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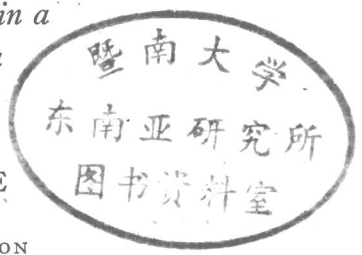
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UPPER NANKIN STREET SINGAPORE

*A Sociological Study of
Chinese Households Living in a
Densely Populated Area*

369



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UPPER NANKIN STREET
SINGAPORE

BY THE SAME WRITER

The Development of the Architectural Profession in Britain
(London, Allen & Unwin)

A Manifesto for Education in Malaya
(Singapore, Donald Moore)

Natten hade varit Mild och Öm
(Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell/Gebbers)

“Faith” is a fine invention
When Gentlemen can *see*—
But *Microscopes* are prudent
In an Emergency.

EMILY DICKINSON

To My Father

PREFACE

THE following report embodies the results of eighteen months' research undertaken as a Social Research Fellow in the University of Malaya, 1954-6; it was originally submitted, in a mimeographed version, to the Social Research Committee of the University in April 1956.

The aims of the research were fourfold:

(i) to make a sociological analysis of the living conditions of Chinese households in a densely populated urban area;

(ii) to define in sociological terms the group living in these conditions;

(iii) to measure the extent of neighbourliness amongst them;

(iv) to set up objective criteria and definitions for future studies in this field.

It was hoped that fulfilment of these aims would be not only of academic interest, but also of practical value to the Government of Singapore in trying to deal with the social problems arising from the dense overcrowding of parts of Singapore, and to that end the broad plan of research was planned in co-operation with the Department of Social Welfare.

The question may legitimately be asked: To what extent are the conditions revealed by the following study representative of urban Singapore as a whole, or even of other streets in the neighbourhood of that selected? The answer is given in the chapter on the interpretation of the obtained data: That in all probability the conditions are not typical, in so far as Upper Nankin Street is one of two streets selected by the Singapore Improvement Trust for early demolition on account of extreme overcrowding. This need not limit the value of the findings, however. While Upper Nankin Street is undoubtedly one of the most densely populated streets in Singapore's 'Chinatown', the differences between the living conditions found there and those in, say, Pagoda Street or Trengganu Street are probably largely those of degree. This is an hypothesis which, it is hoped, will be put to the test. A second and more important consideration which led to the choice of Upper Nankin Street in preference to an attempt to find a more 'typical'

street (if any exist) was that it was hoped that, after the demolition of the old shophouses in the street and the consequent dispersal of the inhabitants, a follow-up study of those inhabitants in their new residences would be undertaken, and further data obtained on their new living conditions, their attitudes towards the change, and the measurable effects of the change on the variables dealt with in the present book; data which would be of considerable interest, not only to the sociologist but also to the administrator.

The report is divided into four parts. The first three parts deal with the three stages of the project itself; each includes a chapter devoted to the definition of categories, followed by chapters setting out the data obtained. Particular emphasis is laid in the report on the validity of the obtained data, and Part Four consists of a chapter from which an estimate may be made of the probable extent of error. Copies of the final forms of the questionnaires, and the instructions to investigators, are given as appendixes. The limitations of space have prevented the inclusion of the various forms of questionnaires used at pilot surveys and more than a brief reference to the improvements made as a result of them. The number of times a form has been completely revised can be deduced from the final letter of the form reference number; CC/4/C, for example, is the second complete revision, the previous forms being CC/4/A and CC/4/B respectively. It does not follow, however, that a revision of a form was preceded by only one pilot survey; in several instances it was necessary to carry out a number of pilot surveys for each revision. While a discussion of the various problems met with in the process of these pilot surveys, and the means of their solution, might have been of use to subsequent workers in this field, it was felt that their general interest was not such as to justify the lengthy descriptions that would be necessary to deal with them. A section giving general recommendations for future work in this and similar fields has been added to the chapter on the validity of the data.

The completed questionnaires for each of the surveys have been bound together, and deposited as research archives in the Library of the University of Malaya, by kind permission of the Librarian.

A list of acknowledgements follows this preface.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I SHOULD like to acknowledge the help I received from Mr. T. P. Cromwell, the Director of Social Welfare, Singapore, who gave me a great deal of his time in the early stages of this project, made numerous valuable suggestions, and bore patiently with my methodological elaborations and professional sensitivity. While the idea of the present project was my own, it was developed in close collaboration with the Social Welfare Department, and it was, indeed, one of the aims of the study that it should provide data which would be of value in dealing with social problems in Singapore; in particular, of course, the problem of overcrowding.

It would be difficult for me to exaggerate the debt I owe to Mr. Johnny Wong Geok Lin, Acting Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Social Research). Not only did he make available to me the resources of the Research Section, including the loan of investigators and coding clerks, but also, and more important, he lent me the fruits of his long experience in the field of social research.

To both Mr. Cromwell and Mr. Wong I submitted each of my questionnaires and instructions in draft form, and from them I received that painstaking and detailed criticism, the value of which can only be appreciated by a research sociologist.

A further member of the Social Welfare Department to whom I owe an indebtedness of a special order is Miss Sally Yeo, social research investigator. I was granted the loan of Miss Yeo's services at an early stage in my research, which services I was fortunate enough to retain throughout the whole project—a further example of the generosity of the Department. Miss Yeo had the burden, therefore, of all the pilot surveys, as well as participating in the full surveys, and I picked her brain relentlessly, not only in respect of her own experience of investigating, but also for details of local customs, dialect variations, and a hundred and one other matters. Her ordered and logical mind, as well as her exceptional skill in interviewing, were of the utmost value to me.

Mrs. Marjorie Topley and Mr. A. E. Wells, of the Department of Social Studies of the University of Malaya, were kind enough to read and comment on my schedules and definitions, as well

as to bear with the rationalizations with which I sought to defend them.

I should like to thank also Miss Pauline Chong and Mrs. Leow Hup Hin, full-time research investigators of the Social Welfare Department, and Mdm. K. K. Bong, a part-time investigator also loaned through the good offices of that Department, for their patience in listening to my instructions, and for their perseverance in carrying them out.

Professor T. H. Silcock, Chairman of the Social Research Committee, made several detailed and very helpful comments on the Report after it was submitted to the Committee, which I have taken into account in revising the mimeographed version.

I should like to mention the debt I owe to Mr. Chan Chung Yee, my Cantonese Tutor, whose wide knowledge of Chinese literature, whose interest in world events, and whose patience, skill and tact all helped to transform the hours spent attempting to master Cantonese from a duty into a great pleasure.

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I am also indebted to the Editor of *The American Journal of Sociology* for permission to quote from Peter H. Mann's 'The Concept of Neighborliness' (Copyright 1954 by the University of Chicago); to the Editor of *Sociology and Social Research* for permission to quote from Harry C. Harmsworth's 'Primary Group Relationships'; to the Ministry of Labour and Welfare, Government of Singapore, for permission to quote from *A Social Survey of Singapore* and *Survey of Family Living Conditions 1953*; and to the Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press for permission to quote on the title-page from the Johnson edition of the *Poems of Emily Dickinson*.

Finally I should like to record my gratitude to the Publications Committee of the University of Malaya whose very generous sponsorship has made the publication of this book possible. I am deeply sensible of the honour which this sponsorship, made in the face of many adverse factors, confers upon me.

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations have been used in this Report:

DK—'Don't know.'

DNA—Does not apply.

HH—Household.

SD—Standard Deviation.

NOTE

The percentage-equivalents of the frequency distributions given in the Tables in this book do not always total exactly 100, as they are expressed to the nearest whole percent. The figure '100%' properly does not give the sum of the percentage-equivalents for each frequency, but is the percentage-equivalent of N, the total itself.