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I, Wei Cao, hereby submit this work as part of the requirements for the degree of:

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CHILDREN OF “A DREAM COME TRUE”: IDENTITIES OF
CHILDREN ADOPTED FROM CHINA

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the Division of Educational Studies
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2004

by

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ABSTRACT

This empirical study was designed to explore the identity work of children who were adopted from China by American parent(s). The purposes of this study were to investigate how these children construct their identities as intercountry adoptees in the US, and to describe the subtle interaction of home and school cultures regarding these children’s identity formation.

The identity of recent international adoptees is an under studied area, particularly these Chinese adoptees. The researcher followed 13 families who were affiliated with the Families with Children from China (FCC) in the Midwest over the course of 16 months in 2003 and 2004. The adult participants were between 36 and 59 years old; most of them were European Americans. The child participants were between 11 months and 13 years old, including biological and adoptive children in the families. Their post adoption experiences, family life, schooling, community, and FCC activities were studied to understand many of the core adoption issues in cultural identity; abandonment, schooling, racism, gender role, and community connections.

The findings provided an understanding of the contextual reality these children lived. Children’s identity was multifaceted and fluid. Children in this study demonstrated great resilience and agency (Holland, 1998) as they actively negotiated their identities at home, at school, in FCC and their immediate communities. The researcher suggested the importance of public rituals to facilitate children’s Chinese identity development. In addition, the study also provided some up to date and useful information and understandings of Chinese adoptees identity formation for the concerned families, schools, and adoption professionals in international adoption communities.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I dedicate this dissertation to those FCC families who participated in my study. Thank you for giving me your trust and sharing your joys and emotional stories with me about your life as adoptive parents and adoptees. I cannot name you here for the confidential purpose.

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I am thankful for the good suggestion my friend Pat Davis gave to me about my dissertation topic when I was considering a dissertation project on immigrant children from China.

I could not have done this without the friendship of many friends, in particular, Marc, Qian, Haiyan, J.H., Beth, Janet, Rod, and many others. I want to thank Teri, who will claim her doctoral degree this year too, for being my dissertation writing partner over the past year. Our writing partnership has been so effective.

Finally, I want to express my deepest gratitude to my parents, for educating me to be a responsible and passionate person. Thank you for giving me a chance to explore the world that was unknown to you; Thank you for your sacrifice after I left China. Thank you for allowing me to do one thing for my life (with apprehension) that you had never imagined for yourselves. Thank you mom and dad, I love you so much, even if I do not always agree with you!
# CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................ III

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .................................................................................................. VI

LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................ VIII

LIST OF FIGURES ......................................................................................................... IX

CHILDREN OF "A DREAM COME TRUE": IDENTITIES OF CHILDREN ADOPTED FROM CHINA .................................................................................................................. 1

  Introduction ............................................................................................................. 1
  Review of Literature ................................................................................................. 7
  Methods ................................................................................................................... 13
  Results .................................................................................................................... 44

CONCLUSION .......................................................................................................... 101

REFERENCES ............................................................................................................. 121

APPENDICES ........................................................................................................... 126
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Parent age groups
Table 2. Parent educational level
Table 3. Family income
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Data collection with core participating children and families

Figure 2. Children’s identity negotiation diagram

Figure 3. Parental roles

Figure 4. School and peers

Figure 5. FCC and community

Figure 6. Child
CHILDREN OF A DREAM COME TRUE: IDENTITIES OF CHILDREN ADOPTED FROM CHINA

Introduction

This empirical study was designed to explore the identity work of children who were adopted from China by American parent(s), most of whom were European American. The purposes of this study are to investigate how these children construct their identities as intercountry adoptees, and how the subtle interaction of home and school cultures influences the identity formation of these children.

People recognize the trend that there more and more Chinese children are joining families headed by their European American parent(s). These children were adopted from orphanages in various cities and towns in China. The number of the adopted children from China increased dramatically in the last decade in the United States. According to the US Department of State, 33,823 children were adopted from China between 1991-2002. In fact, most people in any given size city in the United States now either have family members, relatives, friends, or themselves adopted Chinese children. They added more colors on the fabric in the making of American families.

Many of these Chinese children were infants in their orphanages at the time they were adopted. Most of them were healthy babies with a few exceptions. They were abandoned by their parents mainly because they were girls. In the late 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, the Chinese government realized the pressure from the country’s huge population while it determined to modernize the nation. “One child policy” became a state policy to eliminate the high birth rates, and eventually reduce the population growth.
Under the population control policy, parents in the cities are allowed to have only one child, unless the child is born with disability or parents themselves are the only child in their families or they are minority members. In these cases, they are allowed to have the second child. In rural areas which is home to about 80 percent of China’s population, there are some elaborations on the policy—“one son-two children” (Johnson, 2004). ¹Parents in the rural areas are allowed to have one child if he is a boy. If the first child is a girl, the couple is allowed to have the second child. If parents have the third or fourth and even more children, these children are called “over quota” children, or black children. Parents will be fined if over-quota children are discovered and reported to the population control authority (Johnson, 2004).

Over-quota children are common in the rural areas but there is a strict surveillance system in the cities that ensures the “one child policy” is reinforced. It is also much more difficult for a woman to hide her pregnancy in the cities. They will be subject to abortion or sterilization should an over-quota birth be discovered. With the economic prosperity that is enjoyed relatively widely among the city population, more and more couples, especially in big cities, do not want to have more than one child if not any.

But it is a different picture for the vast majority who live in rural China where old tradition and cultural practices are still the norm of reference for conducting their lives. Traditionally, Chinese society regards men as the only legitimate heir of the family. Men also take the responsibility of caring for their parents when parents get older. So they are the ones who promise the stability and sustainability of the family names, social status, and welfare of their aging parents. While women might be good as daughters, they would marry out one day and help their husbands to take care of her parents in law. With the population control policy

¹ Many of the abandonment information depends on the findings of Kay Johnson who has spent over a decade conducting comprehensive field work on adoption in China.
implemented in rural China, some (percentage unknown) parents choose to abandon their baby girls to avoid fines for having an over quota child. If the over quota ends up being a boy, parents will go ahead and pay the fine and keep the boy.

The real situation on abandonment is very complex. According to more than a decade of field work in China, Key Johnson concluded that parents seldom abandoned their first baby if she was a girl. They regarded their daughters as a wonderful emotional satisfaction because she is likely to be more devoted than boys. But for the practical purposes noted above, they also need to have a son. The conflict between the state policy and a family’s desire for a male heir creates the pressure that forces many rural parents to get ride of the “extra girl” partly to free them up from the birth quota for a boy heir. As a result, girls who are abandoned are most likely the second, third or fourth daughter of the family.

Children’s disability is also a reason of their abandonment whether boys or girls. Some of these children have severe disabilities. But some children have minor and even correctible problems like cleft lips, birth marks, an extra finger, etc.

Virtually all abandoned children do not have any evidence that indicates their birth place and birth parents. There is normally no note from the parents explaining why they chose to abandon their daughter. Chinese laws prohibited parents from abandoning their children. So parents do not want to be identified for the relinquishment of their daughter. As a result, parents secretly put their daughters in a box or a basket, bundled them up and left them in a train/bus station, police station, park, market, front door steps of orphanages, places where babies could be found quickly by others and sent to orphanages.

Historically, Chinese society always has always had adoption practices. It most frequently happened between relatives in situations that both or one parent of the child died. The
relatives would informally adopt and take care of the child. It was not uncommon for parents to give their sons to a relative who did not have any boy heir in the family. The childless families were willing to adopt children formally to complete a family and be taken care of as they were old. They preferred adopting from strangers in order to protect adoptive ties from future interference from birthparents or other biological relatives. Therefore, the adoption would be permanent.

In contemporary China, domestic adoption is also a practice for having a family. Childless couples are also happy to adopt a child to complete their families. Chinese government posted regulations that require couples to be childless and over age of 35 to adopt. This rule was changed in 1999 to lower the age of the couples to 30. For families who have their own children but want to have daughters, they are subject to penalty if they adopt a daughter. This was a rule to restrict parents using adoption to illegally trade girls. But it stopped a substantial number of parents who genuinely wanted to adopt and could not.

The 1999 adoption law revision loosened several requirements for parents who wanted to adopt as a way to encourage the growth of domestic adoption. But the numbers of available babies continued to rise in the orphanages which created more pressures on orphanages that were already experiencing overcrowded baby rooms, understaffed child care personnel and limited funding. In 1990, the Chinese government opened its door for international adoption to solve the orphanage crises. In the short period of time since thousands of children have come to the United States. According to the US Department of State, 33,823 children were adopted from China between 1991-2002.

In the United States, most of these Chinese children were adopted by European American parents, some of them single parents or with a same sex partner. Nearly all of these adoptive
parents do not speak the Chinese language nor do they have an intimate understanding of Chinese culture and traditions. What happened to these children after they were adopted? How do these children adjust to their American life? How do they experience American society and integrate into it as cultural beings? These questions became my initial research questions that eventually led to this research.

Adoption is not a new social phenomenon in American history either. However, intercountry or international adoption is a relatively new dimension of American family scenes. Intercountry adoption started largely as an altruistic response to the sufferings of war orphans and the abandoned children of servicemen in World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War (Masson, 2001). The practice typically involves the transfer of children from developing countries to the wealthy West (with a few exceptions). The United States is the largest receiving country of intercountry adoption (Masson, 2001).

With rapid globalization and development occurring in the third world, the number of intercountry adoptions increased sharply starting from the 1990s and continuing into the beginning of the 21st century. The number of international adoptions jumped from 8,102 in 1990 to 19,237 in 2002. They come from over 50 countries in Asia, Latin America, Africa, and Eastern Europe (US Department of State, 2003). The leading reasons for the abandonment of children appear to be poverty, unavailability of contraceptives, social prejudice toward unmarried mothers, cultural preferences for male children, and state policies.

Among the countries that are open for intercountry adoption, Korea had been a leading source country since the Korean War when American military men and Korean women had children out of wedlock. These children suffered social stigma as unwanted children and ended up in orphanages for adoption. Another wave was composed of so called “Euroasian” children.
They were left by their American father during the Vietnam War. Many of them were later adopted to the United States. The fall of the Berlin Wall disrupted the socialist social system and left many children in the orphanages poorly attended. These orphaned children in the former socialist countries in the Eastern European countries were also available for international adoption. Among them, Armenian children were largely adopted to the United States.

In recent decades, China and Russia have become the major sources for international adoption with 5,053 and 4,939 adoptees respectively in 2002 (US Department of State, 2003). According to the US Department of State, 33,823 children were adopted from China between 1991-2002. Most Chinese adoptees were girls and a small number of boys who had some form of disability.

This empirical study was designed to explore the identity work of children who were adopted from China by American parent(s), most of whom were European American. The purposes of this study were to investigate how these children construct their identities as intercountry adoptees, and how the subtle interaction of home and school cultures had influenced the identity formation of these children.
Review of Literature

There are communities of scholars who have done research on adoption and the adjustment of adoptees after their placement into the adoptive families. The longitudinal study results in the Delaware Family Study revealed the developmental patterns in adopted children’s post adoption adjustment (Hoopes, 1982; Stein & Hoopes, 1985). In this study, researchers rated the adjustment of children as more fearful, less confident and less task motivated than their non-adopted peers. The identity development and self image gap between the adoptees and non-adoptess were more prevalent in the middle childhood years. However, these difference disappeared when children reached adolescence.

In another longitudinal study, the Colorado Adoption Project indicated that there were no differences between adopted and non-adopted children in terms of mental or motor functioning and communication skills (Plomin & DeFries, 1985; Thompton & Plomin, 1988). When children were in first grade, adoptees performed slightly more poorly in reading and math than non-adopted children (Coon, Carey, Fulker, & DeFries, 1993).

Some researchers placed their focus of the adjustment problems in adoptees on the role of genetic heredity (Cadoret, 1990). There is a greater similarity in intelligence, personality, and even interest patterns between the adopted children and their birth relatives compared with adopted children with their adoptive family members (Cadoret, 1990; Grotevant, Scarr, & Weinberg, 1977; Horn, 1983). It is assumed that the genetic background of adoptees is less optimal than the one of non-adoptees’. As a result, this factor is regarded as an important contributor in the increased psychological risk associated with adopted children.
Even though the genetic factor is viewed as important, environment factors also play a prominent role in development and adjustment of adoptees and often leads to higher than expected outcomes compared with non-adoptees with a similar environment background (Scarr & Weinberg, 1976, 1983).

Attachment theorists suggested that the early parent-child bonds are the cornerstone for healthy psychological adjustment that affect the development of humans from infancy, childhood to adulthood (Bowlby, 1969, 1973; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985). In adoption specifically, Tizard and her colleagues (Tizard, 1977; Tizard & Hodges, 1978; Tizard & Rees, 1975) documented the long term impact of adoption on attachment. They found that adopted infants had initial difficulty in attachment, it continued to their childhood years. However, in a study by Singer, Brodzinsky, Ramsay, Steir, and Waters (as cited in Brodzinsky, 1998) found that children who were adopted within the first few months of life were able to form secure attachment with their adoptive mothers, especially if they were intraracially adopted.

The social role theory places much of its emphasis on the analysis of the adoptive family kinship system (Kirk, 1964). It is assumed that adoptive family relationships are built on the foundation of loss — the loss of the dreamed biological child for the parents and the loss of birth parents for the children. He found that there were two types of reactions adoptive parents took: "rejection-of-difference" and "acknowledgment-of-difference." Parents who chose the first tended to think that their adopted children were the same as birth children, they were not different from birth children, therefore, they did not feel comfortable talking about the differences between the adopted children and themselves as adoptive parents. Kirk recommended that adoptive families acknowledge the losses in the family and encourage open discussions on
adoption issues at home. Kirk’s social theory was instrumental in leading the change of open adoption that has been widely practiced today.

Many adoption studies place focus on transracial adoption. These involve the children of minority groups adopted by White parents and into White families. Most of the literature on this topic relies heavily on quantitative methods and survey instruments to study the adjustment of African American children and other children of color who were adopted into European American families (Grow & Shapiro, 1974; McRoy & Zurcher, 1983; Simon & Alstein, 1987). Some interview studies investigated the racial identity of minority children who were adopted by their European American parents (Simon & Alstein, 2002; Patton, 2000).

More leading scholars of transracial adoption believe that intercountry adoptees deal with similar issues as transracial adoptees. In their more than thirty year longitudinal study on adopted children of color, Simon and Alstein found that these children adjusted well, especially when their adoptive parents incorporated the child’s ethnic culture into the family culture (Simon & Alstein, 1987). Most of the children developed healthy identities (Simon & Alstein, 2002).

However, given the long history of racial divide in the United States, transracial adoption has been a controversial issue within the adoption community. Many White adoptive parents and professionals support the transracial adoption as a way of forming a family. Many claim that it also reduces the negative outcomes for minority children who are living in limbo between foster homes. Some adoption professionals believe that most white parents were unable to teach their African American children survival skills to deal with the racism in the country. They regard transracial adoption as a form of cultural genocide. In 1972, the National Association of Black Social Workers took a firm official stand on transracial adoption: “We affirm the inviolable position of black children in black families where they belong physically, psychologically and
culturally in order that they receive the total sense of themselves and develop a sound projection of their future”. (The Adoption History Project, 2004). In her interview study, Sandy Patton (2000) also reflects the inadequate preparation that African American adoptees received from their White parents.

To avoid the controversy of transracial adoption in addition to many other reasons, many adoptive parents turned their attention to intercountry or international adoption. American families have adopted children from Asia, South America, and Eastern Europe since the 1980s and in the 21st century. This has become a new wave of non-war related international adoption in the United States, drawing attention from many adoption scholars.

Among country specific intercountry adoption studies, there are studies on Korean adoptees (Wilkinson, 1995) and later Romanian adoptees (Goldberg, 2001). There are fewer research studies on Chinese adopted children. However, Tessler, Gamache, & Liu (1999) have conducted a demographic study of families on the East Coast that adopted Chinese children. They found that many adoptive parents have the tendency to raise their children to be "American” and the Chinese culture supplies supplementary elements for their child rearing. For parents who wish to maintain a balanced bi-cultural identity for their adopted children, they find it is a very challenging task to keep that promise.

As noted previously, Chinese adopted children comprise the majority of the international adoptees in the last decade. Many studies of this population are aimed primarily at professionals who work with adoptive families in medicine, social work (Hollingsworth, 2003), and psychology (Brodzinsky, 1998). The most extensive research on Chinese adoption was done by Kay Ann Johnson who visited China numerous times to collect data on birthparents in China.
She found that these birth parents would love to have a daughter, but at the same time they need to have a boy for social security, family name, and social status (Johnson, 2004).

Identity has been regarded as one of the seven core adoption issues by adoption social workers Sharon Kaplan Rozsia and Deborah N. Silverstein: Loss; rejection; guilt and shame; grief; identity; intimacy; mastery/control (Kaplan, 1982). There are virtually no studies of adopted Chinese children that describe how these children negotiate their identities in the cultural, social, and institutional contexts of school and home. This study will add this important missing piece to the existing literature.

There has been a paradigm shift in contemporary social sciences. The conventional understandings of stratified and static group characteristics of people do not reflect the current reality of fluid and shifting roles that people take in various contexts. Instead, identity has become a key concept of contemporary research (Howard, 2000) in sociology as well as in education (Hoffman, 1998). Families, society, and schools are critical driving forces that constrain or facilitate a person’s identity work. Identity work or identity formation is construed as a process of working through and situating a multifaceted enduring self that reflects children’s most deep-felt psychocultural commitments (Hemmings, 2004). With these newer understandings of identity, we are able to see the world of children in a new light.

Children negotiate their identities in different settings and situations. The dynamic and fluid nature of identity is apparent in many educational studies on children of different ethnic groups. Among them, Stacey Lee (Lee, 2001) drew a lively picture of the Hmong high school students as they negotiated their racial, ethnic and gender identities in predominantly white high schools. Hemmings (1998) also presented a similar power struggle picture of urban African American high school students as they negotiated their identities at schools. In their
“Adolescents’ worlds: Negotiating family, peers, and school”, Phelan, Davidson and Yu 
(Phelan, et al, 1998) described a rather complex dynamic of youths who crossed the boundaries 
of home and school to negotiate their identities. Some had a smooth and congruent experience, 
others had a very difficult negotiation experience. Similarly, Mexican immigrant children, many 
were undocumented immigrants, experienced the cultural boundary crossing experiences 
between home and school(Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Most recently, Annette Hemmings found that 
the identity work of groups of urban and suburban high school students was a fabric of power 
struggles in politics, religion, kinship/sexual relationships, and economic domains(Hemmings, 
2004).

There is a need within the community of adoptive families and Chinese adoptees 
for empirical research that address their pressing issues of identity (Evans, 2001), such as: do 
these parents wish their children to be “Chinese”, to be “American”, to be both? If both, how do 
adoptive parents teach their Chinese children about Chinese culture and traditions? Do these 
Chinese children, mostly girls, experience a sense of loss? If so, how do they cope with the grief? 
How do they construct their identities? How do they make sense of their connection with their 
ethnic culture, and how do they make sense of their abandonment in China? How do home and 
school cultures influence their identity formation?

It was the goal of this study to provide indepth and multidimensional perspectives 
and information about these pressing identity issues of the Chinese adoptees. The researcher 
hoped that the findings would add an understanding of current discussion on identity work and 
provide valid information and suggestions to professionals and community members who were 
interested in children’s education.
Methods

Research Design

This design of this study employed the use of a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. It was conducted in Greater Cincinnati, Northern Kentucky, Southeastern Indiana and West corner of West Virginia. It focused on families who were members of a group called Families with Children from China (FCC). The primary research method was participatory ethnography with the researcher as a participant observer (Patton, 1990; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). The supplementary research tool was the administration of a survey to this same group of adoptive parents in Cincinnati, Northern Kentucky, and Southeastern Indiana.

The survey was used to obtain a demographic understanding of who were the adoptive parents. The instrument items were adapted from US Census Bureau standards and Tessler, Gamache, & Liu (1999) with some revisions (see appendix1). A quantitative research expert was consulted on validity and reliability of this instrument. Based on the suggestions of the expert, the survey length was reduced from 32 questions to 23 questions to increase the return rate of the responses. The descriptive nature of the survey results provides contextual and demographic information about the adoptive families.

For the core component, the qualitative research, the researcher became a member of the group named above and observed interactions among family members, friends, relatives, and teachers at social events, like Chinese New Year celebration, Dragon Festival, and FCC summer outings. Observations and interviews occurred in homes, in schools, and various social settings. The researcher took notes on site or immediately after the event. The researcher also sought to
identify key informants and interview them and their adoptive children in their homes based on a list of semi-structured interview questions (see appendix 2). Interviews were audio taped and transcribed for the data analysis. Immediate reflection notes on observation and interviews were used to define the sampling plan for the follow up observation and interviews. It was illustrated as follow:

Figure 1. data collection with core participating children and families.

In summary, the researcher visited the homes, schools, and social event sites to observe, interview, and participate in social events with informants and others. The researcher conducted a survey, took field notes, organized data, and analyzed data. The researcher, who was Chinese, also became an active member of the adoptive community and brought in Chinese culture and tradition to the FCC community events as a reciprocal gesture to the community. All the field notes and transcribed interview data were categorized for analysis. NVivo2 software was used to assist qualitative data analysis. SPSS software was used for quantitative data analysis.

The research findings will be shared in the relevant professional and local communities, including family members, professionals who work with them, and other scholars who are interested in this topic.
For confidentiality concerns, the identities of all participants in this study, except a few public figures, are disguised. Some important personal identifiers were changed to protect privacy. The individual profiles are composites developed to conceal identity. However, the richness and complexity of their experiences were preserved.
Data Collection

Setting

The data collection occurred in 2003 to 2004 for a length of 16 months. The primary investigation site of this study was in Greater Cincinnati of Ohio that comprised thirteen counties and the corners of three states - Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana. According to the Greater Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce, the metropolitan area is home to almost 2 million people. Two major north-south highways, I-71 and I-75, passed the heart of the City. In addition, Ohio River linked the city with Pittsburgh in the East and St. Louis in the Midwest. It served as a water transportation artery for the area. For its convenient location and lower cost of living, headquarters of several Fortune 500 companies have settled here. It had all the amenities of a large metropolis but maintained a friendly, small town atmosphere. According to census 2000, the racial demography of the region was as follows: White -- 85.3%, African American --11.7%, Asian and Pacific Islander --1.2%, Other Origin --1.8% (US Census cited in Cincinnati USA website, 2004).

The study depended primarily on the help of the Families with Children from China in Greater Cincinnati (FCC-GC). It was an organization established to provide much needed support to parents who adopted children from China. There are many branches of FCC nationwide. The Greater Cincinnati FCC had a comprehensive website and an exclusive listserv for its members. I used FCC to refer to the branch in Greater Cincinnati region in this study.
Most of my participating families were from the Greater Cincinnati area, but a few were from West Virginia. In this study, I use the term Cincinnati to refer to all geographical areas where participating families resided.

Quantitative Data

In collecting quantitative data, I got the help from the FCC chairperson Debbie Borchers who posted the advertisement for my call for participation in this study in the FCC newsletter (see appendix 3). I promised the anonymity of all participants if they chose to help with the study. The FCC community was aware that I was about to conduct a research study on adopted children from China. Since the survey was designed to provide a demographic sketch of the target population and the limited time I could have to conduct this part of the research, I decided to collect the data on a FCC social event without distributing it to the entire FCC community. Cluster sampling was employed. The survey was administered on a Saturday in April 2003 where FCC’s April Dragon Festival was held in Finneytown High School. 70 surveys were distributed to parents and most of them were collected by the end of the same day. Three parents kindly mailed their surveys back to me a few days later. The total returned surveys were 40, which accounted for 57% return rate.

Race, Sex, Marital Status.

Almost all parents were White. The survey results indicated that 100% of the subjects were White, and their spouses (when applicable) were 97% white and 3% biracial. 30% of the subjects were male, and 70% were female. Among them, 82.5% were married, 15% were single, and 2.5% were living with a same sex partner.
Age, Education, profession, Income.

Parent’s ages ranged from 30s to 50s, most parents were in their 40s (see table 1 for details).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>51-55</th>
<th>46-50</th>
<th>41-45</th>
<th>36-40</th>
<th>30-35</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of subject in age</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent in population</td>
<td>5 %</td>
<td>40 %</td>
<td>45 %</td>
<td>5 %</td>
<td>5 %</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| No. of spouse in age | 3 | 12 | 14 | 2 | 2 | 33 |
| Percent in spouse population | 9.09 % | 36.4 % | 42.4 % | 6.06 % | 6.06 % | 100% |

Most parents received a Baccalaureate (45%) or more advanced degrees. A few of them received a doctorate degree or a high school degree (see table 2 for details).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree received</th>
<th>Doctorate</th>
<th>Master</th>
<th>Baccalaureate</th>
<th>Associate</th>
<th>High school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of subject education</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>5 %</td>
<td>25 %</td>
<td>45 %</td>
<td>10 %</td>
<td>15 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of spouse education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>2.94 %</td>
<td>32.35 %</td>
<td>38.24 %</td>
<td>14.71 %</td>
<td>11.76 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parents held a variety of jobs: professor, teacher, finance manager, writer, real estate agent, engineer, artist, librarian, social worker, nurse, etc.

Almost all families were in the middle or upper class income levels, with almost 40% of the households making $100,000 and more each year. Another 40% of the households made $50,000-$74,000 per year. There were 5.26% of the households made less than $25,000 a year. With a few exceptions, it seemed these families had a solid financial support. Unlike the stereotypical speculations, it was clear that not all families who adopted internationally were “rich” families.

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<td><strong>Family income</strong></td>
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<td>Income level</td>
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<td>Families at each income level</td>
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**Number of Adopted Children, and Religion.**

Most parents adopted only 1 child. 67% of the families have 1 adopted child, 22.5% of the families had 2 adopted children, 7.5% of the families have 3 adopted children, and 2.5% of the families had 4 adopted children.
Parents described their religions as Christian (22.86%), Catholic (17.14%), Protestant (11.43%), Methodist (8.57%), Jewish (8.57%), Baptist (5.71%), Lutheran (5.71%), Presbyterian (5.71%), None (5.71%). Unitarian, Atheist, and Spirituality counted for 2.86% respectively.

Qualitative Data

Considering the personal and sensitive nature of this study, I chose to use networking and snowballing techniques to recruit my participants in the qualitative part of the study in order to be less intrusive. I joined the FCC and became a member of its social events committee. I served as a cultural advisor to the FCC community. Members of social events committee volunteered to help me recruit participants through their personal connections with other parents. They also helped me post an advertisement on the FCC listserv to recruit participants through public channels. I set confidentiality as the condition for participating in this part of the study. This combination of networking and snowballing techniques worked very well.

Participants

In a month, there were 13 families emailing me to participate in my qualitative section of the research. 4 out of these 13 families were headed by single moms. Among these 13 families, 22 were adult participants ranging from 34 to 59 years old. Among them, 12 received a Baccalaureate degree, 9 received a Master degree, 1 received a Doctoral degree. There were 27 child participants, 4 of which were biological children. They were between 11 months and 13 years old. Later, an adoption social worker was introduced to me by a parent to provide some professional information on the legal process of adoption from China.
Data Collection Plan

During the course of 16 months of data collection in 2003 to 2004, I interviewed families (multiple interviews with some families), had dinners with them, celebrated holidays and birthday with them. In return, I taught them to cook Chinese dishes or cultural details (if they were interested) as a reciprocity gesture. I participated in all FCC social events at various locations: parks, churches, zoo, schools, and community center. Through communication with parents, I was able to visit 3 schools to which three families sent their adoptive children. With the consent of parents, school administrators and teachers, I observed these children at their schools and interviewed two teachers of two particular children.

All of the interviews were audio taped upon permission of interviewees. The audio tapes were transcribed immediately after the interviews. By the end of my data collection stage, I reviewed 10 sets of adoption documents (dossiers) and looked 10 adoption picture albums. I had 34 audio tapes, each was about 90 minutes long with the total interviews about 2,940 minutes long. I also had more than 100 pages of field notes, 4 pictures of children, 1 essay written by a child, 1 painting by a child, 30 pictures I took in Chinese New Year party.

Data Analysis

I used NVivo 2 software to analyze all the qualitative data I had collected over these 16 months. I coded all the data based on the concept that occurred. Each concept was a node regardless of its relationships with other nodes. Some sentences were double coded under different concepts. As I proceeded, I identified mother nodes, then child nodes, or even grand child nodes. I grouped them based on that hierarchical relationship. All data yielded a total number of 500 nodes in such familial hierarchical relationship (Appendix 4 for coding samples).
Some nodes were removed from their original groups to a more appropriate coding group as patterns evolved in the data analysis process.

As I moved along with the data analysis, I identified patterns that were most prevalent among mother nodes. I synthesized them and established several themes: parents, schools, FCC/community, and children. The detailed description of the pattern and the dynamics between each theme are going to be introduced in the Findings chapter.

Before I moved to the findings, it was necessary to lay out the context of the findings which were centered on the families. The following segments are about their stories.

*Family Profiles*

Families who participated in my ethnographic part of the study all had a compelling story to tell. They are recounted here in the form of composites. Each composite draws on data of several families that share the same reason for adopting. The four reasons are: infertility, God’s will, altruism, wanting to parent.

*Infertility.*

Some families went through adoption because they suffered infertility. They chose to adopt instead of spending expensive medical fees on fertility treatments. The McKinneys illustrate the experiences of these families.

I got lost when I went to the McKinneys for the interview. As I was apologizing with embarrassment, Ellen eased my anxiety with a warm hug and a friendly smile. I saw one Asian girl running towards me in a Princess Belle dress as Ellen led me into her house. She greeted me with a hug. “I am a Chinese”, the girl said as she looked at me. Ellen told me this was her 4 year
old Chinese adopted daughter Mei Ling. After I said “hi” to her, Mei Ling went to the play room and continued her drawings. She ran out and showed me the dragon she drew. “It’s a Chinese dragon!” she said with a sense of pride. I praised her immediately. Ellen asked her to keep playing in the play room and sat with me for the interview. She offered me a cup of Chinese green tea and a piece of Niangao—the Chinese New Year Cake. They both were delicious, and authentic, too. I was very impressed with her culinary skills.

Ellen went upstairs and returned with two books on China adoption: “The Runaway Rice Cake” by Ying Chang and “Mei Mei Loves the Morning” by Margaret Hooloway Tsubabkiyama. She said her Mei Ling loved to be read to at bedtime. I particularly liked the first book for its artful and authentic illustration. She had a life time passion for the books. Actually, that was how she met her husband and got married, too.

Ellen was 5’5, slightly heavy for her height. She had grey shirt and blue jeans. Her light brown hair was cut short. She looked quite relaxed as if she had known me for years. Her husband John was 5’8 with blond hair and blue eyes. He was thin and quiet. As we were talking, John went to the play room to look after Mei Ling.

Ellen was 42, she had a BA in English and has worked in a variety of jobs. She finally landed in a publishing company where she did editing and book selections. John was 34, he had a BS in biology and worked as a researcher in a medical facility. When Ellen started her job, she became a close friend with an older lady, Cathy, who had worked there for many years. Cathy was so fond of Ellen and later she introduced her son John to Ellen. Ellen was concerned about her being older, but they quickly fell in love and got married despite the 8 year age difference.

John was not particularly interested in having a child as he thought the world did not need him to add more people. But Ellen had always wanted to be a mother ever since she was a young
girl. After an ectopic pregnancy and a miscarriage, her dream of becoming a mom was getting slimmer. So she and John decided to adopt.

Wei: Why didn’t you choose domestic adoption?

Ellen: People just waited and waited. Then birth mothers changed their minds about adoption. To me, to give the baby back is like another miscarriage. The baby I lost in miscarriage was a girl after they have done the genetic test. I miscarried in the 12th week. Most people don’t think it is a big deal. But for mothers, it is difficult.

We thought about Korea, China and Marshall Islands. The reason we thought about Marshall Islands was because a friend adopted from there. The process was very quick, but it was closed for adoptions. I stayed in Japan for a year and I had very deep impression when I taught in the orphanage there. So Asian has been always special to me. So we thought about Korea, but the chance of getting a girl was bigger in China. So we chose China.

I always wanted a girl. I like boys, but I just want a daughter. John likes girls. He has little need for a biological offspring who will carry his name. It felt right to adopt a girl in China. I know Japan and China are very different cultures. But I felt I had a little familiarity with the Asian world. I guess in Japan I learned to think differently. I do not know if there is an eastern way and western way, but I learned a lot from Japanese experience.

At the time we applied for adoption, I was 36 and John was 28. No one would have been able to adopt under the age of 30 if the new adoption law had been in effect. Lily, the adoption agency staff, told us we had to hurry. We turned in paper on Oct. 4, 1998 and were just never any question in the process. We got Mei Ling on March 29, 1999. The
law was in effect on April 1. We were told that Mei Ling has a 3rd degree cardio
murmur. I had no problem with that because we have one of the best children’s hospitals
in the world. All we need to know is what is the problem.

It was a great joy for the McKinneys to take Mei Ling home, they both were very
grateful that China gave them their beautiful daughter:

*John:* We brought her over across the ocean to here. When we were gone to China, I was
nervous. I had very little parenting training. But it was because of her, that I was able to
be the father. We were very focused on Mei Ling, I have very strong memories of holding
her, feeding her bottle at night, patting her arms, looking at her eyes. She is much taller,
much a bigger person now. That was just a wonderful connection for me. My first child!
She is so wonderful ...[he was in tears] She is the first love of my life as a child. So she
will always be very special. It’s neat our first parenting is over a child from China. That
goes back on my mind, there is always opportunity for me to do something for her. But I
also have gratitude towards Asian cultures, in particular China.

*Ellen:* There is a quote “To be a parent is to have your heart walk around outside your
body”. That’s hard. I am in awe of her. Her very being amazes me. The fact that all the
forces combined to bring this child to me was incredible. She is our daughter, it is
amazing. She is miracle, she is the answer, dream come true, all these are true. We didn’t
know we would ever have children. And here she is. There is a shadow for years, when I
met Mei Ling, finally I realized it was she. She has helped me be a better person, and has
made me aware that being a mom, made me very humble. [in tears] She is a pure gift. I
ache that I can not share these with her birth mother. She has to do a lot on her own. She
is going to have to decide who she is. But doing this, she will always be our precious being to us. I used to stare into her eyes, I still do. They are stars, literally, there is sparkle, it is kind of like meeting an old soul.

When Mei Ling was 2, Ellen and John decided to adopt another child so Mei Ling wouldn’t have to grow up lonely. After they talked to Mei Ling and got her consent about the baby sister, they turned in their dossier to the same adoption agency with much ease because they had experience before. By November 2002, they got a referral of their baby’s with her picture. They fell in love with her immediately. In February, they were told that they could go to pick up their baby in May 2003. They started to make calls to their travel agency for the upcoming travel to China. They prepared toys and clothes for their baby, as well as gifts to her orphanage. Mei Ling was asking about her baby sister all the time and she wanted to help her mom take care of the baby.

Ellen asked me to help her pick a name for her daughter number 2 since her first daughter was named after the First Lady Madame Jiang who persuaded President Roosevelt to support China during WWII. So Ellen wanted to name her second daughter something that was meaningful as all Chinese children had, but also phonetically easy for Americans to pronounce. We sat at the table and went through pages of a Chinese book with characters for naming the children. We came up with many names for her: Mei Quan (beautiful mountain spring), meaningful but difficult to say; Mei Ping (beautiful duckweed), sounded too similar to Mei Ling; Mei Hong (Beautiful rainbow), maybe; Mei Chen (beautiful dawn), not sure. By the end of the evening, Ellen still did not know which one she wanted to name her daughter.
Unfortunately, the outbreak of SARS epidemic quickly spread over almost entire China and the WHO announced the travel warning on China visit. McKinneys were so anxious about the wellbeing of their baby in China, they wanted to fly to China and bring her right back home to the United States.

As Chinese were working around the clock to fight the SARS, FCC community also donated money and mailed it to the Red Cross China to express their support to Chinese people along with many other international groups and overseas Chinese organizations in the US.

Finally, the SARS was under control and the travel warning was lifted. McKinneys were notified that they could travel to China to pick up their baby in October. Ellen wrote a letter to her and asked me to translate it into Chinese so the orphanage caregiver could read it to her:

September 14, 2003

Dear Xiao Tong,

We are so happy to have you as our daughter. We have fallen in love with you just from your picture, and we can not wait to hold you in our arms. We promise we will always love you so very much and keep you safe.

We are very busy packing our suitcases and your clothes and toys. We will leave and come to China on October 20, 2003 and we are very excited about the BIG day.

Xiao Tong, you know have a large extended family who can’t wait to meet you. Besides mommy and daddy, you have a big sister who is 4 years old. Her name is Mei Ling and she is from Taiyuan, Shanxi. She is very excited to see you, and she will travel to China
to come and get you. She wants to give you lots of hugs and kisses. She will bring lots of toys, and the two of you can play together. She will also ride in the stroller with you so you are not afraid.

Your grandmothers and grandfathers on both of your parents’ side will be at the airport when we come home. They will put you on their laps and play with you. They will make funny faces at you and sing you sweet songs and make you laugh. Xiao Tong, we love you very much and can’t wait to hold you in our arms and comfort you. Please do not be afraid when your nannies bring you to us. We will take good care of you.

Love always,
Mom and Dad

It was a great joy for the McKinneys to return with their second daughter Xiao Tong. She was healthy and she loved to be held by people. To their surprise, Mei Ling was upset about all the attention everyone gave to her baby sister. She started to regress: needing her parents when she went to the bathroom, waking up at night many times whining for mommy which she had not done for almost two years.

_God’s Will._

Other families went through the adoption because they felt called to by God. They chose to adopt instead of and in addition to having biological children. Ann and Ben, the second composite, illustrate the experience of adoptive parents who are responding to God’s will.
Ann and Ben lived in a well known affluent middle and upper class neighborhood in the city. They have been married for 15 years and it was the first marriage for both of them. Ann was 40 years old with blond hair and blue eyes. She was about 5’6”, well toned and casually dressed. She had classic look face which suited her figure well. She had a BS in Engineering and had worked for a major chemical products company in the city for many years. She had to quit her job when her oldest child was 4 because the little girl always got sick. So Ann never went back to the former work force since. She looked like a typical middle class “soccer mom”. Ann was very outgoing and warm hearted. She was easy to open up a conversation. Ben was 43. Ben was 6’1” and well built. He seemingly towered over her in physical size. Ben had brown hair and a pair of glasses, he was well mannered and soft spoken. Ben received a BA in Business and has been working for the same company as Ann did years ago. They met through the work and got married. Ann and Ben were quite opposite in many ways, but they worked nicely together as a husband and wife team.

Ann grew up in a Catholic family and Ben was a Southern Baptist. But they both went to the Presbyterian Church, so naturally their two children have been baptized Presbyterian. Their oldest daughter Christine was 11, the younger one, Halley was 4. Halley was adopted from China as a baby.

Ann and Ben did not think they were one day doing adoption. When Ann was pregnant, she was doing well and even taking trips around the country:

It is crazy, because God told me to [adopt]. I believe God told me to adopt. I was on a trip when I was pregnant with Christine. When we were leaving, the labor came to me and I started bleeding all over the place. I was in the ambulance. I said “God, if you want me to adopt, could you make it a little low key?”. They thought I miscarried, but I didn’t. We went on to have
Christine. But we decided later if we wanted to have more kids, we would adopt. So, I think God made it.

Because of the incident, Ann got very tired after she gave birth to Christine, and Christine was sick often when she was young. So it was not in their mind to adopt children until years later when Christine was over 4 years old.

Wei: What made you decide to do international adoption?

Ann: We looked through the books for domestic adoption, um, we didn’t appear to want to adopt Caucasian infant because too many people were interested in that. We could have other babies if we wanted to. So we didn’t feel the need to do it. We said: “Let those people who have the need to have babies adopt these babies”. Then we looked through the books in Cincinnati area, those kids had very tough special needs: Down syndrome, MS, or they have been abused, maybe in more than one foster home already. I didn’t think I could handle that. We met Marilyn who moved next door. She was getting ready to get her child from China. So we thought maybe this was a good way.

Wei: So you didn’t think about other international options: Russia, Guatemala, or Korea?

Ann: We thought about that.

Ben: we thought most comfortable with the Chinese process. They were more organized and structured. We also wanted a daughter, they had a lot of daughters available.

Ann: Also, East Europe has much higher rate of fetal alcohol syndrome, also has much worse orphanage conditions that children come out in much worse shape. They are often older. South American, if a child is going to be in American, unfortunately the stereotype for Hispanics for female [was either] “slut” or “stupid”. For Asian, the stereotype is
intelligent. Wow, if a child has to be adopted, has [to have] a stereotype, may just have a
good stereotype. That is terrible to say, but it is true in America.

Wei: Have you ever thought about having a boy?

Ann: No.[laughed]

Ben: We really want daughters. Since Christine was a daughter, it made sense to adopt a
child who is female.

Wei: Was it difficult to adopt a child when you have ability to have your own?

Ann: At that time in China, if we had one child at home, then we were supposed to have a
special needs child. But the law changed right before or right after we went. We were
told that special needs could be heart murmur, then you say “OK”. So we didn’t worry
about it. That was the only restriction.

Ann and Ben were eager to visit the orphanage of her daughter’s when they got to
Wuhan, China, but they were not allowed to tour the orphanage nor taking pictures. They later
learned that a BBC reporter secretly videotaped 5 orphanages years ago disguised as a visitor and
produced a documentary called “Dying Rooms”. It was about abuses in orphanages in China.
Wuhan orphanage was one of them to be taped. The documentary was criticized by the Chinese
government and some adoption professionals as overly exaggerated on this subject in China. As
a result of that, virtually all adoptive parents were banned from visiting the orphanages.

When they finally saw the baby in the lobby of their hotel in Wuhan, they were in tears to
see this 17 pound, pretty heavy little girl of theirs. Her head size was smaller than the average
according to the Chinese development chart for children. So the director of the orphanage got
worried that they wanted a different baby when Ann and Ben were asking questions about her
head. Ann said “We just wanted to know if she had a major problem”.

31
Wei: *How did you feel when you had her in your arms?*

Ann: *Just like when I had Christine. It is the same thing. They are immediately your child.*

Wei: *Was she afraid of you?*

Ann: *No. She was in Ben’s lap and he rocked her right to sleep. Right after 1 or 2 days, she wanted us only. She was a calm baby until she got home. She was very energetic. She didn’t want to sleep.*

Ben: *they gave us some formulas, the nanny even came the next morning to make sure we were doing all right.*

Ann: *Our interpreter was frustrated with families who didn’t do what the orphanage said. We kept doing the same things as they did [in the orphanage]. So she could have the same pattern with us.*

It was not until years passed by did Ann and Ben realize that Halley had some kind of special needs because she had experienced extremely high level of anxiety and concentration difficulties. But the specialists in the Children’s Hospital diagnosed that she was on the borderline with language problem and borderline with the attention deficiency disorder. Ann and Ben were frustrated about these “borderlines” as they were not quite sure what they were attacking. Ann’s friend even suggested that she do an Indian soul retrieval ritual if nothing else worked.

Ann: *She is very emotional all the time. It is very hard for her to do the school work while she has to sit still. She just literally flip flop on the gym bar. Just to settle herself down.*
So I think it is more now of her personality than anything else. She gets really anxious if she goes to do anything new. She has got a big story about how bad that was going to be before she even got there. Then she got there, she was fine. She doesn’t like to be out of the routine.

Ben: She has hard time to focus.

Ann: And to repeat the basic pattern. I am starting to worry about that. She told me today that she will be always happy if she and Christine popped up on the same day. She wants to have her 5 years birth day, but she is not even 5 yet. I asked her “what’s the difference when you are 5?” she said “I will be happier when I am 5”. She wants to be older as her friends. She is competitive.

Ann did not think there was such a thing called “adoption anniversary reaction” in one of Jane Brown’s workshops until she experienced it with Halley:

The first time we saw, one year after we came home, a little girl who sat next to her [in the adoption trip] came to visit. We have not seen them for one whole year. She was not even 2 years old. As the girl walked into the house, Halley went crazy, mourning, pushing the girl down to get away from her. She went bizarre. This was coming out of blue because she had never attacked any other Asian child, not even the ones from her same orphanage. She just started crying. She was crying and crying. Somehow she knew that child was not the one she wanted to be around. Now we were stunned. It took her an hour to calm down. Some of these were just too deeply seated to understand. We finally remember she was freaking out. You know what? I just realized it was her anniversary. The girl’s family and we went out for dinner. That was all we did for the celebration.
Altruism.

The third group of families adopted because they thought it was a right thing to do.

Mary Anne was a 47 year old single mom with three adopted children. She was a very good looking woman wearing a pair of glasses. The left front of her scarlet color jacket had a FCC logo and a Chinese character “Love”. She wore a pair of blue jeans and sports shoes. She appeared younger than her age only her grayish curly hair revealing a little truth of her age.

Mary Anne was from an eight-- children middle class Catholic family. She thought she had learned all the important values and morals for this life from her parents. She earned her BA in Management in 1980 from a local university. She had worked for a major regional airline to open a new station and train new staff for 12 years. She then realized that it was an illusion to climb the corporate ladder and compete with her male colleagues in getting into leadership positions. She disliked the male dominant culture in the company and quit her work there. She has worked for her family run business three days a week ever since. She liked her job that not only accommodated her many obligations as a single mother but also provided her a stable income for her immediate family.

Mary Anne said she had been a disappointment for her mom before she adopted children because she did not get married and have children of her own in time. As time went by, she moved into the “old singles” category by societal standards. In her heart, she knew that she wanted to be a mother one day. In August 1995, she was at age of 38. One evening, she was watching the NBC Dateline show about children in the orphanages in China. This was not as negative as the BBC’s “Dying Rooms”, but it captured her attention to know that there were so many children needing a home:
Being a single, I have never had a child of my own. When I watched that show, I realized there were so many children I did not know, I did not realize until that night. I kept waking up, I kept thinking one parent is better than none. That was Thursday night. On Friday, I woke up and decided that I had to do something to help these children. I called the adoption social worker in our area.

Mary Anne went on for adoption based on a strong call for an altruistic act. Her adoption process was relatively smooth without any major difficulties. Her face was glowing as she was telling about her first adoption experience:

I started the paper work in September, and all the paper was ready by the end of November except the INS approval. That was because our government was shut down in November 1995 for lack of money. I think our prints got lost. I had to redo my finger print, I got my INS approval in March, 1996. I got my referral in May. From there, everything went much much faster. I should have traveled in June, but then the original two adoption entities were merged to China Council for Adoption Affairs (CCAA) in June. While they reorganized the CCAA, all the families had to wait. So I did not travel until August.

With 16 families who adopted from the same orphanage with the same adoption agency, Mary Anne traveled to Guangdong to claim their babies:

Yaoyao, the translator in China, told me that there were about 50 babies in one room with 2 care givers. They were very busy. Jenny [her daughter] couldn’t really sit up, she held the bottle with her feet. I think because the way they bundled the baby, she couldn’t hold the bottle with her hands. She never even drank a whole bottle, she always left a little bit.
I truly believe that when she woke up in the middle of the night, there was nobody to feed the baby. So she drank what was left there in the bottle. That was what Yaoyao told me. They gave them a bottle at night, they did not collect the bottles so children could put themselves back to sleep.

Mary Anne’s eyes were moist as she told about the orphanage life her oldest child had, especially as she mentioned that no one really knew if Jenny was from Zhaoqing, or in a rural area outside of Zhaoqing. They only put them in places that children would be adopted. It was difficult to know the history of her daughter without any information from the past. When the biggest moment came, all parents forgot the sorrow for their children and were anxious to see their children carried out by caregivers:

It was the conference room in Zhaoqing Social Welfare Institute. That was a big building for elderly people, we were in that conference room. We did the paper work in the conference room. The babies were on the other side of the street. The caregivers brought the babies to the conference room. We were not allowed to enter into the orphanage. She was 10 months old, she did not cry, she was sick. [When she was handed to me] she held on my long sleeves. Most babies cried, some cried for days. I think for the most part, American parents did not hold them the way they were used to, didn’t smell the way they were used to, didn’t feed them the way they were used to. We left 3 days earlier because Jenny was sick. I heard there was a baby who cried for days. It took them several days to get used to their new parents. Another girl smiled, clapped her hands, rocked on her feet. But the third day, she was lost. She cried for several days. When I came home, everyone I talked before said babies might cry, mourn for the loss. I said “why didn’t you tell me earlier?”
After Mary Anne had her daughter Jenny, Jenny was in seizure and a high fever. She had to take her to a hospital in Zhaoqing. Dr. Lang, a pediatrician accompanying the adoption group, helped her communicate with a Chinese doctor in the hospital because both of them could speak German. Later Dr. Lang helped her connect to a western trained pediatrician in a SOS clinic in Guangzhou. Her daughter was transferred to there and given a different dose of medicine. That was the time they realized that Jenny was given the adult dosage before. Luckily she had thrown up most of it, so she did not take the full amount of the medicine. In the clinic in Guangzhou, she quickly recovered from the seizure and lung infection. After they got the visa from the US consulate in Guangzhou, the group was ready to go home:

The night before I left China, we had a birthday party because several girls in that group were turning one. I told several families that I would be back. They asked me “with everything you went through, you want to have another baby?” Because I have 7 brothers and sisters I did not want her to be the only child. I was not sure whether I would be allowed to adopt or not. I have 3 sisters I am very close with. I want Jenny to have the same kind of relationship that I have with my sisters.

Mary Anne’s dramatic adoption experience in China kicked off her new stage of life as a mother for the first time. She took two months off the work to take care of Jenny. She was excited to start her journey as a mom of an adopted child from China and watch Jenny grow under her care:

Mary Anne: By the time we left China, she started to eat, but it was not eating the whole bottle like that. She started to show us that she could sit up and she could crawl a little
bit, stuff like that. But once we got home, she was eating everything that was put in front of her. She gained one pound a month for a whole year. She weighed 14 pounds when we went to get her, she weighed 26 pounds in her 2 years old check up. Babies in here, probably in China too, if they were raised at home, typically they doubled their weight in the first year. So for a 7 pounds baby, they should be 15 pounds at 1 year old. Then the second year they don’t grow as much. She did not grow that much in her first year, so she made up the growth in her second year. That is not unusual for a lot of children that were adopted.

Wei: Was she developmentally delayed?

Mary Anne: Yes, but she caught up quickly. Probably the only area she didn’t catch up was her speech, language development. For a baby, doctors did gross and fine motor skills development evaluation, but they couldn’t really do a lot with her language development. So when she turned 3, I did take her to the speech evaluation program at preschool. At that point, she did not say half of the things she should have been saying. As she turned 3, she went to the preschool and worked on the speech development. But she is fine ever since.

Mary Anne went on to adopt Lisa later and has put a lot of energy on connecting with China and Chinese people for her daughters.

Wanting to be Parent(s)

The rest of the families went through adoption for a variety of reasons other than those already cited. This last composite illustrates one example among many including irreversible vasectomies, single parenting, same sex parenting, and age.
Becky and Carl have been married for 10 years. Becky was a school librarian and Carl was a business owner. Becky was 5’5”. She was wearing a pair of thick glasses. Her light brown hair was tied up on the back of her head. It matched her brown eye color well. She was a little heavy with wide hips. She was 55. Carl was 50, 6’2” tall, with curly brown hair. He had heavy eye glasses, he was a little shy at the beginning, but he was quite open to talk about his adoption experiences once we started the conversation about their children and adoption experiences.

When I rang the bell, a girl who looked like a 6 or 7 years old rushed to the door and opened it for me. A dog was barking at the door, he was licking my hand when I entered the house. Becky welcomed me, Carl was standing behind her. Becky introduced children to me by their birth order: Sara, 7, Jessica, 5, and Linda, 3. Their big two story house in the shade of big trees reminded me the interior of the house in the movie “Gone with Wind”.

Sara had a red ribbon on her hair that reached to her waist. Her hair was quite brown in color for Chinese. Her eyes were brown. When she smiled, she squeezed them and made them smaller. She was very friendly to me.

Jessica was almost taller than Sara. She had a nice oval shaped face which was considered as one of the features for a beauty in Chinese classics. Her complexion was very light. Her long hair was silky and shining like a small waterfall. Her eyes were dark and big. Unlike Sara, she was quiet and reserved.

Linda had a round face with a band on her short dark hair. She was like a little Chinese princess in the cartoon movies. She looked very innocent and sweet. She had some speech problem and was a little difficult for me to understand. She liked to be held by her mom.

Sara took my hand and asked me to take a seat in the living room. She hugged me and smiled at me. I put her on my lap and taught her to write her name in Chinese. She was
fascinated to watch me doing it. Then she tried it on her own. Becky told me that Sara was very careful about her handwriting. She showed me her name in Chinese characters and they looked good. Becky asked me what I wanted to drink. So I asked for iced tea without sugar. Becky brought a plateful of cookies. These were St. Patrick’s Day cookies and chocolate chip cookies.

Becky did not get married until she was 44, so she did not want to take the risk by trying to get pregnant. Becky and Carl always wanted to be parents, so they decided to adopt a child:

We had decided to adopt a child at very beginning of our marriage. We thought about domestic adoption first. But the birth mother did not pick us because we were not qualified. Teen moms tended to choose younger couples for adoptive parents. So we thought about Russia. But the rules and regulations were constantly changing there. There were illegal things involved, too. People ended up returning home empty handed. So we chose to stay away from Russia.

Korea did not consider couples who were over 40 for adoption. I was already 44, so we thought about China. It was natural to us in addition to Carl’s possible ancestral link with China.

Becky showed me the dossier of her first adoption application and explained to me the entire adoption process. It was a heavy 100 page book that indicated the scrutiny adoptive parents had to go through in order to prove that they were fit parents for their prospective child. It included her and her husband’s birth certificates, their marriage license, financial statement, social worker statement, background check by the local, state police, and INS through FBI. All these documents had to be notarized by various officials or staff at different administrative levels. Then they were translated and sent to Chinese embassy in Washington D.C. for verification of the translation. Then they were sent to the adoption agency and mailed to China
for adoption consideration. China Center of Adoption Affairs (CCAA) would examine all the
materials and selected the ones that met Chinese international adoption requirements. They
would match the parents with the baby. Some adoptive parents said that the match was so
accurate as if children inherit much of the personality traits of their adoptive parents. After a
period of time which could be very short and very long, an adoption referral arrived. That was
the official confirmation of the adoption which included information about their child and her
picture. A few months or even weeks later they were able to travel to China to claim the baby
depending upon the agencies they chose. It was an incredible experience to all adoptive parents.
Then all the waiting and anxiety became the reality:

Our first adoption was a total mess. The liaison, an American student in China, made
money from us and made a big mess of our documents and itinerary. The director of
orphanage corrected the mess and handed us our baby, Sara.

The liaison person left us in Guangzhou, so we had to fly to Taipei for transfer. We were
inspected at the airport and transferred to an airport hotel. We called our adoption agency
for help. It was a long story, total mess! The guy was banned from doing adoption
business in China.

The second trip was fast because of the Christmas. We went there on Dec. 23 and
returned on January 3. It was very quick process. Jessica was from Yueyang, Hunan. She
was found in a market place. We went there and took a picture. But this time all members
but us lost their luggage. So men shared Carl’s clothes which were huge [to their sizes].
They claimed that Jessica had heart murmur. We were able to adopt her as a special
needs child. But the doctor in here said that she was perfectly healthy.
Linda was adopted from Nanjing, Jiangsu province. This time policy of adoption was changed again. Linda was reported of having disability. She had speech difficulty which was very correctable.

However the adoption trips were, Becky and Carl thought their dream of being parents came true. They lived a family life that was not much different from other families except the adoption and cultural issues they needed to address. They took children to the FCC functions regularly and taught them history and cultural traditions about China. They also talked to their children about their adoption stories when they were babies:

*Becky: We talked about that it was a very difficult decision, they did not want to [abandon the child], but they had to. Then we talked about adoption process and how she ended up with us. We also talked about the split pants, she thinks that is hysterical. The baby’s butts stick out. They thought that was hysterical.*

*Wei: Did you keep the split pants?*

*Becky: Uh hum. I had Katherine’s and Karolyn’s. Kristine’s orphanage was so poor, so they asked us to return them. I remembered my grandparents made similar things like jackets when we were kids, but not split pants. My grandmother saved these for years…*

There was an ancient Chinese myth about predestined affinity or 纠 (yuán) that connected two people. It was said that there was the Old Man of the Moon who was wise about matching up people. He knew the 纠 between a man and a woman. So he would secretly tie a man and a woman together with the opposite ends of a red silk thread when they were born. No one was able to see the red thread but people always knew that they would meet their lover one day by
following the invisible red thread. When the right moment came, their lovers would appear in front of them. Because of love of this myth, adoptive parents created a modern tale of their version of the “red thread”: there was a red thread that tied the adoptive parents to their adoptive child in China. All they had to do was to follow that red thread and get to their baby in China.

Wei: What do your children mean to you?

Becky: they are happiness, future[in tears]. I believe in the Chinese red thread legend.

We were meant to be a family. We will always be a family...
Results

Many interesting patterns evolved as the data analysis process moved along. The most interesting was the resilience of children. Perhaps, equally interesting were the inventive ways they negotiated their identities at home, school, and their immediate communities. The fluidity and the dynamics of these patterns were illustrated and described in texts here. The discussion begins with parental roles and ends with children:

Figure 2. Children’s identity negotiation diagram.
Parental Roles

All parents wanted the best for their children and did everything they regarded as the best they could provide. The following descriptions explained parental roles with their children’s Chinese identity, racism, adoption discussions, and extracurricular activities. The organizational structure of these topics and their subgroups is available in figure 3 on next page for easier understanding.

Chinese Identity

The Chinese cultural identity of these children has been a highly discussed topic among adoptive parents. Most parents believe that they should recognize their children’s Chineseness because “most people will see her as Chinese when they first see her. Then they may go to her American part. She can’t be Chinese”. Parents played an important role in fostering their children’s Chinese cultural identity. They have Chinese children’s books, paintings, toys, music, videos, even furniture at home. They go to Chinese restaurants on different occasions, especially on the child’s adoption anniversary. Underneath the surface of these commonalities, there was a wide spectrum of attitudes and corresponding actions among these families that reflected parents’ beliefs and expectations for their children, ranging from very proactive to passive. Based on the patterns of behaviors and attitudes parents displayed regarding their children’s Chinese identity, I label them “China fanatics”, “balancing cultures”, “not much Chinese”, and “No Chinese culture”.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parental Roles</th>
<th>Extracurricular</th>
<th>Adoption Discussion</th>
<th>Racism</th>
<th>Chinese Identity</th>
<th>Bicultural</th>
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<td>Balance between the two adoptive cultures</td>
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<td>Balance among family and Chinese traditions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Peer pressure concerns</td>
<td>Limited adoption discussion between parents and children</td>
<td>How to talk about it</td>
<td>How parents talk about adoption</td>
<td>Social and psychological importance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extracurricular activities and holiday celebrations</td>
<td>Not an issue</td>
<td>Not an issue</td>
<td>Not an issue</td>
<td>Racial difference</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No Chinese culture</td>
<td>Not much Chinese</td>
<td>China fanatics</td>
<td>Bicultural</td>
<td>Balance between birth and adoptive child</td>
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China fanatics.

China fanatics families were made up of parents who believed China was a critical component of their children’s identity. Chinese culture should be an ongoing part of their family lives. This notion was well articulated by Cindy, an adoptive mother of three:

They [the children] have their mother there, their father there, they probably have their brothers and sisters there. They have grandparents, they have uncles, they have a family there that is just as important as our family here. They are just like a tree grafted together, that is what they are. They are really grafted individuals. If you have a tree that is grafted from two branches that grew together to be one, if you kill off one root, the another part doesn’t pick up what is left. It kills off one part of what that tree is. That is how important that tree is…

In order to incorporate this Chineseness into their family lives, these parents have exhausted almost all available resources to stay connected with Chinese culture. They actively participated in all FCC events, learning the Chinese language, history, and traditions. They celebrated major Chinese holidays as well as American ones. They hosted visiting teachers from Liuzhou, China, and made friends with local Chinese Americans families. When children got a little older, they took them back to visit China. Actually, some of them were scheduled to visit China with their children as a group in June. Unfortunately, their trip was forced to be cancelled because of the sudden SARS epidemic in China. As time went by, these parents gained a nickname as “China nuts” for their tireless dedication and passion for materializing that sense of Chineseness for their children. Although there were only 2 of them among of all my participating
families, their roles in FCC and adoption community have been influential. They served as the pioneers and founders of the FCC Cincinnati branch. Their strategies and experiences have been the models or lessons for many adoptive families. Therefore, it is helpful to see the patterns of their behaviors regarding their children’s Chinese identity.

It was important for the parents to help their adoptive children feel comfortable with their Chinese cultural identity. Cindy strongly believed in this. In her practices, she hosted Chinese visitors and also read literature on adoption and Chinese culture. “We learn as we move along”, she said in the interview. She had taken her oldest daughter Anna to the Chinese language school until she realized that Anna had to sacrifice many of her Sunday fun times with friends in order to come to the language school. She thought it was more important for her children to have a normal childhood and feel connected with their peers.

It would help children to relate to China if parents could help them establish relationships with Chinese people and visit them in China through the sister city relationship with China and Chinese Americans in the city. Melissa has stayed active in both FCC and Cin-Liu Sister City Committee. She also hosted many Chinese visiting teachers from Liuzhou. She and her children made friends in Liuzhou through this connection. Melissa took her oldest daughter Lily to China when Lily was 4 years old on a FCC adoption group trip to China. Lily enjoyed the entire trip so much that she still talked about the Great Wall of China, her orphanage, and most of all, her friends in Liuzhou years later. “Lily is very proud being a Chinese, it is one of the reasons why I feel strongly that Jena and Maria need to go back before they go into the first grade because Lily’s experience was so good”, Melissa’s eyes were wet as she talked about that visit.

Culture could include detailed behavior of conducting the daily life. Melissa went as far
as to share some life details with her children as she learned them. She even taught her daughters the Chinese squat style of using the bathroom. Having this training, she expected them to feel comfortable with the primitive toilet facilities in some parts of China should they travel there one day.

Parents took advantage of the cultural events and workshops available for them through FCC. Melissa almost never missed FCC events. She thought it was important for her children to learn about their birth culture so they will feel comfortable with who they are as they get older. She believed that children needed to experience Chinese culture as much as possible:

I think … the more they learn about Chinese culture, the more they experience it themselves, they will be able to go back to China and be grateful for the experience they have. We simulate as much as we can what it would be like [in China].

“China fanatics” parents have done everything they could under their circumstances creatively to foster their children’s sense of Chinese identity. They were the front runners of FCC community and were generous about sharing their experiences and learned lessons with other adoptive parents regardless of the philosophical differences among them.

Balancing cultures.

The most diverse group was balancing cultures parents group. These parents understood that it was important to expose their child(ren) to the Chinese culture, but they did not do as much as the previous group described as “nuts”. There were a variety of reasons that explained these differences: work and family obligations; living too far away from the city; balancing the demands from both the biological child and the adoptive child; diverse cultures within the
family; beliefs of the positive Asian stereotypes in the US. They participated in the FCC events. Some of them were FCC officers and board members. They also went to some adoption workshops. Some of them were able to keep their baby’s outfit from the orphanage as a way of symbolizing their child’s connection to China. Some of them encouraged their child(ren) to study the Chinese language and host Chinese visitors as well. However, unlike the group described above, who were focused heavily on fostering Chinese cultural identity, this group showed a variety of foci. In addition to China, researcher identified four other cultural dimensions that made their familial activities more complex. They were the most diverse group that amount of 5 of my participating families in this study.

The first subgroup of balancing cultures group was “balance between birth and adoptive child”. It was composed of families who had both biological and adoptive child(ren). For example, Marilyn and her husband Jimmy had one adoptive daughter Rebecca and a biological daughter Julie. They thought it was important that their child learn her Chinese culture. They were in awe of the 5000 years old Chinese civilization and they would love to learn it as a family. They wanted to visit China again together because they believed it was such a wonderful way to connect with Chinese people. But they were struggling with the question of “How much [Chineseness] is enough?” for their child(ren):

That’s really hard because in our family, Julie is a birth child, when we celebrate Rebecca’s Chineseness, at the same time, we don’t want the focus to be: Well, we introduce you to Chinese because you are Chinese. In some way, it almost singles out Anna. So that is something we have been trying to work on. How much is enough?
At the same time, they were also concerned that Rebecca was going to be uncomfortable with her Chinese identity:

You always stick out in the crowd. Here she is always going to be Chinese. That is the first thing people will notice. And then everything else. It just gets tiring. You know I feel bad for it. She can not come home and relax because everyone’s face looks like her. That is just the way it is. So we are going to have to find a way to cope.

The next subgroup in balancing cultures group was the “balance among family and Chinese cultures” group. Because of the diversity within their family cultures, they were forced to choose the priorities among these cultures in their daily routines. For example, Sandy and William had a biological child Kimberly and an adoptive child Grace. They were not only dealing with the same issue Marilyn and Jimmy were dealing with, but also the cultural choices of their own family traditions. William was a Christian, Sandy was Jewish. They wanted to bring their children up with both Christian and Jewish traditions. In addition, they also wanted to incorporate Chinese tradition into the family life. Grace studied Hebrew, went to Sunday schools, learned the Chinese dance and traditions through FCC. After a while, they found it was too difficult to live all of these cultural traditions in the same family.

_Wei: Do you also think Jewish culture is part of her identity too?_

_William: Christian too, because I was raised Christian. I think Grace related to Jewish more, because she studies the Judaism stories and the religious background of it. She really participated in last night’s Passover dinner which is one of the biggest Jewish holidays. It was very family oriented, children liked it a lot._

_Wei: Are you also celebrating Christian holidays too?_
William: We do in my family. So we do Easter Egg hunting. It gets a little confusing, but we just don’t know what Grace’s religious tradition would be in China. May have been Dao, or Confucian, Buddhist, we don’t know enough.

Wei: How did you make the decision that Grace should study Judaism?

William: We sort of just picked one to be less confusing. So we plan to raise her in Jewish way. I think Grace has to decide as an adult which side she wants to pursue.

Other families in this balancing cultures was the “balance between the two adoptive cultures”. They were families that had adoptive children from different countries. They needed to learn these cultures and then incorporate them in their family lives. Diane adopted two children, Nicole from China and Nathan from Korea. She thought it was important for her daughter to learn about Chinese culture. At the same time, she also needs to balance that with Korean culture, as well as an American one as a family. There was not as a strong Korean adoption community as the FCC here, so she felt that it would single Nathan out if she went ahead doing too much with Chinese culture. But she attended many FCC adoption workshops and got a tutor for Nicole to learn the Chinese language with Nicole’s consent. Diane did not want to force Chineseness upon Nicole if she did not want it.

The last subgroup in the balancing cultures was “bicultural” group. This referred to families that were made of one bicultural parent. Mark and Elizabeth adopted two daughters, Victoria and Stephanie. Mark was European American and Elizabeth was a Chinese immigrant who came to the United States as a little girl with her parents. For them, Chinese culture has always been a part of family life. Both of them felt comfortable doing things that were related to China. Mark and Elizabeth felt that it would be the best if their daughters were bicultural,
meaning they were competent in both Chinese and American cultures. It was part of family life for them to cook Chinese food and have Chinese friends. The oldest daughter could address her grandparents in Chinese. The whole family also stayed connected with local Chinese friends.

Growing up in the US, Elizabeth was quite Americanized. Sometimes she did not feel that she knew many details of the Chinese cultural tradition as much as her parents did. But she also realized that some of what her parents knew might have been abandoned in China as culture evolved there over the years.

As these data stories revealed, parents in this group were dealing with constant confusion, indecision, and uncertainties. There are many uncertainties and conflicting thoughts in the minds of these parents for all the dilemmas they are facing. There were no generic “one size fits all” solutions for them given the diversity of the individual and family backgrounds.

_Not much Chinese._

“Not much Chinese” were made of parents who did not do much with Chinese culture for their child(ren)’s identity development. The majority of the parents, which were 6 of the participating families, recognized their daughter's Chinese identity, but they did little to incorporate it into their family routines. They did not engage in many China related activities compared with the previous two groups. Lindsey, for example, thought her children grew up in the United States and their culture should be American, similar to the ancestors of hers and her husband’s:

America is her culture, China is her heritage. That is not the culture they grow up with.

My husband spoke Russian at home until he was 4. Then they spoke English at home. He forgot about it.
Jeanne adopted two daughters from China. She tried to help her children understand the Chinese culture through books, videos and FCC events. In terms of Chinese emphasis in the family, she did not think she should “stuff it down throats” if they did not want it. In addition, her oldest daughter was struggling with school work:

I don’t think Melissa is going to study the Chinese culture at least for a long time. I showed them the video about China, they don’t seem interested in the Chinese culture. We go to Chinese restaurants, but Chinese foods are not my favorite. We eat it once a week, it is probably quite often enough.

In most of these families, their Chinese related activities were about holiday celebrations and eating at a Chinese restaurant. Many of them participated in the FCC events, made presentations about Chinese New Year in their children’s class if their children were at school age. They planned to visit China when their child got older.

“Not much Chinese” group represented the majority adoptive families. They did mostly ceremonial activities with their children regarding Chinese identity.

*No Chinese culture.*

“No Chinese culture” group was made of parents who did not have much interest in Chinese culture. Parents from this group did not regard China as important to their children. They intended to raise their children as any other American child. As a mom in FCC said about their adoption trip to China:

I can tell you in one of my trips, there was a family. I can tell you the only reason they took that trip was to get that baby. At one point during the trip, she said “I hate Chinese food”. She complained that she couldn’t breathe, stuff like that. When we were in
Changsha, she didn’t like the weather, she didn’t like the food, she didn’t like people looking at her. They thought they were there for a vacation. First of all, they have not prepared themselves for China. What do you expect in a country that has all these people? And most important thing was she said “why would I want to get on bus to get there?” because we were going to take a bus to the orphanage where babies came from. Back to this day, it has been 3 years since adoption, I have not received any picture of her daughter, I have never received a letter from her. Maybe I go over board by trying to send baby pictures to people in the same (adoption) group. Because I feel they have the connection to all of these. That little girl does not know the other girls that were adopted from the same orphanage. We have no idea what the baby girl looks like today.

These parents did not have much interest in China, as being said about them by an adoptive parent above. I had no access to their daily life to know how these parents and children did with the Chinese culture at home.

These four different groups of parents presented four different sets of patterns that reflected their understandings and beliefs on their adoptive children’s Chinese identity. How their children responded to their different approaches to the Chineseness was discussed in the later part of the chapter.

*Racism*

In context of American society, ethnicity often stood side by side with the notion of race as two important identifiers to differentiate people. As these Chinese adoptees were growing up and interacting with the main stream society in this country, parents thought about this issue and took actions accordingly.
Racism is an issue.

Almost all parents had a general understanding about the racism that their children would encounter in America, but their perception of its seriousness varied. Some parents recognized that racism would be an issue their children had to face, but they assured themselves by saying that Asians had a positive stereotype in this country:

I think there is a potential problem. I think in some ways they are lucky. The stereotypes for Chinese are positive stereotypes. Chinese are hard working, very intelligent and musically gifted. So, of course, all my kids are, that has nothing to do with their being Chinese. The society is going to tell them you are too short, too tall, or they don’t know how to relate socially. As a parent, you try to give them the best tools you can. In this case, help them deal with the racial issues, because I don’t know if I can give them all these skills. I can tell them things that might happen to them. I can talk about things to do. Again, I can’t do it all.

Not much.

Some parents believed that their children would encounter the racist behaviors in their lives, but they reassured themselves by holding on to the belief that it would not be as bad for their children as it was for the African Americans:

I think it will [be an issue for them]. Right now I feel Chinese or Oriental people are pretty well accepted. Maybe there are certain neighborhoods they are not. I don’t know if I am wrong. I did not see black people treated badly. I worked with black people. Everyone seemed to be getting along pretty good.


Racism not an issue.

Some parents were not sure about how racism was going to play in the lives of their children, but hoped that it was not going to be an issue at all as the society was becoming more diverse:

I don’t know. I think there will be enough adopted kids around as they get older. I don’t think it is going to be a big issue. I am hoping this society is getting more diverse, so these kids will not stand out. Now Hispanics are becoming the majority minority. You know my girls may not be noticed at all. That is what I am hoping.

So, again, all the parents in this study seemed to agree that their children could have to face racist discrimination. But they disagree as to the various levels of seriousness. Most of them agreed that Asians had a positive stereotype in this country. Therefore, their children wouldn’t be badly treated. The notion of racism in their minds was predominantly overt racism. They addressed the individual differences among family members to ensure their children that they were not the only ones who were different.

Adoption Discussions

Adoption was a very important component of the identity of these Chinese children, as well as the way of being a family for this group of people. They engaged in adoption discussions of various intensity and regularities.
Reasons to talk about adoption.

Most parents were quite open about their adoption with the children. Lindsey thought it was hard not to talk about it. Since their children were adopted interracially, people would know that they did not come from the same genetically related family:

Well, probably when she was 2, but it had to be earlier than that because we watched TV on adoption when she was 17 or 18 months old, she pointed to these children and to herself, which was telling me that she understood these children were like her. When you adopt children cross racially, it is hard not to talk about adoption because they don’t look like you.

Another reason parents wanted to talk about adoption with children was that they took it as more a social and psychological issue that was too important to ignore:

I think it is important to talk about it, and allow them to talk about it. Some children will deal with them, some children won’t. Some children may feel a sense of hurt, and not understand it. I think not bringing it up is to say that it is not ok to have these feelings.

How to talk about adoption.

For parents who talked about adoption issues, language was important. Parents were careful about choosing the age appropriate wordings to help children understand this issue. They told the adoption stories little by little from times when their children were very young. Diane even practiced the words before she told her daughter:

When she was a baby. When I was rocking her in the rocking chair before she could understand, I was talking to her. If you are not comfortable with the story, or telling the story, children sense that. So I was practicing all my words when she didn’t really
understand them. We just came back from China on a big airplane. So she came to understand things. I added a few more things to the story that I thought would be age appropriate things. You can’t tell her that whole story at one time. It is too much for any child. So, I told her a little bit at a time. Then added as years have gone by. She is free to ask anything any time she wants.

Abandonment.

Many parents actually did not believe there was any abandonment issue since their children were adopted as an infant. Karen told me that she believed the abandonment issue was more like an issue created by the adoption professionals: doctors, psychologists, and social workers. Karen’s view probably represented majority parents’ perception on this topic as I sensed in a workshop on abandonment. Most parents were skeptical on this with their verbal and non-verbal language when they raised questions to the speaker.

If parents recognized the abandonment issue, many of them had difficulties using the word “abandonment” when they told the adoption story to their children. They worried that it would hold very strong psychological stigma for their children which traumatized their children again.

The others believed that it was important to address it even though they did not like the harsh connotation of the word. On question of how to talk about it, they tried to articulate it in a sensitive way. Here is how one family described the process and what was said:

What I do is to put them in the context. When I told them their adoption story, I told them about their birth family and the difficult choices they make. They lived in a country where there were too many people. The government had to find out what to do to deal
with that problem, because they cannot have all the food, clothing, and things to take care of people. So the government said families can only have one or two children. Since the tradition said that the male took care of his parents. His wife took care of the husband’s families. Also, then, in many of the countryside, a lot of people had no one to take care of them. Your birth family was probably in that situation. If they have a daughter, they won’t have anyone to take care of them because they don’t have a retirement plan, social security. My parents don’t live with us because they have their social security. But that is not possible in China. We talked about that. It was a difficult choice. They were probably in tears. The other thing we talked about was the birth family would have found out it was a girl and could have done something earlier. But they chose to have the birth. I don’t have definite information, but I feel strongly and I told them that they were loved so they were put in a safe place, so they could be found right away and be taken care of. To me, abandonment has many meanings. We talked about their birth parents leaving them in the safe place.

*Limited adoption discussion between parents and children.*

For children who were adopted at an older age, parents did not talk about abandonment or adoption with them as much as other parents did. They assumed that their children understood what had happened to them if children did not ask about it. Melissa was adopted when she was five years old, she could not recall how she was abandoned. She vaguely remembered how she was adopted. In her neighborhood in Huntington, West Virginia, she could hardly find anyone to converse with in Chinese after she left China. Now she had lost her Chinese language and most details of her life in China since she came to America.
Extracurricular activities and holidays.

Extracurricular activities were passionately emphasized among parents who wanted the best for their children and assimilated in the mainstream American society. In addition to school work, parents actively helped their children participate in activities like soccer, ballet, gymnastics, musical instruments, art, and singing. Every summer, parents took their children to various places for summer vacation as many middle class families did. They held birthday parties for their children, celebrated American holidays like Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter, etc. Many of them also took children to their own churches and had them baptized. Some parents also led the prayer at night that included the birth parents of their children before bedtime. Almost all girls had Barbie dolls. As a result of that, these children were quite familiar with American mainstream culture.

Peer pressure concerns.

Parents also were concerned about peer pressure that especially older kids had to deal with. For example, Cindy often talked to her kids about this issue:

We talk about peer pressure a lot because peer pressure will push my kids to try drug, sex, so we talked about that at the start. Alice wanted to get an L.L.Bean backpack, it was very important to her. She tried to tell me why she had to do this. I said “Do you really think L.L.Bean backpack is really a better backpack? Or because everyone else has one?” She said “Both”. Then I said “If everyone else tries smoking, do you think you will try that too?” she said “Mom, get a grip, it is only a backpack we are talking about!” you are right, ok. But peer pressure really is a big thing.

Cindy felt scared that her daughters were getting older by days. In the years to come,
she envisioned her Alice baby sitting other people’s children, and heading for the college.

It was clear that parents put much care and interest in their children although their views on Chinese identity, racism, adoption issues, and extracurricular activities varied greatly. They tried to help them cope and be successful in America as they were growing up. However, they were more or less concerned about the future of their children. Cindy expressed her fears for her children:

My children are Oreos, Twinkies. My children are seen in contrast of me, they will think “Oh, they are adopted Chinese children”. When my children are seen outside their school, outside of me, people see them as Chinese, not adopted Chinese children. I want them to have a sense that they feel comfortable in that role. As being a person of Chinese descent. In which they live in the area of country is not very diverse, so when they are seen, people will not think they are American born Chinese, they will think them of as foreigners. I am sure you have encountered that, too. I want them to feel comfortable with whatever identity it is. Not feel they don’t fit here, there, or whatever.

School and Peers

School obviously was a very important place that affects the identity development of children (Hemmings, 2004). This was the place where children learned the survival skills and formed their social ties with peers. From daycare, kindergarten to grade school, parents in this study were very selective about the school their child(ren) attended. There was a wide range of schools these families selected: reputable public schools, Montessori, parochial, special needs schools. They all hoped their children would be successful and happy at school. These schools
tended to be serving the predominantly middle class and white students. Almost all adoptees in this study were one of the few if not the only Chinese students at their schools. Children’s experiences in these schools varied greatly in curricular diversity and peer culture. The following two examples demonstrated the two extreme examples of these schools through the lens of three adoptees’ school lives. The organizational structure of this topic was described in figure 4.

Figure 4: School and peers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School and peers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity in curriculum, teacher gave individual attention to students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Inclusive School*

Inclusive school tended to be more serious about diversity and inclusion. The school administrators and teachers made an effort to ensure that children were exposed to different cultures and that all students should be accepted in school regardless of their cultural backgrounds.

Sara went to Ft. Wright Elementary, a highly reputable school in the city. Her second grade teacher, Mrs. Moore, was good about bringing diversity in her class. Her classroom was decorated with English letters, flags from different countries. There were multicolored ribbons hung on the ceiling. The end of each ribbon had a name tag in butterfly shape with a child’s name on it. There was a long but low bookcase against the west wall for the children to read.
There was a rocking chair and area rug in front of the bookcase. Mrs. Moore sat in the rocking chair to read to her students in the reading classes. There were four older computers by the south wall. They seemed well maintained and used daily. On the back of her room was a row of cabinets that reached to the ceiling. Two large size posters were posted on the cabinet doors, one was the star of the week with a picture of the child who was the star that week. The other was a class management chart that indicated children’s duties: who was collecting desk work sheets, who was in charge of reading, who was in charge of roll call, etc. Students enjoyed doing their duties and were proud of their roles of the day.

Mrs. Moore placed four children in one group with two in each row sitting on the opposite side of the desks. Sara was seated with two boys and another adopted Chinese girl. Mrs. Moore intended to make sure that these two Chinese girls had each other’s company in class activities.

Sara wore her purple color birthday t shirt that she made for herself a few days ago when we celebrated her birthday at home. Her hair was tied up into a bun on the top of her head. She seemed to enjoy the journal writing they were doing. Once in a while, she sneaked a glance at me to see what I was doing. Later, she walked towards the back to get something from her backpack. On the way to her seat, she handed me an envelope addressed to me: Ms. Wei. I opened it. It was a thank you card Sara made for me. She thanked me for coming to her class. She was very happy that I was there for her.

In the interview with Mrs. Moore, she told me that the school put a lot emphasis on diversity even though the school was largely made of European American students. They celebrated different cultures in each month. This month was black history month, so they talked about Martin Luther King, slavery, and racial discrimination. There was a portrait of Martin
Luther King’s on the East wall. Last month was China month, they celebrated the Chinese New Year at school. The cafeteria served Chinese lunch on the Chinese New Year’s Day. Sara wore her Qipao, the traditional Chinese dress, and made a presentation about China with her mom on that day.

The school also made an effort to help students feel at home in school. In Sara’s case, she has never encountered any racial slurs or has been teased because of her Chinese or adoption background. Children here were well behaved and serious about learning. Mrs. Moore incorporated many multicultural literatures and activities in her curriculum. For example, considering Sara’s adoption background, Mrs. Moore asked her to do a family picture project instead of family tree in her lessons about families and heritage.

Sara was a popular kid at school. She knew a lot of people in the building. But Sara seemed to be struggling with her school work:

She is an average student; we are working on attention issues. She is easily distracted. Sometimes it takes a tap reminder, or other techniques to get her focused. Once we started the activity, she will be very into it. But then her mind starts wandering. Once we move around the room doing activities, she has a little difficulty with that freedom, not being able to stay on task and make choices. For example, we read a chapter after the lunch. She had very hard time with it. I don’t think it is beyond her level of comprehension, she has very hard time focusing on reading. She is too social which is opposite to her China sister Kelly, who reads intensely. They are quite different. Sara may not finish what she needs to finish for the day. Becky [Sara’s mom] has been very good about making sure that she finishes all the work. She has a lot of supporting hands, which is very beneficial. She can be better if she gets her focus under control.
Ft. Wright Elementary has tried to bring in diversity in school to address the needs of its student body. Sara enjoyed going to her school. Sara’s parents were very thankful that she went to this school and had Mrs. Moore as her teacher.

*Hostile School*

Hostile school reflected the jungle rule that the strongest survive. There were a lot of tensions and hostility among students. The school curriculum was primary Eurocentric curriculum.

Melissa and her sister Tina went to St. Joseph School, a Catholic private school in a middle class suburb of Huntington, West Virginia. Melissa and Tina were the only two Chinese students in school. There was a Japanese student. The rest were European American. Every morning, Melissa and Tina dressed in their uniforms: a white shirt and a blue and white grid pleated skirt with two stripes crossing over the shoulders. They could not take the yellow bus to school if they were not in uniforms. They often skipped breakfast to catch the bus.

St. Joseph School was a slightly older two story building adjacent to the church. A cross was on the front of the building. The interior of the building was bigger than it looked from outside and well maintained. The corridors were spotless. There were a lot of windows in the corridors between classrooms. It was a k-8 school next to the high school.

Tina’s class was on the first floor. Students sat in five rows facing the teacher. There were 23 students, 13 boys and 10 girls. There were 3 computers by the left wall. There was a big blackboard on the front wall. A TV/VCR was mounted on the wall at the corner by the blackboard. Above the blackboard were 26 letters in alphabetic order. Tina sat on the left front
seat in the first row. There was a boy behind her seat and another boy beside her. She did not talk much with her peers.

School began at 8:00 a.m. with singing the National Anthem, pledge to the flag, and a prayer. Her first grade teacher, Mrs. Thompson, was asking them questions of the day. Tina seldom raised her hand to answer the questions. After the questions of the day session, Mrs. Thompson divided students into 3 groups. One group was doing the reading with her, one group doing the computer test on the computers, and the last group was doing the work sheets at their own desks. Tina was a little shy in her class. She was not as active as other students in the class, but she got right answers. She sneaked a look at me and looked at other places quickly. She was assertive when she was getting her computer seat to do the test. She seemed a little bored and not interested in the class.

After the first bell, I walked to Melissa’s class upstairs. Melissa was extremely conscious about my being there. She looked at me quite often during the class time. She answered most questions correctly and tried to be active in class to show off her intelligence. Some kids asked her who I was. She told them that I was a friend. When she was in the language class, she handed me four envelopes with two thank you letters and two surveys. She was smiling at me when she saw me opening them. She was apparently bored with the classes.

She held my hand and guided me to the cafeteria when it was the lunch time. It was not as noisy as some public school cafeterias I have been. Boys and girls sat in separate sections of the cafeteria. They all talked to friends nearby. Melissa asked me to say “hi” to Tina when we passed her table. I said “hi” to Tina and gave her a hug. Tina’s friends looked at her with admiration. Melissa asked me to wait outside the serving window for her. She quickly came out
with a tray of food. We walked to another end of the cafeteria. Many kids looked at us because I might be the first adult Asian visitor in that school.

Melissa asked a girl to give up her seat and asked me to sit there. Girls were curiously looking at me. They tried to ask me questions about who I was. I answered. I told them that I was a friend of Melissa’s mom. They all asked me if I was the mother or aunt of Melissa’s. Melissa asked me if I knew her China mom. I told her “no”. She introduced me to her friends Maria and Emily. Melissa did not quite want me to talk to other girls when girls across the table talked to me. She said they were not her friends. She tried to pull me to talk to Maria.

We walked out for the recess. Maria, Emily, and Melissa showed me their cheerleading dance. I was amazed to see girls doing that. Later, several girls talked to us and asked me who I was. I told them I was a friend of Melissa’s. Melissa pulled my hand and asked me not to talk to the girls who approached me. I asked why. She said they were the ones who kicked her out from the clique.

When we got to the playground, there were many students gathered in groups. Melissa was the only Asian girl there. Maria and Emily started to play Apple’s Stick game without Melissa. Melissa felt she was left out and she asked if they left her out. Girls ignored her and Melissa was going to get upset, but she did not say anything. She walked to me and asked me to leave the playground with her. I asked her why. She said she just didn’t want to play. When girls saw us there, they came towards me ignoring Melissa. I told them they should be playing together if they were friends. They tried this time, Melissa did not get a clue of what they played. She stopped and stood in the middle. Another girl was smiling outside the circle, she wanted to join, but no one even talked to her or invited her to join the group game. Melissa was left out
quickly. It appeared these girls did not want to include them. Girls could come and take her friend away from her without saying anything to her. There was a lot of tension among cliques.

When we got home, I asked Tina what they studied. She told me that they studied the history of the United States. She said her teacher taught them that their ancestors came from Ireland, England, and Scotland on Mayflower. She asked me if her ancestors came from Ireland, England, or Scotland.

Jeanne told me that St. Joseph School was difficult for children because kids bullied each other. The school principal had addressed this issue, but it did not stop the bullying behaviors in school. Tina was told by a classmate that her nose was so flat, as if it was run over by a truck. She told her mom a week later about it.

Jeanne: I did tell her teacher about it. Her school psychologist also talked about why people are different, stuff like that. She talked to her once or twice about it to the psychologist.

Wei: Did they talk about the difference to her or in the class?

Jeanne: They talked about it in the class, too. The psychologist talked about it one on one. Tina came back, and said “oh, I talked to this lady, and she told me it is ok to be ugly”. [Laughed] I said “what?” she said “oh, she said it is ok to be different.” Of course. I don’t know she wanted to get attention or what [by saying that].

Jeanne was considering changing the school if these things continue to happen. But then she was concerned that kids had to travel long distance to the school if that was the case. At the same time, she also found it difficult to be part of the parents group because most of these
parents were significantly younger than she. They most likely talked about children’s sports that Jeanne and her children had no interest in participating.

It was clear that St. Joseph did not place much emphasis on diversity issues by staying with the traditional course in Eurocentric curriculum. The obvious clique school culture served as the instrument to torment students who did not fit in, such as Melissa and her sister Tina.

*Parents and School Interactions*

Many parents realized the importance of school to their children’s wellbeing. They stayed actively involved with their child(ren)’s school. Some of them volunteer regularly at school, some of them presented in their child’s class about Chinese culture and adoption. Some of them stayed in close communication with the teachers and took PTA positions. In return, school administrators and teachers were inclined to address the sensitive issues like racism, adoption, and tolerance in school.

Some parents, however, were not so comfortable with such amount of publicity. They only contacted schools when their children reported incidences at school. Their approach to school of their children’s was more reactive compared with other parents that were described above. Their children did not receive as much benefits or sensitive treatments at school because of their levels of involvement with teachers and building administrators. What would Melissa and Tina’s school experiences be if Jeanne had been more involved in school activities?
FCC and Community

FCC and Its Members

Families with children from China (FCC) has been instrumental in providing information about China, adoption and post adoption care for families in Greater Cincinnati area (see figure 5 below). It had about 176 families by the time the research was conducted, it was continuing in membership growth.

Figure 5: FCC and local community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FCC and Local Community</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FCC and its Members</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Inception of FCC</td>
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</table>

FCC inception.

The Families with Children from China (FCC) is a national organization. Its first chapters started in big cities like New York, San Francisco in the early 1990s, and many cities established its own local chapter quickly afterwards. The Greater Cincinnati chapter—FCC-GC was established in 1992. On the webpage of the FCC-GC, states its mission as the follows:

The Greater Cincinnati Chapter of Families with Children from China (FCC-GC) is a volunteer organization that serves to provide support, information and cultural opportunities to individuals and groups within the Greater Cincinnati area.
In sharing our knowledge and celebration of Chinese culture and adoptions we hope to facilitate future adoptions and to enable our Chinese children to appreciate their rich cultural heritage (FCC Greater Cincinnati, 2004).

The FCC chair Debbie Borchers, a pediatrician and an adoptive mom, was one of the founders and key players in the creation and development of this organization. In my interview with her, she gave me a brief history of FCC:

As you can imagine, the earliest FCC occurred in New York, Chicago and San Francisco where there were more people with adopted children from China. It is really a word of mouth phenomenon. I was one of the people that started FCC. The very first FCC thing was in my house….back in 1995. I got to know a few people who were mostly single moms who adopted children from China. I decided that was the time for us to get together. Other thing was a few moms in Chicago from Anna’s group started FCC in Chicago. So we got together in December of 1995 in my house. It was in Oxford. Nothing happened until the Chinese New Year with Chinese American Association. There were 6 or 7 of us who decided we should get together. So there was a steering committee meeting in someone’s house in February. Then we started doing different events….So that was kind of how to get this group going. We started doing things socially in people’s houses.

FCC activities.

FCC has grown over these years since its inception in 1995, it had over 120 families as its active members. Debbie thought the real numbers of adoptive families with children from China
should be much larger, but no one really had an accurate number due to the different adoption agencies parents used. Some families also chose not to participate in FCC activities.

FCC served as resource center in providing adoption workshops for families who were going to adopt, and families who were dealing with post adoption issues. FCC placed most of its energy on bringing Chinese culture to the adoption community for children and parents. With the help from local Chinese Americans, Chinese visitors, and other local organizations, Chinese New Year and the Dragon Festival were the two well attended major cultural FCC events each year. They also watched the shows by the Chinese visiting troupes as a group. Debbie thought FCC was important for families, but FCC also needed to create events that were relevant to children:

I think to certain extent you have to make it kid friendly. I think the cultural authenticity without children will make it hard for parents. We talked about it last night that parents won’t come to the events if they are not doing it with children. So it has to be cultural authentic for the sake of children. One of the things we were talking about to do in next year’s culture fest is to do “hands on” workshops that parents can do with children together. Whether it is Taichi, or it is calligraphy, or it is cooking. Things they enjoyed doing together as a family. Because honestly if kids want to do more, parents don’t want to separate themselves from their children.

Connections among FCC members.

FCC members took advantage of the technology and used internet platform to exchange their ideas and questions regarding their adoption experiences. Most parents took FCC as their major source of support for their children and themselves. They shared the information
about the upcoming books, news, and TV shows relating to the adoption. They also were ready to take action as a group if they found any of these programs offensive to them as a community.

**FCC connection with local Chinese American organizations.**

Locally, they stayed connected with various Chinese American organizations. In the early winter of 2003, one city council man was considering to hire a developer who made racist remarks about Chinese Americans, accusing them for having a different math, so the downtown new development should not include any Chinese business people. FCC responded to this quickly by joining an organized protest with different Chinese American groups to the city hall. They made a passionate plea not to hire this developer with other local Chinese American leaders. As a result, their action was well taken by city council.

**China sisters.**

No one really knew who started the term “China sisters”. It referred to children who were adopted from the same orphanage. As parents did not know any information about their children’s birth parents, these China sisters were really the ones children related to in China as if they were sisters from the same families. Actually, care takers in the orphanages in China gave these children the same last name as if they were living there as a very big family. Most parents hoped that children kept this tie with their China sisters as they were growing up. These parents expected that they would support each other when they become adults because they shared many common experiences and feelings as adoptees from China.
Local Community

Community was the extension of families. So families took it serious on how their communities reacted to their adoption and different family structure. There were three types of community reactions based on the interviews or survey comments from parents.

Accepting community.

Despite the obvious physical differences between the parents and their adoptive Chinese children, most parents thought that their communities accepted their families well. They did not get many internationally negative or hostile comments about their children or the adoption from their neighbors or strangers in the street. They attributed this to the fact that more and more people in Cincinnati adopted from China, so people were used to seeing European American parents with an Asian baby.

Occasionally negative.

However, not all parents’ experiences were such rosy pictures. Although it was not the situation faced parents in my qualitative study, many parents did encounter insensitive comments and questions from people in the street in my survey results. Some parents even experienced rejections from extended family and neighbors because of their infertility and the race of their children.

Rejecting community.

Some parents expressed their concerns about the rejection by the local community simply because they were not from Cincinnati. It seemed the small town mindset worked in many of
their neighbors’ heads. Rachael and her husband moved to Cincinnati from Oregon, they moved to an all white neighborhood in a northeastern suburban. They were surprised to find out that they were not welcomed in the local community. She was rejected from any assistance when she asked for help from fellow church members in the neighborhood after her arm was seriously injured. But her neighbors responded passionately to another local woman who was in the similar situation. She was especially concerned about her two year old adopted daughter who was the only non-white in the neighborhood. She did not think her Angela would feel at home in this neighborhood as she got older. She did not like to entertain the idea that her two children would grow up having this kind of attitude. They were considering moving back to Oregon or a more accepting neighborhood when they were more mobile financially. Again, this type of move took a long time to materialize if they were lucky.

**Parents and FCC/Community Interactions**

Many parents considered FCC as very important for them. They expressed intention to participate in FCC events and learn things about China and adoption. Becky thought her kids benefited from the FCC workshops for children:

At this point, kids need only generalized information. I think kids who do not have connection with FCC group are really going to have identity issues. I don’t think they [my kids] are going to have a hard time.

Many families lived in the suburban neighborhoods realized that diversity was a problem.
for their children. Some parents expressed concerns about their child(ren)’s self esteem growing up in the predominantly white neighborhoods. The four year old Rebecca complained that “‘I am the only Chinese in the class, I am the only Chinese in this family. I don’t like it.’” Marilyn and Jimmy felt sorry for their daughter, at the same time, it was not easy for them just to pack and move to a more diverse neighborhood.

Sandy and William were luckier. They were worried about Grace’s unhappiness with her skin color. They decided to buy a house in a racially more diverse neighborhood, so their daughter did not have to be the only Chinese all the time. Sandy told me that Grace was a lot happier once they moved to their new house. Grace had more Asian friends at school too.

Children

Children were the center of this study. They demonstrated their resilience and flexibility as they negotiated their identities at home, in school, and their immediate communities every day. Their sense of Chinese, their reaction on China visit, their response to racism, as well as their negotiation experiences are described here (also see figure 6 on the following page).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children's Own Sense of their Chinese identity</th>
<th>Adoption</th>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>Visit China again</th>
<th>Children's View on Adoption and Birth Parents</th>
<th>Negotiation at Home</th>
<th>Negotiation at School</th>
<th>Negotiation at FCC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proud being Chinese</td>
<td>Grief</td>
<td>Verbal complaint</td>
<td>Enjoy being with their China sisters</td>
<td>Adoption Grief</td>
<td>Keep Parents out of School</td>
<td>Motivate parent</td>
<td>Refuse to go to FCC as too kiddish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed feelings</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Non-verbal resistance</td>
<td>Love FCC events</td>
<td>Grief verbally</td>
<td>Keep Parents out of School</td>
<td>Non-verbal resistance</td>
<td>Speaking up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dislike</td>
<td>Grief</td>
<td>Verbal complaint</td>
<td>Speaking up</td>
<td>Grief in symbolic way</td>
<td>Self Denial</td>
<td>Verbal complaint</td>
<td>Compromising</td>
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<td>Confrontation</td>
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<td>Do not want to talk about it</td>
<td>Keep Parents out of School</td>
<td>Verbal complaint</td>
<td>Self Denial</td>
</tr>
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<td>Non-verbal resistance</td>
<td>Confrontation</td>
<td>Question Birth Parents Act of Abandonment</td>
<td>Keep Parents out of School</td>
<td>Verbal complaint</td>
<td>Self Denial</td>
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<td>It’s different</td>
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<td>Verbal complaint</td>
<td>Satisfied</td>
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<td>It’s fun</td>
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<td>Verbal complaint</td>
<td>Satisfied</td>
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<td>Verbal complaint</td>
<td>Satisfied</td>
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**Figure 6: Children**
Children’s Own Sense of Their Chinese Identity

There was not a clear correlation between how much the parents emphasized China and how children felt about their Chinese identities. Children’s attitudes and actions regarding their Chinese identity varied even among the siblings in the same family.

For example, Alice, who had a “China nuts” mom, did not want to do much of anything with China after she reached eight years old. Her four year old younger sister Mia was excited about doing things with China.

The four year old Rebecca’s parents were those “somewhat Chinese” parents. Even though her parents gave her many opportunities to learn about China, she felt uncomfortable with her Chinese identity. She did not want to be the only Chinese in the family. Her sister Julie, who was blond and blue eyed, wanted to be Chinese. She thought it was “cool” to be Chinese.

Melissa, eleven years old, was from one of those “not much Chinese” families. She felt strongly about being Chinese, at the same time, she also identified with Blacks. Based on what I learned through interviews with her and my visit in her school, I realized that she was forced to identify with minority because of the constant rejection from her peers. Her eight year old sister Tina, however, resented her Chinese identity. She wanted to be a blond haired and blue eyed American.

Many children enjoyed China related activities their parents arranged for them, especially when they were younger, but many were expressing their desires of being American, and not doing things with China. They refused to take Chinese language lessons, did not want to learn the Chinese dance, rejected going to FCC events. As a result, many parents had to back up and not push their children too hard on their China connection:
Wei: Do you like your mom to go to school to talk about China?

Alice: She did when I was younger, now she doesn’t.

Wei: She doesn’t, or you don’t want her to do?

Alice: Sometimes I don’t want her to do. Sometimes I don’t know.

Wei: Do you feel that will make you feel different from others?

Alice: Sometimes.

Wei: Do you feel embarrassed [by her coming to your class]?

Alice: Sometimes.

While the children were different from their parents, there were still four distinctive patterns in their attitudes and behaviors regarding their Chineseness: Proud being Chinese, mixed feelings, embarrassed, dislike being Chinese.

Proud being Chinese.

“Proud being Chinese” group were the children who took great pride of their Chinese identity. They participated in all FCC events and loved their Chinese dresses. They loved Chinese food and culture. They learned to dance and sing Chinese songs. They even learned from their Chinese or Chinese American friends to cook Chinese dishes. Some of them taught their friends about Chinese culture. As one mother described:

They love their Chinese dresses and (Chinese holiday) parties…They know it is important to them…and I try to make sure they understand that is always part of where they are from. Lisa could be one of these kids who can say I have the best of both worlds.

Lindsey thought her daughter was very proud of her Chinese identity:
There will be days when she wears her hair in a bun with different hair decoration pieces coming from China. On picture days, on New Years Day, she gets a lot of compliments. She is telling people about it, telling the teachers, teacher assistant, secretary. She is very proud of it.

*Mixed feelings.*

“Mixed feelings” was the children group who had mixed feelings about being Chinese. They sometimes wanted to be Chinese, sometimes wanted to be “American” – White. Some of them were sure about their Chinese identity, but they also knew that it was undesirable according to their peers. Occasionally they had to fight back against their peers’ prejudicial comments and behaviors.

Lily was ten years old; she was an attractive young woman with clear dark eyes and straight long hair tied in the back. She always had a pleasant smile on her face. In our conversation, she told me about how she felt about her Chinese identity:

*Wei: How do you feel right now after so many years from China. Do you feel like a Chinese, American, or something in between?*

*Lily: I feel a kind of in between.*

*Wei: What makes you feel in between?*

*Lily: Probably being around here where everyone is not Chinese makes me feel American. Like when I get back to China, I feel I am Chinese because there is tons of Chinese people stuff like that.*
Melissa, who was eleven years old, was an attractive and passionate girl. She liked to cook Chinese food at home and take care of her younger sister. She was quite in charge of the family matters. She liked to talk to me, and ask me questions about China. She was quite sure that she was a Chinese.

*Wei:* Do you like to be a Chinese or American?

*Melissa:* Chinese.

*Wei:* Why?

*Melissa:* I look different ways than American. Different language, different food, different attitude, different kind of opinions from American. And different everything. Different person of course.

Melissa’s firm stand on her Chineseness was in part of a response to the rejection she experienced for being a Chinese. However, she was not sure how that Chineseness was supposed to be. She knew some basic information about China. She did not feel very comfortable when she was in China. She thought there were too many people in China and they all looked alike.

*Embarrassed.*

“Embarrassed” group was the children who were uncomfortable claiming a Chinese identity. They tried to reject doing things that were related to China. They preferred to play with European American children in the neighborhood and at school. They were comfortable with themselves when they were with other adoptive children in these FCC events.

Sandy and I were standing outside the gym floor to watch Grace and her teammates practicing their gymnastic routines. Grace was quite good at it as one of the best in her team. But
she was very self conscious about herself. When she did her routine on the floor, or on the bar, she pretended that she did not see me, only her mother. She talked to only white girls in the team, not any of the Chinese girls in the same team. In an interview at her home, she told me that she was clear about her Chinese identity:

\textit{Wei: Do you see yourself as an American, or Chinese?}

\textit{Grace: As a Chinese American.}

\textit{Wei: Why?}

\textit{Grace: Because I was once from China, now I am living in the America. I used to live in China, and now I live in America. Um, and um...and that’s all.}

\textit{Grace knew the words of Chinese American, but she was not necessarily sure about what that meant, or how she could relate to that concept.}

\textit{Dislike.}

“Dislike” group of children had a difficult time accepting their Chinese identity (see C4 of table 2). They rejected the notion that they had to be the only one or one of the few Chinese at home and schools. They expressed desires of wanting to be White. Marilyn told me that her Rebecca responded to her suggestion about learning the Chinese language with “I like the way I talk”. Marilyn and her husband thought it was not easy for them to live in the Midwest and find a real Chinese cultural identity.

Eight year old Tina didn’t want to associate with China, she wanted to be an American:

\textit{Wei: if there were something you can change, what would you like to change?}

\textit{Tina: my skin.}
Wei: to what?

Tina: um, the color you have (she pointed to my arm).

Wei: why do you want to change?

Tina: because I just like your skin, smooth.

Wei: yours is smooth. Your skin is darker than mine, but we are the same people.

Tina: um, I like yours. My skin is stronger than yours, I don’t like it. I also want my nose to grow bigger, have a bone in there.

Wei: when you get older, your nose is going to be bigger.

Tina: ok, anything else.

Wei: Do you feel you are Chinese, American, or something between?

Tina: something in between.

Wei: how?

Tina: I look different than other kids.

Wei: because you look different, you don’t feel like an American?

Tina: um. Um. It feels like a Chinese.

Wei: Do you want to be Chinese?

Tina: no.

Wei: You want to be American?

Tina: um.

Wei: Can you be American?

Tina: I want to have blond hair, nose.
Children obviously demonstrated their different attitudes and actions to illustrate how they felt about their supposed Chinese identity. The patterns here showed that younger kids tended to have positive attitudes towards their Chinese identity, especially when they were in frequent contact with their Chinese friends, Chinese American peers, or their China sisters. Older kids, in this study, kids in their middle childhood or preteen years, mostly changed to a more negative outlook on their Chinese identity with the exception of a few. It seemed no matter how much parents tried to instill that pride of Chinese identity, parental effort alone was not enough force to resist the negativities on their Chineseness from the society, their peers, and the community, overtly, or covertly. That was typical in school peer interactions that were introduced previously.

Visit China Again

Whatever children felt about their Chinese identity, almost all of them expressed their desires to visit China again. In fact, some of them had been there once since they were adopted.

Motivation.

To some children, China was romanticized as a large, beautiful, and exotic place that they saw on children’s programs. Grace was uncomfortable with her Chinese identity, but she liked the idea to visit China one day:

*Wei: You do think you want to meet your birth parents someday?*

*Grace: I like the houses there, I watch a show called Sagwa, that’s where I see these cute houses. They all live in a big house, Sagwa likes to eat his tail.*
Some children have already been to China, they shared their travel stories with their siblings and friends. As a result, their younger siblings wanted to have the similar experiences by visiting China, too. Carolyn was one of them:

Wei: Do you want to go back and see the orphanage?

Carolyn: Yes, but I don’t like the Chinese food. I don’t like to eat Chinese food, I only like to eat plain rice and like steak.

Wei: (kidding) Oh, so you are going to starve in China.

Carolyn: Yah. That is why my mom said I should go. She says “if you want to go, you will have to eat Chinese”. My mom said we probably will have to wait until Krista is older to go.

Wei: Do you think you will be able to eat some Chinese food?

Carolyn: I don’t know. If I can’t eat anything, I don’t think I will go because I will starve. But I really want to see the Swan Hotel, I think that is what Anna called. Anna said the hotel was really pretty, because she has been to China. I want to see it.

China experiences.

Most children in this study did not have a clear picture of what China was and how Chinese people conducted their lives besides some general or stereotypical understandings, like chopsticks, Chinese Qipao, bikes, limited freedom and one child policy. Some children except one did not feel an emotional connection with China, when they were physically there:
Melissa: It’s not just like that. A lot of people there are alike because there are so many people walking around and I don’t know which is which. Is that hard to find your mom?

Wei: No.

Melissa: It’s hard for me. People in China look the same to me in my opinion.

Children’s View on Adoption and Birth Parents

Adoption.

All children in this study had a clear understanding of their adoption, mostly it was because their parents have been telling them their adoption story at very beginning of their American life.

Some children understood that their parents were not able to take care of them, that was why they were adopted. They also had a clear picture of how they were adopted:

Wei: How do you know about your adoption story?

Carolyn: Because my mom told me.

Wei: What do you remember now?

Carolyn: She said my mom couldn’t take care of me, so she had to make an adoption plan, I think. So I think she left me somewhere, then the orphanage got me so she adopted me. I remember the thing now. Wow, she wrote a letter I think to them, and then I think um she said “call me” I think. And then she didn’t know she was getting me. She wanted to adopt someone, she wrote a letter and asked them to call me on the phone. People talked to her, I don’t know her name, I think she said “that will take a while” because they didn’t have any babies yet for other people to have. So there is these people.
Because of these people, there were adopted children like me. They thought they were not ready. So the lady she talked to called my mom, and she said that um, like there was a child for her that she could have. So my mom came to China and got me.

Some children understood that they were in the orphanage and later adopted was due to the one child policy in China:

My mom and dad adopted me, they never see or met my parents, my birth parents. And I know that we don’t know where they are, and like um... when I was little, people in China could only have one child, I think that, maybe something similar, and I think that’s all.

Some children started to question why their birth parents did not keep them, especially after they were told that they probably had a birth brother, and a sister at home. Diane told me that her daughter started to question this specifics about her adoption story:

I think she is thinking about that now. She hasn’t said. She asked “why they didn’t keep me?” my answer to that is “I don’t know”. Truthfully I don’t know. I would only assume it was because they were poor, because of the rule in China. You know I explain I truly don’t know. So if I want to be totally truthful to her, that is what I had to say first. Then she said, “what do you think”, then I can tell her what I think. What I know is I don’t know. She is just kind of listening to that. “who took me to the orphanage?” she asked that. “How did I get there?”, you know, she has always thought about that. I don’t know the answer to that either.
Some children did not want to talk about their adoption with their parents and stay silent about it:

Our family day is the day she was adopted, March 29. We went to a Chinese restaurant that we liked, this was our tradition to do. We were talking about that we were taking a video camera to China with us when we first met her. We came home and watched the video together. She was clearly uncomfortable after we watched the video for a while. She was tired, it was clear she didn’t want to discuss with anyone.

All children wanted to meet their birth parents someday, and to see what they looked like.

*Wei: Do you want to go back and find out your birth parents someday?*

*Grace: Yah, but if I can’t find them, I still like to go back because I really don’t know what China looks like. I was like 6 months old when I was adopted. My parents adopted me. [smiled]*

Some children also wanted to visit their caregivers in the orphanage.

*Wei: Do you want to go back to China someday?*

*Tina: (Nod her head)*

*Wei: What do you want to do there?*

*Tina: To see my Nainai. She will recognize me, my Nainai.  
Wei: Who is your Nainai?  
Tina: Like someone who took care of me. Like when I was in the orphanage, my Nainai took care of me. How many more questions do you have?*
Some parents did not initiate adoption conversation regularly at home, some children also did not want to talk about it voluntarily.

_Grief._

All children grieved about their birthparents, their home, and the fear of abandonment. They grieved privately in different ways. Some children grieved in symbolic ways, others grieved verbally, and others grieved silently. Lily questioned her mom about her birthday as illegitimate because no one knew for sure which day she was born. Melissa, who was adopted at an older age, told her mom different versions of what happened to her in China, all of them involved the death of her parents: they died in a car accident, their house was on fire and her parents were killed in the house, they fell from the bridge. Her stories reflected on her sadness for her birth parents, and a necessary closure to her past pain in China.

Cindy told me that her daughter was in touch with her feelings at a very young age:

Carolyn was 3, she said “mom, when my mom left me in the orphanage, do you think she was sad, do you think she cried?” I started thinking about her. I was driving, she could see tears on my face. “I think she must be sad, she must cry a lot too”. Carolyn said “mom, I was just a little baby, do you think I cried too?” She was so in touch with that. It just broke my heart. [Cindy was in tears]

Some children were not comfortable talking about their feelings, they preferred to keep their pains for themselves:

_Wei: Do you like to know something about China?_

_Tina: Where my mom and dad is._
Wei: Do you feel bad that you don’t know where your birth mom and dad is?

Tina: yeh.

Wei: Did you cry?

Tina: No, not that much.

Wei: When you cry, did you talk to your sister or your mom?

Tina: No.

Wei: You talk to yourself?

Tina: Yeh.

Some children expressed their interest in adopting a baby girl from China when they
grew up. This seemed a clear sign of their projection of their sadness on their abandonment by
rescuing other abandoned children in China (Lifton, 1996).

All children expressed desires of wanting to know their birth parents, and meeting them
some day. At the same time, they also knew that it was very unlikely that this could happen.
China was a big country, and all of these children had very little information about their birth
families at the time they were adopted. It was extremely difficult to search for their birth parents
without enough information.

Tina: I want to adopt a baby girl from China, then I want to have a twin or triplets. Do
you want to have your own baby?

Wei: Yes.

Tina: Why didn’t you adopt a baby from China?

Wei: Because I can not feed the baby without a job. I need to have enough money to take
care of the baby. Right now I can not.
Children Negotiate their Chinese Identity at Home

It was evident from the variations children’s perception of their Chinese identities that the children did not always respond to what parents expected from them. Children were actively seeking workable channels to negotiate their Chinese identity with their parents. For example, Alice made her mom change her mind about going to the Chinese language school on Sundays, so she could have time playing with her friends. She also persuaded her mom to satisfy her own preference for after school programs:

Wei: Do you fight with your mom sometimes?

Alice: Sometimes. Like the 7 up group [I really do not want to go]. And my mom really wants me to do ballet, but I really don’t want to do. I feel she makes me do it. Like I really want to do soccer. But my mom likes dance better. So I said to her “ You are forcing me to do things. Maybe if you didn’t do it, I would like it better”. She said “if you don’t like to dance, you shouldn’t have to do soccer. I was upset about that.”

Wei: Do you still dance?

Alice: Yah, this year because we have already signed up. My mom said next year if I don’t want to I don’t have to, but I can still do soccer.

Wei: Are you glad?

Alice: (Alice gave me a shy smile)
Alice was glad that her mother finally altered the plans and let her have the after school program she really wanted. Her verbal protest and persuasion helped her mom understand her better.

Some children preferred the non-verbal messages to declare their stand on these issues. Grace was not too interested in her Chinese identity, but her mother Sandy hoped Grace to connect with me and learn from me as her role model. When I visited them at their home, Grace preferred to play with her white friends from school or her neighborhood. When I visited her school with her mom, she pretended that she did not see me in her school and focused on playing with her classmates in their PE class.

Children could also heat up parents’ interest as well. Jeanne did not do much with Chinese cultural activities if kids did not want to attend. But her Melissa and Tina, on the other hand, asked her to let me stay with them overnight. Tina even offered her bedroom to me if I could stay with them. They eventually get her permission to sleep over in my place. They both were excited to cook Chinese food with me in my kitchen. Tina told me she wanted to have my Chinese cooking utensils too.

According to some parents, children also tried to prevent their parents from embarrassing them by not letting them go to school for the Chinese New Year. They wanted to fit in to their peer group as they got older. Obviously being part of the peer group at school was more important to their happiness than pleasing their parents.

*Wei:* Did your mom go to your school talking about Chinese New Year celebration?

*Carolyn:* Once I think.

*Wei:* Did kids like that?

*Carolyn:* (nod and smiled)
Wei: Do you want your mom to come back and talk about it next year?

Carolyn: (shook her head) No.

Wei: Why?

Carolyn: I don’t know (smiled)

Children Negotiate their Identities at School

Many parents considered their children having good experiences at school. Almost all parents talked about Chinese culture, adoption, and New Year celebrations in their children’s classes. They thought their children were well accepted in their schools. Becky and Carl were very satisfied with the school their daughter went. They thought the school was excellent learning place for children. But not all children had that positive school experience, so children developed different ways to cope with their less than friendly school environments.

Self denial.

Some children chose self denial as a way to cope with the stress as one of the few minorities in the dominantly white school environment. Grace was one of the few Asian students at her school (in fact, her classmates thought she was African American when they talked about Martin Luther King). As gifted as she was, she did not feel comfortable with her Chinese identity. To cope with undesirable image, she denied her Chinese identity by rejecting doing things with China in her school, and associating with white students. She strived to be one of the most popular students by pleasing other students and helping them in class. Sandy and William
were concerned about her identity development, they eventually moved to a new neighborhood that had a more diverse school. They found Grace was feeling better about herself at her new school.

Confrontation.

Melissa found herself being tormented by her peers at school all the time. Her ADD symptoms and controlling trait may have contributed to her unpopular status at school, but her Chinese identity was a clear problem for students to accept her:

Wei: *Do you have a lot of friends at school?*

Melissa: *No, I was ditched. I was in a group, they think I was annoying, I wasn’t. So (shrugged her shoulders). I used to be the nicest person in the group, I gave them money, anything they wanted. But they just ditched me. Jill, the one lived on the same street. She is hyper, extra extra hyper. People like that. (She asked to go to downstairs to watch the dog)*

Wei: *Do you feel uncomfortable because you are Chinese, non-White?*

Melissa: *No.*

Wei: *Did they ever call you name because you are a Chinese?*

Melissa: *No. They did “Chinese, Japanese”, I don’t know what they sing. (She pulled her eyes upwards and downwards to show how kids did that to her). I just ignore them.*

Wei: *Did you teacher say anything about these girls who were mean to you?*

Melissa: *No, I tell them if there is something major.*

Wei: *Do you play with children from FCC?*
Melissa: No.

Wei: Do you like for me to find some friends for you who are at your age?

Melissa: No, younger. I like to be the boss because I like to be in charge. I don’t know. I just like to be a boss. Set table! Go to bed! Eat! It is bed time now.

Melissa was teased and marginalized at school by her peers, her teachers apparently did not do much about it or they were not aware of what was happening to her. But Melissa was a strong fighter. She used to please her peer who bullied her in the bus. After realizing it was not changing her situation, she started to confront them by ignoring them. She also made good use of my presence in her school as her leverage to make her peers have envy of her. She asked me to hug her sister for the same reason.

Compromising.

Tina, on the contrary, was compromising her dignity to fit in regardless how her peers treated her.

Wei: Do you feel embarrassed when people call you a Chinese?

Tina: um because I am the only person in my school who is Chinese.

Wei: You want to be the same as they are?

Tina: (nod her head)

Wei: Do they make fun of you?

Tina: (nod her head).

Wei: How?

Tina: Like I have black skin.

Wei: You don’t have black skin, your skin is just tan.
Tina: Some kids told me to put sunscreen [sic] on.

Wei: Did you tell them that it is so impolite to be so rude to you?

Tina: no.

Wei: Did you tell your teacher that kids make fun of you?

Tina: no.

Wei: Why not?

Tina: Because I don’t like to tell her. Then my friends will get in trouble.

Wei: But if they are your friends, why did they call your name?

Tina: I don't know. A girl said that, I still like her. I didn’t tell her [teacher] because she is my friend. She always makes fun of me, I always forgive her.

Wei: Maybe you can tell her that you don’t like to be made fun of?

Tina: Then she stops to be my friends.

Wei: Do you have a lot of friends?

Tina: I have almost a whole class of friends.

Wei: If you have a whole class of friends, you can loose one but you still have many others as your friends?

Tina: I like to be friends with all classmates.

Speaking up.

Speaking up was a way some children used to handle racial remarks from their peers. Nichole went to a very diverse school which multicultural education was an important part of the curriculum. But she still encountered the racial slurs twice in her school. The first time she was told “You are Chinese and stupid”, and the second time she was told that all Chinese people
were mean to Children. Nichole was upset but she made it clear to each of these children that she was not going to tolerate these remarks. Her mother credited it as a result of her participation in the social worker Jane Brown’s workshop. Brown made presentations and workshops for adoptive parents and children across the country. Diane thanked Brown for giving her daughter the power to handle these remarks (personal communication).

Some children were happy with their school experiences, but others had to negotiate their Chinese identity at school as part of their daily lives. They used different ways like denial, confrontation, compromise, and speaking up to cope with the negative or racist treatment by their peers.

*Children Negotiate at FCC.*

Most young children enjoyed the FCC events and many credited FCC as a place where they learned some interesting things about China and their adoption. As children got older, they expressed their reluctance to go to FCC functions, the major complaint was the FCC events were “kiddish” for older children. Children who were older (7 and up) became bored quickly and eventually lost interest in these activities. Many older children were here because their parents made them come because they really did not have much interest in the programs.

Parents were keenly aware of their children’s reactions toward FCC and started to brainstorm ideas that were more attractive to older children. They established a program called “7 UP” that was geared towards the issues that older children were likely to encounter. Children were expected to learn the tools on how to deal with adoption questions and racist comments from peers and adults. Older children were also encouraged to volunteer for FCC fund raising
and social events as a way to learn volunteerism and the importance of helping others. FCC “7 UP” was still in process of generating ideas and innovation by the time this research was conducted. It was clear that children’s messages were strong forces that pushed parents to restructure their programs to suit the cognitive and social needs of these children.

No matter what the nature of FCC events, it seemed that most children of all ages enjoyed meeting their peers and China sisters in these occasions. At Chinese New Year, summer picnics, Moon Festival Outings, I saw parents exchanged information with each other, while children played with their China sisters or newly made friends of their age groups. They made friends quickly once they were playing with each other. One parent told me that it was so important that these children were able to see each other often and play together. They would grow up together as years went by. Grace did not like to be associated with Chinese too much, but I saw her with sweat all over her face chasing after her China sister Sara once she got to the event. I did not see the same embarrassed Grace that I saw in her school.

The social event committee also hosted the FCC Adoption Month Family Ball. Many parents and children were dancing on the floor, many people were having a good time. I also saw Melissa was sitting there by her mom. She was not as savvy as her sister to go out and make new friends, so she was left alone there, and played with new babies nearby. I introduced a girl similar to her age to her and told them that they might like to be friends. A few minutes later, I saw two girls departed and went back to their old comfort zones.

Diane was concerned about the diminishing attraction for older children as FCC grew larger because her daughter refused to go to FCC events for a long time. Diane thought the organization was getting too large that a lot of people did not feel the personal connection any
more. Parents and children felt a sense of disconnection if they did not know people in these FCC events.
Conclusion

International adoption or intercountry adoption was a post WWII phenomenon that responded to the urgent needs of children orphaned by the wars. Later, with rapid globalization and development occurring in the third world, the number of intercountry adoptions in the US increased sharply starting from the 1990s and continuing into the beginning of the 21st century. Among the countries that are open for intercountry adoption, China and Russia are the major sending countries in the last 10 years (US Department of State, 2003). According to the US Department of State, 33,823 children were adopted from China between 1991-2002. The majority of them were girls, some with disabilities. Almost all boys adopted had some form of disability.

Most of the Chinese children were adopted by European American parents. They were virtually transplanted from one culture to another with practically no transitional stage nor time. Although the wellbeing of children like these after they come to the United States has been studied by the adoption professionals in medicine, psychology and social work, the enculturation of these children and their cultural identity development has been under studied.

This empirical study was designed to explore the identity work of these Chinese adoptees. The purposes of this study were to investigate how these children construct their identities as intercountry adoptees and how the subtle interactions of home, school, and community cultures has influenced the identity formation of these adopted children. The findings of this research will contribute to an ongoing discussion of ethnic identity (Hemmings, 2004, 1998; Lee, 2001; Holland, et al.,1998) as well as the fluid and conflicting process of culture acquisition ( Eisenhart, 2001). In addition, the findings will provide some up to date and useful
information and understandings for the concerned families and adoption professionals in international adoption communities.

**Setting and Data Collection**

The site for this study was included Greater Cincinnati, Southwest Ohio, Northern Kentucky, Southeastern Indiana and the Southwestern corner of West Virginia. Data collection lasted for about 16 months in 2003 and 2004. It focused on families who were members of a group called Families with Children from China (FCC). This research employed a combined research design which used both quantitative and qualitative methods. The primary research method was participatory ethnography with the researcher as a participant observer (Patton, 1990; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). The supplementary research tool was the administration of a survey to this same group of adoptive parents in Cincinnati, Northern Kentucky, and Southeastern Indiana.

The survey was adapted from the survey used in a study of adopted Chinese children by Tessler (et, al.,1999). Cluster sampling was used to collect the survey data. 70 copies were distributed to parents in the Dragon Festival organized by FCC. 40 of them were returned with the return rate of 57%. The survey results provided the descriptive data on the demography of the FCC parents. More than 97% of them were White. Among them, 82.5% were married, 15% were single, and 2.5% were living with a same sex partner. 90% of them were above 40 years old. 75% of them received a Baccalaureate or advanced degree. 39.48% of them were above $100,000 annual income level. Parents came from a variety of religious backgrounds, but most of them wanted their children to learn Chinese language and had a deep level of understanding of Chinese culture.
For the core component, the qualitative research data, I became a member of the FCC and volunteered in its social events committee as a cultural advisor. I identified key participants through my FCC volunteering work, and they helped me recruit more members through private and public channels. I interviewed them and their adoptive children (when ages were appropriate) in their homes based on a semi-structured interview guide. I observed interactions among family members, friends, relatives, and teachers at social events, schools and family celebrations. All data were analyzed using NVivo 2 software to identify the patterns.

There were four types of reasons that motivated families gave for going through adoption: infertility; wanting to parent; altruism; God’s will. They chose China because they were not qualified to adopt domestically. Also, some parents were concerned with the problems many domestically adopted children had. They also preferred to have a girl and China had mostly girls for adoption. They also regarded Chinese children as healthier compared with children from other countries. Most parents were satisfied with the adoption process and claimed that it was run smoothly compared with adoption from other countries.

Post Adoption Issues

After parents returned to the US with their adopted children, the majority of them reported that their children had various levels of developmental delays and sleep difficulties. Some children displayed behaviors resembling certain disorders or disabilities that were not diagnosed at their initial evaluation. This could be frustrating for parents, because they were not able to recognize these behaviors as possible pathological signs. At the same time, the unknown history of their children made it more difficult for parents, doctors, and therapists to understand
the roots of problems. However, most children adjusted quickly and under normal circumstances were soon able to sleep well at night. They also caught up in physical and cognitive development within one year and achieved English language reacquisition within two years.

The qualitative data analysis revealed the challenges these adopted children faced as they negotiated their identity at home, at school, and in their immediate community. Obviously these spheres were the core influences on their identity formation. Children were actively engaging in negotiations in these different spheres as they conducted their daily lives. This study briefly reviewed these spheres and then explained how children negotiated in each of these domains.

*Parental Roles: Chinese Identity*

All families in this study had some China related materials like books, music, dress (Qipao), toys, paintings, video, handicrafts, or even furniture at home. They went to Chinese restaurants on special occasions, especially on their children’s adoption anniversaries. They celebrated Chinese New Year at FCC and made presentations in their children’s classes about Chinese New Year when age appropriate. Underneath these common practices, these parents had a variety of different views on fostering their children’s Chinese identity. They displayed patterns of behaviors from very proactive to almost passive. I identified them as “China fanatics”, “balancing cultures”, “not much Chinese”, and “no Chinese culture” based on their approaches to Chinese identity.

“China fanatics” parents emphasized the Chineseness of their children. They have done practically everything they could with all available resources they had. They sent children to Chinese language schools, and sought connections with Chinese people through the sister cities
relationship Cincinnati established with Liuzhou in China 14 years ago. They hosted Chinese
visitors and eventually visited them in China too. One parent, Melissa, even taught her daughters
to squat in Chinese style to use the toilet. Her rationale was that she was preparing them for the
prospective trip to China in case girls had to use old style toilets that were common in less
industrialized cities. Although there were only 2 of them among all participating families, their
roles in FCC and the adoption community have been influential. They served as the pioneers of
the FCC Cincinnati chapter. Their strategies and experiences have been the models or lessons for
many adoptive families. Therefore, it is helpful to see the patterns of their behaviors regarding
their children’s Chinese identity.

“Balancing cultures” parents were the most diverse group and there were 5 families in
this group. They recognized the importance of Chinese culture to the wellbeing of their adopted
children, but they were struggling with the choice they had to make because of their own diverse
family cultures. Some families had to balance between the needs of their birth child and the
adoptive child. They did not want to single out any one of their children by emphasizing one
culture over another, but it was very difficult to find the right equilibrium. Some families had to
balance the emphasis they put on the cultural backgrounds of each of their children who were
adopted from different countries. Among these, Sandy and William had the most colorful family
cultural scheme.

Sandy and William were not only dealing with the balance between their biological and
adoptive child, but also the cultural choices of their own family traditions. William came from a
Christian family and Sandy was Jewish. They wanted to raise their children in both Christian and
Jewish traditions. In addition, they also wanted to incorporate Chinese traditions into the family
life. So an enculturation routine for their adoptive daughter Grace would be: studying Hebrew,
going to the Sunday school, learning some Chinese dance movements and traditions through FCC. After a while, they found it was too difficult to live all of these cultural traditions in the same family.

For the family that was made up of one Chinese American and one European American parent, it was relatively easy to incorporate Chineseness into their daily life, but they also had to learn many Chinese traditions that had evolved in China since their Chinese American parents and in-laws had emigrated to the US.

“Not much Chinese” families were made of parents who did not do much with Chinese culture for their child(ren)’s identity development. The majority of the parents, which were 6 of the participating families, recognized their daughter's Chinese identity, but they did little to incorporate it into their family routines. They did not engage in many China related activities compared with the previous two groups. They mostly did holiday celebrations and ceremonial activities with children regarding Chinese culture. Some of them let children make a choice. It was more important for the children to assimilate into the mainstream culture.

Lindsey’s words illustrate many of these parents’ viewpoint on this topic:

America is her culture, China is her heritage. That is not the culture they grow up with.

My husband spoke Russian at home until he was 4. Then they spoke English at home. He forgot about it.

“No Chinese culture” group was made of parents who did not have much interest in Chinese culture. Parents from this group did not regard China as important to their children. They intended to raise their children as any other American child. According to an adoptive mom’s account dealing with these parents, it seemed this group of parents took China as a source
for babies and they were eager to make their adoptive children an “American” who had nothing to do with China. Since they were not interested in activities related to China or FCC, I had no access to their daily life to know what, if anything these parents and children did with the Chinese culture at home.

The patterns of parents’ approaches to Chinese identity for their children reflected a broad array of philosophical differences. “China fanatics” parents helped children develop a more real connection with China and their Chinese friends through their personal ties and experiences with Chinese people and culture. A lot of conscientious efforts and creative endeavors were required to do so. Parents thought they were “swimming up against the current” but it was worth it.

One of the families in “balancing cultures” group mirrored the intersecting reality of the complex American cultural streams. People were confronted with many dazzling cultural streams from which they had to make a choice and live with it. It posed a real challenge for parents and children as they conducted their daily lives while incorporating these cultural streams in their routines.

The approaches of the “not much Chinese” were inclined to be more superficial. Their adopted children got little substantial meaning from these activities. These activities tended to be easier to operate and popular with children, but they did little to foster children’s sense of Chinese identity.

The “no Chinese culture” group posed an impediment to the healthy identity development of their children. While parents might be happy to be “color blind” at home, by doing so, they failed to recognize that the Chineseness of their children was a very important part of their identity formation. Based on the narrative history accounts of many Chinese Americans in Iris
Chang’s book “Chinese American”, American society would not fully embrace them as its pledged members no matter how much they may have assimilated into American mainstream society (Chang, 2003). Many Chinese Americans were often stuck in the middle if there were political conflicts between the two countries.

**Parental Roles: School Involvement and Attitudes towards Racism**

There were almost binary approaches towards parental school involvements regarding their children’s adoption, and attitudes towards racism and ethnic identity issues. Some parents were very involved; the others were not. Apparently, children benefited from parents who were more involved in their children’s school.

Most parents agreed that racism could be an issue that their children would encounter, as the United States is very preoccupied by race and color. But majority of them also thought Asians had a positive stereotype in this country. Therefore, their future encounters with racism should not be too bad, or at least not as bad as African American experience. Some even discarded the notion of racism. They thought their children would have no problem merging into mainstream society as America was getting more diverse. The positive stereotype of Asians might even be to their children’s benefit.

It is true that American society is getting more diverse, but power has mostly remained in the hands of European Americans as the dominant group. The Eurocentric, or Anglo-Saxon, notion of Americanness is still the mainstream ideology that dictates practically all power structure in the US. Parents who failed to see such a picture ran the risk of preparing their
children with too few tools to deal with the racism they would likely encounter as they grew up and integrated into the mainstream society.

The notion of race is a construct that was discredited by social scientists many years ago. American Anthropology Association officially declared race as construct, not a scientifically grounded fact (American Anthropologist Association, 1998). But racism that evolved based on the construct of “race” has lived a long life and is continuing to be an important contributor of many social inequalities like geographic and ideological segregation, economic disenfranchisement, educational inequality, and political disengagement.

It is not the major goal for this work to solve all the racial problems in America, but it would have been a mistake if I failed to recognize its impact on children who already shown signs of its negative influence on them. Tina’s strong desire to be “blue eyed and blond American” was a direct result of the racist behaviors and language coming from her peers at school. Grace and Rebecca felt embarrassed to be the only Chinese at school and they did not want that. They sensed the overt racism but had no words to label it, they only knew that it was undesirable to have a dark skin and black hair. Many parents in this study seemed to take overt form of racism as the only recognizable form of racism. Therefore, there wasn’t a lot of racism related problems. In this context, the challenges posed to parents particularly were their awareness of racism and also their own “white privilege” (McIntosh, 1989).

Culturally and historically Asian Americans tended to choose working hard, creativity, and silence to cope with the oppression of racism. If they ever stood up and fought, it was seldom reported and recorded in the history book. Even one of the most covert racist discrimination laws against ethnic minority in American legal history, the “Chinese Exclusion Act”, is barely known beyond the academic domains of China and history studies. As a result,
for all these reasons combined, the mainstream society might have formed a wrong impression based on the quietness of Asians as an indicator of being treated well (Chang, 2003).

Parents’ understanding of the deeper meaning of racism and its manifestation in American society needs to take place before they can help their children deal with the racism at school and the society as children are growing up. Unfortunately, I saw many examples of self denial in action regardless how they thought about racism verbally. I am afraid this is a void in the identity development of these children.

*Parental Roles: Adoption, Extracurricular Activities*

Most parents engaged in adoption discussions with their children at very early ages. They regarded it as an important outlet for their children to express their feelings and seek answers. Some parents who adopted older children were not as engaging as other parents. They assumed that children already understood what was going on with them, especially if children did not raise many adoption questions.

Almost all parents were engaged in some typical middle class extracurricular activities for their children to prepare them for the mainstream membership: soccer, dance lessons, gym lessons, summer vacations, birthday celebrations, dining out on special occasions, etc. Some parents sought psychological therapy for their children when it was necessary.

Schools varied in terms of philosophy, curriculum, and instruction. It was only realistic for this study to reveal what the schooling experience was like from the perspective of children. Extreme examples were used to demonstrate possible school life experiences of these children. Their schools tended to be either diverse or Eurocentric in curriculum and school culture.
FCC

FCC served as cornerstone for the adoptive families to learn Chinese culture, explore issues on adoption, and identify ways to deal with racism and negativity from the community and peers at schools. It was a catalyst for children and parents to connect with each other as a unique cultural group and a community that they could seek help and support.

There was no clear correlation between what parents did regarding their children’s Chinese identity and how children felt about their Chinese identity. All older children, with one exception, at different levels wanted to be White or to have a “lighter skin”. However, children from more pro-Chinese identity families did not have children who hated their Chinese identity. Children were also actively seeking opportunities to negotiate their identity with parents, at school, at FCC, and in their immediate communities.

It seemed that children who were more interested in China and felt proud of being Chinese were those who were still in their early childhood years. They had a romantic notion of what China was like and that made them feel proud. Being Chinese to them was more about fun and extra holiday celebrations which were pleasant things to anticipate. Children who did not have much exposure to nor interaction with Chinese people or their China sisters, felt negatively about their own Chinese identity even though they were still in their early childhood years.

As they move into the middle childhood years, which all the first wave adoptees (who were adopted from China between 1990-1994) were at the time this research was conducted, children started to sort out the myths from the reality. They were caught between the notion of being Chinese and the notion of being “American”. If the school and community environments were indifferent or even hostile towards their differences, and the parents were not proactive by
interacting often with Chinese role models, many of these children would end up resenting their
Chineseness and trying to dissociate that identity from them, or compromise their dignity to
please their peers in order to fit in. The superficial festivals and dances alone did not make
children feel proud of their Chinese identity in contrast to the stronger Anglo-Saxon, Western-
European mainstream messages.

China sister connections were also crucial for the identity development of these children.
These adoptees were not Chinese, nor were they fully American in this racially conscious
society. They were not Chinese American either. Their China sister groups were the unique
cultural groups that appreciated them and helped them understand each other based on their
common experiences. Children who had frequent contact with their China sisters, and did a lot of
activities together tended to hold a more positive image about their Chinese identity. They were
more comfortable in social settings whether dominated by Caucasian or Chinese. They had a
healthier outlook on their “situated self” (Spindler, as cited in Hemmings, 2004).

Children: Rites of Passage

The French folklorist Arnold van Gennep first analyzed ceremonies that dealt with an
individual’s “life crises” which he called “rites of passage” in the early 1900s, but it was not
translated into English until 1960s by Solon Kimball (van Gennep, 1960). He and others posit
that there are three developmental stages in the rites: rite of separation, rite of transition, and rite
of incorporation. These three stages of rites are not always equally elaborate or considered
important by all people or in all ceremonies (van Gennep, 1960):

Rites of separation are prominent in funeral ceremonies, rites of incorporation at
marriages. Transition rites may play an important part, for instance, in pregnancy, betrothal, and initiation; or they may be reduced to a minimum in adoption, in the delivery of a second child, in remarriage, or in the passage from the second to the third age group. (p. 11)

Schools have served as a very important institution that has facilitated children’s rites of passage into mainstream society (Hemmings, 2004). The school curriculum carried the bandwagon of Anglo-American, Western-European, middle-class traditions. “Teachers convey this curriculum in incremental states as they guide and judge individual students’ progress from one level of instruction to the next” (Hemmings, 2004, p. 4).

In Tina, Melissa, Rebecca and many other children’s accounts, they received confusing messages in school about their ancestry, their racial, ethnic, and cultural identity. They were told they were American adopted from China and loved for who they were. They were told covertly that they were not “American” at school unless they were “White”. The rite of passage at school facilitated the powerful negative messages that made Tina feel inferior and led her to deny her Chinese identity. She would be more than happy to be a “blond hair and blue eyed American with a bone in the nose”. Although not as extreme as Tina’s encounters, Grace and Rebecca were not happy with their Chinese identity. They felt embarrassed about their connection with China by birth. Children in this situation definitely suffered a great deal in self esteem and identity confusion when they resented their Chinese identity and valued their Caucasian peer identity. Their partial membership in their peers’ clique has come with a heavy price: their dignity and Chinese identity.

Melissa was cornered into the loner’s territory by her peers because of her Chinese identity and her special needs symptoms. Her peers pulled their eyes up and down and said to her
“Chinese eyes, Japanese eyes”. She was “ditched and hit” by her former friends who eventually abandoned her. She was faced with reality acknowledging that she could not be an “American”, therefore, she had to be Chinese, because she knew “I am different”. The sad reality was she did not really have a concrete concept of China to know what Chineseness meant to her. All her comprehension about China was the Great Wall and crowded cities where people “were alike”. She did not feel she was connected to people when she revisited China to pick with her adoptive sister with her mom. She could not retreat psychologically and culturally to be “Chinese” as other conventional first generation immigrant Chinese could. She was stuck in the cultural transition of liminality and did not pass the rite of passage to be an “American”.

Children Negotiate at Home, School and FCC/Community

Children recognized the power of the society through the lens of their experiences at home, school and community. But they also actively negotiated their identity as they conducted their lives in these settings, particularly the school and FCC. They showed great resilience (Brodzinsky, et al, 1998) and agency (Holland, 1998).

Alice successfully persuaded her mother to give up the grand notion of continuing her ballet lessons. She wanted to play soccer. Her passion eventually changed her mother’s mind. As a result, she got to choose soccer over ballet.

Schools were tougher places to negotiate compared with home settings. Melissa showed great strength navigating in friendly and hostile territories as she conducted her life at school. She used my presence wisely to arouse envious reactions from her hostile former clique members. Sara, Grace, and Tina who all made every effort to be a popular student or to be part of
the clique, even if they had to compromise their identity and dignity. Nichole refused to compromise and confronted the boys who teased her about her Chinese identity at school.

In community, particularly in FCC event, the children used nonverbal language, and sometimes verbal language to tell parents if the programs were too “kiddish” and that they did not want to be part of it. So parents were motivated to innovate the FCC programs to suit the needs of these older kids. They also enjoyed being with their “China sisters” and made new friends in FCC events. They had a good time when they played with each other in these FCC social events.

Discussion

As many other anthropology and education scholars have found, the researcher also realized the usefulness and effectiveness of an identity framework. It revealed psycho-socio-cultural realities of children as they negotiated their identities at home, at school, and in FCC and their immediate community. An identity framework enables a holistic and contextual analysis of the realities of children who experience cultural transitions.

By employing an identity framework, this study revealed three identity issues that adopted children were dealing with: unclearly defined cultural boundaries that appeared contradictory; poorly facilitated rituals that left children in the liminal state of identity development; and under or unrecognized loss children suffered as adoptees.

Cultural contradictions

This study presented the complex contextual picture of the lives of post adoption
Chinese children in the United States. It was no surprise that there were mixed messages, complicated situations, and ambivalent attitudes and feelings. It seemed that fostering the Chinese identity of these children was an effort against the current in America, at least in the vast heart land part of America. It seemed that China and the US represented exact opposite spheres of the contradictions for children. Children sought a centerpoint on the continuums of two cultural settings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>America</th>
<th>China</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream</td>
<td>Sidestream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concrete</td>
<td>Abstract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual</td>
<td>Staged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear</td>
<td>Vague</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimate</td>
<td>Unreal/different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systematic</td>
<td>Community based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panorama</td>
<td>Peek hole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be the same</td>
<td>To be different</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Rites of passage*

These contradictions posed questions regarding social roles and relationships. How could these American children and their parents proclaim their Chinese identity. “China fanatics” parents seemed to be on the right track by facilitating their children’s Chinese identity development. In the introduction of van Gennep’s “Rites of Passage”, Solon Kimball warned us that the rites of passage that were commonly used in indigenous societies cross culturally have become lost in modern societies (Kimball, 1960):

Somehow we seemed to have forgotten this – or perhaps the ritual has become so completely individualistic that it is now found for many only in the privacy of the psychoanalyst’s couch. The evidence, however, does not bear out the suggestion. It seems
much more likely that one dimension of mental illness may arise because an increasing number of individuals are forced to accomplish their transitions alone and with private symbols (p. vxii).

Loss

There was also a tremendous amount of loss these children went through during their short transition in adoption. They lost their birth parents, birth country, and birth language. For the older adoptees, they not only lost all the above, but were also left alone to decode all cultural signs by themselves without assistance from someone who spoke their language or understood their culture. Their transition passage was obviously more painful, more lonely, and more prolonged compared with their infant adoptee counterparts.

Most families recognized the loss children went through, even though some were skeptical about it. The renowned adoption psychologist David Brodzinsky also echoed the idea of cultural anthropologists about the importance of public ceremonies and their impact on passage into incorporation. Brodzinsky (1998) agreed with cultural anthropologist Barbara Myerhoffe (1982) that there were always public recognitions of loss that people suffered from loved one’s death and even divorce. But little public attention has been given to adoptees who lost so much.

Implications

From what was learned from these children and their experiences in this study, several implications are suggested. It is to be hoped that these implications might somehow be useful for the FCC families.
The first implication the researcher proposes is the establishment of FCC collective
ceremonies that might facilitate the children’s incorporation into their multiple identities. They
would, therefore be able to finish their transition passage collectively and be validated in the
public eye.

The researcher also suggests that parents and children visit China and ritualize the loss in
the place where their children were found. Hopefully, this will give children an outlet to publicly
mourn the loss they suffered consciously and unconsciously, and make peace with their past and
move on.

Public ceremonies alone will not solve the issue of racism that challenges children’s
Chinese identity. So another implication is to give children the tools to deal with racism. It might
be helpful to have workshops with Korean adoptees and Chinese American speakers who have
first hand experiences on this subject and how they learned to cope with it. It will be meaningful
to facilitate discussion sessions with older children afterwards and help them learn from each
other’s experiences.

The fourth implication of this study’s findings, suggests the important of adoptive parents
recognizing forms of covert and overt racism. This might prove to be very difficult, because
parents have to acknowledge their “white privilege”( McIntosh, 1989) in the first place. Very
few people in FCC knew that love did not solve all the problems. With assistance, they probably
could come to an understanding of racism and how it manifests itself in American lives.

The fifth implication has to do with the parents’ involvement at their children’s schools.
The schools were unlikely to be the places where changes happened quickly. But regular parental
involvement or communication with school teachers and administrators would help these
educators better understand their children’s different situations. Parents could help teachers
explore educational materials that were helpful for adopted children. “Adoption and the Schools” by Lansing Wood and Nancy Ng (2001) would be an example of helpful materials.

Another implication suggested by this study is the importance of connection seeking. It was apparent that parents who were more successful helping their children in Chinese identity development have tried many ways to connect with Chinese people and culture. That was the first step to making children feel real about their Chinese heritage. But again, like swimming against current, this initiative could be very difficult for many to materialize.

The list of implication can be longer as we move along and understand more about the issues of Chinese adoption. This was merely a first step to sketch how this group of children adapt to school and home cultures and negotiate their identity successfully. They were neither in the best place in the world, as some may speculate, nor were they victims of abandonment subject to sympathy. They are a unique cultural group adding a strand in the American multicultural stream.

Further Research

The majority of children in this study were in their middle childhood years. The researcher anticipates that more complex issues will arise as children step into their teenage years. That is the reason why this study needs to be a longitudinal one. The researcher plans to stay connected with these families for the next few decades as long as they wish. Further studies will be completed in the near future.

There were limitations in this study. The parent participants in this study tended to be more pro-FCC, therefore, they tended to have more pro-China attitudes and approaches to foster their children’s Chinese identity. It was very challenging to include families that desired nothing
more than a child from China. It was unknown if they made up the majority of the adoptive families. What is important is to know how their children developed a cultural identity?

With all above mentioned limitations, it is necessary to conduct further research on such topics. As more and more Chinese babies are adopted in the United States, these types of findings will be hopefully beneficial to them.
REFERENCES


Appendix 1

Questionnaire for Parents of Children Adopted from China
(This is confidential. The researcher is the only person who reads this. The researcher is obligated to
the ethics of research and she will not discuss the content of your answers with anyone.)

1. What is your sex? Female ______ Male____

2. What is your marital status? Married ____ Single____

3. What is your racial background? White ____, Black____, American Indian & Alaska Native _____, Asian & Pacific Islander ____, Hispanic ____ , Other ____.

4. What is your spouse’s racial background? White____, Black____, American Indian & Alaska Native ______, Asian & Pacific Islander _____, Hispanic _____, Other _____.

5. What educational degree did you receive? High School _____
   Associate Degree ______ Baccalaureate_____ Master______ Doctorate________

6. What educational degree did your spouse receive? High School _____
   Associate Degree ______ Baccalaureate_____ Master______ Doctorate________

7. Which age group do you belong to?
   a)30--35 ___  b)36-- 40 ____  c) 41 – 45 ____  d) 46—50 ____  e)51—55 ____
   f)56-60 ___  g)61-65 ____  h)66 and up______

8. Which age group does your spouse belong to if you are married?
   a)30--35 ___  b)36-- 40 ____  c) 41 – 45 ____  d) 46—50 ____  e)51—55 ____
   f)56-60 ___  g)61-65 ____  h)66 and up______

9. What is your occupation? __________

10. What is your spouse’s occupation? __________

11. What is the annual income of your household?
    Under $5,000 ____  $5,000 - $9,999 ____ $10,000 - $14,999 ____ $15,000 - $24,999 ____
    $25,000 - $34,999 ____ $35,000- $49,999 ____
    $50,000 - $74,999 ____ $75,000 - $99,999 ____ $100,000 & over ____

12. How many children do you have?
    a)1 ____ b)2 ____ c)3 ____ d) 4 _____ e) more (please indicate) _____

13. How many of your children are adopted?
    a)1 ____ b)2 ____ c)3 ____ d)4 _____ e) more (please indicate) _____

14. How old is/are your adopted child/children? ________

15. Which province and city is your adopted child/children from? ______

16. Why did you decide to adopt? (please select all that apply)
    a) I/ we have infertility problem _____
b) My life is unfulfilled without a child____
c) I want to have more children even though I have my birth child/children____
d) I want to provide a home for a homeless child____
e) My spouse likes children____
f) It’s an altruistic act on global level____
g) I need someone in my life to whom I can give love____
h) I want to continue my family name through adopting a child____
i) I want to have someone to take care of me when I get old____
j) Social and peer pressure to be a parent____
k) Others (please specify)_____________________________________________

17. What contribute to your choice of adopting a Chinese child? (please select all that apply)

a) I cannot meet all requirements for adopting a child in the US. _________
b) The waiting list is too long if I adopt domestically____
c) The health risks (AIDS, STD, fetal alcohol syndrome, etc.) of the child is high if a) I adopt domestically____
d) Domestic adoptees are at high risk of child abuse prior to adoption____
e) It costs less economically to adopt a child from China____
f) It costs less emotionally to adopt a child from China____
g) There is no entanglement with the Chinese birthparents____
h) My religion made me think that it was a right thing to do.____
i) I really like Chinese culture, my Chinese baby will give me a unique link to that culture____
j) I feel sorry for these abandoned girls in China, and I want to help them by adopting one____
k) My friend adopted one child from China____
l) Other, please specify_____________________________________________

18. How do you describe your adoption experience?

a) Excellent ____
b) Good ____
c) Fair ____
d) Poor ____
e) Terrible ____

19. What does/do your adopted child/children bring to your life? (Please use a separate paper if you need more space)

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

20. What are the issues you have been dealing with since you adopted your child?

My child:
a) Reattachment problem____
b) Health problems____
c) Developmental delay ____
d) Language difficulties ____
e) Diet adjustment difficulties ____
f) Unknown personal history prior to adoption ____
g) No adjustment problems at all____

My family and myself:
Unexpected stresses relating to my new role as a parent ____
Others____________________________________________________________

My family and community:
a) Rejection to my child from my family and community ____
b) Negative comments from people on the street ____
c) Prejudice against couples who do not have birth children____
d) Prejudice against single mom(s)/dad(s) ____
e) Others:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

21. How important is it for your child to inherit your ethnic culture, religion/spirituality and values as part of her/his family education?
   a) Very important ____
   b) Important ____
   c) Somewhat important ____
   d) Not important ____
   e) Not important ____

22. How important is it for your child to learn and be familiar with Chinese culture?
   a) Extremely important ____
   b) Very Important ____
   c) Important ____
   d) Somewhat important ____
   e) Not important ____

23. What levels of Chinese cultural competence do you expect your child to have?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Thank you very much for participating in this study. I appreciate the trust you give to me. Wei
Appendix 2

Semi-structured questions for the interviews to adoptive parents:

1. Do you think your child adjusted well to her new life here?
2. How do you describe her physical and emotional development compared with her non-adoptee peers?
3. What joys and happiness does your child give to you?
4. What challenges does your child bring to you?
5. How have you dealt with these challenges?
6. When did you/ are you going to tell your child about her/his being adopted?
7. How did you/ are you going to help your child understand why she/he was abandoned in China?
8. How did she cope with her sense of abandonment if that was an issue for her?
9. When and how did your child recognize her/his racial identity?
   Age: __________________________ Please describe the situation.
10. How did your child react to her/his racial identity?
11. How important is it for your child to inherit your ethic culture, religion/spirituality and values as part of her/his family education?
12. How much Chinese cultural competence do you like your child to acquire?
13. What cultural identity do you think it appropriate for her?( ie: American, fully bi-cultural, mostly American with some Chinese education, her own choice)
14. What are the challenges do you think you child is dealing with/is going to deal with?
15. Is racism from “outside world” an important issue that your child and you have to deal with all the time? If so, how have you dealt with it?
16. What else do you like to tell me about your child or adoption that you think are important?
Dear Parents,

You are cordially invited to participate in my study on identity formation of children who were adopted from China. The purposes of this study are to investigate how these children construct their identities as intercountry adoptees, and how the subtle interaction of home and school cultures impacts the identity formation of these children.

I will mail you a short survey for you to complete and mail it back to me. It will take about 15 minutes to finish.

As I talked to some of you in the Chinese New Year’s Party, I may observe the interactions of your child/ren and talk to them if you give me the permission to do so. I would like to interview you as a parent (parents) with your consent. Would you please e-mail me (wei.cao@uc.edu) if you are interested in participating in this study? All participants will receive a report of this study when it is completed.

The confidentiality of all participants will be strictly kept. Following the ethical standards for researchers, I will not discuss the content of our conversation with any one. Your identity will be changed or disguised in the report to protect your privacy.

As a FCC member, I am interested in doing things related to China with your family.

Thank you very much for your participation.

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Teachers’ College
University of Cincinnati
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Cincinnati, OH 45219
Appendix 4

Node Listing in Hierarchical Order

**Number of Nodes:** 554

1 **China identity**

2    **Children attitude**
3        love being Chinese
4        proud of being Chinese
5        best of both worlds
6        doesn't want to associate with China
7        limited interest in Asian/Chinese culture
8        excited about visit China again
9        want to learn Chinese
10        embarrassed for being a Chinese
11        doesn't like Chinese food
12        knows she is a Chinese
13        know nothing about China
14        something in between
15        not too interested in learning Chinese
16        mixed identity desire
17        --sometimes want to be Caucasian
18        love Chinese food
19        embarrassed
20        mostly feel like an American
21        doesn't like Chinese food
22        I am a Chinese American

23    **Children action**
24        connect with Chinese
25        first visit China
26        visit orphanage
27        people look the same
28        it's different
29        similar and strange
30        Wear Chinese outfit
31        love Chinese food
32        connect with China
33        sing Chinese songs
34        knowledge about China
35        a few facts
36        a vague image
think about caretaker in orphanage
doesn't identify with me
curious about Chinese
influence peers to like Chinese culture
doesn't read books about China
cook Chinese dishes
learn Chinese culture
present in class about China
learn Chinese dance for New Year
doesn't like to wear Chinese outfit
prefer White Americans
Parents attitude
Chinese, but American too
somewhat Chinese
should visit China
(Description: some said it should be before 7, some said it should be teen so they can remember what they see in China)
dislike China
importance of China exposure
as much as they can
hard line to walk
being who they are as individual
their family and ties are in China
graft of both countries
we learn as family
American, CA by heritage
we need to balance both cultures
people make assumption based on face
best of both world
Chinese American
Asian have positive stereotype
people see them as Chinese first
Parents action
host Chinese visitor
adoption workshop/conference
connect with Chinese people
connect with Chinese American
watch China related movie and documentaries
talk to child's class about China
teach children Chinese behavior
eat at Chinese restaurant
expose to Chinese culture regularly
talk about China
read books about China
go to Chinese language school
live in Chinese way but not limited
learn to cook Chinese food
does not do much
keep newspaper clips
FCC events
attend Asian cultural events
have Chinese furniture
Chinese painting
buy Chinese doll	ravel to China
don't push children too hard on Chin
read books about China and adoption
keep their clothes from China
handicrafts
Chinese music
want her to appreciate Chinese culture
very difficult to meet their needs

In group connections
adoption group union
communication(internet)
sisters
FCC children of the same age

Chinese Language
language school
do not go to language school
kid does not like Chinese language
academic struggle
interfere with family time
no more class to offer
take away her Sunday activities
difficult to learn

Chinese visitors
Chinese American friends
for children
for adults

Visit China again
Play cello on the Great Wall
adopt sister trip with parents
Understand Chinese Culture
visit Chinese friends
scared by people there
people were nice
agitated for medical reasons
they are alike
Children's future identity
Chinese American
multicultural
be comfortable with changeable identity
concern about kids not fitting in
sometimes Chinese, sometimes not
people will see them as Chinese first
try to find balance
will not have problem
Outcomes of China visit
stretched feelings about China
do not like it
connect to China
Culture Camp
authenticity
We do not cross cultures

Reasons for adoption
Altruism
Want to be parent
Family members were adopted
Infertility
miscarriages (secondary infertility)
God

Preadoption situation
“old single”
Career
Family support
Miscarriages

Adoption choice rationales
Domestic difficulties
single
unlikely to get a young child
too many foster families
prefer girls
entanglement with birth parents
too old to adopt
special needs
may have to give baby back
Provide a home for children
Not a baby
Family member adopted before
Foreign babies have less issues
Like Chinese culture
Family member adopted Asian kids
Adoption in China is smoother
Friend adopted a Chinese baby
Want a girl
East Europe has worse orphanage
Good stereotype of Chinese in US
Have lived in Asia

Adoption process
Dossier
Selecting agency
Travel to China
Gotya!
Passport and visa for baby
Wait
Referral

Orphanages
Director
Staff
Building condition
Memory about orphanage life

Post adoption care
Daily care
Medical
condition
treatments
Improvement
Physical
language
emotional
Emotional
Correctional treatment at school
Personality
Daycare
Adjustment
Condition upon arrival
Struggles
   relationship with peers
   ADD
   relationship with parents
   separation anxiety
      sleep with mom
      sleep with mom in the same room
      sleep difficulties
      need to see parents
   language delay
   disorders
Coping strategies
   medication
   volunteering
   therapy
   pretend to understand
Not enough time due to 2nd child
Consecutive adoption
Rationale
American tie
   Travel in summer
      with relatives
   American Holidays
      Acquire American culture
         Barbie dolls
         soccer
         dance lessons
         religion
         gymnastics
      Old memory about China fade away
Identify with peers
Peer pressure
Racial identity
   Recognize racial differences
   Do not know they look like other Chinese
Parents view
Parents action
239  Child understanding
240  not identify with Chinese
241  Does not like her racial characters
242  Somewhere in between
243  Do not want to be Chinese
244  Identify with White
245  Want to imitate me
246  Limited exposure to racial diversity
247  do not understand biracial concept
248  afraid African
249  I look strange to her
250  Identify with Blacks
251  Talk about it
252  Perceived as positive stereotype
253  Can't blend in
254  We are multicultural family
255  Give them tool to deal with it
256  Learn as we go
257  Comfortable with me
258  Identify with me
259  Mixed feelings about being Chinese
260  Embarrassed
261  Don't want to be the only one
262  Attitude towards racism
263  encounters
264  not an issue
265  ambivalent
266  will experience, not as bad as African American
267  can't deny it
268  equity

269 Abandonment
270  Parents explanations
271  Child reaction in behaviors anxiety
272  Abandonment situation
273  Parent change job
274  Sad
275  Anniversary reaction
276  Learn to trust
277  Talk about abandonment
278  Talk about birthday