

## ADOPTION IN SINGAPORE

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Some aspects of the problems relating to adoption may concern medical practitioners, nurses and almoners. In Singapore, mothers giving birth in Kandang Kerbau Maternity Hospital (Vickers 1953) or at home, sometimes wish to give away their babies; and in the Paediatric Department, Civil General Hospital, and in the Infant Welfare Clinics, babies who have been adopted frequently present special problems. The purpose of this study was to find out what happens in Singapore where children are adopted, whether by legal adoption under the Adoption of Children Ordinance (1939), or by registration as transferred children by the Social Welfare Department under the Children and Young Persons Ordinance (1949), or by private arrangement.

### METHOD.

In June, 1960, three field investigators, while doing a survey on Sickness in (a) Bukit Panjang, (b) around Amoy Street and (c) Kampong Amber, Singapore, on 3,597 males and 3,333 females (Lloyd Davies and Mills 1961) asked those over 21 years of age (and under 21 years of age if not living with parents or guardians) the following questions: -

Were you given away or adopted? (recorded as adults adopted).

Have you adopted or received any child who is not your own child into your family? (recorded as children adopted).

Have any of your children been given away or adopted? (recorded as children given away).

Those who said yes to any of the questions were interviewed by me with the help of an interpreter during May and June, 1961.

Standard forms were used for ascertainable facts, and free conversation provided further information. Where the adoptive parents of an adopted adult and the adopted adult were living in the survey area, both the adoptive parents and the adopted adult were interviewed, and the interviews recorded separately. Likewise, where the adoptive parents and the natural parents who gave away the child lived in the survey area, both the adoptive and the natural parents, but not the child, were interviewed. Those who had

moved out of the area since June, 1960 were not interviewed; but a few others, including some who had adopted or who had given away babies born after June, 1960, who had not been included in the 1960 survey on Sickness in Singapore, were interviewed, if living in the survey area.

### RESULTS.

Two hundred and ten persons (adults adopted 39, children adopted 98, children given away 73) were included. About a quarter of the subjects were Muslims and three-quarters followed the Chinese Traditional Religions. There were 8 Christians who were Protestants. There were no Hindus. There were three times as many females as males. Half of the males and a quarter of the females were adopted by relatives. Adoption by relatives was more common with Muslims than with followers of the Chinese Traditional Religions (Table 1). The present ages of the subjects are given in Table II and their ages at adoption in Table III. About 80% were adopted under the age of one year. Over half of the children adopted knew about their adoption and 133 of the 210 subjects saw their natural parents after they were adopted, although 12 of these had stopped seeing their natural parents by the time they were 5 years old.

Forty-three mothers had given away children. Six gave away 3 or more children. This included one who gave away 7 children. All mothers who had given away 3 or more had given birth to at least 8 children. Seven mothers or fathers who gave away children had been given away themselves. Children who had been given away ranged from the eldest in the family to the fourteenth, but the average position was the fifth.

Too many children was the reason most commonly given for giving away Chinese girls and poverty or sickness for Chinese boys. Malays usually gave away sons because relatives begged for them (Table IV). No children or lack of children of one sex was the usual reason for wanting to adopt children. Ten adoptive mothers adopted children because they were sorry for the child. Three Chinese adoptive mothers wanted a future daughter-in-law (Table V). Adoption for the purpose

TABLE I.  
Persons by Whom Adopted

Ethnic Group & Religion	Relatives		Friends		Strangers		Did not know		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F			
<i>Muslim</i>									
Malay	10	8	2	8	1	6	M	F	36
Boyanese	2	4	1	—	—	—	—	1	7
Javanese	2	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	4
Arab	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Indian	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
Pakistani	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	1
TOTAL	14	17	3	8	2	6	0	1	51
<i>Chinese Traditional Religions</i>									
Hokkien	11	16	7	45	8	20	—	10	117
Teochew	2	2	1	—	—	—	—	2	7
Cantonese	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1
Khek	3	4	2	12	1	4	—	—	26
TOTAL	16	22	10	57	9	24	0	13	151
<i>Christian</i>									
Hokkien	1	3	—	—	2	2	—	—	8
GRAND TOTAL	31	42	13	65	13	32	0	14(a)	210

(a) All adults adopted.

of acquiring a future daughter-in-law was more common in the past and altogether 17 girls were adopted to be daughters-in-law. Two girls married their adoptive fathers. Eight adopted children had the same surname as their adoptive families and 9 natural mothers gave away their children to families with the same surname. Fifteen adoptive mothers were unmarried or widows.

One hundred and thirty-four of the 159 Chinese knew their animal year, but only 6 of these were born in the year of the Tiger. The horoscopes of 10 adopted children had been taken, either by the natural or the adoptive parents. No natural mother said she gave away a sick baby, but 5 Malay and 8 Chinese adoptive mothers said the baby had been sick at the time of the adoption. One adopted boy was mentally defective and one adopted girl had a deformed foot. Two

adoptive mothers regretted the adoption and one of these and one other adoptive mother complained of the adopted child's behaviour. Eight adoptive mothers resented neighbours' comments about the adoption. The mothers of 10 children were sorry they had given the child away and in 5 families a sibling, aged between 2 and 4 years, was distressed when the child was given away.

No adoptive mother adopted more than 4 children: the majority adopted one child. More than half of the adopted children and all but 7 of the adults adopted were adopted into homes where the adoptive mother had one or more natural children. Seventy-five per cent of the children were adopted or given away without a written contract. Ten were adopted or given away legally under the Adoption of Children Ordinance (1939), and 18 were registered as transferred children

TABLE II.  
Present Age

Age in Years	Adults Adopted						Children Adopted						Children given away							
	Muslim		Chinese Traditional Religions		Christian		Muslim		Chinese Traditional Religions		Christian		Muslim		Chinese Traditional Religions		Christian			
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	Total	
Under 5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	34
5—9	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	6	6	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	50
10—19	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	8	6	9	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	42
20—29	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	4	8	10	1	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	38
30—39	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	4	9	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	24
40—49	2	1	1	9	—	—	—	—	1	—	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	11
50 and over	—	1	1	8	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	11
TOTAL	3	4	3	29	0	0	0	9	21	24	37	3	4	7	7	8	50	0	1	210

TABLE III.  
Age at Adoption

Age	Adults Adopted						Children Adopted						Children given away								
	Muslim		Chinese Traditional Religions		Christian		Muslim		Chinese Traditional Religions		Christian		Muslim		Chinese Traditional Religions		Christian				
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	Total		
Under one month	1	2	1	8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	94
1—11 months	—	2	—	10	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	71
1—4 years	1	—	1	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	30
5—9 years	1	—	1	5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	11
10 years and over	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	4
TOTAL	3	4	3	29	0	0	0	9	21	24	37	3	4	7	7	8	50	0	1	210	

TABLE IV.  
Reasons for Giving Children Away

Reason	Muslim		Chinese Traditional Religions		Christian		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Too many children	—	2	1	20	—	—	23
Too many girls	—	—	—	2	—	1	3
Mother sick	—	1	1	4	—	—	6
Mother-in-law sick	—	—	—	1	—	—	1
Father sick	—	—	2	1	—	—	3
Father out of work	2	—	1	7	—	—	10
Poverty	1	1	2	6	—	—	10
Business bad	—	—	—	2	—	—	2
Mother a widow	—	—	—	2	—	—	2
No time to care for child	—	1	—	1	—	—	2
Relative wanted child	4	2	—	2	—	—	8
To save child's life	—	—	1	—	—	—	1
Attached to foster mother	—	—	—	2	—	—	2
TOTAL	7	7	8	50	0	1	73

TABLE V.  
Reasons for Adopting Children

Reason	Muslim		Chinese Traditional Religions		Christian		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	
No children	7	8	8	16	2	3	44
Wanted a boy	—	—	12	—	1	—	13
Wanted a girl	—	3	—	7	—	—	10
Too few children	1	2	—	—	—	1	4
Likes children	—	3	—	1	—	—	4
Lonely	1	2	1	2	—	—	6
Own child died	—	1	—	2	—	—	3
Pity	—	2	3	5	—	—	10
To be a daughter-in-law	—	—	—	3	—	—	3
To be a servant	—	—	—	1	—	—	1
TOTAL	9	21	24	37	3	4	98

under the Children and Young Persons Ordinance (1949), (Table VI). Only 7 natural and 13 adoptive parents thought that an adoption

society would be helpful. About half the followers of Chinese Traditional Religions and three-quarters of the Muslims had consulted

TABLE VI.  
Method of Adoption

	Legal		Transferred Child		Given with Contract		Given without Contract		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
<i>Children Adopted</i>									
Muslim	3	2	—	3	—	—	6	16	30
Chinese Traditional Religions	1	—	1	6	5	3	17	28	61
Christian	1	—	—	—	—	—	2	4	7
<i>Children Given Away</i>									
Muslim	1	—	2	2	—	—	4	5	14
Chinese Traditional Religions	—	2	1	3	2	4	5	41	58
Christian	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>171</b>

TABLE VII.  
Use of "Go-Between" in Adoption

	None		Relatives		Friends		Others		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
<i>Children Adopted</i>									
Muslim	9	14	—	3	—	4	—	—	30
Chinese Traditional Religions	15	20	4	7	5	9	—	1	61
Christian	1	2	2	—	—	2	—	—	7
<i>Children Given Away</i>									
Muslim	5	6	2	1	—	—	—	—	14
Chinese Traditional Religions	4	31	2	5	1	14	1	—	58
Christian	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>171</b>

at least one grandparent before the child was adopted or given away, and in 5 cases a grandmother adopted the child. Nearly two-thirds of the adoptions were arranged directly between the natural and the adoptive parents. Relations or friends arranged the adoption for the other third (Table VII). Half of the natural mothers received M\$10/- (£1. 3s. 4d.) or more at the time of the adoption. Chinese

adopters paid considerably more money for boys than for girls and as much as M\$1,000 was given for one boy. Where the Malays adopted Chinese girls they frequently followed the Chinese custom of giving money, otherwise among the Muslims the difference in value between a boy and a girl was small (Table VIII).

TABLE VIII.  
Money Given or Received

Malayan Dollars	Children Adopted						Children given away						Total
	Muslim		Chinese Traditional Religions		Christian		Muslim		Chinese Traditional Religions		Christian		
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
None	6 <sup>(1)</sup>	14 <sup>(3)</sup>	7	18	1	3	5	4	3	15	—	1	77
Under 10	—	1 <sup>(1)</sup>	—	2	—	1	—	—	—	7	—	—	11
10 — 19	—	—	—	5	—	—	—	1	—	7	—	—	13
20 — 49	2	1	2	5	—	—	—	—	—	7	—	—	17
50 — 99	1	2 <sup>(1)</sup>	1	2	—	—	2	1	2	9	—	—	20
100 — 199	—	—	5	2	—	—	—	—	1	2	—	—	10
200 — 399	—	1 <sup>(1)</sup>	5	1	2	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	10
400 and over	—	—	3 <sup>(a)</sup>	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3
Amount not known <sup>(b)</sup>	—	2 <sup>(2)</sup>	1	2	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	7
Other gifts	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	2	—	—	3
TOTAL	9 <sup>(1)</sup>	21 <sup>(3)</sup>	24	37	3	4	7	7	8	50	0	1	171

Raised figures represent Chinese Children adopted by Muslims (included in total).

(a) M\$400, M\$700 and M\$1,000.

(b) Includes money paid in China, during the Japanese occupation of Singapore, and money paid by a relative.



## DISCUSSION.

**Adopted Adults.**

It is likely that there were more adopted adults in the Survey areas than those who recorded their adoption. The proportion of Chinese men to Chinese women who said that they were adopted was considerably smaller than the proportion of adoptive parents who said that they had adopted sons to those who said that they had adopted daughters. This would suggest that in the past either Chinese sons compared with daughters were more wanted and less available for adoption, or that sons more than daughters, who had been adopted, had not been told about it. It is also likely that some adults who knew about or suspected their adoption did not wish to admit to this. How far those who say they are adopted differ from those who do not cannot be assessed. Adoption is a subject with a strong subjective and emotional element which would, to some degree, influence the responses.

Most of the adopted adults seemed to have been happy with their adoptive parents. The giving away of sons to brothers is common among the Chinese, and where a brother is childless it may be considered a duty (Cheng 1953). Three Chinese men adopted in China by uncles said that they were happy in their adoptive homes, but the impression was that one of the men whose parents were living at the time of the adoption rather resented the fact that the parents had given him away, while the other two men, who were adopted because their parents had died, had accepted the adoption as the best that could be done under the circumstances.

A cheerful 57-year old Hokkien sampan man said that he had been adopted by his father's eldest brother, a farmer in China, when he was 2 years old, as both his parents were dead. He had 2 older cousins. He said that he had been very happy with his uncle and aunt, whom he regarded as his own parents. When he was 18 years old he came to work in Singapore, but continued to keep in touch with them.

The Chinese women who said they were adopted by relatives also seemed happy in their adoptive parents' homes. Occasionally the relative also died and the woman was re-adopted by a neighbour. Where this had happened the woman seemed grateful to the neighbour for the kindness.

A Hokkien woman aged 51 years said she had been looked after by her grandmother from the time when, at 3 years old, her parents died, until she was 9 years old, when the grandmother died. A washer-woman then cared for her until she married at 19 years old. She thought this had been a good arrangement, and added that recently she had heard about the washer-woman's death and regretted that she had not seen more of her after marriage.

Although adoption is accepted by many Chinese as a sensible method of getting rid of an unwanted child or of acquiring a child, the adopted women varied from those who accepted their adoption as natural and those who resented the fact that their parents had given them away. Some adopted women said they wondered what their natural mothers were like, others said they never thought about them.

A Hokkien woman, aged 26 years, was given away by her mother in China, after her father's death, when she was 9 years old, to a family going to Singapore, as her mother, who was very poor, had heard that Singapore was better than China. The mother worked on a small farm and remained in China. The woman said that she missed her mother, but she was glad she had been adopted as she had been well treated and not made to do housework, as the adoptive mother servants.

A Hokkien woman aged 48 years said that she was given away when she was about 6 years old for money, as her father was sick and could not pay for the treatment. She thought she might have been the one to have been given away because she was born in the year of the "Tiger", and that was not a good year. Soon after her adoption the adoptive parents separated and the woman went with her adoptive mother to Singapore. When she was 12 years old her adoptive mother died so she was taken over by neighbours until she married at 17 years. The woman said that she often used to think about her natural mother but would try to dismiss the thought of her from her mind. She had been well treated by her adoptive mother.

A Hokkien woman aged 24 years had been adopted when she was a few days old. She said that she was happy in her

adoptive mother's home and did not wish to see her natural parents because had they loved her they would not have given her away.

Some of the adopted adults had always known about their adoption, others learnt about it from neighbours or were told about it by their adoptive parents. The latter frequently occurred at marriage. The responses to the information varied considerably. Some refused to believe their adoption, others accepted it without being unduly surprised, while another group were uneasy at discussing the matter with their adoptive parents. Several of the adopted adults learnt little about their natural families, while others kept in touch with them. Where the adopted adults had been happy in their adoptive homes, knowing the natural family did not seem to lessen their affection towards their adoptive families.

A Hokkien woman, aged 43 years, who had a deformed foot, said she had learnt about her adoption when she was 12 or 13 years old, through neighbours. Although she used to wonder what her natural family was like, she did not like the idea of discussing the matter with her adoptive mother.

A Teochew woman aged 43 years was told by neighbours about her adoption into a well-to-do family when she was very small. At first she refused to believe it. Later she believed, but the idea did not worry her nor did she seem interested in her natural family.

A Hokkien woman aged 50 years learnt about her adoption through the woman who had arranged a marriage between her natural brother and the chief tenant's daughter. Her adoptive mother then told her that she had adopted her and the son. Neither of them had admitted surprise at the news, nor did the woman resent the fact that her mother had given her away. She said she was glad to know about her natural family and, at the time of the Survey, saw her natural mother about three times a year.

Sometimes a Chinese woman adopts a girl with the intention of bringing her up to marry a son. By this means she has a daughter-in-law trained by her in housewifery. The women in this survey who were adopted for the purpose of becoming a daughter-in-law were divided over whether they thought it was a good idea or not. The advantage to the

woman was that if the adoptive mother was kind and some of the adopted women had been the favourite, she was happy to remain within the family. The disadvantage appeared where the adopted woman had not wanted to marry her adoptive brother.

A Hokkien woman aged 51 years was adopted when she was about 4 months old, as her natural mother died. She said that she had frequently gone to her father's house and had always known she had been adopted to be a future daughter-in-law. She added that she did not have to marry her adoptive brother, but she had wanted to do so, as she was happy with her mother-in-law. She was considering adopting a girl to be her daughter-in-law, as she had no daughter and would like to have one.

A Hokkien woman aged 44 years was given away at birth to be a future daughter-in-law. The adoptive mother had no natural daughter and the woman was her favourite and tended to get what she wanted. When she was 19 years old she was told about her adoption, and that she should marry her adoptive brother. She was very pleased about this as she had the love of her mother-in-law and thought the system was a good one.

A Khek 43-year old woman was given away when she was 10 years old to be a future daughter-in-law, as her mother could not afford to keep her. She said that she had been well treated and was happily married to her adoptive brother, but thought that it would have been better to have remained with her natural mother and chosen her own husband as then she might have married a richer man.

Occasionally Chinese adopted women married their adoptive fathers.

A high-grade mentally defective Teochew woman, aged 60 years, was adopted for M\$400-500 when she was 15 years old, in order to do housework. A year later she became the second wife of her adoptive father. The adopted woman, who bore no children, appeared to be very much dominated by the first wife, who treated her as an unpaid servant.

One adopted woman had natural parents who were Chinese, but adopted into a Malay family. The adoption appeared happy.

A Chinese woman aged 58 was adopted



into a family where the adoptive mother was Malay and the adoptive father French. The woman was educated in a Convent and cared for by her adoptive grandmother. The woman said that looking Chinese did not create difficulties, but the grandmother became very angry if anyone remarked that she was Chinese, and would never admit the adoption. The adoptive mother adopted the girl because she had no children of her own, and the natural mother, a close friend, asked her to adopt her baby, just before she died. Later the adoptive mother was re-married to a Malay. The adopted woman also married a Malay and changed her religion from Roman Catholicism to Muslim.

The other Muslim adopted adults had been adopted by relatives or by a close friend because the natural mother had died, and were happy in their adoptive homes. The only exception to this was a Pakistani man.

A Pakistani man, aged 38 years, was given to his aunt in Bombay, who had three daughters but no sons. He lived with her until he was 5 years old, when he met one of his brothers and complained that he was ill-treated, so his mother took him back. When he was 7 years old his father died and the boy came to Singapore with his elder brother. He looked after his brother's employer's youngest child. The brother did not tell the employer that they were brothers, and when the employer paid for the brother to return to Bombay for a holiday he remained with the employer. The brother was expected to return to Singapore, but did not do so. When he was 10 years old the boy left his employer and worked with a company of painters for 2 years. Then he joined a travelling acting company for 3 to 4 months. After that he worked in the "New World" selling things. The man said that everyone had been kind to him but he felt lonely and longed for his mother. He sent two letters but had no reply. He thought he had addressed the letters wrongly.

### **Children Adopted.**

The purpose of this section was to find out the opinions of the adoptive parents about the adoption. As only two adoptive parents said they regretted the adoption, and most said that they were pleased about it, it would seem in general, from the adopter's

point of view, the adoptions were successful. One adoptive mother who regretted the adoption complained that her husband had deserted her and married the adopted daughter, for whom she paid M\$200 when she was 10 years old, to do the domestic work. The other adoptive mother who complained was the second adoptive mother of an adopted girl.

An unmarried Hokkien adoptive mother, who was a temple-keeper, adopted a 7 year old girl who had previously been adopted when she was one year old by a married woman who frequented the temple. This woman was an opium-smoker, and as she neglected the girl and the girl was fond of the temple-keeper, friends suggested to the temple-keeper that she should adopt the girl and bring her up properly. When the girl was 12 years old the second adoptive mother went to Sarawak for a year, leaving the girl with a friend. After this the girl's behaviour became difficult. The second adoptive mother complained that the girl often visited the first adoptive mother without telling her, and neighbours told the girl she need not obey as she was only adopted.

In most cases the children were handed over to the adoptive parents without even a written statement about this, and yet no adoptive parent said that the natural parent had tried to get the child back afterwards. Sometimes the adoptive parents were afraid that the adopted child might wish to find out about his natural parents and want to return to them, and for this reason some wished to hide the fact of the adoption from the child. Where the adoptive parents and the adopted child had different surnames the birth certificate could be a source of concern, as this had to be produced first when a child was registered for school and later when he obtained an identity card. One adoptive mother, who was anxious that the adopted girl should not know about her adoption, said that she told the girl that her birth certificate had been burnt so she had borrowed someone else's; another adoptive mother said that the adopted boy's birth certificate was so faded that no-one could read it, therefore it would not present a problem.

It was mainly to safeguard their rights as adoptive parents that a few adoptive parents, including 3 Malays who had adopted Chinese children, would have liked to have

used an adoption society. The majority, however, were not worried that the adopted children would wish to return to their natural parents and often allowed the natural mother to visit the child after adoption. Some adoptive mothers only allowed this while the adopted child was too young to remember; with others the visiting continued, and one adopted child even lived in the same house as the natural family and frequently fed with them. In the case of adoption arranged between Muslims the child is supposed to know about the adoption and the natural father attend the ceremony when the child is married.

Adoptive mothers who did not mind their adopted children knowing about their adoption were divided between those who left it for the child to find out either through neighbours or through the birth certificate, and those who would say things like "It is some time since your mother visited" or would point out members of the adopted child's natural family to him. Some of the latter adoptive mothers said that the adopted child refused to believe that he had been adopted. The general feeling expressed was that as the child was fond of her why should he wish to leave? A few adoptive mothers said that the adopted child resented the fact that the natural parents had not wanted him and others that they did not wish to tell the child about the adoption because they did not wish to hurt his feelings.

A Hokkien couple adopted a boy at birth as they had no sons and the natural parents had many children. The adoptive and natural parents worked as labourers at the same place. The adoptive mother said that although the fathers met at work she was not afraid that the boy, 13 years old at the time of the Survey, would leave her when he finds out about his adoption, but added that later she will talk in such a way that he will know about it. She said that the boy was happy in their home and that he was a good boy. She was quite contented with the way in which the adoption had been arranged.

A Hokkien adoptive mother adopted twin girls when they were a few days old, as the natural mother had several children. She said she had registered the girls at the Social Welfare Department as she thought that would make it easier for them to attend school. She would have liked the girls' names to have been

changed to hers, but she was not afraid that they would want to return to their natural parents, who were neighbours, as they were happy with her. She had also adopted another girl, as her parents had returned to China.

The Chinese custom of adopting a girl to bring her up to be a daughter-in-law is declining in Singapore. Some adoptive mothers thought that if the girl wished to marry her son she would be pleased, but rarely was there any evidence to show that pressure would be brought to bear on the girl to do so.

A Hokkien adoptive mother said she adopted a girl when she was 4 years old, as the natural mother had died and she herself had no daughters. The natural father, who continued to visit, had owed the adoptive family M\$60/- and on adoption the debt was cancelled. The adoptive mother said that she had hoped that her natural son would marry the girl, but if he had not wanted to she would not have minded. Her husband, though, was very anxious for him to marry the adopted girl and would have tried to persuade him to do so had he been unwilling.

The adopted girl, who married the younger son, said that she had been quite happy about the idea of marrying her adoptive brother, as their adoptive mother had been kind to her, but even if she had not wanted to marry him she would still have done so.

A Hokkien adoptive mother said that she adopted the daughter of a great friend when she was 12 days old to become the wife of her adopted son. She had always called the girl daughter-in-law, so that she would know about her adoption. Neither the adopted son nor the adopted daughter wished to marry the other, but she was glad about this as she will have both a daughter-in-law and a son-in-law.

Some adoptive mothers had the adopted child's horoscope taken to confirm the desirability of adoption. Occasionally the horoscope originally suggested an adoption.

A Hokkien adoptive mother said that when her sister's daughter was a baby she was sick, so her horoscope was taken. This said that her niece should be adopted, so she adopted her.

Although grandmothers were frequently consulted at the time of the adoption, unless

the grandmother took an active part in family activities the consultation was often only formal, and had she objected the adoption would still have taken place. Cases where the grandmother's objection had been effective would not have been discovered in this Survey, as the child would not have been adopted. Therefore no conclusions can be drawn from this Survey about the extent of the influence of grandmothers on adoption. The higher proportion of Muslims than of Chinese who consulted grandmothers was partly because fewer Chinese grandmothers were available for consultation. Where the grandmother herself was adopted, the grandchild could reduce her loneliness after her children had grown up and left the home.

Most adoptors adopted children to meet their own needs, and it was quite common for unmarried women or widows to adopt children. In one case a man whose wife was in China adopted a boy for company. The boy accompanied him when he went to work. Children adopted by single persons usually received much affection. Most Asian women, on marriage, do not expect to love or be loved by their husbands, but to serve them and bear their children. The woman is usually content if her husband supports her adequately. For this reason the child may not normally share his mother's love with his father, although he would share her attention with him, and in respect of having to share affection the presence or absence of a father might be relatively unimportant. A good father does, however, support his family, and in this respect the effect of the absence of the father in the home would largely depend upon the alternative forms of support available for the woman. Also, in many cases, he may play a part in the upbringing of his children. To what degree the absence of a father in the home affected the child, or to what extent there were father substitutes was not enquired into, but there was no overt evidence to suggest that these adoptions were unsuccessful from the child's point of view.

A Hokkien actress said that her husband died a year after her marriage. She adopted two girls, one now 15 years old, when she was 4 years old, and the other, now 9 years old, when she was one month old. The girls were first cared for by a servant who was really their mother substitute. Later the adoptive aunt helped to bring them up. The woman said she adopted the girls because she liked children.

### Children Given Away.

Although only 10 out of 73 natural parents said they were sorry they had given away their children, this is likely to be an under-estimate. People often repress unpleasant feelings, and this may have happened in some cases. One mother who regretted giving away her daughter said business had been bad at the time. Another mother said she regretted she had given a son away, as she had been poor at the time, but as she has had several other children since, she no longer minded. One father had forgotten he had given away a daughter.

During the Japanese occupation a Khek father and mother gave away their eldest daughter, now 23 years old to a friend of the natural grandmother, as the father was out of work and they were afraid that there would be no food for the baby. The natural mother had not seen the child since she was 3 to 4 years old, but the grandmother who lived near the girl told them how she was getting on. The father was the one at home when we called to interview the parents. He had quite forgotten that he had given a child away. This may have been because the child having been given away had either left so little impression on him that he had forgotten, or that it had been such an unpleasant experience that the memory had been repressed.

Another mother was sorry she had given away her daughter and was anxious to know whether we could arrange for her to see her.

A Khek father and mother said that they agreed to give away their baby if it was a girl when the mother was pregnant, as business was bad at the time and they could not afford a servant for the mother. They only saw the girl once after she was given away, but had heard from a friend that the girl was attractive and intelligent. They said they had promised the adoptive mother not to see the daughter, but they would like to do so without her knowing. She said she would not have liked to have used an adoption society, as they wished to investigate themselves that the home was a good one. The natural father, a dispenser of Chinese traditional medicines, said business had improved, they had a servant and they had not given away any other children. They regretted having given away that one.

Although most of the children were given away without a written contract none of the natural mothers considered claiming back the child. Only 7 mothers thought an adoption society would help, either because it would mean that the adoptive mother would feel more secure or because the adoption society would ensure that the adoptive mothers treated the adopted children kindly. For their own peace of mind many natural mothers liked to see their children after adoption to find out how they had settled in their adoptive homes, and would only agree to adoption under those conditions. Sometimes the visiting continued, at other times it stopped as the child became old enough to remember. Had fewer mothers been able to see their children after giving them away probably more would have regretted it and more also might have favoured an adoption society.

Most mothers preferred to give their children to close relatives or friends. If a stranger adopted the child the go-between would be either a relative or a friend.

Some of the inter-family adoptions were in order to carry on ancestor worship, and where the relative had no-one to do this it was considered a duty (Cheng 1953); at other times it was a matter of convenience.

A Hokkien man had no son to worship his ancestors. He would not let his only daughter adopt a boy as the surname would be different, but adopted his brother's son as his grandson. The natural mother was glad to give the boy away as 5 out of her 8 other children had died, and she was afraid that this one might die if he was not given away.

Where there was some misfortune in the family the natural mother would sometimes say that she was too poor or too busy to keep the child and that she was glad she had given him or her away, as the adoptive mother loves the child. A few mothers held their duty to their family to be stronger than to their child. One child was given away to pay for his father's medicine. Sometimes the child would be given away at a mother-in-law's request.

A Hokkien mother gave away a child at her mother-in-law's request to a childless domestic servant whose husband had deserted her. The adoptive mother paid for the child's keep and the natural mother looked after her.

In a Hokkien family 7 out of all children were given away for M\$50 to M\$60 each because the father was out of work. The other 4 children were kept because the parents were getting old and they wanted children to look after them. The children were adopted by childless friends who would let the mother see the children for a few months and would then disappear. No contracts were signed.

In every case where siblings were reported to be distressed when the child was given away the siblings were between 2 to 5 years old. This could be because at that age children are old enough to realise what is happening but are very dependent upon their parents for support. It is likely that more siblings had been upset but that their parents had forgotten the fact.

The Malay children were given away because a relation or close friend begged for the child and the natural mother had several children. These mothers said that they would not have given away their children otherwise, and that they did not regret it because the adoptive parents loved the child. Two families who said they gave away children because of poverty were the only exception to this.

A Malay father had been adopted by an aunt who had 4 daughters. He had been spoilt when a boy, and only went to school when he wanted to go, and was not required to contribute his earnings to the home. He gave away 4 out of his 8 children during periods when he was unemployed. One child went to a grandmother, one to another relative and two to friends. He said that he did not regret giving them away but added one of his sons was very upset when his brother was given away.

## CONCLUSION.

From the evidence available from this Survey, it would seem that the system of adoption in Singapore had worked reasonably well. This is probably largely due to the fact that it is a generally accepted practice and considered a sensible way of dealing with the problem of unwanted children on the one hand, and lack of children on the other. Most natural mothers were anxious to ensure that their children would be happy in their adoptive homes and took trouble to investigate before giving the child away. If the children were



not given away to friends or relatives, friends or relatives would be used as go-betweens. The adoptive mothers were anxious to have the children, and tended to treat them well. Although there was no evidence to show that there was any ill-treatment of adopted children in the areas of the Survey, had there been cases of this the fact of adoption might not have been disclosed.

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