

**DECENTRALIZATION OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT  
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA:  
COMPARATIVE NOTES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS\***

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**ABSTRACT**

*National development in South-east Asia today has been accompanied by the emergence of developed urban centers as a significant element in the national system of cities. Besides the drastic urban growth due to natural increases in population and processes of urbanization, the development of these cities ironically continue to enhance primacy which to a large extent contradicts urban policy efforts to create a balanced national system of cities. Their dominance is a consequence rather than the cause of centralization or overconcentration of urban functions, policy decisions, city-size distribution and basic resources. Even the regionalized growth pole strategy seems to play a supplementary role in their predominance. So various comparative notes and research questions are highlighted to expose another essential element within the existing framework of urban development, namely decentralization. Specific focus would be given to various policy views and emerging alternative options. The trend in major South-east Asian cities shows little change despite concerned redistribution goals and regional equality. The general conclusion is that new planning alternatives as well as fruitful research have to be undertaken.*

*Pembangunan negara di Asia Tenggara hari ini disertai dengan pembangunan pusat-pusat urban sebagai elemen signifikan dalam konteks sistem perbandaran nasional. Selain daripada pertumbuhan bandar yang pesat oleh kerana pertambahan penduduk semulajadi dan proses urbanisasi pembangunan bandar-bandar ini dengan ironisnya terus berkembang ke arah primasi yang secara kebetulan bertentangan dengan usaha-usaha polisi urban untuk mengrealitaskan sistem perbandaran nasional. Dominan ini diakibatkan oleh sentralisasi atau konsentrasi fungsi-fungsi urban, keputusan, distribusi sahs bandar dan sumber-sumber asas. Malah strategi "growth pole" pun seolah-olah memainkan peranan supplemtar sahaja. Oleh itu beberapa nota komparatif dan persoalan-persoalan penyelidikan dikemukakan untuk menunjukkan elemen essensial dalam konteks pembangunan bandar masakini, khususnya berkenaan desentralisasi. Fokus utama diberi kepada hal-hal*

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\*Kertas kerja ini dibentang di Konferensi Pengajian Asia Tenggara (Conference on South-east Asian Studies), Kota Kinabalu, 22-25 Nov., 1977.

*polisi dan alternatif baru. Pola dalam bandar-bandar utama Asia Tenggara tidak menunjukkan apa-apa perubahan besar walaupun ada kecenderungan pada tujuan-tujuan redistribusi dan equaliti regional. Konklusi umum ialah alternatif baru dikehendaki dalam perancangan dan juga dalam penyelidikan.*

## INTRODUCTION

National development planning in South-east Asian countries emphasizes a two-pronged approach. On the rural front is the concerted effort towards the transformation of traditional rural sector into a modern sector with an additional stress on regional planning. On the second front is the peripheral development of primary urban centers. This emphasis overlooked the importance of urban development per se and its decentralizing roles and functions so as to be consistent with the redistribution goals of national plans. The first approach generates the development of new growth centers, normally spatially divorced from depressed regions; whilst the second approach encourages the development of primacy in the major metropolitan cities. So what is required is a set of policy alternatives and options which can be applied in the context of a comprehensive urban development strategy.

The attempts to understand urban phenomena, issues and problems in South-east Asian countries are not new. The most prominent includes McGees "South-east Asian City" and the recent Yeung and Lo's edition of "Changing South-east Asian Cities".<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the most detailed work has been undertaken in the fields of urbanization.<sup>2</sup> The thematic interest of most of these studies, however, continue to be the search for a formal theory of urbanization. In fact, Yeung has drawn attention to the fact that research on South-east Asia to date "has been guided by hypothesis and concepts, because it is a modest heuristic approach attempting to discover generalities about the cities, leading hopefully in the end to theory formulation."<sup>3</sup>

This paper hopes to utilize a similar conceptual framework on the question of decentralization of urban development. Basically, it is intended to justify on a priori that decentralization of urban development is able to stimulate the activities of remote, smaller, medium-sized or intermediate cities and it can be integrated into national urban and urbanization

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1 T.G. McGee, *South-east Asian City* (London: Bells and Sons, 1967); Y.M. Yeung and C.P. Lo (ed), *Changing South-East Asian Cities: Readings on Urbanization* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1976).

2 The most comprehensive bibliography has been collected. See G.W. Breeze, *Urban South-east Asia: A Selected Bibliography* (N.Y: Asia Society, 1973). Other works are: G.W. Breeze, *The City in Newly Developing Countries* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1969); McGee, *Urbanization Proccess in The Third World* (London: Bell and Sons, 1971); D.J. Dwyer, *City as a Center of Change in South-East Asia* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1972).

3 Yeung and Lo (eds) *op. cit.*, xvi.

policy. No initiative would empirically be made to measure the degree of centralization or decentralization; nor is it meant to present a paradigm or a model.<sup>4</sup> The essay would specifically focus at the outset on the conflicting views of centralization versus decentralization; followed by an appraisal of South-east Asia urban scenario, its general situation at both national and metropolitan level, problems and prospects; and finally brief notes on policy alternatives.

## CENTRALIZATION AND DECENTRALIZATION CONTENDING VIEWS

One of the most controversial urban debate in the sixties was on the nature and trend of urbanization process. McGee noted that:

“on one side is a group of writers who stress that the urbanization process as it is occurring in the Third World is qualitatively different from that which occurred in the United States and in Great Britain. On the other side is a group of writers who argue, in Riesman’s words, that the process of urbanization is strikingly close to lines followed in the West a century and a half before.”<sup>5</sup>

his debate polarized the arguments concerning the role of urbanization process. But in our case, the views depart slightly. The issue is “what is the most practical step to take in introducing and implementing urban development? Is it more conducive to decentralized or otherwise?”

The centralization argument recognizes the changes in industrial structure which has become more specialized and progressively larger and their relationships more complex. It has been associated with the process of localization and agglomeration which takes place as a consequence of physical proximity, integrated needs and development of industrial nodes. Most planners and economists, in fact, support a policy of urban agglomeration.<sup>6</sup> It is seen effective even in regions with limited development opportunities, but having certain comparative initial advantages, such as harbour, transportation, and climate, to create further advantages and opportunities, such as specialized labour force, credit and job opportu-

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4 For a tentative attempt to measure, see Gebhard Kirchgassner and Werner Pommerhne, “The Demand for Fiscal Decentralization: Some Preliminary Findings”, *Sociologia Ruralis*, Vol. 16, n. 3, 1976, pp. 208–219. For model or paradigm, see John Friedman, “Urbanization and National Development: A Comparative Analysis, in Friedman (ed.), *Urbanization Planning and National Development* (N.Y.: Sage, 1973), pp. 65–90. It should also be noted that South-east Asia includes Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Brunei. The definition of urban differ markedly in each of these countries and they are empirically referred as given elsewhere.

5 McGee, “Beachheads and Enclaves: The Urban Debate and Urbanization Process in South-East Asia since 1945”, in Yeung and Lo, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

6 Among them are Alonso, Mera, Mills and Richardson.

nities. The interaction widens the market and spurs new enterprises, transforming the surrounding economic activities, and reinforce a cycle of growth.<sup>7</sup>

Underlying this argument, there are several basic notions. The city is the center of change and the generator of growth. Secondly, the dualistic structure of most South-east Asian cities has to be viewed in more positive light as encouraging, not inhibiting, economic growth as experienced by modern Japan. Thirdly, the primate cities which result from over centralization as only a phase in the process of economic change. In addition, these cities are able to effect change in underdeveloped areas through diffusion and “trickle-down” of information and resources. It is also viewed that city is an excellent “urban milieu” for modernization and political development.

The argument seems to assert the assumption that the development of primacy is a “necessary evil” because it is one of the clear-cut indicators of economic development. It overlooks the fact that over a period of time various diffusion mechanisms would take place among various cities so as to approach an equilibrium or steady-state. It also failed to note that initial stages of urbanization and development lies with the developed centers due to their preferential treatment during colonial periods which persists to this day.

The practical experiences and realities of South-east Asian cities followed closely the centralization argument. As a consequence, development of primate cities impinged with a host of urban problems is fashionable. Decentralization which refers to reallocation of services, resources and even policy emphasis away from metropolitan centers to new centers of urban growth, small-cities, medium or intermediate cities and other neglected areas. The criticism levelled at centralization has also been numerous. Gilbert summed up as:

“they do not explain satisfactorily why industrial productivity rises with city-size; they ignore the work of ‘dependency school’ which adopts a less flattering interpretation of large cities; they dismiss the major diseconomies of scale in terms of intervening variables; they assumed that social distribution of costs and benefits is neutral; and fail to note that urban planning in less developed economies is even less effective than Europe and North America.”<sup>8</sup>

In order to substantiate the argument above, it can be stated that firstly it is presumptuous to infer that higher productivity is caused by agglome-

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7 Lloyd Rodwin, *Nations and Cities* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970), p. 5.

8 Alan Gilbert, “The Argument for Very Large Cities Reconsidered,” *Urban Studies*, v. 13, n.1, 1976, pp. 27–34.

ration economies. Rather they may be caused by superior urban infrastructure, service or labor. In fact, if these factors are available to medium-sized cities certainly productivity would also rise.

With regards to municipal expenditures, it is undeniable that it is proportionately higher in large metropolitan centers. After all, city government is more accessible to government bureaucracy and decision-making machinery. But most are spent for overhead capital and infrastructure which are monumental.

The political and economic systems are also in favour of urban rather than rural and small-town sectors. Most observable is transfer of capital from rural to urban due to the concentration of banking and industrial activities. Sometimes, it is so excessive as to create polarization, backwardness or even underdevelopment.<sup>9</sup>

As an additional point, we can also note that the diseconomies of scale (problems such as pollution, crime, etc.) is prominent in cities. In most cases, more complex and sophisticated methods, thus draining financial resources, are needed to overcome them.

From the argument, it is possible to draw some basic assumptions and principles which characterized a decentralized urban development model. Firstly, urban development has to be consistently integrated and planned in the context of both urban-nonurban typology. Secondly, it is meant to check development of primacy which is a "headache" to most South-east Asian cities and a classic representation of centralization. Inclusive is the idea of equitable allocation of resources and services. Thirdly, "trickle-down" and diffusion would only be effective if greater emphasis and participation is given to non-metropolitan areas. Fourthly, decentralized urban strategy is directed towards the problems of immigration, labor absorption and population concentration.

As a summary, it can be stated that centralization favours "big-city" development whilst decentralization preferred smaller cities and towns. But if we use a regional or metropolitan scale, centralization would simply be the development of central business districts as opposed to peripheral and suburbia development. On a national basis, development of new growth centers and regional planning can be considered as decentralization measures because the efforts create alternative urban centers, thus contributing to resource development, resettlement and job opportunities.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> This view is shared by Frank, Myrdal, Friedman and Cassanova. For further references, see: A.G. Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (N.Y: Monthly Press, 1967); Myrdal, *Economic Theory and Underdeveloped Regions* (London: Duckworth, 1957).

<sup>10</sup> Louis Lefebvre and Mrinal Datta-Chaudhuri. *Regional Development Experiences and Prospects in South and South-East Asia* (Hague: Mouton, 1971).

## THE URBAN SCENARIO: DESCRIPTIVE FACTOR

### 1. National Context

The evolution of South-east Asian cities is generally standard—from a period of indigenous urbanization characterized by independent realm of nuclear urbanism; colonial impact and development of dualism; and the current post-colonial urbanization with its induced urbanization and primate cities.<sup>11</sup> The most significant initial development of cities, however, followed closely the influence of colonial policies. The cities developed as a consequence of the roles they played in the expansion of international, primarily European enterprise in this region.

Due to centralized colonial administration, the development of the cities tend to be either the major ports or the administrative centers. The participation of rural populace is undoubtedly very insignificant. Today these days are characterized by rapid population growth, essentially alien to local identification, primate and center of political and economic power.<sup>12</sup> Even Bangkok, which was never a colony, conformed closely to colonial pattern of city development because of economic penetration.

Urban development in South-east Asian countries tend to concentrate in very limited areas. According to Goodman,<sup>13</sup> this encourage the existence of few extremely large or great cities rather than smaller, but more closely connected urban centers that could more effectively mediate and bridge the gap between urban and rural society. In addition, he also observed that immigrant communities predominates as compared to indigenous populace. As for example, in Indonesia the percentage of Chinese to total population is about 2.5%, but the percentage of Chinese in urban areas is about 12% and in relation to the total population living in urban areas the percentage is about 10.2%; in Thailand, it is 9%, 51.3% and 9.2%; in Cambodia, it is 7.5%, 22.8% and 7.6% respectively.<sup>14</sup> In Malaysian case, Chinese dominated the urban centers as well as forming the majority of the urban population.<sup>15</sup>

The urban scenario has changed drastically since independence and post-liberation periods. In relation to other parts of the developing world, South-east Asia is relatively least urbanized. About 80% of the population are rural. Population growth rate is high. For example, urban popu-

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11 Yeung and Lo (ed.), *op. cit.* xvii-xxi. For origin and growth, see Fryer, "Cities of South-East Asia and Their Problems," *ibid.* 8-12.

12 N. Ginsburg, "The Great City in South-East Asia," *ibid.* pp. 2-7.

13 Allan E. Goodman, "The Cause and Consequences of Migration to Saigon," *Final Report to SEADAG*. New York: Asia, 1973.

14 Allan E. Goodman, "The Political Implications of Urban Development in South-East Asia: The fragment Hypothesis," in Yeung and Lo (ed.), *op. cit.* p. 117.

15 James Jackson, "The Chinatowns of South-east Asia", *Pacific View Point*, May 1975. pp. 45-76.

lation grow from 23 million to 57 million over a period of 20 years (1950–1970). A high percentage of the urban population is in big cities.<sup>16</sup>

Most of the urban dwellers are concentrated in the metropolitan centers. Jakarta has a population of more than 5 million, Manila more than 4, Bangkok 3 million, Rangoon 1.8, Saigon 2 and Kuala Lumpur 0.7.<sup>17</sup> The current trend shows radical increases of indigenous or outmigrants in these cities, thus likely doubling the present population.

As selected cases, we can quote the experiences of some South-east Asian countries. British colonial policy centralized urban development, and this was further substantiated by Emergency which induced development of new villages and towns. Post-independence emphasized rural development, but it “backlashed” to development of urban areas due to extensive infrastructural and physical development. The evidence seems to suggest that The New Economic Policy favours urban areas too due to its commercial and industrial priorities. For metropolitan areas of 75,000 and above, there was 96.7% increase in population.<sup>18</sup> The most startling case is Kuala Lumpur which have grown into almost a “primate” city, especially if it is incorporated with Petaling Jaya, an adjacent satellite town.

Indonesia also demonstrates a higher growth rate for the urban areas as compared to the growth rate of the total population. In 1942, there were 32 municipalities which are identified as urban, numbering 50,000 and an administrative capital (19 in Java and 13 in Outer Islands). By 1964, there were 48 municipalities, in addition to the Special District status of Jakarta Raya (19 in Java and 29 in Outer Islands). The growth of cities, on the other hand, has been very unpredictable. The fastest growing city, about 4.6%, are in Sumatra, Sulawesi and Kalimantan. Most of them are less than three-quarter million people—Pekan Baru (Riau), Watampone (Sulawesi Selatan), Pare Pare (Sulawesi Selatan), Uno Seumawe (Atjeh). The major metropolitan cities of Indonesia (Jakarta, Surabaya and Bandung) showed drastic expansion, followed by Semarang, Medan, Palembang and Makassar. The overall urban population would continue to increase.<sup>19</sup>

The situation in Philippines, another archipelagic state, does not show much variation either. In 1970, the number of urban places reach 2,406.

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16 A.M. Woodruff, “A Study of Urban Alternatives—The Great Cities of East and South-east Asia,” in *The Cities of Asia* ed. by John Wong (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1976) pp. 17–45.

17 Donald W. Fryer, “Cities of South-East Asia and Their Problems,” in Yeung and Lo (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 8.

18 Timothy Lam Thim Fook, “Urban Land Use Policy and Development with Reference to Malaysia,” in John Wong (ed), *op. cit.*, p. 118.

19 Pauline Milone, “Contemporary Urbanization in Indonesia”, in Yeung and Lo (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 92–99. For evolution of Indonesian cities see Goantiang Tan, “Growth of Cities in Indonesia 1930–1961”, *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 56, 3, 103–108, 1965.

Manila and its suburbs dominate the urban scene as elsewhere with metropolitan center.<sup>20</sup>

For the Indo-Chinese states, it is difficult to make any early assessments. But the trend may not differ much viewing the previous state of insurgency and present drive for reconstruction attracts city-ward migration. The average contribution of this component to urban growth was 40% from 1945 to 1965 though a slight outmigration occur during airwar period in 1965.<sup>21</sup> Urban growth has been rapid in Hanoi and the other major cities. The case may have been reversed in Cambodian case where mass movement of “back to the countryside” is carried out.

In Thailand, the overall level of urbanization is low, but the rate of urbanization, like elsewhere, is considerably high. The number of urban places increased significantly with Bangkok sharing half of the total population followed by Chiangmai, Korat, Haadyai and Udorn. On the basis of early census classification, municipal area increased too. For example, between 1947 and 1960 the total urban increase of 68% is attributable to the largest 10 of the 116 urban places.<sup>22</sup> The regional variation seems to be very little (excluding Bangkok region), showing close relationship to level of economic development.

In the case of Singapore and Brunei, both are basically city-state, urbanization is not a factor. But their urban population has also grown significantly due to natural increases.

## 2. Metropolitan Context

The morphology of most metropolitan South-east Asian cities originated from old cores, usually with the presence of colonial and immigrant quarters and bordered on the peripheral by indigenous *kampung* or *barrio*. With decolonization and creation of new nation-states, the internal urban structure is giving way to planned high-rise and transportation network. The remnants are old quarters, like “Chinatowns” and blocks of workshops and manufacturing establishments.

The most dramatic metropolitan growth and changes takes place on the fringes where residential districts, satellite towns and industrial zones have become polarized into a “greater metropolitan area”. Jakarta Raya is almost 1550 square miles, Greater Manila and Thornburi-Bangkok Metropolitan Region are larger still. The Federal Territory of Kuala

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20 Yue Man Yeung, “South-East Asian Cities: Patterns of Growth and Transformation,” in Brian J.L. Berry, *Urbanization and Counter urbanization* (London: Sage, 1976), p. 294.

21 Nguyen Ti, “Urbanization Patterns in North Vietnam,” *Soviet Geography*, June, 1974, pp. 352-357.

22 Sidney Goldstein, “Urbanization in Thailand, 1947-1967,” in Yeung and Lo (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 100-103.



Lumpur and the adjoining satellite town of Petaling Jaya would make "Greater Kuala Lumpur" of comparable size to other metropolitan areas of South-east Asia.

Bangkok provides an excellent case study of metropolitan development. The capital city area numbered 1.8 million in 1960, and by 1967 the population reached 2.6 million and in 1970 more than 3 million. It contained half of Thailand's urban population and accounted for almost two-third of urban population growth in the country. It is 32 times the size of the second city of Chiangmai.<sup>23</sup>

The space for further expansion of existing metropolitan area has become expansive and compact in many ways. Development, though planned in many cases, takes place in a very uncontrollable and laizze-faire manner. In the densely populated centers of Manila, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur or Rangoon, traffic congestion is a daily experience. This is compounded by chronic development of stalls and hawkers along new roads and buildings.

Another factor which deserves attention is the economic structure of the cities. There is serious imbalance between ethnic groups on one hand and social groups on the other hand. This exemplified Geertz<sup>24</sup> dualistic conception of Third World cities. One sector is the firm-centered economy where trade and industry takes place through a given set of social institutions for some distributive or productive end; and the other sector is the bazaar economy which is based on independent activities of commodity traders who relies basically on ad hoc exchanges or with the world's satellite-status metropolis-national metropolis-satellite relationships.

### 3. National-Metropolitan Interaction: Urbanization Process

The process of urbanization integrate the mainly rural-national components to the emerging metropolitan-urban components. The pattern and trend, however, differ very much from those experienced in developed nations. The reasons include natural increases which contribute to higher proportion of increase of city population largely due to improved medical techniques and secondly, the rapid increase of rural-urban migration.<sup>25</sup> The latter is either pressured by poor conditions in the country side or as a reaction to insurgency measures. Which of these two reasons is more prevalent is subject to further country-based migration studies. Our main contention is that the rapid rise in city population is because of unprecedented rise in both natural increase and migratory movements.

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23 *Ibid.*, 100.

24 Clifford Geertz, *Agricultural Involvement: The Processes of Ecological Change in Indonesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), pp. 8-9. See also W.R. Armstrong and T.G. McGee, "Revolutionary Change and Third World City: The Theory of Urban Involvement," *Civilizations*, 18, 3, pp. 353-77, 1968.

25 T.G. McGee, "Beachheads and Enclaves...", In Yeung and Lo *op. cit.*, p. 61.

The influx of immigrants towards large metropolitan centers seem to be an uncontrollable factor. The process is continuing basing on the neglected and underdeveloped state of rural areas. Most rural projects lag considerably and the man-land ratio is small. For Bangkok, out of 1.91 native-born inhabitants, one quarter was born outside the city. Half the resident of Manila were born elsewhere and half of Jakarta annual growth results from migration. Almost one-fifth of the Malays lived in cities in Malaysia by 1970, largely the result of immigration.<sup>26</sup> The movement is more pronounced among the young who seeks educational and job opportunities in the cities. Ironically, their protracted residence influences their life style and preferences for city-life.

### THE EMPIRICAL INFERENCE

One of the most useful empirical indicator that can be used to measure primacy is rank-size distribution. There appear to be a very high degree of correlation between development of primate cities and city-size distribution. Many writers, in fact, use normal rank-size distribution as an acceptable criteria in determining a national system of cities.<sup>27</sup> In addition, there is also close relationship between rank-size and centrality principles which is beyond the scope of this paper to venture into.<sup>28</sup>

Any deviation in the distribution of rank-size is assumed as tendency towards primacy which in turn is correlated to centralizing functions. This empirical test, however, do not answer the question of future direction or causation. At best, it states hypothetically that primacy is associated to "lop-sided" urban development rather than with a system of cities properly integrated as demonstrated by western countries. Primate cities are found to generate negative effects, almost paralytic in nature, towards the development of small towns as well as parasitic towards national economy. It is not inaccurate to state that primacy and centralization of urban activities and function as intertwined.

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26 Yeung, "South-East Asian Cities...", in Brian J.L. Berry, *op. cit.*, p. 293. Aspects and implications of this movement can be referred to Nathna Keyfitz, "Political-economic Aspects of Urbanization in South and South-East Asia", in Hauser and Schnore (ed.), *The Study of Urbanization*, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1965), pp. 265-309; and Gavin Jones, "Implications of Prospective Urbanization for Development Planning in South-East Asia", in *Population and Development in South-East Asia*, ed. K. Kantner and McCaffrey (Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Co., 1975), pp. 99-117.

27 Richardson, "Optimality in City Size, systems of Cities and Urban Policy: A Sceptic's View", in Gordon C. Cameron and Lowdon Wingo (ed.), *Cities, Regions and Public Policy* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1973), pp. 29-48. Arnold Linsky "Some Generalizations Concerning Primate Cities", in Gerald Breeze (eds.), *City in Developing Countries* (Englewood: Prentice-Hall, 1969) pp. 285-294.

28 There are two main differences: Firstly, rank size is an empirical relationship whilst central place can be determined by a priori reasoning, and secondly, central place refer to regional system: whilst rank size to nations.

Does the rank-size in South-east Asian countries shows a normal vis-a-vis systematic urban growth or marked deviation? In an international study of 15 countries, Berry identified Thailand as one of the countries which has primate city-size distribution.<sup>29</sup> He also noted that Peninsular Malaysia lies between lognormal and primate city-size distribution. In another study which particularly focus on South-east Asia, Berry classifies Burma, Indo-China and Thailand as countries with tendencies to primacy and Malaysia, Philippines and Indonesia as lognormal.<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps one of the best useful research on city-size distribution for South-east Asia is by Hamzah Sendut. He commented:

“when towns and cities of South-east Asia are arranged by size and rank of population, they form a distribution which is characterized by the largest city being generally many times the size of the second largest city. Above a certain designated size, the distribution shows this large city with many small towns and a deficiency of towns with intermediate sizes.”<sup>31</sup>

The study reveals the following results:<sup>32</sup>

- a. Malaysia shows lognormal city-size distribution as if conforming to a system characterized by small towns, medium-sized cities and large cities.
- b. The Indo-Chinese states and Indonesia indicate primacy, but approaching log-normalcy,
- c. Thailand and Philippines are cases of primacy. In the case of Bangkok and Chiangmai, the index of primacy is 26.15 and with four other cities is 9.6.<sup>33</sup> Similarly with Manila which dominates 25 other cities in Philippines.

Various criticisms can be thrown at the application of rank-size to infer urban centralization. But further research evidence is required to at least relate rank-size, primacy and centralization. On an acceptable basis primacy justifies the description of the urban scene, and on a tentative basis the general urban scene is a consequence or a characteristic of centralized urban development experience.

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29 Brian J.L. Berry, “The Distribution of City Sizes”, in Berry and Horton (ed.), *Geographic Perspectives on Urban Systems* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 67.

30 Brian Berry, “City Size and Economic Development: Conceptual Synthesis and Policy Problems with Special Reference to South and South-East Asia”, in Leo Jacobson and Ved Prakash (ed.), *Urbanization and Development* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1971), pp. 111–156.

31 Hamzah Sendut, “City Size Distribution of South-East Asia”, *Asian Studies*, vol. 4, n. 1–3, 1966, pp. 268–80.

32 *Ibid*, p. 268–80.

33 *Ibid*, p. 268–80.

## URBAN CRISIS: THE PROBLEM FACTOR

The interaction has also generated serious urban problems. Lacquian<sup>34</sup> stated that urban tensions arise due to the interaction between process of dualism, creeping urbanism and ruralization whereby in all three cases rural segment interacts with urban segment due to differences in values and approach. They are by no means unique to urban South-east Asia only, but in relation to major cities in developed nations they fared badly. Primate cities of South-east Asia are plagued by shortages in housing, unemployment, traffic jams, environmental deterioration, high crime rates, urban poverty and political crisis.

The measures taken by respective countries differ. For example, in the case of housing, Singapore has been very successful in undertaking public housing programs and integrating them into national development.<sup>35</sup> Singapore has provided housing to more than a third of the population. Through urban redevelopment and urban renewal, the city-state has been transformed into a well-planned modern metropolis. Other cities such as Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta and Manila, due to lack of adequate mechanism and resources have relied on some low-cost and high-rise residential development. In the peripheral areas of Jakarta, Bangkok and Manila, site-and-services approach has been adopted.

Shortage of housing in essence is more acute than in any western city. At least one quarter of the population in the primate cities live in illegal squatter settlements which mushroomed on almost any patch of unoccupied land, especially within peripheral areas of the city. There is an estimated 36,000 squatter families of over 200,000 persons occupying 15% of Kuala Lumpur total area.<sup>36</sup> There is also evidence that the phenomena has intensified with time. In 1968, there were 137,000 squatters and in 1969 there were 156,000 taking 30% of the city's populace.<sup>37</sup>

Some writers have recognized the positive contributions of squatters in nation-building.<sup>38</sup> Most squatter settlements, have their own standards

34 Aprodicio Lacquian, "Urban Tensions in South-East Asia in the 70's," in W.H. Wriggins and J.F. Guyot (eds.), *Population, Politics and The Future of South-East Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), pp. 120-146.

35 Yue-Man Yeung, *National Development Policy and Urban Transformation in Singapore: A Study of Public Housing and the Marketing System*, Research Paper No. 149, Department of Geography, University of Chicago, 1973.

36 Tunku Shamsul Bahrin, *et al*, "Urban Squatters—An Adaptation to Poverty", in Mokzani (ed.), *Poverty in Malaysia* (KL: University of Malaya Press, 1976), p. 101. For a comprehensive appraisal of squatters in South-East Asia see J.L. Taylor, "Slums and Squatter settlements of south-east Asian Cities", in *Kuala Lumpur Forum* (KL: Edin to Press, 1973) pp. 175-189.

37 *Ibid*, p. 101.

38 Examples are Aprodicio Lacquian, "Slums and Squatters in South and Southeast Asia", in Jacobson and V Prakash (eds.), *Urbanization and National Development* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1971), pp. 183-203; D.J. Dwyer, "Attitudes towards spontaneous settlement in Third World Cities", in D.J. Dwyer (eds.): *The City as a Centre of change in Asia*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1972), pp. 166-178.

of social and functional relations. They are politically well-organized and in cases where tenure is given, squatter has been transformed into commendable habitat. The official policy, however, is benign neglect. In Malaysian case, the attitude is normally apathetic. There is lack of effective legislation pertaining to enforcement coupled with political and social sensitivities.<sup>39</sup>

The urban problem of housing is further compounded by unemployment. The creation of new jobs in the cities only encourages further immigration rather than ultimate solution. In addition, the employment available tends to be capital-intensive industries also. In 1970, Malaysia experienced 10.1% unemployment in urban areas as compared to 5.4% in the rural areas.<sup>40</sup>

Another cause for headache to policy makers is the deteriorating urban environment plus the social problems accompanying it. The fantastic rise in automobiles do not meet the insufficient roads. New industries and a host of other hazards have definitely frustrate urban populace. Crime rate and drug addiction are more pronounced in urban areas too. Urban poverty has taken in a new social dimension due to inflationary food prices and high living standards. Squatters are excellent manifestation for three-quarter of them earn less than \$100.<sup>41</sup> Poverty has also generate communal distrust and animosity, especially in Malaysia where prosperity and poverty are identified along racial lines.

Perhaps a quotation from one of the contemporary writers of South-east Asian city can summed up the dimension of urban problem confronting South-east Asia today.

“The physical sign of urban services strained almost to breaking points, serious deterioration of the urban environment of inner city areas and massive housing deficiencies are abundant almost everywhere. The modern steelmills, the newly-created industrial estates, the western styles commercial symbols of central business districts and opulent housing of a tiny minority of the rich stands as islands engulfed in a sea of urban problems typified by the spread of squatter hut. The central issue is surely what these physical changes mean in terms of social, intellectual and entrepreneurial life of the city.”<sup>42</sup>

### URBAN CHANGES: THE TRANSFORMATION FACTOR

What can be said of urban South-east Asia, its future, characteristics, forces holding it and the possibility of modifying these forces? The pro-

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39 Tunku Shamsul, *et. al, op. cit.* ,p. 102.

40 Yue-Man Yeung, “Southeast Asian Cities...”, in Brian J.L. Berry, *op. cit.*, p. 295.

41 Ishak Shari, “Squatters: The Poor in Kuala Lumpur”, in Mokzani (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 113.

42 D.J. Dwyer, *op. cit.*, XI.

pect of urban transformation is real. If the criteria used based on 40% to 50% of the population concentrated in urban areas, only Singapore is confronting the transformation. But if it is based on 25% to 30% that live in large cities of 100,000 and over, almost a quarter of South-east Asia population is experiencing urban transformation.<sup>43</sup> This incipient stage of transformation will be accompanied by changes in economic and social structures. The dualistic economic structure have to be substituted with a more unified economic relations. The traditional social structure has to accomodate change in life-styles, behavioural patterns and social stratification which are beginning to influence the populace.

The process of transformation would also influence the patterns of urbanization in respective South-east Asian countries. McGee<sup>44</sup> discussed four distinct patterns in selected cases:

- a. deliberate urbanization as in the case of city-state of Singapore. This includes control of inward migration so as to check unemployment and constraints on urban social services; relocation and resettlement of urban dwellers in public housing; urban renewal and redevelopment, especially in inner-city areas; new town development and economic diversification;
- b. urbanization utilized to readdress urban imbalance. For example, in Malaysian case where ethnic composition in cities is identified with Chinese. It is hoped that a destabilizing effect can be achieved;
- c. urban involution ala Javanese model where pattern of "pseudourbanization" prevails. Economic growth in rural areas is unable to hold people and many move to cities where economic development is not occurring fast enough to absorb the population;
- d. military-ideological pattern of urbanization which is based on "persuasive" relocation and resettlement of rural dwellers in city enclaves, usually complete with social utilities and amenities.

These examples also suggest that homogenous conditions of underdevelopment and urbanization would be more diversified. The changes are also reflected in the cities where promulgation of national cultures becomes the main intention for they are nurtured as elements of national identity.

Is an urban revolution likely? South-east Asia is still in search of it, and the prospects seem likely. Malaysia is simultaneously attempting to

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43 Yeung, "Southeast Asian Cities...", in Brian J.L. Berry, *op. cit.*, p. 300. See also Berry's comparative analysis "Transformation during diffusion: Third world urbanization", in Berry, *Human Consequences of Urbanization* (London: McMillan, 1973), pp. 74-114.

44 McGee, "Beachheads and Enclaves ...", in Yeung and Lo (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 60-75.

tackle racial imbalance in the cities and to successfully implement its development programs. On one hand urbanization of the Malays seem acceptable, but on the other hand it could retard rural development efforts. Hamzah Sendut cautioned that:

“Yet it is obvious that vast social transformation is taking place as a result of urbanization and unless additional details are forthcoming it will be impossible to plan for the future and arrive at a judicious social policies.”<sup>45</sup>

Underlying this dilemma is the serious unemployment and poverty issues, especially among the Malays.<sup>46</sup>

A similar pessimism exists with Philippines. Urban problems have generated varying forms of protest movements and political participation. Manila's growth is at worse a “nightmare”.

Even post-war Vietnam and Cambodia are grappling with the prospects of urban revolution. Peace conditions has created a massive reservoir of labor force. Attempts have been carried out to reconstruct war-torn Vietnam through administrative consolidation, popular participation and voluntary compliance of both rural and urban population. But the new government still favours a policy of returning immigrants to places of origin, and thus Saigon and other major cities in the south would still maintain large population.

Whether it is urban transformation or urban revolution, urban South-east Asia would continue to witness changes which have far-reaching implications on its structure, environment, socio-economic institutions and patterns of urbanization. If it is related to the existing serious urban problems, it would be impractical and questionable if no steps are taken to reevaluate and reassess previous development policies. It would even be logical if new policies are adopted to cope with the impending urban crisis of urban transformation.

### SELECTED ALTERNATIVES AND OPTIONS

There is no definite strategy of decentralization that can be applied to all South-east Asian countries due to their diversified problems and priorities. But there are various alternatives and options available which can be incorporated into a comprehensive set of urban development policy. Further research and studies are needlessly required in most of these modest proposals.

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45 Hamzah Sendut, “Contemporary Urbanization in Malaysia”, in Yeung and Lo (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 76.

46 Raja Mohd. Affandi, *Perbandaran dan Orang Melayu* (Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Melayu, 1977). See also Kamal Salih, ‘Urban Strategy, Regional Development and New Economic Policy’, *Malaysian Econ. Association Paper*, 1975.

## 1. National Urbanization and Urban Policy

Almost all metropolitan centers of South-east Asia shared a large part of financial and urban services besides their dominating influence in decision-making. As we have noted earlier, they are also undergoing massive urbanization. So perhaps the initial move would be the formulation of a national urbanization policy which can actualize a planned, systematic approach to decentralization. What is the pattern of urbanization among cities of various sizes? What are their capacities to absorb surplus labor? The experiences of Turkey and Kenya, two examples, can be studied.<sup>47</sup>

In relation to this policy, the primate city deserves special attention in order to discourage further centralization and concentration of people and economic activities. It is beyond the scope of this work to touch on this aspect, but it is sufficient to state that metropolitan development needs further assessment so that it is in line with national policy.

Research pertaining to metropolitan development may include a detailed evaluation of urban growth, especially in urban expansion and land-ownership as being undertaken by Evers and Goh,<sup>48</sup> density pattern, traffic and transportation, infrastructure and resource mobilization. It is fundamental to check the development of metropolitan areas, because uncontrolled development has generated housing shortages, congestion, etc. Rodwin<sup>49</sup> suggested that this emphasis can be modified to four areas of research interest:

- a. responses to spreading metropolitan areas;
- b. building of resources and capabilities of government;
- c. who are the beneficiary?
- d. changing role of the cities

Daniel P. Moynihan<sup>50</sup> also lists some fundamentals of urban policy that can be used as basis of further research. His reference is American city, but undoubtedly some of them can be useful guide in South-east Asian case too. These includes research into poverty and social isolation of minority groups (in our case indigenous or immigrant groups), concept of urban balance, reorganization of local government, fiscal vitality, and provision of public services.

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47 See Salah El-Shakhs and Robert Obundho (eds.), *Urbanization, National Development and Regional Planning in Africa* (N.Y: Praeger, 1974); John Friedman, *Urbanization Planning and National Development* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1973), ch. 9.

48 Hans Dieter Evers, "Urban Expansion and Landownership in Underdeveloped Societies", in John Walton and L.H. Masotti (eds.), *The City in Comparative Perspective* (NY: John Wiley, 1976), pp. 67-79; B.C. Goh, "The Pattern of Landownership in Central Georgetown," Center for Policy Research, University of Sciences of Malaysia, no. 2, 1975.

49 Lloyd Rodwin, *Nations and Cities* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970), p. 280.

50 Daniel P. Moynihan, "Towards a National Urban Policy", in John Walton and D.E. Carns, *Cities in Change* (Boston: Allyn Bacon, 1973), pp. 646-661.



One of the most interesting, yet frustrating, aspect of urban policy is the question of city-size. What is the relationship between centralization and city-size? So far it is difficult to determine optimal city-size or even optimal distribution of cities. Perhaps in research it is necessary to identify ranges of city-sizes appropriate for proper urban development.

## 2. Development By Regions

The main aim of this policy is to check the inflow of rural migrants. In this plan, various small and intermediate towns are incorporated like a metropolitan area, complete with transport and social facilities and employment. T.T.F. Lam<sup>51</sup> referred to it as the Federal Urban Area and convinced that a comprehensive planning for education, industrial and settlement can be carried out. Sendut<sup>52</sup> also proposed for a series of areas covering all functional sectors and establishing a hierarchy of independent towns. So far the definitive plan and policy are still not clear.

## 3. Dispersion of Economic Activities

Perhaps the most dominant economic activities are industrial development projects which are able to act as "leading industry" generating productivity and employment opportunities. They can be located in newly-developed areas rather than in fringes of metropolitan areas which have given rise to suburban sprawl, ribbon development and even conurbation. Research should be made into the feasibility of such ventures, development areas, their cost-benefit, and industrial location studies. Industrial decentralization has been consciously adopted by many South-east Asian countries through Industrial Estates program, but their results has been so far unsatisfactory. This policy can also be used as an instrument to redress imbalance in industrial structure and regional disparities.

Preliminary attempts have also been made to relate industrial decentralization with regional planning and growth centers. As a case is the study by Kamal and Lo to disperse industries from major concentration of Kuala Lumpur-Petaling Jaya complex.<sup>53</sup>

## 4. Frontier and Regional Development

Frontier development is the favourite of many policy-makers, especially in insurgency state. Examples are FLDA programs and NARRA schemes

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51 T.T.F. Lam, "Planned Urbanization: Major Priority Issues in the 70's," *Perancang*, 3(2), September 1971, p. 18.

52 Hamzah Sendut, "Towards a National Urban Policy," *Malaysian Economic Association Paper*, 2nd. Malaysian Economic Convention, Kuala Lumpur, 1975.

53 Kamal Salih and F.C. Lo, *Industrialization Strategy, Development and Growth Center Approach: A case Study of West Malaysia*, UNCRD, Nagoya, Nov. 1975. See also Kamal Salih, "Rationalized Growth Center Strategies in Malaysian Regional Development," Working Paper for Malaysian Economic Association, 1974.

in the Philippines. Lately favour seems to shift to regionally-based development programs commonly associated with growth centers, such as resource development, irrigation, integrated land development, etc.<sup>54</sup> So far new growth centers are taking shape in most of the programs, but at a very slow pace and at a very high capital cost. General appraisal seems to suggest that this approach fails to check the influx of rural-urban migration, though it is successful in promoting national development.

### 5. Small Towns and Intermediate Cities Reconsidered.

The immigration from rural areas tends to be primarily to metropolitan areas. So new policies can be adopted to improve, develop and allocate proper resources to the small and intermediate towns, because they can be substitute to metropolitan areas, absorb and attract rural migrants in greater proportions. Mitchell<sup>55</sup> showed that this is the case in most South-east Asian countries and in most cases they provide job opportunities. In another study Osborn<sup>56</sup> showed the role by “medium-sized” cities in Malaysia. Osborn stated that middle-cities can play pivotal role in urbanization and modernization due to their large numbers. They seem to be way-stations in rural-urban migration pattern and other upward flows, receptacles of communication and development impulses and innovations, outposts of central authority and countervailing regional power.

Possible research in this area are:

1. Organization and function of small towns and intermediate cities of South-east Asia;
2. inter-city hierarchies and implications on planning;
3. preparation of a systematic urban inventory in order to determine their status of trade, transport and industrial location. This includes sites, accessibility, land-use and so forth.
4. masterplan of small towns and intermediate cities.

### Devolution of Centralized Power

This measure may prove beneficial for a number of reasons. Firstly,

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54 Extensive works in this field has been done by Friedman, Alonso, UN, etc. For example, see Friedman and Alonso (eds.), *Regional Policy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1975); UN, *Planning for Urban and Regional Development in Asia and the Far East*, (NY, 1971).

55 R.E. Mitchell, “Similarities and Differences in Migration flows to urban Settlements in five Southeast Asian Countries,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 6, 1975, pp. 52–60.

56 James Osborn, *Area Development and the Middle City in Malaysia*, Research Paper No. 153, Department of Geography, University of Chicago, 1974. As a case which supports this hypothesis, see Richard Ulack, “Urbanization and Migration in Medium-sized Industrializing City: Case of Iligan City, the Philippines”, *Southeast Asia*, Vol. 3, n. 4, Fall, 1974, pp. 1009–1033.

closer rapport between city officials and the people. Secondly, there will be better provision of services due to local awareness. Thirdly, it reduces “red tape” and government bureaucracy. The idea here is to encourage a more favourable sense of local participation in decision-making.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

It seems very unlikely that decentralization in any South-east Asian country would seriously threatened the power and influence of the central government. The underlying reasons for decentralization of urban development are to cope with the rising urban problems and urban changes which to a large extent resulted from long periods of centralization. It is not meant to negate centralization totally, but more fundamental is to orientate a more feasible urban development policy within the national framework. Another reason is to siphon-off resources and emphasis from the metropolitan center to smaller cities, because excessive concentration would further swollen the precarious “Humpty-Dumty” state of the primate, metropolitan city.

It has been observed that the policy options and alternatives will not totally check the centralizing tendency of metropolitan center. First, higher income level accompanied by increase mobility of resources would continue to create demand for services. Secondly, the elites of the state may fear any form of local autonomy, and finally, administrative mechanisms will continue to be in the metropolitan center.

