Abstract

To date, Peta Ikan Village has enjoyed 120 years of existence. It was originally a fishing settlement, which has experienced three phases of development, namely, the pre-1943 era, the period 1943-1945 and the post-war era. In the first two phases, fishing activities played an important role. But the economic structure changed after the Second World War.

Since 1959, Singapore has set herself on the road of modernization. This has brought about significant changes in the economic structure. For example, the labour force in manufacturing rose from 14.1% in 1957 to 19.2% in 1966. On the other hand, the labour force engaged in the primary sector dropped from 8.5% to 3.5%. The development of technology, transportation, mass communication, the proliferation of education and the raising of educational standards, together with economic development, have led to an increase in social mobility which, in turn, has affected certain changes in the socio-economic structure. Those changes are manifested in Peta Ikan Village. The social and economic transformation in Peta Ikan Village after 1959 was in part due to the pressure of the increase in population. At the same time, the social and economic development of Singapore has also provided the villagers with economic opportunities which serve as a pulling force on migration.

The economic activities in Peta Ikan Village have turned from one in which fishery was predominant into a multiple economy. Of the gainfully employed labour force in the village, some 49% were blue-collar workers in various industries other than fishing, 30% in white-collar service, and only 12% in
fishing industry. The development of fishing industry in the village now faces many problems. Chief among these are: lack of capital, low educational level of the fisherman, and lack of enthusiasm among the younger labour force for fishery. These factors have together formed a vicious circle in which the circular causation of each factor seems to have strengthened the fishermen’s conservatism towards production.

The village is predominantly a Chinese community with only 10% of non-Chinese population, and the Teochew being the largest dialect group. Male population slightly outnumber the females. The population is young with 52.9% under 20 years old, and only 38.2% in a 20-55 age-group. The corresponding figures for the whole of Singapore are 50.7% and 49.5%. This indicates that the village has a higher dependent population than that of the average of Singapore. Further, with a higher average number of members per family (8 persons) and a larger proportion of the population with an average monthly income lower than that of Singapore’s (60.8% of the families in the village enjoy a monthly income of less than 200 dollars, compared to 51.7% in the whole of Singapore), it is evident that the economic conditions of the average villager is lower than that of an average Singaporean.

While the lower literacy rate of the age-groups above the 35 years than that below the 35 years reflects the legacy of the colonial past, the higher literacy rates for the age group 10-19 indicates the expansion of formal education in the village.

Though predominantly Chinese, the community is not without the traits of a plural society. The Malays are mainly employed in service jobs, the Eurasians mainly white-collar, and the Chinese are more widely distributed in different occupations.
Certain widely accepted social structure and organization exist within the Chinese community. For example, the drying of coconut kernels and the manufacturing of sea-shells, ashes are monopolised by the Teochews; 67.5% of the sailors are Hainanese; of the Hokkien group, more than 75% are engaged in labour jobs, while other dialect groups are more evenly distributed in various industries.

In the village, wealth is not evenly distributed. The average family income ranges from less than a hundred dollars per month to over a thousand dollars. Those with better economic conditions usually enjoy higher social status. Thus, the businessmen, in particular, play a leading role in this community.

The social institutions in the village such as the Chinese primary school and the Hin Chong Sports Club function as a uniting force between the various dialect groups, but they seem unable to integrate the various races. The establishment of the community centre in 1963 provided a place for the people of this village and the neighbouring village to carry out various socio-cultural activities, thus promoting contacts between the ethnic groups. It is in this context that the community centre has served as a significant force through which the Singapore Government's policy of multi-racialism is implemented.