

LAYOUT

General Geographical Location

Sekinchan is one of the most successful Chinese padi areas located in the State of Selangor. It is about 67 miles away from Kuala Lumpur and about 44 miles from Klang. It can be reached by the ordinary means of land transportation after crossing the ferry at Kuala Selangor (about 16 miles away) whose jurisdiction it is under.

The Sites that have been referred to so far are the areas in which the houses of the padi-farmers are located. Altogether, there are 3 such sites. The main village is roughly situated in the centre, flanked by Site B on the right as one enters the Village; and, on the left by Site C. The padi lots are to be found at the back of the Village, and Sites B and C, with the road from Kuala Selangor in front of the 2 Sites. Site A is located some 3 miles away from the main village and can be reached by a narrow, undulating laterite road just before reaching Sekinchan. On the whole, Sekinchan is quite well planned in the sense that location is much facilitated by specific areas being or have been ear-marked for specific purposes i.e., to say, most, if not all, of the farmers' houses are in Sites A, B, and C. All the padi lots are concentrated in one area approximately 5,100 acres; and in the main village are found the various features of a "modern" society, like schools, cinema, community hall, etc.

About half a mile away from the main village is the fishing centre of Bagan. Here, the main activity is fishing, and, as such, has been left out of the survey.

Arrangement of the Houses in Sites A, B, and C¹

All the houses in the 3 Sites are built in straight rows, the number of which depend on the number of houses found in each Site. Generally, except in the case of the first² rows in Sites A, B, and C, and the last row in Site A, there are two houses placed "back to back" with a narrow, laterite lane between the rows. The system of numbering houses is very odd here and will be commented on in greater detail when we consider each individual Site on its own.

Approximately 91 acres in area, Site A is isolated away from the other two sites by a distance of about 3 miles if we approach it by road. It consists of the farmers' dwellings and a school area. Although Map 1 lists 248 houses, there are actually about 120 inhabited houses only, the rest being vacant or non-existent while the school area consists of houses numbered 143-158 and 216-230 as shown in the Map.¹

1. See sketch maps 1, 2 and 3 in Appendix I(a), (b), (c).

2. By "first" here, we mean the row where house numbers start from No.1.

There are altogether 8 rows of alleged houses if we consider the "back-to-back" houses as rows. Apart from lanes leading to the houses, the whole Site is surrounded by either padi lots or wasteland. According to the numbering of houses, the main road from the main village reaches the last row first with the back of the houses in this row facing the road.

The system of numbering houses here will confuse a stranger when he goes to Site A for the first time. If one were to stand at the end of the road coming from the main village, marked X³ on the map, the first row starts right at the end. The house bearing No.1 will be at the extreme left. The houses are numbered with odd numbers as one move down the first row; even numbers as one move down the second row; odd again for the third row; even for the fourth, and so on. Therefore, we have houses with odd numbers facing those with even numbers while the last row (i.e. 8th row) with even numbers faces the road. Another peculiar feature about the numbering system is that the next consecutive odd number after the last house of the odd number row follows on after the last house of the even number row. For example, No.63 in the third row is allotted to the house which is "backed" to No.62 instead of the house which is "backed" to No.2 as the case should be if a consistent system is to be followed. In the same way, the next consecutive even number after the last house of the even number row is affected. As a result, we find that two rows of numbers are in an ascending order while the next two will be in descending order. No reasons were given by those in charge of numbering the houses. One can only suggest that the officials while in attempting the same procedure as practiced in the numbering of houses found in the towns failed to realise that the row of houses could not be extended indefinitely and also failed to take into account of their "back-to-back" system which is not found in towns or the usual villages.

The biggest of the 3 Sites, Site B is approximately 180.4 acres in area.⁴ There are altogether 13 rows of houses with 35 houses in each row making up a total of 455 houses.⁵ The front of the last row houses according to numbering faces the padi lots while the back of the first row faces the road from Kuala Selangor to Sabak Bernam. If one were to stand in front of the first row, the main village area would be on one's left and on one's right, the road leading to Site A some 50 yards away. The set-up of row structure is the same as that found in Site A.

The same peculiar system of numbering exhibited in Site A is found here with one difference. At the end of each row, except the last one, there is a great jump of the numbering to 400 and above. This can be easily explained for these houses bearing numbers 400 upwards are new extensions to the Site. They are new houses built either to cope up with population increase or by new immigrants who have move in from other areas. The numbering of these new houses has its own peculiar features. One would expect No.404 (since No.403 is the last house of the last row

3. See Map 1, in Appendix I(a)

4. See Map 2, in Appendix I(b)

5. These figures are taken from the village map supplied. They may not be accurate as the map was made sometime ago.

originally) to be the house next to the last house of the first row (i.e. after House No.61). Instead, it begins immediately after No.403 and follows an ascending order till it reaches No.455 which is the last house of the first row. It also deviates from the original system of numbering in the sense that instead of having one row with even (or odd) numbers and odd (or even) in the next row, the numbers follow an ascending order for the next neighbour till the last house of the original row with the next ascending number going to the new house immediately opposite or the house "back to back". For example, taking No.407 which is the last house in the last row, No.408 will be at the back of house No.407. The number goes on ascending till it comes to No.411 which is next to the last house of the originally last but one row. No.412 then goes to the house immediately opposite it. It is rather difficult to hazard an explanation except that the officials are very inconsistent in their system of numbering houses. Such inconsistencies may be explained by the fact that when new officials are assigned to Sekinchan they ignore what their predecessors had done. It may also be that extension No.400 was built first and No.455 last.

Another interesting feature about the layout of the houses is its relation to the dialect groups found there. The following comments apply only to those houses allocated for this analysis and are shaded in different colours in the Map to denote the different dialects groups.⁶ Except for rare occasions, we find that there is a tendency for people of the same dialect group to be neighbours. More often than not, we find that a few houses together either on the same row or (and) on the opposite row have occupants of the same dialect group. From experience in the field, it is found that this tendency does not apply to the allocated section exclusively but it is also true for the whole Site in general. There are many reasons for this "segregation". The main one would be that it is easier to maintain neighbourly friendliness and contact with families speaking the same dialect than with those speaking other dialects. Other reasons may be that the group were old friends or mutual friends in other areas before settling down in Sekinchan.

Site C is the second largest site with an approximate area of 124.8 acres.⁷ Though it has more rows of houses (15 altogether), there are fewer houses in each row - 23 for the first 2 rows and 21 for the remainder, making a total of 331 houses in all.⁸ The same general geographical location found in Site B is also true here. The only difference is that if one were to stand in front facing the houses of the last row, the town would be on one's left while the road from Kuala Selangor to S. Bernam would be on one's right.

The strange system of numbering houses that we have seen in Sites A and B is also exhibited here. One major difference in this respect between Site B and Site C is that there is no extension of new houses in Site C and, therefore, the jumble system of numbering houses 400 onwards

6. See Map 2, in Appendix I(b)

7. See Map 3, in Appendix I(c)

8. These figures are taken from the Village Map. They may not be accurate as the map was drawn some time ago.

does not exist. Apart from this, there are two minor differences. Houses No.1 and 2 do not seem to be in line with the first house of the other rows. Actually, these 2 were put in by the writer for they were missing in the Village Map. We can only speculate as to the reason. They may have been overlooked by those who drew the map. This is not of great significance as it has been remarked earlier that the total number of houses on the Site itself need not correspond to that given on the map. There also appear to be two houses having the same number of No.178. This may again be due to the carelessness of those who drew the map supplied.

Where the relation of layout to dialect groups is concerned, the same conclusions reached for Site B can be applied to Site C. The only difference is that such "segregation" appears to be more marked in this Site.⁹ For example, we find that with the exception of three houses (one occupied by a Henghwa household and the other two by Cantonese), the whole of the third row is occupied by Hokkien houses.

Finally, for the two Sites of B and C as a whole, it was discovered through experience in the field that most of the houses there are inhabited. For those few exceptional cases, the houses were either too dilapidated for habitation or the previous occupants have shifted elsewhere.

9. See Map 3, in Appendix I(c) on page 44.