlement – undermining Malayan communism – the image even betrays references to socialist realism in its almost heroic depiction of a happy and sturdy New Village woman working the land with a farming implement from a low angle, even while it hints at a much older ethnographic fascination with photographic vignettes of Chinese 'types' common in late nineteenth-century commercial photography and associated in the academic literature with individuals such as John Thomson,[100] a genre which appears to have influenced COI editors and photographers when it came to their work on 'personalia' in Malaya in the mid-1950s (see, for instance, figure 14).[101]

Emergency-era photographs of resettled squatters thus suggest not so much the unidirectional colonial gaze involving European photographers and Chinese subjects, but the inherent contradictions that lay at the heart of the Humanist movement, as well as that movement's influence well beyond imperial metropoles – contradictions which are now being unpacked by scholars who work in other geographic contexts. The literature on Hewitt's *Picture Post* by scholars such as Andrew Blaikie, for example, highlights the contradiction between the 'ameliorist documentary humanism' that typified the work of many postwar photojournalists employed at that publication, and the often overlooked 'banal imperialism' that it also endorsed. As Blaikie notes, even while celebrating through social realist photography the plight of the poor and socially marginalised, *Picture Post* traded in 'stock stereotypes' when documenting life beyond England.[102]

This contradiction was even more pronounced in the colonial context. As Cécile Bishop suggests, for instance, there was an inherent tension around issues of race in the Humanist photographic tradition when it came to the non-European context in the 1950s: 'On the one hand, this universalizing, humanist rhetoric [of postwar photography] undermines racial codes', argues Bishop, for it stressed the supposed universality of the human experience – we all eat meals and launder our clothes, after all. However, 'such imagery runs the risk of erasing both the historical inequalities under which the subjects live and the complexity of cultural difference'.[103] In other words, despite all they share aesthetically with the 'Gorbals boys' of late 1940s Glasgow,[104] images of squatter children in Malaya were produced by offices such as the FMIS and distributed by the COI to document a late-colonial and stereotypical 'Other' – the Chinese squatter – while contrarily underlining the Humanist universality that such 'Others' engaged in – eating, doing laundry, childcare – thus decontextualising the violence of resettlement. As Douglas Smith notes, a number of the most celebrated of Humanist photojournalists were themselves well aware of this contradiction, and openly struggled with the 'conflicting demands of journalistic integrity, political sympathy and public expectation'.[105] Henri Cartier-Bresson, for example, wrestled with the problem of photography being made to work for 'both the reproduction and the undoing of stereotype' – a fact that was illustrated in debates around depictions of Chinese people in a series of images he produced in China in 1949.[106]

The issue was, of course, context. Apparently spontaneous photographs of an older woman washing clothes, a family eating together or a parent with a child are the stock fare of postwar Humanist photojournalism, the type of image one might expect to see in *The Family of Man* or on the pages *Picture Post*. Yet the inclusion of such images in COI, FMIS or USIS publications in the early 1950s, and their location via captioning and placement in 'optimistic developmental narratives of resettlement' that dominated colonial accounts,[107] demonstrate just how malleable postwar Humanist photography could be. Here was a form which could be deployed to fit the narratives imposed on Malayan communities by colonial

100 – James R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), 161–67.

101 – Such portraits are labelled in the COI collection at The National Archives as 'personalia', and cover an extraordinary range of racialised 'types' in Malaya.

102 – Andrew Blaikie, 'Image and Inventory: *Picture Post* and the British View of Scotland, 1938–1957', *IRSS*, 38 (2013), 11–48.

103 – Bishop, 'Race as Aesthetics', 59.

104 – Blaikie, 'Photography, Childhood and Urban Poverty'.

105 – Douglas Smith, 'From One China to the Other: Cartier-Bresson, Sartre and Photography in the Age of Decolonization', *Photographies*, 2, no. 1 (2009), 60.

106 – Ibid.

107 – Zhou, 'Ecological Narratives'.

authorities, even while it gave agency to Malayan photographers themselves who found employment or freelance work with those same colonial authorities.

Recent scholarship on the concept of 'Cold War Humanism' is instructive in this regard. There is no doubt that some of the most celebrated vehicles of American Humanist photography during the 1950s, from *The Family of Man* exhibition to *Life*, 'were deployed as part of the USA's ideological battles against Communism during the Cold War'.[108] American agencies funded such work and the Humanist aesthetic leant itself neatly to American Cold War ideas about the centrality of the family unit and the supposed unity of humankind. The archival files suggest that British Humanist institutions such as *Picture Post* and the various pictorials it inspired in late-colonial Malaya served a similar purpose and were seen in this way by colonial intelligence officers. The 'Picture-post [*sic*] type of vehicle', as one colonial official described it – 'well illustrated and geographically orientated to the innate parochialism of South-East Asia' – was identified as an important medium for propagating government messages about the Emergency.[109]

None of this suggests, however, that British or American attempts to 'Humanise the Other'[110] through such platforms necessarily meant that the fruits of resettlement photography were interpreted this way in Malaya – or anywhere else. If, as Sarah E. James has argued, the 'compassionate and egalitarian' depictions of the socially marginalised which typified Humanist photography meant that it could appeal to Soviet bloc editors as much as it could to European and American middle-class readers, then why could it not also appeal to a rising community of Malayan-based photographers who were employed to create a body of work that would be later used by institutions in Kuala Lumpur, London or Washington, DC to sustain distinctly Cold War – and racialised – agendas?[111] We see this range of interpretation in the very different treatment of some images that Malayan photographers created for the colonial state. Figure 3, for example – an image of squatters coming and going from a resettlement camp gate that was credited to the DOI and published in the aforementioned RAF album – was utilised by the MCA in its official *Malayan Mirror* newspaper in June 1953. Here, the image was used not to denote the 'confidence' that squatters apparently felt under resettlement according to the interpretation given in the 1950 RAF album, but to illustrate the MCA's view of 'the lot of the "settlers"' who lived within the camps: 'But for the pioneering spirit of the Chinese and their endless fortitude and endless energy, many of these New Villages would have remained jungle'.[112] With the addition of an entirely different caption, and with its placement in an MCA newspaper rather than a government or military publication, the image could be transformed from a banal instance of late-colonial propaganda into a typical example of 1950s Humanist social realism.

108 – Sarah E. James, 'Henri Cartier-Bresson's "Man and Machine": Rethinking the Cold War Traffic in Photographs, against the Grain', *Photography and Culture*, 14, no. 2 (2021), 135–54 (142).

109 – A. J. W. Hockenhull, untitled memorandum, 8 August 1957, Colonial Territories: Review of Information Work in Smaller Territories: Mauritius, Sierra Leone, Federation of Malaya, FO 1110/1057, The National Archives, London.

110 – A phrase I borrow from James, 'Henri Cartier-Bresson's "Man and Machine"', 142.

111 – Sarah E. James, 'A Post-Fascist Family of Man? Cold War Humanism, Democracy and Photography in Germany', *Oxford Art Journal*, 35, no. 3 (2012), 315–36.

112 – 'Grim Problems Facing the New Villages', *Malayan Mirror*, 1, no. 1 (14 June 1953), 9.

Conclusion

In many ways, the story of colonial photography in support of resettlement during the Malayan Emergency is straightforward. A European colonial power used photographs, alongside words and weapons, to justify the forced resettlement of hundreds of thousands of people into strictly controlled camps as it sought to defeat a communist-led insurgency. The state commissioned, selected and published photographs that reflected the racist sentiments held by many colonial officers, while at the same controlling the ability of others to see Malaya's New Villages and their inhabitants in any manner other than that sanctioned by the state.

However, I would suggest that the photography of resettlement presents us with a more complicated picture – one which has been overshadowed by some of the recent literature, with its emphasis on the use of photographs of 'withered

corpses by the jungle path',[113] and the tendency to locate the Malayan Emergency in a transnational history of British colonial violence.[114] Just as the more established research on colonial filmmaking in Malaya during the Emergency is demonstrating how British propaganda overlapped with the development of a 'local, postcolonial cinema' in which colonially trained but Malayan producers, cameramen and editors were beginning to articulate a view of Malaya that was independent of Britain, albeit still 'mediated, controlled and recorded in London',[115] so too did the photography of resettlement – and particularly photographic depictions of the squatter – speak of influences and connections that went well beyond British control. None of this contradicts the fact that photography was a tool of counterinsurgency, or that many photographers, including local photographers employed by the colonial state, viewed Emergency-era Malaya through a distinctly colonial gaze. However, that same photography can also be understood as part of a complex interaction between decolonisation, postwar photojournalism and increasing levels of agency on the part of non-European photographers. In part, such complexities have been overlooked due to the sheer difficulty involved in matching specific photographs to the individuals who produced them. I would also suggest, however, that the tendency in some of the wider literature on photography and counterinsurgency to assume a monolithic colonial photographic archive has also played a role in encouraging a particular approach to the study of photography in late-colonial Malaya – one which has tended not to consider the unique circumstances of photographic production or the rise of photography beyond the colonial state in its analysis.

Karl Hack warns against a 'post-revisionist' approach to the study of the Malayan Emergency, one in which 'blanket stereotypes that claim to explain all policies over all periods [of the Emergency] can be little more than propaganda or at best naïve oversimplification'.[116] I would argue that we need to be equally cautious in assuming a singular 'Emergency photography' that is defined by the 'systematic taxonomy of the colonial archives'[117] when exploring the uses of photography to promote resettlement. The shift towards a Humanistic depiction of the squatter, for example, complicates the 'blanket stereotypes' around the dehumanising efforts of the colonial state in applying the colonial gaze to resettlement – without, of course, negating the violence, racism and surveillance that defined resettlement and colonial knowledge systems such as Chinese Affairs.

The next step is to do more to excavate the role of Malayan photographers and editors themselves – individuals whose role has been largely obscured, yet who worked parallel with the likes of John Jochimsen and Charles Hewitt to stock the libraries of the COI, and to create the images from which resettlement was promoted to the world. In addition, we might begin to think more critically about the legacies of resettlement photography in the post-Emergency academic study of this conflict, be that in the unquestioned recycling of squatter 'mother-and-child' photographs in some of the most often-cited studies of the New Villages,[118] to the frequent use of COI and *Picture Post*-inspired photographs to illustrate the covers of recent scholarly publications on the Emergency. Most importantly, however, we need to start considering the ways in which colonial photography overlapped with wider local and international trends to create a specific 'picture' of the Malayan squatter – a picture that was a product of the Emergency, but which also reflected a wider postwar, Humanist aesthetic.

113 – Yao, *Malayan Emergency*, 41.

114 – Such as Elkins, *Legacy of Violence.*

115 – Such as Rice, 'Distant *Voices of Malaya*'.

116 – Karl Hack, '"Devils that Suck the Blood of the Malayan People": The Case for Post-Revisionist Analysis of Counter-insurgency Violence', *War in History*, 25, no. 2 (2018), 202–26 (208).

117 – Sam I-shan, 'The Past Recollected: *One Day We'll Understand*', in *Sim Chi Yin: One Day We'll Understand* (Berlin: Zilberman, 2021), 30–5 (35).

118 – Note, for example, the photographs of New Village residents by Sukar Surif which were published in *Chinese New Villages in Malaya: A Community Study*, ed. by Ray Nyce and Shirle Gordon (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, 1973).

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