

## Epilogue

At first sight the foregoing analysis of the effects of change and innovation on the organisation of village life may leave the reader with the impression that indeed a way of life has significantly altered. In a number of instances it is clear that traditional institutions have been replaced, and where they continue to exist they no longer exercise the same functions which they once did in the administration of the society. In place of the relatively loose democracy of the villages a hierarchy of government has been set up, and the village is now part of a national state. New laws have been made which affect the disposal of property, and the old style of semi-formal agreements between villagers in which two families come to an understanding has given way to formal contractual arrangements between individuals. The old community is now widely dispersed within the wide area of the village and no longer clustered around the original long-houses. Furthermore, new opportunities for education and employment have taken many away from the village and this, together with the fact that Kerinci has now been drawn into the orbit of modern communications, has meant that values are changing and that social vision is no longer circumscribed by the boundaries of traditional wisdom.

At least this is the initial impression, but had simply that been the overall conclusion the reader might perhaps wonder whether it required the effort of long research and the writing of the study just to show this. In some respects I might reply that it did, since, as I argued earlier, the commonly heard discussions of the effects of modernisation on village societies are often limited to general comments, or are content to rest upon the conclusions of a generation of earlier writers and talk about the transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* or from status to contract without offering any of the fine detail to illustrate how the change takes place. It was to avoid this kind of simplification of the issues that I wanted to attempt to document the history of recent developments of selected institutions in the village, in the hope that this might give some ethnographic substance to the discussion of social change.

One consequence of paying this close attention to history has been that I was led to the development of what has become an equally important line of argument in the thesis: that there has been as much continuity as its opposite

in the pattern of development over the years. Take the apparently recent demise of the descent group as a corporate body responsible for the social control of its members. With the growth of neighbourhood organisations and with the assumption by the state of the responsibility for law and order it would appear that the *raison d'être* of the descent group have disappeared. The history of the villages has shown, however, that as a corporate body constituted by kinship links among its members the descent group was always weak. And the brief analysis of the process of segmentation and the value placed on kinship ties within a limited circle has shown that it was always the close family, the members of which lived in territorial proximity, which was the agent of socialisation and the most significant principle of social organisation. The descent group structure has, then, always been somewhat marginal, and its contemporary insignificance is not entirely the consequence of new developments.

In the matter of the disposal of property, too, we have seen that although the new legislation allows the individual greater freedom to sell her property as she thinks fit, nonetheless, people still wish to follow traditional procedures, not because they are unfamiliar with the new law, but because consultation within the family over matters of property is such an essential part of domestic organisation and linked so closely to the value placed on proper relations between kinsmen.

Principles of inheritance are another element of social organisation which superficially appear to have undergone radical change. Landed property is now partible among sons and daughters. But the closer we examine this issue, the stronger grows the conviction that what has occurred is not a change of principle, but rather a modification of emphases. It seems, for example, always to have been the case that both sons and daughters inherit from the parental estate. That the immovables passed to the daughters and the movables to the sons seems at best to have been only a convention accepted *pro tempore* because it was adapted to the socio-economic circumstances of a particular historical period. The establishment of a *pusaka* category of property was an adjustment of the convention which suited the circumstances of the twenties and thirties, and now it, too, is being superseded by a pressure to make all the property partible in equal portions. Thus modifications arise in response to changing economic circumstances, but there is no significant change of principle.

The clearest example of continuity in the context of change has been the persistence of the close family as the locus of values for the individual. This has been the more remarkable when one remembers how the last two generations have been much exposed to cultural values and norms quite different

from those of village society. In institutions of tertiary education and in careers pursued in the major cities of Java and Sumatra men and women from Pondok Tinggi have become members of cultural milieux whose orientations are often in violent contrast to those of their homes. Yet it is these same men and women who constantly return to the village and who expect their families to arrange marriages for them. One reason why people from Kerinci have proved so relatively unaffected by the different styles of life and so capable of maintaining a sense of Kerinci identity is that the idea of learning from the outside world, taking what is worthwhile and rejecting the bad according to the touchstone of experience brought from the villages, has a long and tested historical tradition behind it, expressed in the notion of *rantau*.

One arresting image which for me evokes the enduring importance which people attach to a sense of Kerinci life within the maelstrom of economic and technological development which affects them is the motto printed on the T-shirts which young boys can be seen wearing as they stroll about the market in Sungai Penuh. It is in English and reads "The Big Family of Kincai" -- Kincai is the Kerinci dialect contraction of Kerinci. The T-shirt itself and the printed motto are signs of the new life-style. The English words suggest the brash assertiveness of the national youth culture and the desire of the boys to parade in an ostentatious, yet at the same time, humorous and self-deprecating manner. But the institution with which they choose to identify and of which they wish to show their common membership is the "Family of Kincai"; the "family" because the idea does represent for them, perhaps at a deeper level, even than they unconsciously realize, what is central in their lives, and "Kincai" because the word and the notion it conveys joins them together in that unique community of which the dialect is a vivid and emotional evocation. A trivial example, and perhaps I make too much of it, yet it embodies for me some of the themes of my arguments in this thesis.

In so far as one is tempted to generalize from a piece of research like this I would suggest that in looking at the effects of contemporary development on institutions of kinship one should be wary of the assumption that change inevitably occurs in a dramatic way which irreversibly alters the character of a society. That there is change and innovation no one would deny, but one must take care that in describing their effects one discriminates and distinguishes among the numerous social institutions which exist, noting the pace and nature of developments in each case. Nor should one be surprised to note that despite occasional gloomy predictions to the contrary, the most durable institutions of all are those which spring from the high value attached to close family life.