The Missing Peace: Offerings from the Study of Adoption, Culture, and Identity

A Capstone Presented

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Figure 1: Tangles, Water Design Mandala [1]

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[1] "Escapepatterns.com," Pinterest, accessed April 30, 2018, http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-66JChD3b3Cw/Ucu6IXYYEUI/AAAAAAAAFYY/aOh5vxPOyPA/s1600/Calgary+(123)wb.jpg.

Dedication

To our belonging with one another

"It's the people we love most who can make us feel the gladdest and the maddest! Love and anger are such a puzzle!"

–Fred Rogers in *Wisdom from The World According to Mister Rogers*[2]

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[2] Fred Rogers, *Wisdom from The World According to Mister Rogers: Important Things to Remember* (New York: Peter Pauper Press, Inc., 2003), 32.

Abstract

The purpose of this capstone is to expand cultural sustainability practice by investigating how emerging adult Chinese adoptees living in the United States negotiate identity formation and belonging. To understand the multifaceted experience of being a transnational, transracial adoptee means to understand a robust convergence of time, place, and culture. Drawing from two-years of interviews and focus groups with eight female emerging adult Chinese adoptees, I argue there exists a Chinese adoptee culture in the United States with unique needs and nuanced dimensions. Therefore, I situate this capstone at the apex of anthropology, psychology, sociology, and folklore to demonstrate how cultural sustainability practice can lift identities in diaspora, strengthen family ties, and lead to wider social change. I conclude with reflection on what it is like to be an adoptee working in adoption and then offer a set of recommendations of ways to better reconcile vast differences between cultures.

Key words: Chinese adoptee, Cultural Sustainability, Belonging, Identity, Reconciliation

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Prologue

What is your creation story? In response to this question, folklorist, Steve Zeitlin said to me in an interview, "creation stories are always difficult because you don't know where to start them."[3] So I will start in the middle.

Life-changing opportunities occur in the most unsuspecting places. It was on the main walkway of Goucher College's campus one gray afternoon; my eyes came to rest on a table promoting the Graduate Studies Department. I was a sophomore transfer, sociology major at the time and thought, *Goucher offered graduate programs?* I paused to entertain the thought of getting a master's in four years' time and two professor-like representatives (one of them Amy Skillman) from the Graduate office invited me to take a pamphlet which read, M.A. IN CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY. I had just picked up my first tool, and it felt invigoratingly strange. This was back in 2014, and I handed in my application in 2015.

Who are you and from where do you hail? My name is Laura Xiang Williams; named Laura after my great grandmother, middle name 香 (Xiāng) means sweet and fragrant given to me by the 义乌 (Yìwū) orphanage in China, and the only daughter of Marjorie and Douglas Williams. At seven months old, I was adopted into a white family in the United States where I spent the next 19 years growing up in a suburb of New York City in Northern Jersey. Young daily life occurred in a two-mile by two-mile, mostly white, middle-class suburb with an enhanced "bubble-feel" about the town. I often thought of myself as one of five other Eastern Asian koi fish amongst a pond of white bass in elementary and high school. Growing up being different in ways I had not chosen for myself, never felt troublesome. It just was. I credit this

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[3] Interview, Steve Zeitlin, AFS Annual Meeting 2017. 1. 00:00:37

young solace to my parents' proactive operations to connect me with Chinese people in the United States through traditional Chinese dance, adoption mentorship groups, and Chinese language school.

It is not a coincidence I interrogate the intersection of adoption, culture, and identity so deeply. Young solace led to adolescent anger. My adolescence was full of more questions than answers; *Why was I given up for adoption? Where are my Chinese parents now? What is wrong with me for them to relinquish me? Did they even love me?* I did not know it at the time, but my anger was rooted in questioning what love means. My one-dimensional understanding of love meant care, comfort, compassion, being there; then *how could my Chinese mother leave me out of "love?"* A long time was spent in betrayal. I was not *able* to love myself since I was not *willing* to love others. Trust was another point of inquiry. *Who could I trust if I was betrayed so deeply and at such a vulnerable point in my life?* Yet, trust is counter intuitive, and I would overcompensate my trust in others at times I felt the most betrayed. So, when it was time to follow the *shoulds* of society and go to college, pursuing the inquiry of adoption occurred to me as an atavistic curiosity. Thus, higher education presented tools to support my journey through meanings of love and loss, belonging and disassociation, pursuit and aversion. I am glad to have picked up that pamphlet back in 2015 and to have met Amy Skillman's encouraging light.

Sometimes we go through life without realizing the full potential of what "it" all means. When I feel drained by the amount of intellectual and emotional energy I exert as an adoptee cultural advocate in her own adoption world, being with other Chinese adoptees always rekindles this labor of love. Some of us share a certain vibration and tune into each other's' strife. This gift of validation is only the beginning of a deeper exchange. I have come to believe, no matter how

micro a conversation may be, in the grand scheme of things, it holds the power to transform our

cultural world. Even if "it" just transforms you.[4]

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[4] "Inspiration is in the Heart of the Beholder: An Adoptee's Work Exploring Her Identity," *Adoptions Together* (blog), April 5, 2018 (11:59 a.m.), https://www.adoptionstogether.org/blog/2018/04/05/identity-and-transracial-adoption/.

Introduction

What does it mean, to be concerned with the creation of things? For me it means to understand injustices created by our social systems, engage in iterative introspection, and then strive to reconcile parts of who I am to contribute more fully towards a peaceful world. But the path from injustice to peace is not as simple as navel-gazing, and there is still a lot more to understand when it comes to community-based cultural work to promote the healing of damage, lest we learn to listen and care for each other, we learn not only how to survive, but to thrive.

This is where teachings from cultural sustainability become integral to the way I choose to conduct my work and frame of mind. I wanted to learn how to better lift Chinese adoptee culture within the United States, facilitate identity formation from an ambivalent space, and contribute to how we understand ethical approaches to working with and within our communities. I founded a college club called Adoption Web, which posed new questions of what adoption meant to me. The intention of the group was to offer a space for adoptees to explore adoption identity as well as educate others on adoption issues. To be a recognized club we established a faculty/staff adviser, club president and treasurer, five committed members, and held open membership for anyone on campus. For the sake of increasing numbers, I advertised the club as a space not only for adoptees, but also for friends (who might be interested in adopting in the future) or relatives of adoptees. I later learned this requirement posed difficulties in fostering a cohesive, more sustainable, group dynamic. Even the variance of experience between adoptees made it difficult to strike a balanced approach to identity exploration and educational content. Furthermore, Adoption Web became tattooed with my story in a subversive way. My story of being a female Chinese adoptee with white parents became the dominant story. Nothing I said or did was explicitly intended to paint this image, yet it was nearly impossible to

deviate from dominant assumptions of Adoption Web held by the campus community.[5] *How did*

this happen? What can we do to break down these perceptive barriers? Theories, teachings, and

wisdom I encountered in the discipline of cultural sustainability challenged me to look at my

approach to adoption work and the function of Adoption Web with a critical eye to understand

more fully the uncontrollable forces of culture on our daily experiences. In turn, it refined my

practice in community organizing and own identity as a Chinese adoptee.

Language is important throughout my work. Just as getting someone's name right is a

sign of respect, using the correct terminology is a sign of integrity when typifying groups of

humans. I speak of Chinese adoptees to acknowledge the whole of Chinese adoptees present in

other parts of the world and then locate some within the context of the United States. Therefore, I

evade the use of Chinese-American Adoptee.[6] The use of a "hyphenated American" in the early

2000s asserts an identity which questions someone's primary political loyalty of certain

immigrant groups in the U.S.[7] As adoption is much more indistinct in national allegiances, using

a hyphen does not serve the purposes of recognizing the culture of Chinese adoptees in the

United States.

The functional use of "adoptee" I use here is a noun referring to someone who was

legally recognized as part of a family unit as defined by the adoptive country's legal system.

Terms "adolescent," "emerging adult," and "adult" work to describe and distinguish three

periods of time throughout life. These periods are not meant to appear linear (as one does not

come after the other) but viewed as both developmental and life-style classifications of

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[5] See Note 10, "College Groups."
[6] See Note 1, "Capitalize Adoptee."
[7] Sengupta Ashis, "The Hyphenated Identity in Contemporary Multiethnic American Drama," *E-journal of American Studies in Hungary* 4, no. 1 (2008), doi: 17874637.

experience. I use adolescent adoptee to mean the period of life from birth until age 18

categorized by adoptive parental responsibility over the welfare of the adoptee in the United

States. I use emerging adulthood to mean the period of life when the adoptee lives separate from

the immediate family but still relies on family resources as a primary source of support (i.e.

financial, welfare, housing). The field of emerging adulthood originated in life course

psychology with a focus on ages 18-25.[8] Adult adoptee refers to an adoptee who lives

autonomously from immediate family members. One may transition multiple times between

adulthood and emerging adulthood depending on the circumstances (i.e. life transition,

financial). Therefore, I recognize the lines between the categories are softened, but for the

purposes of this paper, I will refer to them as noted here with primary focus on emerging adult

adoptees. "Race" is understood in the United States as "heritage with a group based on

geography and a common set of physical characteristics as manifested in traits transmitted via

genetics such as skin color, hair texture and color, and facial features."[9] Thus, "transracial"

adoption refers to "the adoption of a child of one race by a parent or parents of a different race

than that of the child,"[10] while "transnational" is another term for international adoption. I choose

to use the prefix of "trans-" instead of "inter-" because transnational indicates fusion across

borders from one place to another instead of that movement confined to existing between two or

more nations ("inter"-national).

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[8] Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, "Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens Through the Twenties," *American Psychologist* 55 no. 5 (2000): 471.

[9] Amanda L. Baden and Robbie J. Steward, "The Cultural-Racial Identity Model: A Theoretical Framework for Studying Transracial Adoptees," in *Handbook of Adoption: Implications for Research, Practitioners, and Families*, ed. Rafael Art Javier (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2007), 91.

[10] Amanda L. Baden, Lisa M. Treweeke, and Muninder K. Ahluwalia, "Reclaiming Culture: Reculturation of Transracial and International Adoptees, *Journal of Counseling and Development* 90 (2012), 387.

What is "family"? My favorite answer to this question is from my cousin Geoff who says, "family describes a feeling between people." At the tacit level, it is. On a government policy level, it is confused in conversation about natural birth and lineage ties. With the rise of biological science, distinctions between what constitutes birth and family become more discrete. Concurrently, the lines between how we belong and to whom we feel belonged become blurred. Here, habitual tension when sorting natural characteristics from nurturing characteristics arise for an adoptee. In 2013 when I was growing into my adoptee identity, my grandma was the first one to say to me, "you can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family" and she was the first person I began to question what family really means to me. She listened. Little did I know, my grandma shaped my first lesson as a cultural worker, the gravity of listening and the freedom granted because of it. My hope is by listening and learning from Chinese adoptee experience, society grows to recognize a complex uniqueness to cultural possibility.

Finally, I approached the organization of this capstone as a cycle. I begin with my curiosity into adoption from China to the United States, which gives rise to my development in cultural sustainability practice. Through that practice, I come to great personal and collective discovery and ultimate personal and social change. My family, peers, and professors have all shaped my work and I hope my capstone continues to lift accounts of Chinese adoptee realities. I also invite readers to take what they need from this capstone and be able to apply these offerings in everyday life and ways of thinking. After all, we are sentient beings.

Part Curiosity: Review of Literature

"One thing I noticed, Laura, is that you are a naturally curious person." I remember Cameron, 2014 Holt Camp Director, saying this to me one afternoon as we sat in Georgia. Maybe my parents, teachers, or school friends had told me in the past, but when an older adoptee mentor noticed, that is when I really noticed it for myself.

This section traces my inquiry into adoption, culture, and identity. I first account for the large number of transnational adoption of females from China and adoption in China. Next, I describe the uniqueness in time, place, and culture which typifies Chinese adoptees in the United States. Then with the applied lens of cultural sustainability, I advocate for the need to create more functional opportunities for Chinese adoptees to engage with pluralistic identities and determine belonging.

Leaving China: Accounting for the Wave of Adopted Girls from China

Population control policy is a major cause for the rapid increase in transnational adoption from China to Western countries at the turn of the century. In 1949, founder of the People's Republic of China (PRC)[11], 毛泽东 (Máo Zé Dōng) set an early emphasis on population control to say, "for now, a large population is better" in the desire to achieve economic production goals. China's first modern census in 1953 counted the population near 580 million.[12] Throughout the next five decades, China's population would endure multiple population control policies causing

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[11] 中华人民共和国 (Zhōnghuá Rénmín Gònghéguó)

[12] Melissa Ludtke, Julie Mallozzi, and Jocelyn Ford, "From Mao to Now: China's Population Policy," accessed April 25, 2018. http://touchinghomeinchina.com/timeline.html.

condensed population fluctuation whose far-reaching implications reverberate throughout the world today.[13]

Multiple births were actively discouraged by the government leading up to and during the famine years (1959-1961) which extended into the 1970s.[14] Then, China saw an increase in birth rates during the Cultural Revolution in 1966-1969 when national attention was captivated by Mao's pursuits of massive youth mobilization and power over the Chinese government. In years following, the Chinese government renewed their population control agenda which gave rise to the propaganda slogan, "later, longer, fewer" to encourage couples to marry later, space childbirth, and have fewer children overall.[15] By 1980 when the one-child policy[16] was enacted out of concern for economic sustainability, China's population was near 981.2 million.[17] This was the first major birth control policy that heavily regulated family planning and ultimately be a major contributor to transnational adoption from China.

The one-child policy was not the only cause for transnational adoption from China, but the oppressive social conditions heightened the desire for couples to bear sons over daughters.[18] Traditionally, sons are preferred for two main reasons: to carry on the kinship name to the next

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[13] See Note 2, "Too Many Men."

[14] Weiguo Zhang, "Who Adopts Girls and Why? Domestic Adoption of Female Children in Contemporary Rural China," *The China Journal* no. 56 (2006): 65.

[15] Melissa Ludtke, Julie Mallozzi, and Jocelyn Ford, "From Mao to Now: China's Population Policy," accessed April 25, 2018. http://touchinghomeinchina.com/timeline.html.

[16] 计划生育政策 (Jìhuà Shēngyù Zhèngcè), official translation as the Family Planning Policy.

[17] "China 1980," Population Pyramid, accessed April 25, 2018, https://www.populationpyramid.net/china/1980/.

[18] Kay Ann Johnson, *Wanting a Daughter, Needing a Son: Abandonment, Adoption, and Orphanage Care in China* (St. Paul: Yeong & Yeong Book Company, 2004)

generation, and to care for parents in older age.[19,20,21] In China, patriarchal and unilateral kinship systems establish clear lines of inclusion and wealth inheritance only transmitted between male members. "For females in patrilineal societies in the case of their marriage, this implies that they will have to leave their lineage of origin and will be totally included in the lineage of their husbands."[22] Additionally, the Confucian principle of "filial piety, 孝 (Xiào)" is a guiding force in shaping gendered birth preferences to favor sons, since sons were expected to work and be able to financially support aging parents. Filial piety refers to "a set of closely related behaviors, ritual practices, dispositions and mental states for one's care for and duty to one's parents, one's familial elders and one's ancestors, whether alive or dead and in the afterlife. The ideograph '孝' represents a child 子 (Zi) underneath of and giving support to an elder 老 (Lǎo, old)."[23] Consequently, with the enforcement of the one-child policy, Chinese couples clung tighter to desires to birth sons over daughters thus, leading to high relinquishment of baby Chinese girls and the transnational adoption of them by Western countries.

In due course, the 1992 Adoption Law of China relieved major policy blockades to transnational adoptions thus making it easier and more accessible for prospective parents abroad to adopt from China.[24] The barriers were further widened in 2002 by the Population and Family

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[19] Elaine Jeffreys and Haiqing Yu, *Sex in China*, China Today (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015).
[20] Mara Hvistendahl, *Unnatural Selection: Choosing Boys Over Girls, and the Consequences of a World of Men* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011).
[21] Wang Feng, Baochang Gu, and Yong Cai, "The End of China's One-Child Policy," *Studies in Family Planning* 47, no. 1 (2016): 83.
[22] Bernhard Nauck, "Patterns of Exchange in Kinship Systems in Germany, Russia, and the People's Republic of China," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 40, no. 2 (2009): 259.
[23] Ryan Nichols, "The Origins and Effects of Filial Piety (Xiao 孝): How Culture Solves an Evolutionary Problem for Parents," *Journal of Cognition & Culture* 13, no. 3 (2013): 204.
[24] "Adoption Law of the People's Republic of China," Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China in New York," accessed April 25, 2018, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cgny/eng/lsqz/laws/t42225.htm.

Planning Law taking effect in China which further institutionalized birth provisions for couples.[25] Then the peak of transnational adoptions occurred when adopters from 17 countries adopted 14,496 Chinese children in 2005 alone.[26] China's population is now 1.42 billion.[27]

What about domestic adoption of girls in China? Weiguo Zhang asked this question in a 2006 article and found domestic adoptions of girls in rural China rose after the 1979 one-child policy. Zhang further debunks the myth girls are not desirable to be adopted domestically and builds on a previous argument; childless families in rural areas are ready to adopt abandoned girls and they adopt girls because they value daughters.[28] Zhang also found, couples who are childless, with sons only, or unmarried individuals adopted girls with three main reasons being 1) it was economically reasonable to adopt girls, 2) daughters were valued for their inclinations to care for aging parents, and 3) as passive resistance to the birth control policy.[29] The last reason poses the most interest, suggesting that Chinese families adopt girls out of "a favor to our friends" to avoid "family planning penalties." Hence, collective support is constructed to care for abandoned Chinese girls by Chinese citizens. Zhang concludes, the "circulation of daughters" and "transaction in kinship" among families is likely to continue wherever state control of fertility coexists with a persistent son preference. He calls for future research to account for changing dynamics of national policies, socio-economic transformations, and evolutions in "the family." At the same time, Kay Ann Johnson's most recent book, *China's Hidden Children:*

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[25] Jiang Zemin, "Population and Family Planning Law of the People's Republic of China (Order of the President No. 63)," Orders of the President of the People's Republic of China, accessed April 25, 2018, http://www.gov.cn/english/laws/2005-10/11/content_75954.htm.
[26] Melissa Ludtke, Julie Mallozzi, and Jocelyn Ford, "From Mao to Now: China's Population Policy," accessed April 25, 2018. http://touchinghomeinchina.com/timeline.html.
[27] "China Population," World-o-Meters, accessed April 25, 2018, http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/china-population/.
[28] Weiguo Zhang, "Who Adopts Girls and Why? Domestic Adoption of Female Children in Contemporary Rural China," *The China Journal* no. 56 (2006): 68.
[29] Ibid.

Abandonment, Adoption, and the Human Costs of the One-Child Policy, lifts narratives of

Chinese couples who bear the emotional toll of infant relinquishment. Johnson recognizes how

Chinese adoptees were "somebody's children" who turned into "nobody's children" largely

through an involuntary process involving political coercion and fear.[30] Johnson's earlier book,

Wanting a Daughter, Needing a Son: Abandonment, Adoption, and Orphanage Care in China

looks at adoption in China which support Zhang's claims and further describes challenges facing

Chinese orphanages.[31] Understaffed, inadequate resources, and lack of other institutional support

historically weakened orphanage capacities to provide adequate care for Chinese orphans. Now,

children with birth defects occupy Chinese orphanages largely because parents feel the child will

bring bad luck to their family or the inability to meet the cost of medical care.[32] Also, it is very

difficult to find information (from the U.S.) on how many Chinese orphanages still operate

today.

    Leslie Wang takes a deep dive into Chinese orphanages and transnational adoption in her

2016 book *Outsourced Children: Orphanage Care and Adoption in Globalizing China* to argue

the "outflow of healthy girls through adoption" is

> a key form of outsourced intimacy… for the PRC, sending children abroad to join
>
> Western families has served as a form of "soft power," which refers to a country's ability
>
> to persuade others to do what it wants without force, coercion, or payments. Through
>
> using globally desirable children as cultural bridges and representatives of soft power,

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[30] Kay Ann Johnson, *China's Hidden Children: Abandonment, Adoption, and the Human Costs of the One-Child Policy* (St. Paul: Yeong & Yeong Book Company, 2016), 1.

[31] Kay Ann Johnson, *Wanting a Daughter, Needing a Son: Abandonment, Adoption, and Orphanage Care in China* (St. Paul: Yeong & Yeong Book Company, 2004)

[32] Leslie Wang, *Outsourced Children: Orphanage Care and Adoption in Globalizing China* (California: Palo Alto University Press, 2016).

Chinese officials have been able to enhance the nation's image abroad while also funding the local child welfare system.[33]

She demonstrates two main ways that "outsourced intimacy" operates as an ongoing transnational exchange; 1) through the exportation of mostly healthy girls into Western homes via adoption and 2) through the subsequent importation of first-world actors, resources, and practices into orphanages to care for the mostly special needs youth left behind. Wang's perspective also suggests an implication (whether intended or not) of transnational adoption was to disseminate Chinese culture and influence in Western societies, but in a physical sense. In a way, transnational adoptions from China have not enhanced China's image abroad but accentuated China as a nation to be considered more holistically at the turn of the century.

The Mandala of Adoption: Identity and Belonging in the United States

"It's true that we take a great deal of our own upbringing on into our adult lives and our lives as parents; but it's true, too, that we can change some of the things that we would like to change. It can be hard, but it can be done." —Fred Rogers[34]

Fred Rogers' younger sister was adopted when he was eleven years old and my mom would read me his children's book, *Let's Talk About It: Adoption* throughout my childhood. I carry his thoughtful teachings; "whatever is mentionable can be more manageable."[35]

Change is inevitable, and how change is handled is a big indicator of sustainability. After exploring some political, historical, and social factors leading to a high number of baby girls

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[33] Leslie Wang, *Outsourced Children: Orphanage Care and Adoption in Globalizing China* (California: Palo Alto University Press, 2016), 12.
[34] Fred Rogers, *Wisdom from The World According to Mister Rogers: Important Things to Remember* (New York: Peter Pauper Press, Inc., 2003), 68.
[35] Fred Rogers, *Let's Talk About It: Adoption* (New York: G.P. Putman's Sons, 1994).

transnationally adopted from China, *how has this manifested in social realities of the United States? How were these adoptions handled by nation-state welfare institutes? Furthermore, what does this have to do with identity and belonging?* Dehumanizing effects of government policy can create a disconnect between Chinese people and Chinese adoptees' ability to recognize each other's human potential. This has a lot to do with how demanding and encapsulating hegemonic perceptions towards a people attach themselves to the individual psyche. As Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie explains, "that is how to create a single story, show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become."[36] Here, the way adoption is talked about matters. The danger of perpetuating any one story, is that it flattens any other possibility as *wrong*. Through speech, we either reinforce or breakdown dominant perception of what things *should* be. Thus, assuming a single story, damages the very vital differences we need in ourselves, our communities, our world in order to be resilient to change and sustain our humanity.[37]

In dealing with the expansive topic of identity, I distinguish "self" and "identity" as two concepts perpetually shaping and challenging the other. Anthropologist, Grace Gredys Harris understands, "to work with a concept of self is to conceptualize the human being as a locus of experience, including experience of that human's own someoneness… It may experience itself as a unique unity, achieving a sense of personal identity."[38] Thus, each human creates his or her or

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[36] Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," filmed July 2009 in Oxford, TED video, 18:43,
https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/transcript?language=en.
[37] Suzanne Simard, "How Trees Talk to Each Other," filmed June 2016 in Banff. TED video, 18:20,
https://www.ted.com/talks/suzanne_simard_how_trees_talk_to_each_other.
[38] Grace Gredys Harris, "Concepts of Individual, Self, and Person in Description and Analysis," *American Anthropologist* 91, no. 3 (1989), 601.

their[39,40] own sense of self. Multiple "selves" emerge when one connects experiences to those of others. To this point, cultural theorist Stuart Hall notes,

> Precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of marking of difference and exclusion.[41]

I recognize, experiences which create self, build into an overarching sense of identity. Marking difference simultaneously impacts how and what one experiences. Furthermore, I believe the experience of belonging is created when environments maximize one's experience of being safe, being vulnerable, and being genuine. In bell hooks' understanding of belonging she quotes Carol Lee Flinders, "The values of Belonging are, in effect, the symptoms of a particular way of being in the world. Together, they form a dynamic whole… Within that whole, each value reinforces and all but implies the others, and the source of their power as a constellation is the synergy between them."[42] Thus, I see belonging exists when one can harmonize being in safe surroundings with others, being comfortable enough to express vulnerability in that space, and being genuine towards one's larger sense of identity. Additionally, humans can nurture or destroy a sense of belonging for one another when being together in a certain time and place.

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[39] I include the pronoun "their" to acknowledge those who identify their gender as non-binary.
[40] Stephanie A. Brill, and Lisa Kenney. *The Transgender Teen: A Handbook for Parents and Professionals Supporting Transgender and Non-Binary Teens* (Jersey City: Cleis Press, 2016).
[41] Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?" in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Paul du Gay and Stuart Hall (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2011), 10.
[42] bell hooks, *belonging: a culture of place* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 217.

Thus, the cooperative group whole must strive to balance different ways of being with a shared sense of self and identity and thus group members become creative agents of belonging.

Chinese adoptions in the United States are unique in time. Some may conclude that the gay rights movement in the United States (which saw more victories in the 1990s)[43] also led to more closeted gay couples adopting from China who then remained closeted for many years after adopting.[44] As transnational adoption from China gained momentum in the late 1990s, adoption was becoming more socially acceptable as a viable means of family formation. This social change fed a single story where altruism and infertility became main motivators for adoptive parents to adopt children.[45] Furthermore, these motivations cultivated the widely pervasive single story of adoptees being "lucky," "saved," and "grateful to be adopted" that many adoptees have grown to speak against.[46]

Also, at the time of Chinese adoption from China, the international tourism market was about to have an awakening as the airline industry saw huge advances in flight technology. International borders were becoming more permeable and China suddenly did not seem that inaccessible from the United States. Up until the wave of transnational adoptions from China, adoptive parents were not traveling to meet their adoptive child in country. Often children were escorted to the United States, which meant adoptive parents may never set foot in their child's

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[43] Jeannine Pitas, "History of the Gay Rights Movement in the US," Life in the USA, accessed April 30, 2018, http://www.lifeintheusa.com/people/gaypeople.htm.
[44] See Note 3, "LGBT Chinese exclusion."
[45] Adam Pertman, *Adoption Nation: How Adoption is Transforming America*, Families with Children from China Edition ed. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2001).
[46] Janine Vance, *The Search for Mother Missing: A Peek Inside International Adoption* (self-pub., Adoption Truth and Transparency Worldwide Network, 2017).

origin country.[47,48] However, all transnational adoptions to the United States have been

decreasing in general since its peak of nearly 23,000 in 2004.[49] Now, this influx of transnational

adoptions from many different countries is creating a generation bulge that is coming of age into

the 3rd millennium and is truly reshaping understandings of adoption. In 2000, Maureen Evans,

former executive director of the Joint Council on International Children's Services, observes,

> We never had so many [transnational adoptions] from a single place in such a
>
> compressed period of time before, all of them very young and healthy, and all of them
>
> girls. It's the Chinese children, in their numbers and their gender, all about the same age,
>
> who have changed and will continue to change the face of adoption [in the U.S.].[50]

Chinese adoptions are unique in place. "America has the largest number of adopted

Chinese children from China, nearly 80,000"[51] and has frequented the top five countries of

transnational adoption to the United States.[52] Toby Volkman's work on analyzing transnational

adoption in North America characterizes American adoptive parents as being older, relatively

affluent, well educated, "citizens of the world," many unmarried.[53,54] Therefore, Chinese

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[47] Robin Munro, "The Story Behind the Photo: Meeting Your Child, Then and Now," Holt International Blog, last modified November 23, 2016, http://holtinternational.org/blog/2016/11/the-story-behind-the-photo-meeting-your-child-then-and-now-2/.

[48] Janine Myung Ja, *Adoption History 101: An Orphan's Research into Adoption Trafficking* (self-pub., Adoption Truth and Transparency Worldwide Network, 2016).

[49] Alan Greenblatt, "Fewer Babies Available for Adoption by U.S. Parents." last modified November 17, 2011, https://www.npr.org/2011/11/17/142344354/fewer-babies-available-for-adoption-by-u-s-parents.

[50] Adam Pertman, *Adoption Nation: How Adoption is Transforming America*, Families with Children from China Edition ed. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2001), 77-78.

[51] Xinran, *Message from an Unknown Chinese Mother* (New York: Scribner, 2010).

[52] "Adoption Statistics," accessed April 30, 2018, https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/Intercountry-Adoption/adopt_ref/adoption-statistics.html.

[53] Toby Alice Volkman, "Embodying Chinese Culture: Transnational Adoption in North America," *Social Text* 21, no. 1 (2003): 30-31.

[54] See Note 4, "Adoptive Parent Stereotypes."

adoptees continue to inherit not only adoptive parents' privilege to travel, but also the sense of educated worldliness when adopted to the United States.

To expand, a 2015 article by Frayda Cohen describes three types of travel emerging from U.S.-China adoptions in the past decade.[55] The first is adoption travel referring to when adoptive parents travel to China to meet their child for the first time. Adoptive parents typically spend up to two weeks in China and travel in groups as large as a dozen families.[56] In some cases, American adoptive parents travel multiple times to and from China before finalizing the adoption. Self-organized playgroups then emerge in the United States to extend relationships made in these travel groups. The second type of travel is "homeland or heritage tours organized by both adoption agencies and the Chinese government"[57] meant to continue national bonds. Travel agencies, like The Ties Program's Adoption Family Travel, emphasize the chance to "Visit your child's orphanage, meet caregivers and foster families, return to finding sites and re-connect with other people and places important to your family."[58] This type of travel is typically considered as returning "home" for adoptees and includes tours of cultural sites, attending performances, shopping, and crafts. The third type is grounded in organized, and thus, institutionalized motivations (mostly by adoptees) to give-back to Social Welfare Institutes (orphanages in China) through fundraising and voluntary service. Travel agencies like Sun Travel offer unique programs for any young adult over the age of sixteen to "volunteer in Xi'an

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[55] Frayda Cohen, "Tracing the Red Thread: Chinese—U.S. Transnational Adoption and the Legacies of 'Home'," *Anthropologica* 57, no. 1 (2015): 44.
[56] Toby Alice Volkman, "Embodying Chinese Culture: Transnational Adoption in North America," *Social Text* 21, no. 1 (2003): 33.
[57] Cohen, Frayda, "Tracing the Red Thread: Chinese—U.S. Transnational Adoption and the Legacies of 'Home'," *Anthropologica* 57, no. 1 (2015): 44.
[58] "China Heritage Journeys," *Adoption Family Travel by The Ties Program*, accessed on April 30, 2018, https://www.adoptivefamilytravel.com/asia/china/.

Orphanage and leave your mark!"[59] Based on these three types of adoption travel, transnational

adoptions transcend physical boundaries between China and the United States.

With parents traveling to China and adoptive families engaged in homeland tours

together, it opens more opportunities for members to navigate understandings of belonging to a

Chinese adoptive family in the United States. Moreover, the cultural ideology of the "American

Melting-pot" strongly persuades those of difference to strive for an American sameness. Hence,

the social responsibility to "fit in" falls to individuals of transnational, transracial families to

negotiate and actualize.[60] In this way, adoptive parents engage "in a delicate balance between

acknowledging and incorporating their child's Chineseness and simultaneously reworking their

own identities as white middle-class Americans who were now part of multiracial and

multicultural families."[61] Context based conversations of race, class, and gender in the United

States come to bear on personal and group identities of Chinese adoptive families. For the

adolescent adoptee, often times adoptive parents spearhead the construction of a collective

multicultural identity for the family. Once emerging adult adoptees live beyond immediate

family members, there is the opportunity to incorporate newly learned ways of being into

personal identity.

Information on where in the United States Chinese adoptees reside is limited, but location

histories of Chinese adoption support groups (like Families with Children from China [FCC][62]

with nation-wide chapters) suggest that Chinese adoptees span the nation. To understand the

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[59] "Summer Youth Volunteer Camp," *Sun Travel Inc.,* accessed April 30, 2018,
http://suntravelusa.net/2016VolunteerCamp.html.
[60] Tamar Jacoby. *Reinventing the Melting Pot: The New Immigrants and What It Means to Be American*
(New York: Basic Books, 2004).
[61] Andrea Louie, "'Pandas, Lions and Dragons, oh my!': How White Adoptive Parents Construct
Chineseness," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 12, no. 3 (2009): 294.
[62] "About," Families with Children from China, accessed April 30, 2018, https://www.fccny.org/about.

approach and experience of Chinese adoption trends to the United States, we must first look at

Korean adoptee advocacy. It was the generation of Korean adoptees who advised and mentored

adoptive parents of Chinese adoptees (mostly by panels, workshops, mentorship events). Linda J.

Seligman in her critical and in-depth book, *Broken Links, Enduring Ties: American Adoption*

Across Race, Class, and Nation, notes,

> Activist voices of Korean American adoptees who felt their adoptive parents had been
>
> clueless about their needs have encouraged this generation of adoptive parents to do more
>
> cultural work for their children to facilitate connections with people who look like them,
>
> or to substitute cultural knowledge for biological connections.[63]

She goes on to explain how Korean adoptees have bridged the global ties with the local

experience in their searches for Korean cultural knowledge and efforts to move beyond words

into action. Here we see the rise of organized Korean adult adoptee action groups like the Korean

American Adoptee Adoptive Family Network (KAAN),[64] Also Known As. (AKA), and

International Korean Adoptee Associations (IKAA)[65] all working to bridge issues of race and

class with those associated with transracial, transnational adoption. Offerings like Korean

Culture School[66] and Camp Sejong[67] work to act on adoption intervention across generations of

Korean adoptees. Chinese adoptive parents who were listening at the time, thus infused these

methods into their approach to parenting and chose to connect their adopted children to Chinese

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[63] Linda J. Seligman, *Broken Links, Enduring Ties: American Adoption Across Race, Class, and Nation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013) 247.
[64] "About Us," KAAN, accessed April 30, 2018, http://www.kaanet.org/.
[65] "About," IKAA Network, accessed April 30, 2018, http://www.ikaa.org/about/.
[66] "Korean Culture School," Asia Families, accessed April 30, 2018, http://www.asiafamilies.org/culture-school/.
[67] "Mission," Sejong Cultural Education, accessed April 30, 2018, http://www.sejongusa.org/aboutus/.

culture by means of organized groups (language, the arts, playgroups, and culture camps).[68] The

formation of Jane Brown Playshops (for ages 1-13),[69] Families with Children from China (FCC)

and in turn, Chinese Children International (CCI) emulate methods of earlier self-formulated

collective action by Korean adult adoptees.

In turn, mixed spaces of adoptees connecting with one another are on the rise in the

United States. Virtual spaces like IAMAdoptee.com connect and share information across a

wide, expansive group of adoptees.[70] Multi-adoptee spaces like Holt Adoptee Summer Camp[71]

create new understandings of a collective adoptee culture specific to the United States. To this

point, a study by Hong Kong adoptee, Amanda Baden, investigates the effects of culture camp

on ethnic identity of Korean adoptees. Baden suggests that "culture camps may be effective for

reducing depression and anxiety levels in Korean adoptees" and suspects, "if adoptee culture

camps have more influence on adoptee identity than on ethnic identity, then perhaps the design

of these camps must be further refined."[72] With multi-adoptee spaces emerging, future attention

is required to investigate what constitutes "adoptee identity" and assess what are the needs to

better facilitate the formation of that identity.

In the United States, a fundamental conversation left out of parenting Korean adoptees

(and Chinese adoptees to an arguable similar degree) is that of race relations. To understand how

race manifests in adoptee identity formation, psychologists, Amanda Baden and Robbie Steward,

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[68] Ibid.

[69] "What are the Playshops?" Jane Brown Playshops 2013, accessed April 30, 2018,
https://janebrowntoronto.weebly.com/what-are-the-playshops.html.

[70] "About Us," I AM Adoptee, accessed April 30, 2018, https://iamadoptee.org/.

[71] "Adoptee Camp," Holt International, accessed April 30, 2018, https://www.holtinternational.org/camp/.

[72] Amanda L. Baden, "Culture Camp, Ethnic Identity, and Adoption Socialization for Korean Adoptees:
A Pretest and Posttest Study," in *Adoptees' Ethnic Identity Within Family and Social Contexts. New
Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, ed. Ellen E. Pinderhughes and Rosa Rosnati
(Hoboken: Jossey-Bass, 2015), 27.

developed the Cultural-Racial Identity Model which offers a systematic way to research and

address the complexity of transracial adoptee identity. They concentration on adolescent

adoptees, early life social environment, and parental influences on identity formation and

separate culture from race to acknowledge nuanced processes of both. Where experiences of race

are determined by physical characteristics, experiences of culture are determined by practiced

traditions, history, beliefs, languages, and values. [73] Baden and Steward argue how adoptive

parents discount or affirm an adoptee's racial and cultural connections, indicate the degree to

which that adoptee identifies with a certain race or culture throughout life.

Korean adoptee, Kim Park Nelson, addresses Asian adoptee racial experience in the

United States in her recent book *Invisible Asians: Korean American Adoptees, Asian American*

Experiences, and Racial Exceptionalism. Nelson acknowledges adoptees have agency in how

they identify to say,

> Korean American adoptees are exposed to the practice of ethnic choice because they are
>
> raised into families headed by White ethnics, and it is not uncommon for them to choose
>
> among ethnic identifications that may include both their parents' ethnicities and their
>
> own.[74]

Nelson sees race as but one element to ethnic identity and therefore, expands identity formation

to be understood among an array of reference points. This agency in choice plays a significant

role in how any transnational, transracial adoptees decide to navigate racial identity in the United

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[73] Amanda L. Baden and Robbie J. Steward, "The Cultural-Racial Identity Model: A Theoretical Framework for Studying Transracial Adoptees," in *Handbook of Adoption: Implications for Research, Practitioners, and Families*, ed. Rafael Art Javier (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2007), 91.
[74] Kim Park Nelson, *Invisible Asians: Korean American Adoptees, Asian American Experiences, and Racial Exceptionalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2016) 126-127.

States and gives rise to an ambivalent mindset when straddling multiple physical and cognitive affiliations. Andrea Louie's book, *How Chinese are You? Adopted Chinese Youth and their Families Negotiate Identity and Culture*, applies the conversation of race to Chinese adoptees by

> recognizing that Chinese adoptees are part of a broader Asian American community that shares a history of racialized stereotypes [it] marks a particular shift in consciousness from a focus on birthplace or homeland as the main referent for one's identity in the United States.[75]

Thus, for the Chinese adoptee, decontextualized Chinese ethnic identity becomes re-contextualized racial identity when in the United States. To gain a deeper understanding, Amy Traver investigated how adoptive parents of Chinese children engage in what she coins, "fictive kin work." The work lies in the efforts of Chinese adoptive parents to connect their children to Chinese culture. Traver found Chineseness is constructed in two main ways; 1) by objects bought in China are displayed in the home and 2) social connection with other Americans of Chinese heritage.[76] In these ways, Traver affirms how Chinese adoptees draw on feelings of connectedness to authentic Chinese culture and connectedness to other Chinese-Americans when constructing a racialized identity in the United States.

Now, the shift in cogitation from that of homeland to United States based identity begs the question, *what does it mean to be Asian American in the United States?* To understand racialized pluralistic identities, I turn to Michael Fischer's teachings in how ethnic identities

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[75] Andrea Louie, *How Chinese are You? Adopted Chinese Youth and their Families Negotiate Identity and Culture* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2015), 128.

[76] Amy Traver, "Towards a Theory of *Fictive Kin Work*: China Adoptive Parents' Effects to Connect their Children to Americans of Chinese Heritage," *International Journal of Sociology of the Family* 35, no. 1 (2009), 46.

reflected in literature are multidimensional and grounded in past experiences with projection towards the future:

> What is discovered and reinvented in the new works about ethnicity is, perhaps increasingly, something new: to be Chinese-American is not the same thing as being Chinese in America. In this sense there is no role model for becoming Chinese-American. It is a matter of finding a voice or style that does not violate one's several components of identity. In part, such a process of assuming an ethnic identity is an insistence on a pluralist, multidimensional, or multifaceted concept of self: one can be many different things, and this personal sense can be a crucible for a wider social ethos of pluralism.[77]

Agency to choose how one identifies leads to the shift Louie mentions towards a more pluralistic ethnic identity in the United States in the way Fischer sees the reinventing of self. Since there is no "role model" for becoming a multifaceted self, it leaves identity negotiations up to the individual relevant to experience and worldview. The decision on preferable voice or style to address one's identity takes practice and discovery and most importantly, time.

The chance to reinvent pluralist selves means individuals determine identity differently, to different degrees, and at different rates. *Where do we draw our identity aspiration and how do we recognize this agency in the first place?* For this discussion I turn to lessons incubated in the respective fields of cultural psychology, history, American studies, and folklore narrative. For starters, Andrew Solomon conceptualizes,

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[77] Michael Fischer, "Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory,'" in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George Marcus (Berkley: University of California Press, 2010), 196.

There are vertical identities, which are passed down generationally from parent to child. Those are things like ethnicity, frequently nationality, language, often religion. Those are things you have in common with your parents and with your children… There are these other identities which you have to learn from a peer group, and I call them horizontal identities because the peer group is the horizontal experience.[78]

With this understanding, the micro-sphere of parent relationships relative to the macro-sphere of peer relationships are key influences on identity development. As adolescent adoptees transition into emerging adulthood and begin to live separate from the context of the immediate family, there are more opportunities to experience multiple ways of being. This goes to say there are multiple ways of experiencing the self and multiple ways to experience others. One begins to see how transracial, transnational adoptee identity formation falls *between* those of vertical and horizontal identities. This can cause cognitive dissonance[79] as adoptees strive to create a cohesive self out of multiple spheres of influence. Examples of cognitive dissonance rise between confounding understandings of external race versus internal ethnicity or the concept of "real" family amongst the adoptive family as being non-biological versus society's understanding of "real" family as being biological.[80] When these tensions arise, Solomon goes on to recognize,

And it seemed to me that there were three levels of acceptance that needed to take place. There's self-acceptance, there's family acceptance, and there's social acceptance. And

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[78] Andrew Solomon, "Love, No Matter What," filmed April 2013 in Washington DC. TED video, 23:24, https://www.ted.com/talks/andrew_solomon_love_no_matter_what.
[79] Richard M. Lee, "Overlooked Asian Americans: The Diaspora of Chinese Adoptees," *Asian Journal of Counselling* 13, no. 1 (2006): 57.
[80] Ellen Herman, *Kinship by Design: A History of Adoption in the Modern United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 3.

they don't always coincide… Love is something that ideally is there unconditionally

throughout the relationship between a parent and a child. But acceptance is something

that takes time. It always takes time.[81]

To Solomon's point, each level of acceptance requires a varied approach to acceptance with

nuanced approaches and outcomes. Then, *how is acceptance achieved? What does that look like*

across the three levels? To investigate this further, I draw on literature on reconciliation to

understand how Chinese adoptees begin to harmonize the differences in identity across the self,

family, and society.

When Chinese children leave China and are adopted to the United States, there is a loss

of place with simultaneous gain of another. Leaving China triggers a waterfall of concurrent

disconnections in time, culture, heritage, habits, language, knowledge. Then, arriving in the

United States represents a newly inherited set of connections. In order for Chinese adoptees to

reconcile past loss and present gain, they must come to participate in what I consider "cultural

reconciliation." I first learned of this term from Korean adoptee, Joy Lieberthal Rho, to which I

define as the method and ways adoptees choose to integrate an unknown loss of ancestry with

lived realities towards a more cohesive adoptee cultural identity. Reconciliation is often applied

on a global historical scale to tend to deep, far-reaching wounds of historical horrors and

reinforce national sovereignty (i.e. Holocaust, Apartheid, Native-American reparations). At its

root of definition, global reconciliatory practice builds from "overcoming conflict, especially

through legal, political or diplomatic means, [to] encompass a broader field than conflict

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[81] Andrew Solomon, "Love, No Matter What," filmed April 2013 in Washington DC. TED video, 23:24, https://www.ted.com/talks/andrew_solomon_love_no_matter_what.

resolution alone."[82] In this sense, cultural reconciliation for adoptees is also about coming to terms with cultural conflicts that arise from being transnationally, transracially adopted. This demands a lifelong labor of determining pluralistic identities.[83]

The rise of public reconciliation theory in private sector experience is evidence of an ever-homogenizing global vision. Understandings of reconciliation expands that of forgiveness (implying a wiping of the past to build anew). Levy and Sznaider critique "forgiveness might actually be a bridge between the two worlds of the sacred and the profane… We do not want to be prisoners of the past because only our radical openness to the future makes political action possible."[84] However, that bridge reinforces a disconnect between past atrocity and future possibility. Thus, emerges what Levy and Sznaider describe as a "mnemonic turn" which gives rise to "concepts like healing, reconciliation, restitution, peace, and truth" towards socio-historical peace-building. In this way, upsets of the past are recognized and infused with current and future understandings of action, not simply left in the past. Acts of reconciliation can take place within the self, within the family, and in society. For transracial, transnational adoptees, harmonizing multiple identities within the self, compromising variance within the family, and settling one's difference within society are all strategies of reconciliation across the three levels of acceptance. For Chinese adoptees in the United States, seeking compatibility of pluralistic identities opens the opportunity to understand acceptance and feelings of self-peace.

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[82] "Our Concept of Reconciliation," Global Reconciliation, accessed April 30, 2018, https://www.globalreconciliation.org/what-we-do/reconciliation.

[83] Joy Lieberthal Rho, e-mail message to author, May 22, 2018.

[84] Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, "Forgive and Not Forget: Reconciliation Between Forgiveness and Resentment," in *Taking Wrongs Seriously: Apologies and Reconciliation*, ed. Elazar Barkan and Alexander Karn (Pao Alto: Stanford University Press, 2006), 85.

What complicates the reconciliation process for Chinese adoptees in the United States?
Similar to how forgiveness is built into reconciliation, Eng and Han in *A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia* articulate a similar shift at how melancholia plays out in the Asian immigrant racial experience in the United States. They draw from Freud's theory of melancholia to distinguish, "mourning...is a psychic process in which the loss of an object or ideal...is a gradual letting go… so that eventually, the mourner is able to declare the object dead and to invest in new objects. In Freud's initial definition of the concept, melancholia is… a mourning without end."[85] In dealing with this endless loss, those

> identifying with the lost object [such as birth culture], the melancholic is able to preserve it but only as a type haunted, ghostly identification. That is, the melancholic assumed the emptiness of the lost object or ideal, identifies with its emptiness, and thus participates in his or her own self-denigration and ruination of self-esteem.[86]

Understandings of forgiveness and reconciliation merged with mourning and melancholia, yield Chinese adoptee identity formation when facing loss of birth place and place-based demands of United States assimilation. In other words, Chinese adoptees mourn the loss of birth culture while simultaneously working to reconcile cultural differences in the United States amidst the people who surround them.

Due to the uniqueness in time and place, Chinese adoptees in the United States have begun to shape a shared sense of identity to reconcile difference in race, ethnicity, culture, and family and to heal the loss of birth place and culture. In these commonalities, there emerges a

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[85] David L. Eng and Shinhee Han, "Dialogue on Racial Melancholia," *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 10, no. 4 (2000), 670.
[86] Ibid, 672.

new sense of shared identity. When reading Robert Schreiter's article on "Establishing a Shared Identity: The Role of the Healing of Memories and of Narrative," one might as well be reading about Chinese adoption identity reconciliation in the United States. Schreiter talks about the importance of memory and hope in reconciliation,

> Within the context of social reconciliation, I want to focus here on two aspects: that of memory and that of hope… without a commitment to remember, and to the transformation and healing of those memories, there cannot be reconciliation. Memory is central to identity, both the past and the present. Hope is required in the long, difficult, and often ultimately incomplete work of reconciliation. Most efforts at reconciliation undergo setbacks, roadblocks, and disappointment. Without hope that reconciliation is possible, we will not be able to continue.[87]

Memory and hope are elements that feed our souls as human beings and caring for that hope is arguably the greatest responsibility of a cultural worker (especially one working within one's own community). Thus, memory is reinforced when Chinese adoptees remember they were born in China while hope is cultivated by narrating adoption experience in the United States.

When Chinese adoptees find each other in the United States, a shared sense of belonging emerges. Actualizing these inclusions takes process and narrative is a key tool used to "foster a sense of shared identity."[88] Patricia Sawin applies a folkloristic perspective when investigating ways adoptive parents narrate family creation stories which "expand our sense of both the range

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[87] Robert Schreiter, "Establishing a Shared Identity: The Role of the Healing of Memories and of Narrative," in *Peace and Reconciliation: In Search of Shared Identity,* edited by Sebastian C. H. Kim, Pauline. Kollontai, Greg. Hoyland (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 17.

[88] Patricia Sawin, "'Every Kid is Where they're Supposed to be, and it's a Miracle': Family Formation Stories among Adoptive Families," *Journal of American Folklore* 130, no. 518 (2017)

of what should be considered family stories and how they may function over time, not only for our various family members, but also for those outside the family with whom they are shared intentionally or who hear them at several removes."[89] In fostering a shared identity through narrative, lines then become drawn to signal inclusion and exclusion; belonging and alienation. Narrative also creates social change. In this way, narrative is a powerful way to reconcile differences found in transracial, transnational adoptee identity and change perceptions of Chinese adoptees in the United States.

Chinese adoptions are unique in culture. Both on an expansive level, and an interpersonal level. A colleague of mine once said, "two people interacting creates culture." As aforementioned, there are enough Chinese adoptees living in relative proximity, who gather at exclusive adoptive family functions to greet and support each other. By doing so, they become agents of a collective culture. On a broad level, Chinese food, objects, clothing, and artistic practices all work to construct a shared sense of connectedness to China when in the United States.[90] Foods then become multicultural fusions. Musical genres are played in juxtaposition. Traditional arts and crafts are displayed with local materials.[91] Some adoptees may choose to change their main namesake to reflect transnational identity. If adoptees decide to re-apply for origin country citizenship, nationality lines are further deconstructed to accommodate the multiplicity of transnational adoptee identity. Adoptive families uniquely celebrate "Adoption Day" or "Gotchya Day" each year to commemorate family creation.[92] Documentation of first meeting, homeland tours, and sometimes search and reunion reinforce adoptive cultural

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[89] Ibid, 395.
[90] Linda J. Seligman, *Broken Links, Enduring Ties: American Adoption Across Race, Class, and Nation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 249.
[91] See Note 5, "Families with Children from China."
[92] See Note 6, "Gotchya Day."

practices. These fusions conceive a bounded uniqueness in Chinese adoption culture found in the United States. Yet on an interpersonal family level, negotiations in these fusions also happen within the culture of the adoptive family. Due to these experiential similarities, there emerges a new, sporadic and displaced cohort of Chinese adoptees across the United States (and world) who deal with daily negotiations of identity and belonging. *However, are these similarities in time and place enough to recognize Chinese adoptees in the United States as a cultural "group"?* I argue, yes, and for adoptive parents too. Folklorist, Dorothy Noyes sees the impossibility of a neat definition of the group, but explains,

> We prove the reality of a group by demonstrating that it has a culture, unified within and differentiable without. In documenting, "preserving," and synthesizing this culture into canonical forms… we diffuse and generalize it among that group's potential members, thus improving the isomorphy of group and culture. And yet, working ethnographically, we are aware of the fragility of the group concept put to the test. We learn in interaction of the status differences within a group… we discover the creative individual whose influence galvanizes and directs performance in a particular milieu… we discover the complex networks of contacts and influences feeding into and emerging from an apparently bounded community.[93]

In the case of Chinese adoptees, never before have we seen a "group" as we know it fractured throughout a nation with such sweeping and strong bonded cultural ideologies. This goes to say there are nuanced dimensions of opinion and stance amongst adoptees (i.e. pro-adoption/anti-adoption, culturally engaged/disengaged, right/wrong ways of "being adopted"). Documentaries

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[93] Dorothy Noyes, "Group," *Journal of American Folklore* 108, no. 430 (1995): 449.

like *Twinsters*[94] and *Ricki's Promise*[95] preserve accounts of birth family search and reunion while documentaries like *They Think I'm Chinese*[96] and *Somewhere Between*[97] preserve accounts of what it means to be a transracial, transnational Chinese adoptee. We generalize themes like Asian American racialization and micro-aggressions across the Chinese adoptee population. In turn, we recognize Chinese adoptees quickly learn satisfactory ways of participating in an adoptive family and peer social groups. Adoptive parents also warrant recognition as a bounded group in that there are shared experiences unique to being a Chinese adoptive parent (i.e. traveling to China, attending Families with Children from China events, fusion of family cultures).

Most Chinese adoptions are legally closed where files are usually physically sealed and identifying information is kept from both adoption parties.[98] In closed adoptions, the already complex web of human relationships becomes confounded with imaginative relationships of birth relatives unknown. "Search" and "reunion" become common topics amongst adoptive families and adoptees of closed adoptions. Joyce Maguire Pavao recognizes in her book *The Family of Adoption*, "search is something that all human beings do in one way or another…It is a human need to know as much as we can about who we are."[99] In the case of adoptees, Korean adoptee, Hollee McGinnis, founder of Also Known As Inc. explains, "As adoptees we did not get to choose our adoptions. We did not choose to be relinquished…to be adopted. The decision

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[94] *Twinsters,* directed by Samantha Futerman and Ryan Miamoto (Los Angeles: Premiere Digital Services, 2015), DVD.
[95] *Ricki's Promise*, directed by Changfu Chang (USA: Distribber, 2014), DVD.
[96] *They Think I'm Chinese!*, directed by Nicole Giguère (Quebec: National Film Board of Canada, 2011), DVD.
[97] *Somewhere Between*, directed by Linda Goldstein Knowlton (USA: Ruby Films, LLC, 2011), DVD.
[98] "Open vs. Closed Adoptions," FindLaw, accessed April 30, 2018, https://family.findlaw.com/adoption/open-vs-closed-adoption.html.
[99] Joyce Maguire Pavao, *The Family of Adoption* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015).

to search is one of the few things adoptees get to choose. It is a part of our adoption life journey; it is not our adoptive parents' journey."[100] Search then becomes a touchstone element of adoption identity separate from adoptive parents. Furthermore, Betty Jean Lifton in her book, *Journey of the Adopted Self: A Quest for Wholeness* describes that even when adoptees search for birth family out of a need to feel whole, and may even meet birth family members, there exists new sets of challenges,

> Adoptees are often perplexed after reunion: they thought that just the sight of the birth mother or father, or a member of the birth family, would render them whole. Instead, they may feel more fragmented than before… This means realigning the self, bringing together all the pieces to make it whole… Adoptees must weave a new self-narrative out of the fragments of what was, what might have been and what is. This means they must integrate their two selves: the regressed baby who was abandoned and the adult that baby has become.[101]

Lifton's understanding only acknowledges the "quest for wholeness" towards search and reunion with birth family members. However, in the act of weaving a new self-narrative out of what was, might have been, and what is, adoption search may take the form of general knowledge seeking whether cultural, locational, or temporal. In other words, the definition of birth search and reunion are best recognized to include a search for historical, political, and cultural knowledge of adoptive location. With quick and ease-in-access to information via the internet, mass media, and popular culture, this knowledge acquisition begets the same process of integration not only two

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[100] Marilyn Schoettle, "The Adoptee Search: Looking for the Missing Piece," *The Center for Adoption Support and Education, Inc.* (2000), 3.
[101] Betty Jean Lifton, *Journey of the Adopted Self: A Quest for Wholeness* (New York: BasicBooks, 1994), 258-259.

selves, but the multiples selves to which one attributes meaning. Gloria Anzaldúa in her book, *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, beautifully recognizes an ambiguity of identity in what she denotes as "the borderlands" to write,

> In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness—a *mestiza* consciousness—and though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm.[102]

The fusions of Chinese culture in the United States collapse into the emergence of an entirely new sense of culture and identity. Chinese adoptee identity and consciousness transcends the sum of being Chinese and American. Pain exists in the melancholic adoptee in grievance of birth parents, place, and culture unknown. Nevertheless, there surfaces great creative energy in ethnic choice to construct and deconstruct pluralistic identities anew. Additionally, ambiguity in origin begets adoptee ambivalence and this shared state of consciousness becomes a shared identity and experience. Korean adoptee, Janine Myung Ja, even likens this unknowing-ness as belonging to "the unknown culture club."[103] Creativity then may fuel a sense of hope when Chinese adoptees seek to reconcile differences in the United States.

This goes to consider, experiences of being in-between can be isolating as we seek to balance distance with integration. *Where might Chinese adoptees seek belonging?* A bounded community of belonging then exists as a cognitive community for emerging adult adoptees who begin to choose their own allegiances separate from the immediate family to create a new

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[102] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007), 101-102.
[103] Janine Myung Ja, Jenette Moon Ja, and Katherine Kim, *The "Unknown Culture Club: Korean Adoptees, Then and Now* (self-pub., Adoption Truth and Transparency Worldwide Network, 2015).

"*mestiza* consciousness." In cognitive sociology, Eviatar Zerubavel offers how "members of a particular thought community" understand a shared meaning attributed to the same object which gives way to common sense.[104] An object here is understood as a social situation, cultural artifact (intangible or tangible), or a shared understanding. Additionally, "cultures carve different archipelagos of meaning out of the same reality; they very often also promote altogether different styles of cutting up the world."[105] In other words, how one group of people decide to segregate the world differs from another group's way of segregating the same world and these distinctions create shared islands of meaning. In the case of adoptive families, thought communities begin to differ between adoptive parents and emerging adult adoptees. Different styles of choosing boundaries between same and difference; inclusion and exclusion are made on the same reality. For example, as a transracial, emerging adult adoptee comes to live separate from the context of the adoptive family, race may have a stronger influence on how the adoptee sees him or herself separate from that of adoptive parents. Zerubavel also sees our thinking is inherently limited to what we are exposed to and what we focus on. What is in our immediate focus often overshadows the peripheral. If we focus on a certain aspect of our inclusionary identities, we in-turn, reinforce our belonging by excluding the likes of others. Formations of online social media groups, listservs, forums, and blogs[106] are all evidence of the existence of thought communities permeating time and space yet are connected in a shared sense of belonging. This creates a vast and diffuse structure of belonging that becomes separate from what we physically assume as

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[104] Eviatar Zerubavel, *Social Mindscapes: An Invitation to Cognitive Sociology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 77.
[105] Ibid, 56.
[106] Linda J. Seligman, *Broken Links, Enduring Ties: American Adoption Across Race, Class, and Nation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013).

community. Working ethnographically with adoptees and adoptive parents we see how race, privilege, and networks of care[107] are formed by those in and around an adoptive family.

If there is a unique Chinese adoptee culture, what does this imply for the needs of Chinese adoptees when negotiating identity and belonging? Robert Cantwell frames three cultural rights that members of a recognized culture need in order to thrive:

> At least three self-evident and inalienable cultural rights, it seems, upon which sociality, social affiliation, and its fruits in practical and imaginative life materially depend: continuity in time and in temporal structures; contiguity in space and in spatial arrangements, virtual or actual; and… 'breathing room': that field of intellectual and personal freedom and privacy, as well as the imaginative, practical, and communal liberty that ought to follow from them, in which, out of the free play of imagination upon the surfaces of practical, social, and spiritual necessity, and in the interplay of social influence, human beings accumulate ethnomimetically-developmentally, socially, and, in the broadest sense, artistically-that reservoir of structuring structures, habitus, the underwriting of which it should be the aim of any cultural policy to provide for and protect.[108]

The sense that continuity is the right to practice tradition over time, for an adoptee, the act of adoption has broken continuity in birth culture, but then gives way to a new sense of Chinese adoptee culture in the United States. To sustain a sense of Chinese tradition in the adoptive family, new traditions are inevitably formed and negotiated. In this spirit, language schools,

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[107] Karen V. Hansen, *Not-So-Nuclear Families: Class, Gender, and Networks of Care* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005).
[108] Robert Cantwell, "Folklore's Pathetic Fallacy," *Journal of American Folklore* 114, no. 451 (2001), 64.

playgroups, culture camps, and holiday celebrations are times when adoptive families come together in contiguity. This in-person contact creates a bonded sense of place-based community. Intellectual and personal freedom and privacy categorizes "adoptive family only" spaces which can be further divided into more defined affinity groups (i.e. adoptees and parents). Breathing room is achieved in these affinity spaces to accumulate cohesive structures of belonging by which the unadulterated ways of being can flow. The cultural worker's labor towards actualizing these three inalienable cultural rights brings us to the ultimate "pathetic fallacy" in that working within communities is inherently subjective in nature. To remain objective in this work is simply unattainable and is illusionary if sought. Furthermore, a secondary fallacy lies in seeking to *sustain* cultural productions (either intangible or tangible) one seeks to *change* to remain relevant to the constantly shifting culture-scape. To sustain by simply supporting local capacities to withstand change is different than creating conditions for which communities *thrive*.

Based on the current conversations on community and societal development, consideration of "thrivability" becomes more present at various interesting topics in cultural work. In turn, identity formation exists at this intersection since it establishes, permeates, and informs our choices of community action whether it be social, cultural, or political. In order for the cultural worker to better manage intricacies of Chinese adoptee identity in the United States, it is useful to draw from literature on capacity building and apply it to the individual level. The topic of "capacity building" speaks to how resilience is constructed to withstand change. Comparable to reconciliation, literature on capacity building applies to broader analysis of international development, disaster relief, or institutional capacity. Ian Smillie discusses capacity building and the humanitarian enterprise to conclude,

The time required and the complexity of the exercise will increase depending on the

depth of change envisaged. The simple transfer of information may not require great

effort, but building knowledge, changing behavior, and altering attitudes require

investments with significant different orders of magnitude… A major issue has to do with

the capacity of the potential capacity builders…[109]

To remember Solomon says acceptance always takes time, means building individual capacities

to come to a place of acceptance also takes time. Since adoption identity is complex, increased

time is needed to build individual and institutional capacities to enact change. Furthermore,

effort and time invested always remain relative to the scope of desirable change. Smillie adds,

"and a general lesson about capacity building, one now decades old, is that builders must have

good knowledge of "buildees," their society, and the context in which the effort is expected to

take place.[110] This is one of the first lessons for cultural sustainability practice. This means

cultural workers must recognize the need to build personal capacities and meet the demands of

holding the complex context surrounding communities in order to enact meaningful social

change. If groups were not marginalized by oppressive social systems, there would be no need

for the cultural worker. Therefore, cultural sustainability practice takes knowledge one step

further to work *with* buildees towards social change. By decentralizing oppressive power

structures, the cultural worker recognizes the long-term labor involved to build capacities from

the bottom up. Through cultural advocacy, there exists hope for the acquisition of Cantwell's

inalienable cultural rights.

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[109] Ian Smillie, "Capacity Building and the Humanitarian Enterprise," in *Patronage or Partnership: Local Capacity Building in Humanitarian Crises,* edited by Ian Smillie (Sterling: Kumarian Press, 2002), 21.
[110] Ibid.

"Nothing About Us Without Us" is For Us[111]

By now I have shown how factors influencing Chinese adoptees has given rise to a unique culture of individuals, how race plays a large role in identity formation and belonging, the labor needed to reconcile differences, and what cultural rights are needed for community groups to thrive. Centralized systemic power has allowed adoption agencies to oppress adoptee voice (and birth family voice) since the beginning of legalized adoption. Korean adoptee and activist, Janine Myung Ja, sees how the system of child adoption privileges

> the wants and needs of prospective adopters [to] outshine those of the people actually being adopted, which then to prevent us [adoptees] from investigating pertinent aspects of ourselves, regarding our family, nation of birth, and other essential things that have to do with our true identity.[112]

Thus, adoptees must overcome systemic, social, and physical barriers to even begin to investigate one's adoption identity. Even the term "birthmother" was

> devised by adoption professionals to reduce a natural mother to that of a biological function. This term marginalizes mothers and creates a role for them in society which does not allow them to fully embrace their lived experience as a mother, implying instead that the sacred bond of mother and child ends at birth and that her role is secondary to other mothers in society.[113]

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[111] James I. Charlton, *Nothing About Us Without Us: Disability Oppression and Empowerment* (University of California Press, 1998).

[112] Janine Myung Ja, *Adoption History 101: An Orphan's Research into Adoption Trafficking* (self-pub., Adoption Truth and Transparency Worldwide Network, 2016), 4.

[113] Vance Twins. *Adoptionland: From Orphans to Activists*, edited by Janine Myung Ja, Michael A. Potter and Allen L. Vance (self-pub., Against Child Trafficking USA, 2014), 243.

What Valerie Andrews, Executive Director of Origins Canada, acknowledges is case in point. To suggest birth mothers are "secondary to other mothers in society" serves adoptive mothers to be understood as "real mothers" and equal to the biological standard of motherhood. Dominant terminology, clinical approaches, research outcomes, narrative, and understandings of adoption "trickle down" from those in power to determine adoptions in the first place. The system is assumed for adoptees, but not made by adoptees. It should be expected in future iterations of adoption practice, that not only considerations of adoptee identity will become a critical topic of discussion, but also that of power and oppression. *Who is making decisions and for whom? Under what circumstances are those decisions being negotiated? What does it mean to be a female Chinese adoptee in the United States?* Each of these conversations call for more opportunities to ethically support and sustain cultural advocacy work.

In efforts to work against systems of oppression, one must be mindful of the technical skills needed to best utilize existing resources to efficiently instigate community action. The model of agile project management serves to address the iterative nature of projects involving community organizing. Originating from projects in software development, agile management projects undergo multiple iterations as categorized by intensive production "sprints." Goals are set for each sprint, and assessment after each ensures production remains relevant to customers along the way.[114] Once applied to organizing for social change, customers become community members and the cultural worker becomes a project manager. Consequently, cultural workers who utilizes the agile project management model, provide necessary structure with enough flexibility to effectively move groups towards products of social change.[115] For example, if a

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[114] Charles G. Cobb, *Making Sense of Agile Project Management: Balancing Control and Agility* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2011), 22.
[115] See Appendix B.

group of emerging adult Chinese adoptees desire to produce a documentary about transitioning

in to college intended for other adoptees, the project plan may include "sprints" of research with

reassessment after each, before actual filming and production. Most community organizing

projects rely on non-profit funding. In this way, grant writing becomes an important element to

community action. Since Chinese adoptees in the United States intersect multiple topics of

interest, it widens the range of accessible grants. This goes to say, matching the language and

presentation styles of grant-makers enhances one's chances to acquire funding. Moreover,

projects may require new and diverse partnerships to be forged across public and private lines. In

the example above, the government funded Minority Research Grant Program[116] may be sought

alongside private funding from the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption.[117] In due course, if

adoption services take a more agile approach to governance and production plans with a diversity

in partnerships, it increases the possibility to advance current adoption services and contribute to

a greater understanding of adoption.

Birth family accounts are grossly underrecognized. Xinran's book, *Message from an
Unknown Chinese Mother: Stories of Loss and Love* is one example of how first-hand accounts

break decades long systemic silence to which Chinese adoptees have responded by organizing

the special newsletter, "Message from an Unknown Adoptee."[118] Xinran's book is specifically

dedicated to Chinese adoptees. By publicly representing birth mother accounts, the façade of

hegemonic culture is breached while simultaneously contributing to adoptee empowerment. The

[116] "Minority Research Grant Program," GrantSolutions.gov, accessed April 30, 2018,
https://www.grantsolutions.gov/gs/preaward/previewPublicAnnouncement.do?id=61768.
[117] "Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption," Philanthropy News Digest, accessed April 30, 2018,
http://philanthropynewsdigest.org/npo-spotlight/dave-thomas-foundation-for-adoption?_ga=2.99626327.81848326.1526099323-68678721.1526099323.
[118] "Message from an Unknown Adoptee," China Children International, accessed April 30, 2018,
http://chinaschildreninternational.org/message-from-an-unknown-adoptee/.

richness of human experience is conveyed through first-hand accounts of story. Elaine Lawless

understands the transformative, humanizing power of story to say, "regardless of how it is being

employed, the concept of 'story,' and the recognition of a living breathing 'storyteller,' who

either speaks or writes her or his story, memoir, personal-experience narrative, and recollections,

has garnered a market among both academic and lay audiences."[119] Personal story is relatable

across multiple audiences because there is that recognition of humanity. Collections of primary

source stories like *Adoptionland: From Orphans to Activists,*[120] juxtapose adoptee voice with

those of birth families. Validation anthologies like *Lost Daughters: Writing Adoption from a*

Place of Empowerment and Peace [121] take a much different stand on adoption and begin to

construct a counter-narrative to that of the "lucky girl" or "grateful child." Flipping the script on

this dominant narrative further works to humanize the systemic functionality of adoption. In

2014, writers under the collective pen name, Lost Daughters, started a campaign as a Twitter

hashtag movement #flipthescript to counter the dominance of adoptive parent narratives during

November, National Adoption Month. They understand, "when adoptees write books for other

adoptees, they get additional perspectives more like their own."[122]

 Adoption is being explored through increasingly public creative platforms in recent years.

Adoption blogs, listservs, non-profits, zines, documentaries, music theater, memoir, and first-

person anthologies work to lift the realities of adoption loss and fill the literature above with raw

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[119] Elaine Lawless, *Women Escaping Violence: Empowerment Through Narrative* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 16.
[120] Vance Twins. *Adoptionland: From Orphans to Activists*, edited by Janine Myung Ja, Michael A. Potter and Allen L. Vance (self-pub., Against Child Trafficking USA, 2014).
[121] Amanda H. L. Transue-Woolston, Julie Stromberg, Karen Pickell, Jennifer Anastasi, and editors, *Lost Daughters: Writing Adoption from a Place of Empowerment and Peace* (Lexington, KY: CQT Media and Publishing, 2014).
[122] "#flipthescript," Lost Daughters: Writing Adoption from a Place of Empowerment and Peace, accessed April 30, 2018, http://www.thelostdaughters.com/p/flipthescript.html.

human emotion. When oppressed voices of adoptees and birth parents share lived experience, they speak against social power structures that were not created by others like them. Collections of essays, poems, and letters in books like *I Wish for You a Beautiful Life: Letters from the Korean Birth Mothers of Ae Ran Won to Their Children,*[123] *Perspectives on a Grafter Tree: Thoughts for Those Touched by Adoption,*[124] and *Voices from Another Place: A Collection of Works from a Generation Born in Korea and Adopted to Other Countries*[125] are keynote works for anyone interested in understanding transnational, transracial adoption from Asia. Musicians like Korean adoptee Dan Matthews[126] draws inspiration from being adopted. Recently, Korean adoptee playwright and creative designer, Deb Sivigny, wrote an autobiographical theater adaptation, "Hello My Name Is…" about her adoption story. Through interactive theatrical scenes, audiences come to recognize the complexities of being an insider and outsider of two different nations.[127] Memoirs like *Ghosts of Sangju: A Memoir of Reconciliation* and *Twins Found in a Box: Adapting to Adoption*[128] give public readers a deep dive into the minds and situations adoptees find themselves. Korean adoptees and birth members mostly do these activist writings.[129] However Chinese adoptee memoirs like *Lucky Girl,* Mei-Ling Hopgood's account of

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[123] Sara Dorow, ed. *I Wish for You a Beautiful Life: Letters from the Korean Birth Mothers of Ae Ran Won to Their Children* (Yeong and Yeony Book Company: St. Paul, 1999).

[124] Patricia Irwin Johnson, ed. *Perspectives on a Grafter Tree: Thoughts for Those Touched by Adoption* (Indianapolis: Perspectives Press, 1983).

[125] Susan Soon-Keum Cox, ed. *Voices from Another Place: A Collection of Works from a Generation Born in Korea and Adopted to Other Countries* (St. Paul: Yeong and Yeong Book Company, 1999).

[126] "Info," DANakaDAN, accessed April 30, 2018, http://dan-aka-dan.com/info/.

[127] "Hello My Name Is…," The Welders, accessed April 30, 2018, https://www.thewelders.org/shows/hello-my-name-is/.

[128] Janine Vance, *Twins Found in a Box: Adapting to Adoption*. (self-pub., Adoption Truth and Transparency Worldwide Network, 2017).

[129] Catherine Ceniza Choy, *Global Families: A History of Asian International Adoption in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

straddling identities in birth parents and adoptive parent ties,[130] may be on the rise in the next few decades as this generation of adoptees emerges into adulthood.

To package this robust understanding of adoption, the mandala of adoption pulls together many seemingly, separate ways of being into one, the adoptee. In its symbolism, "the mandala represents the circle of life and wholeness. It reminds us of the impermanence of life and the need to accept change. The mandala provides a sense of calm and comfort, focus and insight."[131] As Chinese adoptees transition into emerging adulthood, identity and belonging are able to be empathetically explored to a deeper degree. When adoptees are able to advocate and validate each other, there emerges a collective sense of self-focus and insight into the ways of life itself. This gives way to building individual and community capacities to stand against minimizing effects of oppressive systems in the United States. The cultural worker must remember, each human has a unique mandala of identity, and to create opportunities to recognize that in each other is for hopes of a more peaceful, sustainable world.

[130] Mei-Ling Hopgood, *Lucky Girl* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2009).
[131] Susan I. Buchalter, *Mandala Symbolism and Techniques: Innovative Approaches for Professionals* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2013).

Part Practice: Methodology

The research methodology for this capstone is a result of a two-year process informed by both qualitative sociological and ethnographic research. It involves literature review, semi-structured interviews[132] of adoptees attending a private, four-year liberal arts college on the East coast, and focus groups[133] of select female Chinese adoptees previously interviewed.[134] I draw from Elaine Lawless' concept of "reciprocal ethnography" in my decision to conduct Chinese adoptee focus groups. I wanted participants "to be involved in the collaborative process of gaining and sharing knowledge"[135] through my research. In-vivo coding was used to identify emerging themes from both datasets. I, the researcher, was also interviewed with the same 2017 semi-structured interview protocol by a peer Chinese adoptee (who was not part of the original interview process) as an exercise in reflexive voice.[136] However, for the purposes of the 2017 demographic charts below, my self-interview is not included or else it would slightly skew the overall proportions. This capstone is in no means an exhaustive study of adoptee experience let alone Chinese adoptee experience in the United States. It is a micro-investigation of a macro topic in how adoption identity and belonging is constructed for these individuals during the time of research. Findings are then overlapped with the literature above. Original names and identifying information has been changed to protect research participants.

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[132] Interviews were conducted in March 7, 2017 through April 13, 2017 and approved by the Goucher IRB Board, (approval number: 20141570)

[133] Focus groups were conducted on February 3, 2018 through February 27, 2018 and approved by the Goucher IRB Board, (approval number: 20141611)

[134] An extension was required to use 2017 data in this capstone and was approved by the Goucher IRB Board, (approval number: 20141470R)

[135] Elaine Lawless, "Women's Life Stories and Reciprocal Ethnography as Feminist and Emergent," *Journal of Folklore Research* 28, no. 1 (1991): 56.

[136] See Note 9, "Reflection Point."

My research question in 2017 read, "How do adoptees articulate their own life experiences and aspirations for their futures?" After a campus wide survey inviting adoptees to participate in my study, a total of 22 adoptees were interviewed (lasting 27-76 minutes) between the ages of 18 and 23. All were attending a private, four-year liberal arts college on the East coast at the time of interview. My degree of personal familiarity with interviewees ranged from having first met at the time of interview to three years. Figure 2 below represents the range of adoption countries (birth countries)[137] while Figure 3 shows the college year distribution.[138]
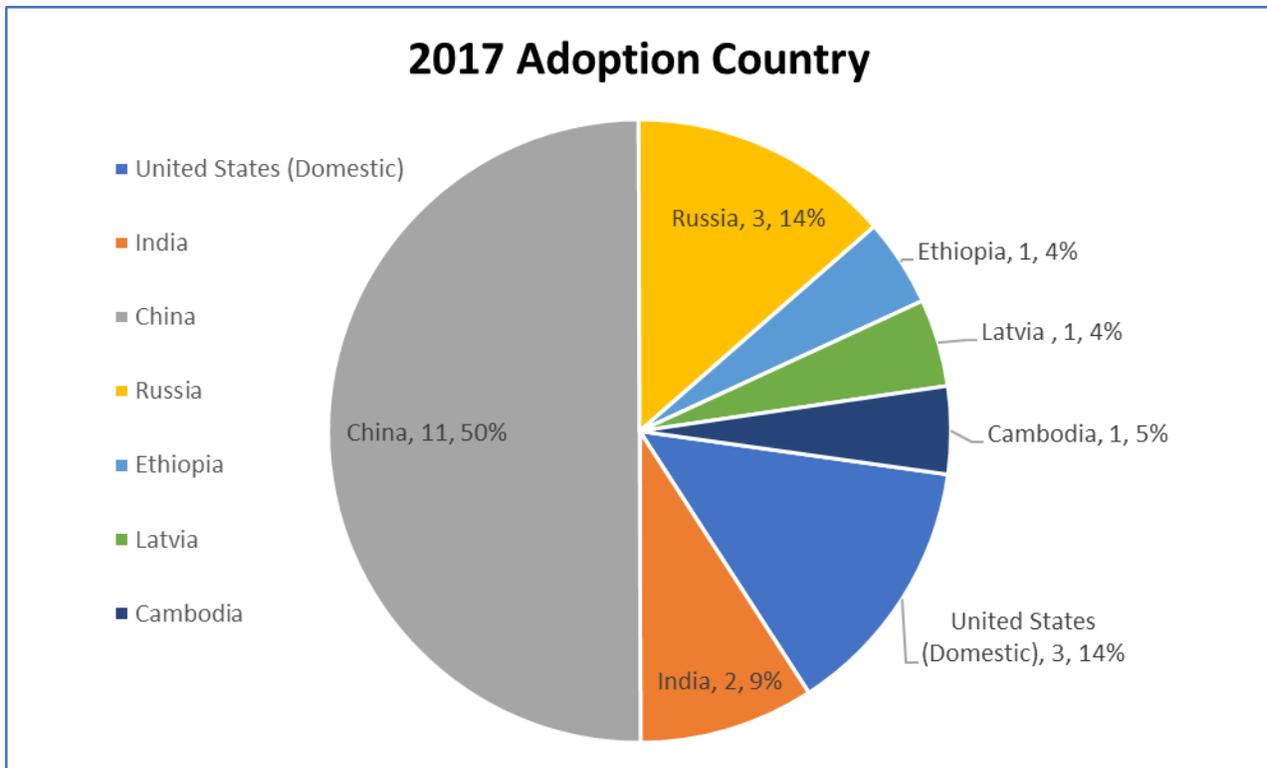
*Figure 2: **2017 Adoption Country**: Adoptees from China accounted for half of the original cohort.*

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[137] I choose to use adoption country instead of birth country to leave open the possibility for boundary crossing before birth. In other words, the country an adoptee was born in might have differed from the final country an adoptee was ultimately adoption.
[138] See Note 7, "2017 Demographic Insight."
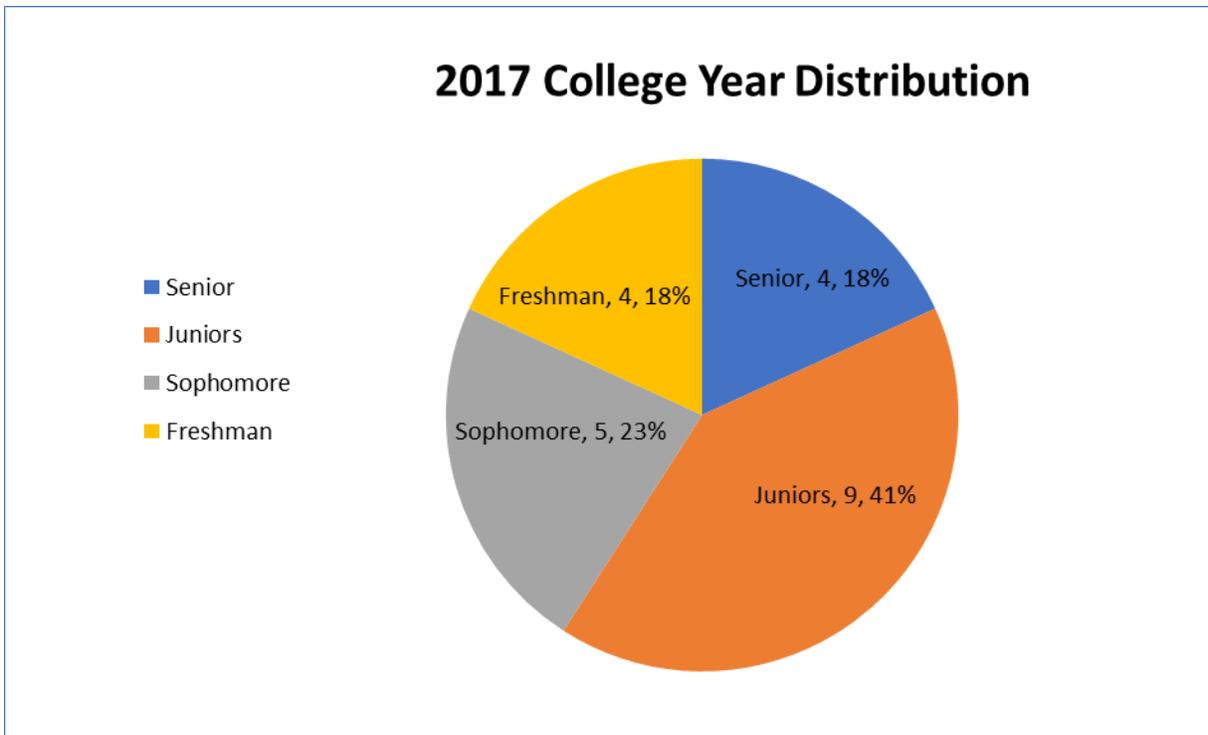
*Figure 3: **2017 College Year Distribution**: A higher number of junior year students were represented.*

Two main conclusions were made from this 2017 study; 1) adoption identity is invisible relative to the social context, 2) adoptees assert control over their adoption identity by choosing how they talk about it with other people.

Of the 11 female Chinese adoptees I interviewed in 2017, eight were able to participate in 2018 focus groups (lasting 60 to 150 minutes). All have closed adoptions from China during the late 1990s and were younger than 22 months when adopted. Research goals for the focus groups were more fluid than before yet, I built questions around 2017 findings.[139] One question was intentionally designed to challenge the group and I asked, "When have you felt most satisfied with your adoption? (or not satisfied?)" The first focus group was held via online video conferencing with two adoptees who had since graduated college. Two other focus groups of

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[139] See Appendix A.

three people each were conducted in person, on college campus at the end of February 2018. I was able to follow-up with a few attendees afterwards, but not all as time allowed. It is also important to recognize participating in 2017 interviews paved the way for adoptees to come to focus groups. Therefore, participants in this research are adoptees who *care* about identity formation in adoption and *want* to think about it more. As participants chose to be present at the focus groups, they chose to focus on Chinese adoption identity and belonging. This goes to say how the conscious decision to engage adoption identity and belonging takes process and some are more readily willing than others.

Part Discovery: Findings and Analysis

"As human beings, our job in life is to help people realize how rare and valuable each of us really is, that each of us has something that no one else has-or ever will have-something inside that is unique to all time. It's our job to encourage each other to discover that uniqueness and to provide ways of developing its expression." –Fred Rogers[140]

I have felt great care by others who encourage me to truly live into uniqueness. My wish is to carry this care forward and bear witness to the wonder of discovery.

In this section, I first outline two main findings from the 2017 interviews. Next, I explain how focus groups offer a model to create invaluable spaces to explore meanings of identity and belonging and begin to reconcile differences within ourselves, with each other, and with society. I conclude with two sets of recommendations. 1) To support Chinese adoptees who wish to change perceptions of adoption in local communities. 2) To assist facilitators in leading a cultural community groups within their communities.

Conversations with Chinese Adoptees

Once in the independent atmosphere of college, some adoptees consider being adopted a unique feature, some do not think about it at all, while others may incorporate adoption into academic assignments. In navigating these spaces of how to behave in the social world, thoughts about being adopted manifest in invisible ways. By feeling very adopted in one situation, and not adopted in others, adoptees master situational awareness of social contexts to which they are immersed. I asked interviewees, "Was there ever a time where you felt 'so adopted,' where you

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[140] Fred Rogers, *Wisdom from The World According to Mister Rogers: Important Things to Remember* (New York: Peter Pauper Press, Inc., 2003): 73.

looked around and thought, wow, I feel very adopted right now?" In response, Erin, junior Chinese adoptee explained,

> Two situations. 1) Is when I'm with my extended family because my extended family is super white. I had this realization a couple of years ago this is crazy and explains a lot why my sister and I feel uncomfortable and not that excited to go see them. There's a desire to want to see other people in your family who look like you. Recently my cousins are having babies. At the baby shower, they all commenting they look just like you when you were that age or talking about family features alike. That is a normal thing that happens, these are all natural things that shouldn't be a big deal but are because I can't do that. 2) Is when I'm with other Asian people who are not adopted, talking about their life. Like, we are from the same place, but we are not from the same world even though we are Asian. But like with family I don't look like you but can relate in other ways. A friend in high school was Chinese but not adopted. They moved here when she was toddler. There's a different culture in her house. She grew up with certain foods, language, but also all American but has more duality. Makes me realize I only have half of it.[141]

Adoption is invisible in both contexts of being visually different (among family) and same (among other Asians). "Place" and "world" become split meanings to describe same physical origins of China, but of different thought communities. Thus, the mind and body become segregated from an early awareness of visual sameness and difference. The significance of this being, adoption identity is largely a hidden identity.

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[141] Erin (Chinese adoptee) in discussion with the author, March 2017.

If being adopted is invisible for emerging adult adoptees, how and why do adoptees control constructing of these indiscernible dimensions? Ways of representing adoption to others in interpersonal communication, allow adoptees to claim control of a largely uncontrollable adoption narrative (did not choose to be adopted, where to, by whom, etc.). To the question, "How willing are you to share you are adopted with someone else?" Faith, senior at the time shares,

> I'm pretty open to tell people. I met someone who was a stranger sitting in hotel one weekend. And we have little name tags on and he asked, "what's your name mean?" And I quickly told him. He did not take the conversation towards asking about adoption at first, then asked "what's it like being adopted?" He had a tone you got to prove yourself to me, "you must provide insight into something I don't know." I felt pressured to answer his question, but I decided not to answer. I said, "I wouldn't know what it's like not to be adopted." For some weird reason I sometimes still hold on to the fact that people can tell that I'm Asian but not everyone can tell I'm adopted, and sometimes I want people to know that and sometimes I don't. Generally, it's when I want to benefit from being adopted if I want to benefit from being part of this really great support system. But sometimes I don't want to be associated with adoption.[142]

Throughout these outcomes of choice, the sense of control over one's own adoption holds steady. In other words, regardless of whether someone wants to tell someone they are adopted, adoptees still have self-agency to make the decisions of what to share and how much to share. Thus,

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[142] Faith (Chinese adoptee) in discussion with the author, March 2017.

adoptees hold agency over their adoption story which contributes to understandings of the self. Natalie, freshman at the time, recognizes how this agency has progressed over time,

> I think [adoption is] part of my identity, but I think it has taken until college to make it very much part of my identity. Previously in high school when people would ask, I would almost feel offended that they asked, and I don't know why, but maybe it was their way of asking. So, I always felt like they weren't asking to know the answer but asking "oh that's weird what's wrong with you" kind of thing. That happened more often than I would like to admit, stranger would always ask "what are you?" and you're like I'm Asian or Chinese and they're like "how do have two white parents?" and then I have to connect the dots. It happens a lot. [143]

Inflection and delivery of other people's questions and Natalie's interpretation of these interactions add colors to the pallet with which she paints her identity. Adoption then becomes more integral to her identity. There emerges an "adoptee labor" to not only strive to integrate adoption identity into a sense of personhood, but also to "prove" and "explain" oneself as adopted in non-adoptee spaces. Since adoptees occupy the world with the rest of humanity in mostly non-adopted spaces, this labor can prove cognitively exhausting if prolonged and recurrent. *How might we ease this labor and process for recognizing our degree of agency over our own experiences?*

Focus Groups of Chinese Adoptees

Recall Robert Cantwell's self-evident and inalienable cultural rights upon which practical and imaginative life materially depend (continuity in time and in temporal structures; contiguity

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[143] Natalie (Chinese adoptee) in discussion with the author, March 2017.

in space and in spatial arrangements; and breathing room). In focus groups of Chinese emerging adult adoptees, we gather together at the same time, in the same way, in a private setting where participants feel free to speak truths without immediate or over-generalized judgement. Speaking into a facilitated focus group space is a time for more questions to be asked than answered which may reveal gaps in understanding for those involved. It is also a time to *care* about adoption. Faith, now graduated, offers the difference between *thinking* about something and *caring* to say,

> Mini revelation recently, thinking about something doesn't mean caring about something. You can think a lot about a subject, person, place. Especially if think about that for a long period of time you think you are caring about it, but you are just thinking about it or just missing it. You can relate it to missing like, college, but doesn't mean you care about it depending about how you are thinking about it. I think what ultimately sustains people is what they care about and if you think about something a lot you can think you care but sometimes you don't… Sometimes thinking about it means caring or sometimes not caring. But I think we learn that if we think about it a lot then it must mean we care about it. But sometimes we are toxic people and think about bad things that hurt.[144]

This is particularly insightful to the fact that adoption identity is an underpinning thought that intersects all aspects of life experiences. No wonder it becomes confusing to assume that something one thinks about frequently, is something one *should* care about *all the time*. But one does not have to care all the time. By recognizing the choice of when, where, and how to engage, it can lead to acceptance (of self, of parents, of system) and strengthen communities. Here, we

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[144] Focus Group Online (Chinese adoptees) in focus group with the author, February 2018.

turn to investigate the ways Chinese adoptees negotiate identity and belonging to multiple groups.

As human beings, we look for similarities in each other to better ground shared identity and reinforce our belonging to one another. In the search for sameness, Faith articulates an insight from her non-adopted roommate,

> One of my roommates, we were talking about it is hard to make friends when we live off campus. She said, "I think you are doing well and you find similarities in others much easier" and she said "I feel like it's because you're adopted and you don't rely on other people looking like you to feel comfortable, you really rely on people who think like you and who have similar interests" You don't rely on looks, "I can tell you hunt out people who are similar to you who like movies like you or thinking like you or eating foods like you. You have the ability to do that that I [roommate] don't have."[145]

When one holds expectations to find sameness, one is most likely inclined to actualize them. In other words, if we expect there to be a similarity in mindset with someone else, we are inclined to find it exists. Thus, emerges a habit of mind Chinese adoptees acquire when in isolating context of either looks or appearance. This mindset suggests the development of a new, collective consciousness Chinese adoptees acquire through life experiences.

When I asked how Chinese adoptees differ from our first-generation Chinese-American peers, answers reflected an inner dialogue of claiming and waiving; owning and relinquishing. Faith mentions, "when I carry around Chinese product or wear a sweatshirt or pattern I feel cool, but it doesn't feel normal. It feels very different than the adopted identity." Here, adoptee

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[145] Focus Group Online (Chinese adoptees) in focus group with the author, February 2018.

identity is distinguishable from Chinese-American identity through interactions with culturally affiliated objects. Sarah adds,

> I agree with that, like kids our age who have first-generation parents immigrated. It's also what the media considers Chinese-American. It makes me feel like I don't count as Chinese-American because technically I'm Chinese and I identify as that but there's always what does that mean? I grew up in the U.S., but I don't have the same connection a typical Chinese-American has to their culture so. I feel disconnected, maybe that is more recent now, but I feel disconnected with the whole Chinese-American identity because I like to say I'm Chinese-American but feel like I have to prove it to people and explain to them what that means to me.[146]

Sarah articulates how having to prove oneself feeds into a sense of disconnection and self-exclusion. Due to our historic point in time, there are fewer second and third generation Chinese-Americans coming of age in parallel with the older generation of Chinese adoptees in the United States. This may explain how there is a lived sense of "not counting" or disconnection between Chinese-American and Chinese adoptees at this time. This means experiential differences of first generation Chinese-American, are more striking than the differences between third, fourth, or even fifth generation Chinese-American children. When Ashley reflects on the same question she adds,

> I grew up considering myself white, today I don't… I check the box Asian. When people ask me, I say I'm Chinese because I know that's what they are looking for. They are not looking for me to say I'm American or I'm white. But internally I always struggle in

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[146] Focus Group Online (Chinese adoptees) in focus group with the author, February 2018.

saying I'm Chinese because I don't feel… My one friend immigrated when she was 4 and

other friends whose parents were immigrants, and they were born here, and their parents

are very much Chinese, and they pretty much grew up in Chinese culture. And I feel like

it takes away from them almost to say "yeah, I'm Chinese" because I don't have any of

the same lived experiences that they do.[147]

For Chinese adoptees, lived experience constitutes identity, but what others see outweighs what

is internally unseen. Due to this disconnect between seen race and unseen identity, Chinese

adoptees become caught in the moment to reconcile those differences. This disconnect becomes

accentuated in considerations of identities like "person of color" and "woman of color." It is

agreed there is a shared racial struggle,[148] but only to a certain degree for Chinese adoptees. Erin

observes,

For me, I think that I really started identifying as a women of color when I came to

college because before then I was surrounded mostly by white people and then the only

time I was in a more diverse space was when I was dancing but even then, I was the only

Asian person in the upper level so it was very like, black people/white people, and they

lumped me with the white people and that wasn't a choice I consciously made, it just

happened to me…

Externalized situations of racial "lumping" infringes on the self, evident in how Erin occupies a

"strange" in-between place on the spectrum of race. This in turn, effects how Chinese adoptees

see themselves as belonging to affinity groups (people of color, Chinese-American). Erin goes

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[147] Focus Group 2 (Chinese adoptees) in focus group with the author, February 2018.
[148] Ta-Nehisi Coats, *Between the World and Me* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2015).

on to articulate how wider race relations impact what power we choose to give our pluralistic

identities,

> And then I think [coming to college] was a time people started talking more openly about
> race which was interesting my sister was still in high school and started talking about the
> same things. So, I think it wasn't an age thing or we're in different spaces thing, but a
> more global, U.S. conversation that was becoming open.[149]

In this way, Erin has come to identify as a woman of color within the changing social and

cultural context of the United States. Another connection of wider social influence on the

experiential level is offered by Natalie who points out,

> When the elections happened of 2016, there was a space for people of color to debrief
> and it was mostly black people so I was one of the three Asians that went, and I got looks
> like 'why are you here, you're not really supposed to be here' so that made me question
> again whether the world sees me as a person of color versus what I see myself as.[150]

Both Erin and Natalie are aware of how the changing culture of race in the United States affect

their personal accounts of Chinese adoptee identity. This iterative process of self-reflexivity thus

takes place in the presence of others, often at the moment of encounter. Thus, Chinese adoptees

engage in a racial struggle on a much more internal level than the assumed extremes emphasized

by wider social movements. Jade also mentions how being in college has shaped her

understanding of being a woman of color but to a certain degree, "When I got here [college] they

[other students] were like 'oh you should join the writers club for women of color' then I went

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[149] Focus Group 2 (Chinese adoptees) in focus group with the author, February 2018.
[150] Ibid.

and it was really really awkward."[151] Observations of feeling "not normal," (Faith) "strange,"

(Erin) and "awkward," (Jade) are all code words for a deeper sensation of foreign identity.

When I asked, "What would you tell your younger adoptee self?"[152] many different

answers emerged but all suggest a need for reassurance in volatile times. I did notice how the

word "tell" has a double meaning. When Ashley spoke about going out to dinner with her

parents to say,

> I feel strange going out to dinner with them [mom] because she is my mother, a white
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> mother and a white daughter they stand closer, and you can tell they are mother daughter
>
> and tell they are related. My mother and I are close, but I can tell the hostess is "hmm
>
> strange."[153]

In this way, to "tell" is used to describe assumptions by others. Within this understanding, the

original question becomes one of "What would you want your younger adopted self to assume?"

Jade says, "I feel like I would tell my younger self, you don't have to embrace it [looking

different] now, but just don't hate on it."[154] Natalie reflects, "I would tell my ten-year-old self,

just validation. What you're thinking is normal."[155] To Jade's and Natalie's points, self-

acceptance and experiential sameness are foundational to building the confidence to embrace the

life-long labor of navigating transracial, transnational adoptee identity. Ashley agrees but

brought up an interesting point about the possibility of doing something differently, "To myself,

just keep being you, there's nothing I would have done differently that would have brought me

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[151] Focus Group 1 (Chinese adoptees) in focus group with the author, February 2018.
[152] See Note 8, "Younger self."
[153] Focus Group 2 (Chinese adoptees) in focus group with the author, February 2018.
[154] Focus Group 1 (Chinese adoptees) in focus group with the author, February 2018.
[155] Focus Group 2 (Chinese adoptees) in focus group with the author, February 2018.

better or worse."[156] Reflection does not have to imply "what would you do differently," but this often becomes a peripheral consideration we focus on reassuring ourselves in the now when we look at our past. Erin takes a different approach to the question to consider a change in situation,

> I kind of agree. I would have given myself an Asian role model person, just to be close to, be as a mentor. It was hard looking back on it to have all my role models or people I sought advice from to not be able to share that experience of not being white or not being black… I didn't know I was supposed to seek that out. No one told me it was not ok for people to point out my eyes, touch my hair and talk about my nose. These things happened to me and I had no idea, it was just "oh that's kind of weird" I've had experiences where people would try and talk Chinese to me which still happens all the time. Now I know it's a micro-aggression, but I didn't know I was supposed to talk to anyone about it, nobody told me it was wrong. Couldn't tell my parents really, didn't know I should or could. So, having someone, a group, I don't know, someone to share those experiences with but also just be a person I could look up to I think would have been helpful.[157]

How to deal with racial micro-aggressions for transracial adoptees then becomes a cognitive space adoptive parents or family members are often unable to fill. When experiential sameness is scarce, there is an increase in the possibility of isolation. Furthermore, there is no role model for assuming a pluralistic, multidimensional, or multifaceted concept of self. In turn, the fact that Chinese adoptee experience is unique and specific further suggests an overarching thread of belonging connects Chinese adoptees in the United States as a cognitive community. Yet, what

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[156] Focus Group 2 (Chinese adoptees) in focus group with the author, February 2018.
[157] Ibid.

Erin alludes to is the importance of mirroring humanity in each other to restructure our determinations of belonging with various social affiliations. To Erin's point of micro-aggressions, Rachel mentions,

> Everyone was like "oh you have such good hair…" Back in the day I thought it was cool, now I know it's cultural appropriation. I was the only person with my kind of hair… To this day people come up and touch my hair and you know it's the same way, you can't just go up and touch an Asian person's like you can't touch a black person's hair.[158]

Experiencing micro-aggressions does reinforce Chinese adoptees identifying as women/person of color. One begins to see how acts of horizontal, peer groups, and experiences of social oppression grounded in physical looks contribute to how Rachel relates to other women of color. Erin goes on to reflect,

> It has been interesting [at college] because I do identify as a person of color but also a lot of times I feel like I really don't deserve to claim that which is very very very strange. I'm not black and I can't identify with those struggles, that culture, but I'm not white and people look at me less as being white as they did before, if that makes sense, it's complicated, it's just a very in between place.[159]

That in-between space can be isolating as Chinese adoptees fail to strike full allegiance to either extreme side of racial divides. Erin also alludes to feelings of being less white as before. Natalie notices this shift of being seen as white within the context of the adoptive family to being seen more racially when living separately to elaborate,

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[158] Focus Group 1 (Chinese adoptees) in focus group with the author, February 2018.
[159] Focus Group 2 (Chinese adoptees) in focus group with the author, February 2018.

You have white experiences too… As I've gotten older, me and my sister would go out to dinner with my parents and they [restaurant workers] automatically see like we're two different parties. They see this older white couple going out to dinner and then we say a party of four. And at the airport, they will not take us as a family because they assume we aren't together… I don't know why they are assuming but I guess it's because we're getting older. It kind of makes me uncomfortable a little bit but it's going to happen.[160]

Natalie gives two real-world examples of how being in a transracial family leads to situations of micro-discrimination as an adolescent adoptee which decrease with age. The transracial adoptive family is then treated differently based on their looks as a family unit. Again, Chinese adoptees are lumped with others around them. When the world sees exclusion, but one feels belonging, it creates an uncomfortable tension in one's identity and leads to further questions of self. Not belonging to any one socially recognized group categorizes the ambivalent space Chinese adoptees occupy.

The racial and cultural heritage inherited from adoptive parents complicate race-based claims to sameness. In the case of categorizing inheritance of vertical identity, Ashley recognizes, "because you have that white last name, you inherit privilege." This demonstrates how class and privilege as vertical identities inherited by adoptive parents can counteract horizontal identities. Privilege inherited by adoptive parents ends up distancing Chinese adoptees from their women of color counter parts in the United States. This become a point of tension when Chinese adoptees seek to reconcile differences between members of the adoptive family

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[160] Focus Group 2 (Chinese adoptees) in focus group with the author, February 2018.

during emerging adulthood. Erin reflects on the efforts of her parents to address these racial differences during her childhood to say,

> [My parents] kind of just accepted what they knew and what they thought I needed instead of actually trying to listen to the way I needed them to talk about it. I don't think I was able to verbalize at the time. We've had some conversation fairly recently that were just frustrating because they think they are trying really hard but it's not in the ways that I need them to be trying. Which then makes me feel like, well they will just never understand, so I don't want to talk about it with you anymore.[161]

When something is obvious, it can be frustrating when others do not see the same obviousness. Then, it takes an extra effort to explain. Erin highlights interpersonal tensions within the adoptive family to allude to the necessity for reconciliation not only of differences within the self, but between family members. In this way, the relationship between Erin and her parents is at risk of collapse. There becomes a need to mediate racial understandings across time and family members to sustain interpersonal relationships. Natalie goes on to add,

> I've had that relationship with my mother… I don't know if that's amplified with adoption or not because there is a part [parents] aren't going to understand unless your parent is also adopted, but even then, they can't know your own story… It was very confusing… I tell her about college and Adoption Web last year and just talking with other adoptees and she has stepped back because she knows she cannot fill that space but

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[161] Focus Group 2 (Chinese adoptees) in focus group with the author, February 2018.

she still wants to help me overcome it in a sense, but not overcome it, but just formulate self.[162]

The transition into emerging adulthood, brings about a transition in identity inspiration. Natalie mentions a key understanding of identity formation for emerging adult adoptees; adoptive parents can only support Chinese adoptee identity formation to a certain degree. To this point, peer groups take on a stronger role in the continuous construction of identity for the emerging adult adoptee.

Affinity groups on college campuses can offer a sense of belonging during college life transition. When experiences align, and participants are able to speak privately and freely, Natalie observes a feeling of relief to not have to explain what it is like to be adopted,

I remember talking with my parents about it [Adoption Web] it's one of those really good relief feelings of being able to talk to someone but not have to explain yourself. But we are talking about adoption and we are explaining your situation/story, but you don't have to explain what it is to be adopted.[163]

Thus, breathing room is achieved and appreciated in constructing a sense of group belonging. Once the labor of having to prove and explain oneself falls away, it is easier to engage in transformative conversation. Ashley reflects on participating in adoption playgroups growing up to mention,

I went through a phase where I was like maybe this is wrong to deny, not deny, but reject it… [Laura] you are setting this forum and connecting people through Adoption Web,

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[162] Focus Group 2 (Chinese adoptees) in focus group with the author, February 2018.
[163] Ibid.

just trying to give people this space to talk about it which I never think I had. Adoption group yeah, but we all just talked about our lives... When you're ten, we didn't use the space the way the adults intended it to be.[164]

Ashely recognizes how participating in a focus group and Adoption Web supported her choice to engage with adoption to a deeper degree than in the past. Growing up, adults in Ashley's life may have assumed the adoption play groups would help Chinese adoptees find a sense of belonging and security in adoption identity. However, Ashely reports that was not entirely achieved. This suggests mediation techniques and facilitation is needed to better support adoptees when engaging with deeper levels of identity formation. When facilitating such an affinity group like Adoption Web, Faith accounts,

> I thought it was important when I was president of Adoption Web, even though I was president, didn't mean I had to identify with being adopted all the time, I was trying to create a comfortable space to have any conversation the room wanted to have, it didn't have to be my conversation. So, speaking up and speaking down in different space, I felt like I was speaking down in AW, but maybe that was because I wanted other people to be able to talk.[165]

No matter the reason to speak down, the intention to hold space for members to talk about what they want to talk about is an important lesson in identifying needs. Faith is also aware of dynamics of power, influence, and authority in a leadership position. She adds,

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[164] Focus Group 2 (Chinese adoptees) in focus group with the author, February 2018.
[165] Focus Group Online (Chinese adoptees) in focus group with the author, February 2018.

I think it's threatening when there is someone in the room who seems very good at what

they do, if there is a club for music and the president is really good at music, it would

intimidate me to come and sing if I wanted to start exploring this and my voice wasn't

that good.[166]

The same goes for constructing a comfortable space for group members to explore adoption to

varying degrees. The threat in a creative space becomes that of prestige. Faith brings attention to

cultural workers in leadership positions who come to reconcile power, influence, and authority in

the moment of a group dynamic. Additionally, facilitation style greatly influences how the group

promotes belonging. When I asked about the impact of Adoption Web on participant perception

of adoption Erin explains,

For me it opened a safe-space, really for the first time, where I could really talk and think

that part of my identity that I really didn't connect with deeply at all before coming to

college… But I think there's a little struggle… between Asian adoptees being in there

with adoptees from other countries, and domestic… but also people who were just

interested in adoption…. I think that made it kind of a strange space. Also, I kind of wish

there had been more people. But I don't know how to get that, but I think if it had felt

more cohesive, that would have made it more sustainable.[167]

Chinese adoptees who attended Adoption Web meetings, all noticed how the meeting space was

diverse to a fault. A cohesive sense of belonging was unable to be achieved. In the case of

Adoption Web, the diversity of lived experience in the group made the space feel "strange" and

therefore, less cohesive. For adoptees, location of adoption and the age of adoptees matters

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[166] Focus Group Online (Chinese adoptees) in focus group with the author, February 2018.
[167] Focus Group 2 (Chinese adoptees) in focus group with the author, February 2018.

greatly to foster a sense of shared experience and then be able to get at a deeper level of interaction. Without this basic level of personal history aligned between group members, the space was not able to grant the necessary privacy and freedom for deeper engagement. In this sense, Adoption Web was counterintuitive to the original intention. On the other hand, Adoption Web was able to offer a supportive space for those who aligned with the dominant image (being a Chinese adoptees of white parents). Rachel offers insight into this archetype to offer,

> I found myself not going… on the outside I saw it as a bunch of girls adopted by white families and I don't identify with that, so I felt kind of out of place… I have another friend on campus, she's black adopted by a black family. We talked about how the face of it, because it's the most common for Chinese girls to be adopted because of history… I was like "uhm I don't know if I want to be part of that, I don't really connect with those people."[168]

Rachel's point further supports the need for opportunities to lift the diversity in Chinese adoptee narrative. Deviant experiences from the dominant story become overshadowed which cause excluding effects of how one chooses to identify and belong. Yet, it is important to recognize the variance in experience to avoid the danger of a single story.

Personal transformation occurred for some participants, in part by listening to different points of view. However, there does exist a disconnect between intellectual logic and cognitive recognition. Ashley expresses this disconnect to say, "I rationally acknowledge that everybody's experience is different but at the same time, since I don't think about it as often I assume everybody growing up was very similar to me. So, it was cool to hear different perspectives."[169]

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[168] Focus Group 1 (Chinese adoptees) in focus group with the author, February 2018.
[169] Ashley (Chinese adoptee) in discussion with the author, March 2018.

This variance attests to the value in differences. Participants left the focus groups with more things to think about. Natalie took away,

> We are in this forum because we are all adopted so you sort of feel like you should have a connection, but some things that were said I did not feel connected. It was a weird identity power shift but not in a bad way, just "oh not everyone thinks the same way I do" just because we are adopted.[170]

By coming together and discussing these differences, we begin to reinforce our own opinions when we hear others. We build our capacities to take discoveries back to our local communities (i.e. adoptive family, work place, etc.) and begin to reconcile differences within the self and between others. At the same time, we are exposed to real accounts of experience and are inclined to think about our relation to others. But our exposure to the beauty in difference is only actualized through the dialogic process. Likewise, a further mixing of adoptee voices is important to sustainability in the fact that this diversity reinforces our resilience to change. The cross-pollination of ideas leads to a stronger variety of pieces one can then choose from in future iterations of identity exploration. In reflection on how the focus group is different from that of Adoption Web Ashley shares,

> I think I belong with you and in our focus group, but I wouldn't say that we are a community, but we have the potential to be a community… I guess you can be part of a community like a neighborhood, but you don't belong in the community.[171]

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[170] Natalie (Chinese adoptee) in discussion with the author, March 2018.
[171] Ashley (Chinese adoptee) in discussion with the author, March 2018.

Ashely highlights a split between cognitive belonging and physical community. This further suggests the notion that Chinese adoptees in the United States attribute belonging to that of a cognitive community, existent by interconnected consciousness. Ashley also recognizes how our focus group held the potential to become a community, but lacked Cantwell's first cultural right, continuity to practice. Thus, a physical community was unable to be recognized. Even though these conversations felt in a vacuum to create enough breathing room to explore adoption identity more deeply, the next step is to take these understandings back to local communities and begin to change dominant perceptions. Before coming to the focus group Ashely expressed, "I was nervous I would be less advanced in my thinking and I do think I was, but I don't think I was far behind or it was a debilitating quality."[172] However, after participating in Adoption Web and the focus group, Ashley reported being more willing and confident in talking about adoption to others and her family,

> if another adopted person came up to me and wanted to talk about it, I would be more willing to go get coffee and talk about it… I've never asked [my sister] about [adoption]. The only time was when my mom was in the room and we had a conversation about it. So, thinking back, I kind of wish I started a conversation about it [with my family] … Now maybe I will."[173]

It is amazing to witness the transformative power of group narrative on personal confidence and social empowerment. In a micro and meaningful way, Chinese adoptees become cultural bridges when they share insights from focus group dialogue back to their local family members or local peers. In this way, they become agents of social change.

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[172] Ashley (Chinese adoptee) in discussion with the author, March 2018.
[173] Ibid.

Turning to consider vertical identity, *what is the role of birth parents in the construction of Chinese adoption identity?* Often times, thoughts of birth mothers overshadow those of birth fathers in part by family structure, or traditional American gender roles of female nurturance and logical understandings of natural birth. The mother had to be present whereas the father could have been elsewhere. In this vein of logic, Faith sees "the American story is very different from the Chinese story. Typical American story, teen pregnancy, teen mom. Couple doesn't want to get married and father leaves… I don't know if that's true in China."[174] In this unknowingness, there exists a disconnect between logic and actualization. Sarah reflects on how the birth mother concept transformed for her,

> Over time, when I was younger than ten, my relationship with birth mother was only with my birth mother no other birth relatives. It was sadness. As I grew up [the sadness] was still kind of there but somehow transformed into this light-hearted thing. I would joke about it with myself and with my mom. Light-heartedly play it off and I think through that, it transformed into this friendlier thing. My relationship with [birth mother] is not so much about sadness but on equal footing… It wasn't about sadness anymore, it was just a thing that's there and I'm not sad or angry about it, it's just a part of me now.[175]

Sarah's narrative highlights the process adoptees sometimes go through in reconciling past upsets with current consciousness. Adoptees may progress through periods of rationalizing, recognizing, accepting, and integrating birth parents into the psyche at different rates and to different degrees along the way. This does not imply there is one superior way over the other, nor does it seek to outline any steps to self-actualization. It does however point the integration of

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[174] Focus Group Online (Chinese adoptees) in focus group with the author, February 2018.
[175] Ibid.

unsettling thoughts as able to give way to self-confidence and a certain cognitive peace. Sarah also alludes to a deeper sense of acceptance. Through the acceptance of others, we learn to accept ourselves, and we transform that for ourselves when we joke about it. In this way, joking becomes a strategy in reconciliation. This use of humor emulates how Rachel deploys adoption jokes when she says,

> I make a lot of adoption jokes which are really messed up sometimes, but I think are kind of funny… All my friends are into reading their star charts and I'm like, "you can't read mine because I don't know my real birthday" and they're like "oh." I'm like "no I'm making a joke out of it because I can." If someone else says it, I'm like that's messed up. But I think I can make that joke because it's about me.[176]

Joking and humor is used to relieve emotional tension. Humor also appeared in focus groups when Jade chuckles, "people say I'm a white girl in a Chinese body"[177] or when Ashley brought up the children's movie, *Big Bird in China*[178] to which the rest of the group laughed in its recognition. I had not previously considered the role of humor in adoption narrative, however I found that humor can be a contributing factor to wider cultural reconciliation. Academic research on this connection is sparse, but Dorothy Roome in her article "Humor as 'Cultural Reconciliation' in South African Situation Comedy: Suburban Bliss and Mutlicultural Female Viewers" recognizes, "humor is ambivalent, and its meaning changes according to the circumstances of its utterances; if the ideology underlying the content is then conceived as the

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[176] Focus Group 1 (Chinese adoptees) In focus group with the author, February 2018.
[177] Ibid.
[178] *Big Bird in China*, directed by Jon Stone (New York: Sony Pictures, 1995), VHS.

site of struggle."[179] Thus, humor is closely associated with an inner struggle as Chinese adoptees seek to reconcile an unknown past with the present understandings of self.

However, conversations about birth family are largely absent between adoptive parents and adoptees. For Ashley, "[adoption is] such a weird topic for me, I try not to talk about it with my mom because I know she has a lot of emotional feelings about it just because it was a big moment I came into her life."[180] Similar thoughts are echoed by other Chinese adoptees. Rachel explains her attitude towards birth search,

> Because I talk to my family about this a lot, not my parents, but my godparents, do you ever want to go back to China, do you want to find your real parents, and I'm like not really. I think for me, I've found a good community from home and I feel strong in that. I'm wondering in that. But I would like to see the two people who had sex to make me. I think that would be one thing to see what two people pro-created. What they look like.[181]

In a subtle way, adoptees avoid exploring birth search with adoptive parents more out of emotional consideration for adoptive parents than an inability to address the topic. Rachel suggests that seeking physical looks is a key motivator to search for biological relatives. There is a sense of lost physical history by not knowing what one's biological parents look like that poses the most interest to search.

With the loss of birth parents unknown, there is a loss of birth culture manifested in the melancholic transnational adoptee a certain trauma is thus inflicted and imposed which is not always as apparent against the wider grateful narrative of adoption. When asked if adoption is

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[179] Dorothy Roome, "Humor as 'Cultural Reconciliation' in South African Situation Comedy: Suburban Bliss and Multicultural Female Viewers," *Journal of Film and Video* 51, no. 3 (1999), 62.
[180] Focus Group 2 (Chinese adoptees) in focus group with the author, February 2018.
[181] Focus Group 1 (Chinese adoptees) in focus group with the author, February 2018.

traumatic, Sarah thinks, "I believe there is some degree of trauma because there is a lot of things

to question"[182] which prompted Faith to reflect,

> I think that's a very interesting definition of trauma that something that opens up more
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> questions. When I was thinking of trauma I was thinking of the image of bringing the
>
> baby from one place to another and that itself is the trauma. You described it as
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> something that makes more questions.[183]

To look at trauma as opening more questions is intriguing. It calls for a drastic change to how we

approach trauma (physical or physiological) from forgiving, mourning, or "getting over"

something to striving to integrate, heal, and reconcile. Questions of change and adaptation do

lead to new considerations in sustainability. This requires people to build capacities whether in

the self or in the social unity, to hold the discovery of new information that may challenge

previous assumptions. As follows, skills in documentation, facilitation, research, community

organizing, project management, and vulnerable observation are some of the ways cultural

sustainability practice, when applied to the Chinese adoptee experience, can be utilized to create

more opportunities for continuity, contiguity, and breathing room. Faith also recognizes a need

for a supportive environment to facilitate effects of adoption trauma to say,

> I think a lot of the trauma is based on how your parents raised you. As long as there is
>
> love and compassion in that environment, that can help. If you were to use adoption and
>
> trauma in the same sentence, I think trauma as the Emergency Room. As long as you can
>
> get the help afterwards it doesn't have to be a debilitating thing.[184]

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[182] Focus Group Online (Chinese adoptees) in focus group with the author, February 2018.
[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid.

The adoptive family culture controls how adoptees come to deal with adoption "trauma" during adolescence but then gets complicated during emerging adulthood where these environments are sought beyond the adoptive family unit. To this point, Sarah explains how adoptive parents construct "detours of being adopted" to say,

> I can think of a detour of being adopted… If we are talking about international adoption and interracial. In terms of integrating the culture into the child's life, if parents didn't decide to do that, and then the child never thought that was an option, then maybe not important to [the adoptee]. Depends a lot on different things because as a kid growing up, if it's an open conversation you're going to be more curious about diving more into the culture maybe. But if there wasn't a conversation there at all, maybe you never thought it was an option until you were exposed to it later on… I think there's a lot of detours.

Sarah calls into question how the culture of the adoptive family unit constructs certain outcomes of adoption identity. The opportunity to connect to an authentic sense of adoption identity is filtered through the family group in adolescence. Once Chinese adoptees move into emerging adulthood, living separate from parents but still relying on family resources as a primary source of support, there becomes another layer of cognitive dissonance. Questioning of past experiences emerge once Chinese adoptees begin to mix their previous worldview with a current worldview. *So how what can Chinese adoptees who are interested, do to help change perceptions of adoption in their local communities?*

Set of Recommendations

Both sets of recommendations are not exhaustive but meant to enhance current practice to instigate future discussion on how to best work with and within our communities. The first set is intended for members of the Chinese adoptee community who seek to change social perceptions

of adoption in their local communities and build collective agency. I respect and recognize not all Chinese adoptees are interested in pursuing this vision, and not everyone has to. I organize these recommendations into four strategies of action; learn, expand, reflect, and lead. The momentum and promise of social change inspires all four strategies.

Learn. Learning about our history as Chinese adoptees both in China and in the United States connects us to each other. When we learn about different things, there are more possibilities to make connections between what we know and what we wonder. I believe we are constantly learning and being open to this consistency, feeds curiosity. Also, document your knowledge. This assists in the reconciliation process. When we commit to remembering where we came from, who we are, and where we can go, we commit to sustaining hope through the labor of reconciliation. As Chinese adoptees, learning about adoption in China and contextual issues in the United States is the first step towards creating social change.

Reflect. Reflection is a time to locate our reactions. There is an assumption that reflection takes place long after an event or exposure to new information. When we locate our reactions as visceral and/or intellectual, we bring reflection closer to the present. Thus, we must recognize any concurrent reflection can lead to new insights. In reflection, we sometimes realize ignorance is bliss. When I first learned about infanticide in China, I had to stop researching for a few days. Reflection on our reactions brings us closer to the inner self which also strengthens individual resilience capacity we need to take-in sometimes disturbing knowledge. By thinking about reflection not confined to a certain time or situation, it helps us be more present for each other and heal towards social change.

Expand. "The more I learn, the more I realize how much I don't know." Albert Einstein understood the pursuit of knowledge leads to more unknowns. When we listen to the stories of

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other Chinese adoptees, we in turn expand our worldview. By being able to hold ambiguity in ourselves, offers more opportunities to connect with others. I recognize advocating for adoption as an adoptee causes public and private spheres to overlap. The ongoing process of choosing which parts of my adoption story to share with the public, with close friends and family, and to keep to myself, grounds me in myself. It also strengthens my capacity to hold the stories of others. Fill you cup before filling others. In this way, expanding our individual capacities as Chinese adoptees develops the overall resilience of Chinese adoptees to become agents of social change.

Lead. One of my professors asked the question, can you have leadership without a designated leader? This question clicked for me. Yes, leadership can exist without a designated leader. It happens quite often and being able to recognize leadership in micro-moments deepens our abilities to support one another in adoption healing and reconciliation. I believe everyone is a leader and everyone yields a unique set of skills. Identifying your skill set and then partnering with other adoptees in sustainability-oriented projects, builds collective agency. Mentoring younger adoptees, organizing an adoptee community outreach program, and/or participating in adoptee gatherings also contribute to building adoptee presence at a local level. Furthermore, very presence of organized groups of adoptees in the public spaces work to change public perceptions of adoption.

This second set of recommendations are meant to assist facilitators in leading a cultural community groups within their communities. For the purposes to clearly convey the second set, I organize my recommendations into three strategies of action; preparation, fruition, and reflection. However, some recommendations may prove flexible across categories. I encourage

the cultural worker to determine how these recommendations might best serve a given situation and community needs.

Preparation. "Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe." What Abraham Lincoln alludes to is the importance of preparation towards effective execution. I recommend five elements to consider when approaching to facilitate a dialogic gathering for social change. (1) Developing an agile project management plan at the onset ensures there will be assessment and progress tracking. An established plan also gives structure to the project while agile management allows for flexibility and adjustment along the way. (2) Careful consideration of what type of dialogic space is being created must match desired outcomes. If planning a series of group meetings, who is being invited? What partnerships are being forged? (3) If in a position of authority, having a clear message, story, and intention sets the tone for group dynamics. Taking the time to prepare one's story or presentation frees up headspace to be present in the moment instead of having to think on the spot.[185] (4) Documentation and research on a group in focus is useful to identify language and context relevant to how the group is coming together. (5) Keep check of one's positionality, access, power, privilege, and authority relative to the group. By checking these qualities, it may also highlight what one, as a cultural worker, can offer in bridging community resources.

Fruition. After preparations are underway, seeing an idea come to fruition requires active considerations in the moment of execution. Most take time and practice to refine. I recommend six considerations for the cultural worker to remember when in the moment of facilitating a focused community gathering. (1) Extend preparation of positionality and language into fruition.

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[185] See Appendix B.

Awareness in power dynamics within the context of the group and utilizing relevant language is important to establishing credibility and relation amongst the group. (2) Establishing a code of conduct relative to the needs of the group is part preparation, but part in the moment. Expectations, intentions, and goals can be set, and everyone's nonnegotiable qualities must be taken into consideration to decentralize any power and authority in collective action. (3) As one listens, one becomes an engaged interlocutor. Active listening skills, validating experiences and "reading the room" as needed all serve to strengthen community ties. (4) If discussing contested topics, checking one's reactions helps to not distract from group productivity. Knowing the difference between visceral reactions and intellectual reactions could mean the difference between meeting a deadline or forfeiting grant money. Checking reactions are important to being able to hold the space for group members to engage in the dialogic process more openly. (5) This goes to say, balancing organic conversation with guided structure is important to obtaining desired outcomes. One cannot control other's reactions, outcomes established in the beginning can be referenced to keep the group on track. However, there is value in allowing for organic conversation to get at the creative nature of dialogic converse. (6) Handle documentation of cultural property with care. If consent forms are involved, have group members sign them after the conversation in order to put ownership of the recording content in their hands. This frees up more freedom to speak without apprehension of having to automatically release the recording.

Reflection. Reflection is closely aligned with assessment and refinement of practice. I recommend four reflection points to keep in mind when observing cultural practice. (1) Revisit desired outcomes. What has been achieved? What needs more attention? What phase of the agile project plan have been achieved? (2) Ask questions of oneself and of the space. When in reflection, it forces us to take pause and reassess and reset to look ahead to the next phase or task

of the project plan. What are the positives? What are the gaps forming? What can be changed for next time? Which parts resonated with you which did not? What has this evoked in you? How has this made you think about experiences more deeply? Here, assessment plays a critical role in reorienting future iterations. (3) Strive to be truthful in observations. What are you noticing in yourself? What are you observing in other? Why might you be noticing these things? Truth is determined relative to the space and acknowledging subjectivity leads to stronger self-awareness to integrate in preparation for future iterations. (4) Look for learning opportunities. Learning is an ongoing process and lifelong at that. Learning from reflection helps to curate a set of skills for future iterations.

Part Change: Reflection

"When we love a person, we accept him or her exactly as is: the lovely with the unlovely, the strong along with the fearful, the true mixed in with the façade, and of course, the only way we can do it is by accepting ourselves that way." —Fred Rogers[186]

Fred Rogers' comments on love can go the same for my passion and purpose in understanding adoption. It takes love to pursue my purpose as an adoptee. I labor to accept the work as is; the good, the bad, the difficult, the inspirational, and of course, the only way to accept the work is to accept myself that way.

Throughout the production of this capstone and the Cultural Sustainability program, I have integrated teachings, wisdom, understandings, and way of looking at the world so deeply that to think about where this knowledge comes from, makes me feel like I know nothing. Back to ambivalence, to know all is to know none. This complexity is what makes life beautiful. I found beauty when I questioned the land that I was adopted to. I found beauty in seeking sameness to relieve irksome disconnection. I found beauty in learning about the intricacies of cultural sustainability practice and the hope it holds for a thrivable future. Ultimately, all this beauty was made possible by the love, resilience, and commune of others. It has taken me a long time to readjust and change the core ways I view the world. However, the integration of new knowledge with core beliefs opens new possibilities to refine cultural work with and within our communities.

My 1st grade teacher, Ms. Fella, granted each student a "start day" to celebrate his or her uniqueness. For this, we wrote a 15-page book, which Ms. Fella had bounded in hard copy. My

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[186] Fred Rogers, *Wisdom from The World According to Mister Rogers: Important Things to Remember* (New York: Peter Pauper Press, Inc., 2003), 52.

six going on seven-year-old self wrote for the prompt I wish… "I could fly to China to see where I was born, to ride my bisckul and to see my orfanig. I will fly all over the world!"[187] I dusted off this book for a book collecting prize competition in 2015,[188] and in reading it, broke my own heart. Rediscovering this book made me think about adoption loss and betrayal has been latent within me since probably before I came to the United States. Sometimes I liken it to the chickenpox virus. Once one has the chickenpox as a child, the virus lays dormant and could inflame as shingles once an adult.[189] Time of stress which suppress the immune system increases the change for this "inflammation." Adoption thoughts work in similar ways, to lay dormant and often comes up in times of stress. However, throughout this capstone I hope to have provided clarity and insight into understanding these complex webs that reverberate throughout adoptee experience. It does not have to hurt like shingles, nor is being adopted even a virus. It is just a state of being I choose to live into every day.

I noticed through reflection, rediscovering this childhood book lined up with beginning the Cultural Sustainability program in 2015. Amy asked in the introduction class to Cultural Sustainability, "Who are you being in the world?" which still haunts me. We had to respond to this question on the first day in a two-minute presentation. I remember sitting in at my summer job before the semester, contemplating this question. I thought I had it all figured out. I was going to talk about my adoption, what activities I did, what I like to do. Had I known that first, four-hour class was the beginning of teaching myself to unteach what I had learned, to then unlearn it, I would have sought commune much earlier. I am so much more than *me*; it is about

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[187] Laura X. Williams, *All about Me* (Topeka, KS: Studenttreasures Publishing Co., 2002), 15.
[188] Laura X. Williams, "Collecting the Adoption Story, One Page at a Time," last modified 2015, https://mdsoar.org/handle/11603/2292.
[189] "Protecting Yourself from Shingles," accessed April 30, 2018, https://medlineplus.gov/magazine/issues/winter10/articles/winter10pg16-17.html.

us and *we* and meaning something in each other's lives. Sitting now, at the end of this academic journey, I can say my capacities have been expanded and I have built a sturdy foundation of knowledge for social change with a lifetime warranty and room to grow. Out of my process, I developed two self-reflection tools which grounded my sense of self. I hope these tools may help other adoptees interested in working in adoption deepen self-awareness and introspection (The Me-irror Chart and What are I when I am not?)[190] Being able to articulate why, who, and what I am as I dabble in reconciliation and multiculturalism, allows me to be more thoughtful and carful when working with communities. I have found this personal insight to be foundational to my cultural sustainability work.

When I was interviewed by a peer (who is also a Chinese adoptee researching adoption) with my own interview guide, we different avenues I had not previously considered. The process became more of a story share than interview between us. We just talked together about our lives and that was cathartic. It reminded me of the transformative nature of storytelling, interviewing, and focus groups. When a group of adoptees who want to think about adoption more deeply and agree to the same language when addressing adoption, the creative possibilities are endless. I strongly felt this creativity energy when speaking with Joy during my capstone process. We speak the same language but think about adoption in completely similar but different ways. It is like a breath of fresh air. With the emergence of online forums and social media I sometimes communicate with adoptees over the internet to just process a thought. This makes me wonder, *to what extent may I utilize these insightful conversations for research?* Research ethics are constantly being written and rewritten. Sometimes I wonder what cultural sustainability research

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[190] See Appendix C.

really *is* if it is everything and nothing at the same time. I might be something like being an adoptee.

Listening back to focus group recordings, I flattened some narratives by projecting my story on the group. I asked a question about having white parents which excluded the possibility for non-white Chinese adoptive parents and families. If I could re-do the focus groups, I would have used the language of "parent ethnicity" to hold all possibilities of adoptive parent qualities. Reflecting on this situation, I saw my projection of white power at play in this focus group I was leading. I assumed a situation and spoke with entitlement in my position at the time. If I could have done this whole capstone process over again, I would have tried to integrate this sensitivity more deeply and pursue a collaborative ethnographic research method. I feel this capstone has given rise to such deep transformation in myself and in some participants, it surpasses any regret in methodology. However, I see this capstone is just the beginning of that ongoing, iterative dialogue in how to best work with and within one's own cultural community.

In thinking about what or who I am being, I learned to let myself *feel* more freely. This is what cultural sustainability work means to me, finding your most problematic ways of our constructed existence, and constantly working towards the reconciliation of inner differences with outside world towards a wider peace. The more I delve into cultural work, the more I recognize that in emotional honesty, there exists human honesty, and to deny that for myself is to deny parts of me I have grown to want to reconcile. I see approaching work with communities raises an inner battle cry to reconcile who we are in a moment in relation to who we want to be along the way. This battle connects me.

I sometimes volunteer at the small museum where my mom works which means I encounter other volunteers, most of whom are retired. I identify myself as my mother's daughter,

they ask about my work, and then I proceed to tell them about adoption. But when my work is my life and my life is my work, I sometimes find myself not wanting to talk about my adoption at that moment. I still do out of politeness, but this feels exposing at times. No one imposes on what I share, but there is an internal conversation with myself in the moment of an external one. Ruth Behar recognizes empathetic ethnography is not for the soft hearted. It requires intense emotional and intellectual consideration. Yet in that vulnerability, people respond vulnerably.[191] When I do speak vulnerably about my adoption experience, other volunteers may respond about their divorce, or late husband, or estranged niece. I realize, owning our own cultural experiences makes us better cultural workers. When I considered diving deep into adoption study, I would have warned myself that when you talk about your work in the professional world, be prepared to expose some of my personal world. I would also have briefed myself on how to tell my story in those situations, so I would not be caught off-guard and therefore, not feel fatigued because of it. Practice your story, Laura. Practice being you.

If I worry why my pinky fingers are short, or my legs are longer than my torso, or why I sometimes sit crookedly, I remember my cousin Bruce saying, "with things like that, I acknowledge it but decide to not give it too much power." It made me realize I have full agency over how I integrate meaning in the world. To honestly say I am using perceptive clues in my body to fill gaps of an unknown past, allows me to take control of an imagined past and simultaneously, take control of my present and future. Bessel Van Der Kolk argues that many sensational environmental factors imprint on our bodies during the first 18 months of

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[191] Ruth Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 16.

childhood.[192] His theory of sensation and effects of trauma on the body makes me wonder if sensational reactions in my body are remnants of a not so distant past that is largely unknown. *Are these remnants something worth my attention and an integration into how I understand myself in this world?* I do not have an answer right now, but I trust I will.

I was offered the pleasure to speak on a panel about transracial adoption in the middle of writing my capstone. It was the first time I spoke of my adoption so vulnerably and into a public space in front of adoption professionals, prospective parents, and adoptive parents. Adoptive parents at the conference also praised the panelists as "brave" and "strong" for sharing our adoption stories. It makes me think how comments like this discredit stances of adoptees who would rather not talk about it. This undermines individual agency to choose how we talk about and to think about it in ways we want. Thinking through this has made me see how everyone is just as brave and strong to live into each day as themselves. At the end of the panel, I felt like I overshared at times, but also felt like I was true to myself. It reminds me of seeing one of my professors from class, speak at a professional conference. He was the same way in front of his peers as he was in the context of the classroom or out to lunch. I appreciate that.

Yet, humans are fallible and sometimes just being ourselves creates more damage than advantage. When I was in the production of conceiving and trying to sustain Adoption Web, I was blinded to the wider impacts of my actions on others. Not all adoptees care to be reminded of adoption and I regret overstepping boundaries at times. Some Chinese adoptees from 2017 interviews did not want to participate in 2018 focus groups. It hurt at first in the sense my passion was discredited in the rejection, but I reminded myself everyone is entitled to individual

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[192] Bessel Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014).

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choice and respecting this agency is a way to respect humanity. As a cultural worker, I constantly walk a tightrope between being too close to my work and being too distant from it.

When I am in times of deep adoption thoughts, I turn to Pearl S. Buck's writings. When I served as a Holt Camp counselor I was still playing with the idea to go into adoption work. That summer, I took a beaten-up copy of *The Good Earth*[193] along for the ride. I fell in love with Pearl S. Buck's storytelling. She not only established Welcome House (first adoption agency from China)[194] but also writes her historically fictive worlds so robustly, I can see myself in them and it comforts me. Buck's rendition of "the Chinese commoner" perspective pulls me into a felt world of characters who I empathize and grow with throughout the entire *The Good Earth Trilogy.* I revisited the second book, *A House Divided,*[195] when I was abroad and working on an adoption research paper without a felt support group and I read the third book, *Sons,*[196] throughout the difficult parts of this capstone. A quote from her crypto-autobiography, *The Eternal Wonder,* resonates with my passions for future cultural sustainability work,

> *"Perhaps one day I shall look back on this entire life as but a page out of the whole of my existence, and if I do I am sure it will be with the same thirst to know more—the certain knowledge that there are truths, the reasons for which we cannot know…. Perhaps that is the whole point of it all—the eternal wonder."*[197]

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[193] Pearl S. Buck, *The Good Earth* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2004).
[194] "What We Do, Mission, Vision and Beliefs," Pearl S. Buck International, accessed April 30, 2018, https://www.pearlsbuck.org/welcome-house-search-information/.
[195] Pearl S. Buck, *A House Divided* (New York: Open Road Media, 2012).
[196] Pearl S. Buck, *Sons* (New York: Open Road Media, 2012).
[197] Pearl S. Buck, *The Eternal Wonder* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, Inc., 2013): 288.

I stole a book off the shelf of my high school history teacher's bookcase. It is Shel

Silverstein's work, *The Missing Piece Meets the Big*-O.[198] At first it sounds like a confusing

story of odd friendships, or trying new things, or how to act when meeting someone famous

maybe? But it resonated with me so much I asked my English teacher if I could keep it and have

it sitting on my shelf to this day. It is a children's story about a literal "triangle" that is a

"missing piece" to an incomplete "circle" (think piece of pie missing from a whole pie). Once

the missing piece tries to fit in the space of other circles, and learns it cannot find the right fit, it

meets the Big-O. The Big-O does not have a space to try and fit the triangle piece, but the Big-O

shows how the piece can turn itself over, and over, and over… and the piece begins to wear

down the pointed edges of a triangle. Eventually, the piece is able to roll all by itself. The ending

line drawing is two circles rolling happily together. When pieces only seek holes to fill, true

agency cannot be realized. If world peace-building is towards a consistent totality of a similar

sense of peace, there is a confusion in intention. What peace may look like for one community in

one context may not be the same *type* of peace in another. *When there is never fully a similar*

whole to aspire to, does that render pieces meaningless? And insofar to seek a standardized

peaceful practice, we learn of more styles, types, and iterations unique to a specific context.

Which is exactly where the work of the public sector, cultural worker comes in. It is in the

curation of those pieces, that lead us to ultimate peace for ourselves, peace for others, and since

we are part of a whole existence, we co-create our cultural worlds.

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[198] Shel Silverstein, *The Missing Piece Meets the Big O* (New York: Harper & Row, 2006).

Conclusion

Often the beginning, will be like the end. I sit here, writing this capstone up until this point from the same state of wonder from when I began. By now I have shown that through curiosity, practice, discovery, and change it may take us on a bountiful journey and offer us many opportunities to explore our core selves. I have articulated the challenges Chinese adoptees face in navigating their adoption identity and reconciling differences in themselves and others. I have demonstrated how historical, political, social, and cultural factors influence our daily decisions and ways of being. I have explained how adoptees, in their very existence, challenge common perceptions in the daily lives of who surround them. They speak into spaces that are dominated by non-adopted people and fill thus, speak themselves into existence.

There exists a bulge of Chinese adoptees coming of age in the United States. This group is unique in characteristic of time, place, and culture. Their groupness is categorized by a sense of ambivalence. This in turn calls for a decentralized concept of self when belonging to multiple groups. New ethical considerations emerge when we seek to create dialogic opportunities in these mixed spaces. My work with Chinese adoptees is far from finished and I do not write this conclusion to neatly package to my whole purpose in life. Looking under the hood of adoption merits scholarly and community attention as a unique perspective in understanding how we create identities and belonging in a mobilized world. Future research may be inclined to investigate how adoptees express intimacy, opinions on child rearing, birth country travel, experience of adoptees in institutional adoption work, perceptions of friends and allies of adoptees, racialization process of adoptees across multiple types of adoption (open/closed, transnational/domestic, monoracial/transracial), and how adoptive parents and birth parents react to all of this. As Gloria Anzaldúa knows:

"The future will belong to the mestiza. *Because the future depends on the breaking down*

of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures. By creating a new mythos—

that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we

*behave—*la mestiza *creates a new consciousness."*[199]

So, everyone has a culture, we just would never see it in ourselves if we didn't see it in each other. I encourage each cultural worker, and conscious being, dedicated to creating change in his or her or their community, to reflect on what makes us unique and embrace that difference with the confidence. We all contribute a piece to a wider peace-ing together of a creative whole. Consequently, the distance between two adoptees is not automatically longer or shorter than it can be between parents, institutional workers, or allies. It is up to us to negotiate those lengths with those who surround us.

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[199] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007), 102.

Notes

1. "Capitalize Adoptee." Steve Kalb from Holt International's Post Adoption Services department understands transnational adoptees as a unique ethnic group in the United States. He says it is a "guiding principle I use at Holt and insist all Holt publications use an uppercase "A." I consider InterCountry Adoptees (ICA) an ethnic group, therefore, grammatically it needs to be capitalized as a proper noun."[200]

2. "Too Many Men." An April 2018 Washington Post article reports, out of China's population of 1.4 billion, there are nearly 34 million more males than females. The article highlights four main areas of complication of this gender imbalance in both China and India; village life and mental health, housing prices and savings rates, human trafficking, and public safety. All topic areas warrant future investigation to the impacts of such a gender imbalance.[201]

3. "LGBT Chinese exclusion." It is against Chinese law for same-sex couples to adoption in China because the government does not legally recognize same-sex marriage. Thus, China did not, and still does not allow gay people to adopt transnationally from China.[202]

4. "Adoptive Parent Stereotypes." Adoptive parents of Chinese children in the United States also deal with stereotypes of being middle-class, assumed infertile, and educated. It is important to remember the danger of having a single story and recognize the agency in individual choice.

5. "Families with Children from China." FCC just celebrated their 25 anniversary and recently instigated a governing adult adoptee board. Chinese adoptee, Lili Johnson researched how

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[200] Steve Kalb, e-mail message to author, April 27, 2018.
[201] Denyer Simon and Gowen Annie, "Too Many Men," The Washington Post, accessed April 30, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/world/too-many-men/?utm_term=.e6ed1765ac2.
[202] "Can Homosexuals Adopt Children from China?" China.org, accessed April 30, 2018, http://www.china.org.cn/english/LivinginChina/184088.htm.

the racialization of Chinese adoptees is reflected in how adoptive parents represent their adopted children in FCC newsletters over time. When adoptive families work to foster a cultural connectedness to China in the United States, authenticity and appropriation of traditional Chinese culture in the West are called into question by how "traditional Chinese culture" is represented to adoptees, by whom, and under what circumstances. In the case of FCC (adoptive parents founded and managed), the adoptive family becomes the basic social unit for processing the intake of traditional Chinese culture (whether in the United States or on a homeland tour). There is a lack of transparency in acknowledging the multiple degrees of separation between contextualized Chinese culture and interpretations of that culture in the United States.

6. "Gotchya Day." The definition of "Adoption Day" or "Gotchya Day" for Chinese adoptees could mean two separate occasions. On one hand it could mean the day parents meet child. On the other, it could mean the day the family arrived back in the United States. In the past, both events usually happened on the same day (i.e. child is brought to the parents and meet in the United States airport). It is up to the family to determine which definition fits. Korean adult adoptee, Eun Mi Young points out, "While endearing to adoptive parents, "Gotchya' is downright disrespectful to adoptees… What does this term imply? We use it when we grab someone who is running from us, or when we save someone from something, or when we're playing a game. We shouldn't use it for an event that recalls the loss of culture, country, and birthparents."[203] It is important to remember whose language is being used and how it shapes understandings.

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[203] Linda J. Seligman, *Broken Links, Enduring Ties: American Adoption Across Race, Class, and Nation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 249.

7. "2017 Demographic Insight." I was looking for continuity in adoption experience where there was none and that is precisely why I argue for more focused adoptee support groups, segregated by adoption experience, but with goals for integrating segregations into a wider conversation.

8. "Younger Self." This question went through multiple iterations from when I first asked it. I wanted to get at the period when tough adoption thoughts. I first assumed it was during teenage years, but Jade thought about the question and said it was more during ages 9 and 10, in middle school, when self-consciousness was first becoming known. If I could ask it over, I would ask, "What would you tell your younger self with regard to being a Chinese adoptee?"

9. "Reflection Point." The idea for one of my Chinese adoptee colleagues to interview me with my own interview protocol was a decision made in consult with my Capstone Committee. The main purpose for this was to be able to include my responses with others whom I interviewed in 2017. It was a cathartic experience to be able to simultaneous participate in my own research while pseudo-conducting it.

10. "College groups." Examples of adoption college groups known to me are Adoptee & Foster Student Association at Virginia Commonwealth University, Holt International college dinners at University of Oregon, Transracial/Transnational Adoptee Identity Collective at Macalester College, and Adoption Web of Goucher College. There are numerous public and private Facebook groups for Chinese adoptees. Recently, China Children International (CCI) has proposed for members in college to instigate a club under the CCI name.[204]

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[204] "College Connections," China Children International, accessed April 30, 2018, http://chinaschildreninternational.org/college-connections/.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Documentation Materials

2017 Interview Guide

Preliminary information:

- Where were you born? And how old were you when adopted?

- What is the structure and demographics of your adoptive family?

- Can you recall any culturally centered resources available where you grew up?

Childhood information:

- In what ways have you interacted with your birth culture growing-up here in America? (this could include holidays, festivals, food, music, language, dance, literature)

    o How often would you interact with your birth culture?

- Would you be able to recall a time you felt tension when interacting with your birth culture? Were you ever caught explaining your adoption?

- If you were given the chance, would you change anything about your relationship with your birth culture growing up?

Current information:

- Now, how do you ethnically identify yourself?

- Have you ever had a "so-adopted" moment?

- When you meet someone for the first time, how willing are you to disclose your adoptee status?

- In what ways have you engaged your birth culture this year?

- What do you think about expanding the understanding of "adoption triad" to include peer relationships and significant others?

- Are you interested in adopting children?

- Is there anything else you wish to share regarding your cultural adoption experience in the United States?

- Is there a quick story or community you wish to offer to further situate the role of birth culture in your life?

The following are select answers to the question "Was there ever a time where you felt 'so adopted,' where you looked around and thought, wow, I feel 'very adopted right now?'" Each paragraph indicates a different interviewee's response.

Maybe when people talk about when they were born. Mom jokes about she had the easiest delivery. Just random things talking about that. It just happens in conversation.[205]

When I want to get out of family reunions, I think, I am not even related to these people, also when people talk about genetics in class. I don't know what I have inherited. Nobody in my family really makes an effort to spend time with me making me feel isolated, my dad's brother is close with grandchildren but never tried to make plans with me. I have always felt that. They got really close to my family friends, but not me.[206]

Two situations. 1) is when I'm with my extended family because my extended family is super white. My sister and I are the only people not white. I had this realization a couple of years ago this is crazy and explains a lot why my sister and I feel uncomfortable and not that excited to go see them. There's a desire to want to see other people in your family who look like you. Recently my cousins are having babies. At the baby shower, they all commenting they look just like you when you were that age or talking about family features alike. That is a normal thing that happens, these are all, natural things that shouldn't be a big deal but are to be because I can't do that. 2) is when I'm with other Asian people who are not adopted, talking about their life. Like, we are from the same place, but we are not from the same world even though we are Asian. But like with family I don't look like you but can relate in other ways. A friend in high school was Chinese but not adopted. They moved here when she was toddler. There's a different culture in her house. She grew up with certain foods, language, but also all American but has more duality. Makes me realize I only have half of it.[207]

I don't really think so. It wasn't really so much wow I'm adopted, but I think if I ever had biological kids that will be first bio related person I would be able to see. That was like wow I

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[205] Theresa (Chinese adoptee) in discussion with the author, March 2017.
[206] Sierra (Chinese adoptee) in discussion with the author, March 2017.
[207] Erin (Chinese adoptee) in discussion with the author, March 2017.

am adopted because I don't know that. It's more like a thought. Never really like a moment I was like I'm really adopted. A lot of my characteristics are from my parents, nurture. [208]

In my immediate family, my mom's cousin was adopted who is older. We just had a family reunion a year ago. They made us all get up as families and introduce ourselves. There was an Indian guy who had kids, some other people of color but not that many. A lot of them were married. That type of stuff is when I realize it. Also, in school if we talk about it. I was happy when I was adopted at the reunion, the history of family and they were slave owners, I was like well I'm not blood related which doesn't pertain to me. In my mind I was adopted because I'm a girl and the one child policy.[209]

Only when I'm in a group of Asians and they are making a pop cultural reference that I don't get, I feel like that can be a sentiment shared by Asians raised in America it's definitely something I feel because I'm adopted. Hardly ever because I'm rarely in a room full of Asians. Probably freshman year when I was trying out clubs and went to [Asian affinity group]. And when I go to Asian markets, I find them a novel and I don't know what any of this is, I don't know what I'm buying but there is an orange on the cover. And a lot of people already know what they like already. And trying to balance, ok, I'm willing to show you how I'm excited, but by doing that it shows you I have not participated in this culture ever.[210]

The following are select answers to the question "When you meet someone for the first time, how willing are you to disclose your adoptee status?"

Depending on the person and how close you are to the person and depending on how blunt they are, they would ask questions "Do you know your birth parents?" Would you ever want to meet your birth parents?" Questions about adoption because people just don't know. Not very often but it depends on who I'm meeting. Some people don't know how to ask because they are curious. I don't take offense, it does not bother me if people have questions about adoption, I just don't have all the answers. I don't have a problem questions and saying I am adopted. It is a part of me.[211]

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[208] Natalie (Chinese adoptee) in discussion with the author, March 2017.
[209] Jade (Chinese adoptee) in discussion with the author, March 2017.
[210] Faith (Chinese adoptee) in discussion with the author, March 2017.
[211] Theresa (Chinese adoptee) in discussion with the author, March 2017.

Pretty willing. If it comes up, asking "where are you from?" I say [U.S., state] and if they keep asking about my family, I tell them I was adopted. Usually people are interested in what it means. I'll answer but I won't share my life story. [212]

If it comes up, or they ask. Part of it is that not everyone assumes I'm adopted, but it has happened. That makes my job easier but is odd you assume that [adopted]. But I don't have a Chinese accent. I don't have a problem telling people.[213]

Pretty open to tell people. I met someone who was a stranger sitting in hotel one weekend. And we have little name tags on and he asked what your name mean. And I quickly told him. He did not take the conversation towards asking about adoption at first, then asked what's it like being adopted. He had a tone you got to prove yourself to me, you must provide insight into something I don't know. I felt pressured to answer his question, but I decided not to answer. I said, "I wouldn't know what it's like not to be adopted." For some weird reason I sometimes still hold on to the fact that people can tell that I'm Asian but not everyone can tell I'm adopted, and sometimes I want people to know that and sometimes I don't. Generally, it's when I want to benefit from being adopted if I want to benefit from being part of this really great support system. But sometimes I don't want to be associated with adoption.[214]

I think it's part of my identity, but I think it has taken until college to make it very much part of my identity. Previously in high school when people would ask, I would almost feel offended that they asked, and I don't know why, but maybe it was their way of asking. So, I always felt like they weren't asking to know the answer but asking "oh that's weird what's wrong with you" kind of thing. That happened more often than I would like to admit, stranger would always ask "what are you?" and you're like I'm Asian or Chinese and they're like "how do have two white parents?" and then I have to connect the dots. It happens a lot.[215]

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[212] Sierra (Chinese adoptee) in discussion with the author, March 2017.
[213] Erin (Chinese adoptee) in discussion with the author, March 2017.
[214] Faith (Chinese adoptee) in discussion with the author, March 2017.
[215] Natalie (Chinese adoptee) in discussion with the author, March 2017.

Focus Group Guide and Questions

I began with explaining the IRB consent form and asked if anyone had any questions. After they signed the consent form, I shared four things to keep in mind.

- We are all experts in our own stories and deserve to hold this space for each other to express our experiences

- We are here to learn from each other and for me learn from you

- I will be looking down to write notes during our conversation

- If you feel uncomfortable at any point, I invite you to voice that and we can determine next steps

Then I asked for attendees to share their name, Chinese name, and why they choose to attend this college. Once we went around the room, I proceeded through the following questions:

- How did parents connect you to Chinese culture growing up and what was that like?

- Do you identify with being a woman of color and why?

- When have you felt most satisfied with adoption or not satisfied?

- Have you ever forgotten you look Chinese?

- How do you think Chinese adoptees differ from Chinese-Americans? What are the implications of that?

- What do you think about Adoption Web? What did it do well or could do differently?

- What would you tell your younger adoptee self?

- Closing Activity: (Pass out two note cards) Write something you want me to really know and give it to me. Then write something you are taking away from our time together and take it with you.

Online Focus Group Log

Researcher: Laura X. Williams   **Project Name:** MACS Capstone 2018

Date Logged: 4/13/2018

File Name: Online-Group_2.3.2018.m4a

Format: Digital file type: o BWF   o WAV   o MP3   **X** Other: m4a

Length of recording: Hour(s):   2   Minutes: 44   Seconds: 34

Date Recorded (YYYY-MM-DD): **2018-02-03**   **Location**: Zoom Online Meeting

Interviewee/Event: Online Graduate Focus Group

Interviewer(s): Laura X. Williams

Subject: Online Focus Group (graduate adoptees)

Copyright Owner: N/A   **Restricted?** o No, **X** Yes, details: Confidentiality protocol

Summary: The facilitator held an online meeting of recent college graduates to discuss adoption experiences post-graduation. Participant identities are coded as "A" and "B." The interviewer's responses are in bold type.

Key words, names, & places: adoption, Chinese, Chinese-American, birth mother

Sound Quality: o broadcast **X** good   o fair   o poor   o unintelligible

TIME CODE   CONTENT DESCRIPTION

(HH:MM:SS)

00:03:07   **How has adoption fit into your life since graduating?**

00:03:21   A: Bottom priority

00:03:55   B: Same, do not talk about it at work

00:05:17   **When have you been most satisfied with adoption?**

00:05:50   B: Connecting with other adoptees, attending Adoption Web (AW), sharing experience

00:06:38   A: An important part to satisfied is to have someone listen but not having to explain yourself. Only adopted person in my program. Other Asian people are from Asia. I don't think I feel uncomfortability because it is hardly brought up but there is a lot of explanation with my name and I feel if someone is not asking questions, they ask it with their face and I explain more. It would be nice if there was another adopted person

00:08:12   **It is nice not to have to explain yourself. Why might you see your relationship with adoption as in and our since graduating?**

00:09:35   B: It comes and goes, seek more online groups since no in-person meetings. I don't bring it up because I don't think I'll get the right type of conversation out of it.

00:10:55   **Think back to last year, any point stuck out since then?**

00:11:31   A: I remember you asking about relationships as part of the triad.

00:13:49   **Good point about having to choose where adoption fits**

0014:12   B: I remember overall feeling, I felt like I didn't give enough thought to the questions (A: Yeah) sometimes I'll think about the things you are asking but I won't know how to say them and then I have this feeling stuck with me and I don't know how to articulate how I'm feeling or how to respond to that without rambling and making no sense. So I felt I could have said more or got more concise in what I want to say. It felt like it wasn't over

00:15:02   **Glad you pointed that out, since it doesn't come up, so when we try to have these conversations the language may not be there. This is us finding the language now. What do you look for when addressing adoption in everyday life?**

00:18:02   A: I think my relation to Chinese culture is very western relation to Chinese culture.

00:20:15   **Can we talk about finding your adoption in your body?**

00:20:28   A: I don't know where my nose came from.

00:20:53   B: Similar interaction with someone, a friend maybe from Shanghai she told me I have a really oval face. Aversion to learning about China, might be the fact that it makes me uncomfortable, there's so much I don't know about it, because of how I look I feel like I should know about it. Weird push and pull.

00:23:41   B: When people ask me if I speak Mandarin I feel disappointed in myself that I have to say no I don't speak mandarin. Which is an interesting feeling. If they are white and say they speak mandarin all the time I feel disappointment in myself. Weird dynamic about wanting to know about, expecting myself to know about it generally being curious.

00:24:28   **That's pretty relatable. How are we different than Chinese-Americans?**

00:24:49   A: For people who are not adopted they try to maintain their Chinese culture while in America. My [Chinese American] friend brought me a coconut drink from an Asian market. I just carried it around and thought people probably think I'm an international student because I'm carrying this thing with characters on it which I remember thinking it made me cool (B: I have the same feelings!) like yeah, I'm cool, I'm carrying this thing. It's so interesting. When I think of typical Chinese-American I think about my friend who purposefully bought her

specific brand to have. And when I go to her house we take our shoes off and she's really maintaining her culture and I don't have that.

00:26:39   A: When I carry around Chinese product or wear a sweatshirt or pattern I feel cool, but it doesn't feel normal. It feels very different than the adopted identity.

00:27:15   B: I agree with that, like kids our age who have first-generation parents immigrated. It's also what the media considers Chinese-American. It makes me feel like I don't count as Chinese-American because technically I'm Chinese and I identify as that but there's always what does that mean? I grew up in the U.S., but I don't have the same connection a typical Chinese-American has to their culture so. I feel disconnected, maybe that is more recent now, but I feel disconnected with the whole Chinese-American identity because I like to say I'm Chinese-American but feel like I have to prove it to people and explain to them what that means to me.

00:29:30   **Reminds me of idea of nationless and history-less. Where/What is your history taken from? [rhetorical]**

00:29:58   B: For Christmas, got DNA kit for whole family. It means a lot to me and he said it means a lot to my sisters too. I got possessive, because they [sisters] are adopted too, but different type of adoption [domestically] it just made me feel defensive like is it really important to them [as much as it is to me] but then it probably is the same amount of importance to them as it is to me.

00:31:26   **Were you interested in DNA last year?**

00:32:08   B: I was interested but not actively seeking it out.

00:32:25   A: I don't want to get my DNA tested.

00:33:15   **Lack of information of Asian DNA**

00:33:28   A: DNA test of white men, so claims only about white men. I would be skeptical of the results.

00:34:45   **Do you identify as a woman of color?**

00:34:53   A: I started identifying sophomore/junior year of college. And it stuck with me. Representation matters a lot to me. Now, I am in a field where I am the majority but when you identify as a person of color and you see all the people of color, but you aren't a person of color in this one specific community it's disorienting and upsetting to me, but I also want that space for them. I just wish I could be a part of it.

00:38:14   A: Exercise senior year, the point was to see our privilege, but we are not privileged being a woman. Goes back to majority doesn't mean privilege. Representation does equal majority but not always.

00:39:51   **Conversations of oppression, race, and systemically oppressed. Have you noticed how these power dynamics play out in your life?**

00:40:31   B: I feel like things have happened, I just haven't recognized them in those ways.

00:40:50   **Especially after graduating, I found spaces where I'm in not adopted and others where I am adopted, and they feel different, I sometimes step up in adoptee spaces, but step down I non-adopted spaces because I don't feel as understood, especially in power, privilege, and positionality**

00:41:29   A: I thought it was important when I was president of AW, even though I was president, didn't mean had to identify with being adopted all the time, I was trying to create a comfortable space to have any conversation the room wanted to have, it didn't have to be my conversation. So, speaking up and speaking down in different space, I felt like I was speaking down in AW, but maybe that was because I wanted other people to be able to talk. I don't know what my actual motivations were.

00:42:30   **Very intentional** A: I think it's really threatening when there is someone in the room who seems very good at what they do, if there is a club for music and the president is really good at music, it would intimidate me to come and sing if I wanted to start exploring this and my voice wasn't that good, so if the club president was like [more personable] it makes it more welcoming. So, I don't know if I was doing that [step down] to make the new people feel welcome because of how I wanted to lead, but I do know I was speaking down but I don't know why.

00:43:33   **Rhetorically, how do we create a space for everyone to feel open to participate, level the playing field so it's not one is more literate than other about adoption. If one person feels like an expert by meeting their birth family it subtracts from the meaning of exploration** (B: There's no right way)

00:44:30   B: Not wrong way, I can think of a detour of being adopted.

00:45:53   B: If we are talking about international adoption and interracial. In terms of integrating the culture into the child's life, if parents didn't decide to do that, and then the child never thought that was an option, then maybe not important to them [adoptee]. Depends a lot of different things because as a kid growing up. If it's an open conversation you're going to be more curious about diving more into the culture maybe. But if there wasn't a conversation there at all, maybe you never thought it was an option until you were exposed to it later on. So not a right or wrong way, but I think there's a lot of detours.

00:47:15   A: What I hear you saying, one of the wrong ways to adopt is on the parents, and how much information they give. Reminds me, the role of other people when they view adoption. How it is viewed at large.

00:48:40   A: People just pigeon hole you into these categories, and that's the wrong way to do adoption as well. Another wrong thing to do it put everything I do on to adoption. I don't want other people to outwardly be like 'that's because she's adopted'

00:50:12   **Very assumptive** (A: I don't like all the assumptions)

00:50:19   **Brings me back to choice, birth searches of choice, what is your reaction to hearing stories of reunion.**

00:51:11   B: My first reaction down plays it, 'oh that's nice, that's good' that's what they wanted to do and if it works out that would be amazing but it's never a jealously, if it's a fellow person who is adopted it happen that's good. If a person found out who is not adopted their reaction is out of proportion like whoa, how does that feel, this is amazing, wow, news headline, Journey to Home. It's a very difference in reaction.

00:52:38   **Media representation when BBC puts out these stories…**

00:53:09   A: It's probably not for other adoptees as much as they are for the non-adopted community

00:53:14   B: yeah, it's all very exaggerated and it's written for the drama

00:53:22   **Has anyone ever asked you if you have met a birth relative?**

00:53:33   B: I get asked that when people find out I'm adopted. I've gotten tired. Let out internal sign. I told her [friend] I was adopted, she was just shocked and didn't know how to react.

00:54:49   I've gotten the question from domestically adopted and non-adopted people. When non-adopted people ask me that question I really just don't want to and go into a reflexive answer like oh maybe someday I don't want to go into it **Like a default?** Yeah

00:56:43   **Have you been asked it recently?**

00:56:48   B: I don't think I have recently… I feel like I have because the feeling is very still much there of the tired, exacerbation of that over asked question, but I couldn't say if over the past month.

00:57:15   A: One of my friends, she's adopted, really starts to think about adoption when relationship ends. I've seen a cycle happen. So, if there is a relation to breakup and adoption, the way I relate it is I get very hurt if someone reaches out and contacts me if we decided we were not going to contact each other.

00:59:46   A: If I had to relate adoption to my own experiences of relationships, I get very hurt if I decided I don't want to be reached out after this. I decided that. Closed adoption. I don't want her [birth mother] to reach out to me. I can't imagine what it would feel like to give a child up for adoption and have that child reach out. Some stories of 'I hope that they [child] would [reach out]'… I know my own experience feels very unsafe to feel like I've done everything I can prevent him from reaching out to me but he can still reach me

01:01:00   A: But you think you're safe, but there are these moments where you aren't safe, and they can reach out to you at any moment if that's what they want. I don't want to do that too. So, I would not want to break that trust, and I don't think a biological mother is secretly hoping that I do. (B: That's true) But I do know that it's sometimes not both people's decision how one biological parent makes the decision without the other consent. I'd like to think it is a decided thing for financial reasons or whatever. But I like to think me coming back into the picture is not what they wanted at all.

01:02:00   **Calamity, how is there resilience and each time we think about it, it's from a new lens. In times of change and pressure adoption comes up. How has your relationship with birth family changed over time?**

01:02:56   A: It really changed when Adoption Web went to visit an adoption agency and we met a birth mother. I never met a birth mother. That's when I started to change it. [birth mother] went from a nebulous black box but now I think of this woman, and she filled this gap for me. I started to think about it the week after but haven't thought about it much more.

01:04:09   B: Over time, when I was younger than 10, my relationship with birth mother was only with my birth mother no other birth relatives. It was sadness. As I grew up it [sadness] was still kind of there but somehow transformed into this light-hearted thing. I would joke about it with myself and with my mom. Light-heartedly play it off and I think through that, it transformed into this friendlier thing. My relationship with her is not so much about sadness but on equal footing, where looking at myself again and seeing everything related back to genetics, just acceptance. It wasn't about sadness anymore, it was just a thing that's there and I'm not sad or angry about it, it's just a part of me now.

01:06:43   B: My sister's adoption was an open adoption. Open line of communication. I think I met her birth mom and it was strange. I used to think it was such a good thing she knew her birth family, I use to be jealous, but she was jealous I didn't know anything, 'you can think about anything you want as like, here I am this is concrete and real, I don't have that pleasure of speculation.' I think about the birth mom concept more recently now than before. After college I have a lot more time by myself to think about it, so I'm looking similarities with other people for that stability which is when I go back to thinking about the birth mom concept and try to think about similarities in my mind like how she is/was based on things that are not environmental influences. That has changed now I don't have most of the social aspect.

01:08:44   **Cognitive shift and adjustment. Maybe we can handle change in different ways because there is this reliance capacity when we didn't have a choice. But how we had to assimilate at a young age when we didn't know what was happening**

01:09:52   A: That's interesting, because one of my roommates, we were talking about hard to live off campus and how hard it is to make friends. She said, "I think you are doing well and you find similarities in others much easier" and she said "I feel like it's because you're adopted and you don't rely on other people looking like you to feel comfortable, you really rely on people who think like you and who have similar interests" (B: That's so true!) You don't rely on looks, "I can tell you hunt out people who are similar to you who like movies like you or

thinking like you or eating foods like you. You have the ability to do that that I [roommate] doesn't have." (B: I never thought about it that way!)

01:11:23 A: I was not able to name that or see that in myself, but my roommate saw that in me and she felt comfortable enough to name that which I think is incredible.

01:11:50 B: Yeah, that was very articulate. **Very observant!** Very astute.

01:12:20 **Do you think the fixation on the birth mother is because of how you were taught about it or a feeling? What about birth father?**

01:13:06 B: I can remember consciously when I was thinking about adoption, my mom would always mention the birth mother concept. That was the choice of parent she would bring up. It never occurred to me about the birth father, and when it did occur me I was like whoa. It might also be that I'm a woman identifying. I never really thought about as a birth father. And sometimes when I was a kid I always thought he [birth father] ran, split, took off and that was the end of it. I didn't really think about it after that.

01:14:38 A: A birth father has been absent. I don't think I ever had that self-aware of yes, I would have a birth father. But I think the birth father is absent in my imagination I was raised by one-person, single mother. The father figure does not play a significant role in my life and I am aware it is because I was adopted into a single-mother household. When I do hear other adoptees talk about it, the focus is on the mother.

01:17:19 A: The American story is very different from the Chinese story. Typical American story, teen pregnancy, teen mom. Couple doesn't want to get married and father leaves. So, either young age or running away in fear. I don't know if that's true in China. From what I know there is a lot of respect for older people in China.

01:18:31 **The China perspective is so unknown from us sitting here, speaking English right now as Chinese adoptees in America.**

01:18:43 B: There's a lot of things you don't know [about China] and have to be there to figure it out. I don't know a lot about family life there.

01:21:32 **How do you deal with not knowing? By being on the borders, more ok with the unknown. How comfortable do you feel with not knowing things?**

01:22:29 B: But if there is a little bit of a basic structure is more comfortable.

01:24:01 A: I feel comfortable asking questions I don't know answer to but trust that there is an answer somewhere. Are you talking about a specific unknown?

01:25:00 **Well like the typical assumption of the American nuclear family and deviating from that**

01:25:29 A: I don't have that eversion to adoption, but I think it has caused me inner turmoil, not a lot, but some, but I am not opposed to adopting.

01:26:23	B: The unknown can be very excited because you don't know. Asking if you will adopt since you are adopted. Common question

01:27:40	**It's like they ask it knowing what you should say**

01:27:43	B: Yes, like you should adopt because that's obviously the first thing that comes to your mind when you are adopted, yes I am going to adopt

01:28:04	A: It's really funny to think the bystander thinking that! I don't know why

01:28:21	**People do ask these questions thinking they already know the answer**

01:28:28	A: Just because you are good, and one things doesn't mean you are good at all parts of it

01:29:35	B: It's not just adopted, but also about just raising a kid.

01:29:41	A: I think it's just confusing those things. I don't think being able to relate to adoption is the most important thing. The intersections of popular schools of thought reminds me how I see the world differently based on my experiences

01:31:31	**Making those connections. It makes me think how adoption trauma is passed on in the family, intergenerational trauma. Do you think adoption is trauma?**

01:32:38	B: I think there is a certain degree of trauma depending on how in tune you are. Because there are a lot of things unanswered. But there is this kind of weird disconnect which make more questions like where I am really from? and what does that mean to me. Especially when you are surrounded by people who are where you are from, it's like a tingle. **I want to talk about that more, when you meet adoptee from the same orphanage**

01:34:00	B: It is really exciting, I would assume most of the Asian kids are adopted and they are, and I would think we should be friends but what if they don't want to be friends. And thought what if adoption is not a good enough reason to approach someone because you don't know if they are open about it or if they want to talk about it. When I was a kid I was in a play group my mom established with other moms with children adopted from East Asia and I was aware that was a connection that brought us together and I was comfortable with that idea of oh we are adopted let's talk about it, as a kid, but not dive deep into the questions we are doing now. It was a general thought that this was a good enough connection to bring all these different people together.

01:35:06	B: In Adoption Web, being around other adoptees, it is this interesting stand off and excitement. And I believe there is some degree of trauma because there is a lot of things to question

01:36:58	A: I think that's a very interesting definition of trauma that something that opens up more questions. When I was thinking of trauma I was thinking of the image of bringing the baby from one place to another and that itself is the trauma. You described it as something that makes more questions. I think a lot of the trauma is based on how your parents raised you. As long as there is love and compassion in that environment that can help. If you were to use

adoption and trauma in the same sentence, I think trauma as the emergency room. As long as you can get the help afterwards it doesn't have to be a debilitating thing.

01:38:30   **How willing are you to trust? (**A: I'm pretty trusting)

01:38:56   B: I give people the benefit of the doubt almost too often. I think it's a learned behavior. When I was growing up I thought about not relying on other people. Development and how much institutionalization affects us growing up.

01:42:18   **I think there is a certain ideology about being independent. What sustains you in being willing to talk about these deep topics of adoption and identity.**

01:43:58   B: My parents did a good job about open communication about adoption. It wasn't until Adoption Web I found more people to talk about it with who were international adoptees. I thought I did before, but it was just with my sisters. So now, finding people who you can talk about adoption with like this. I don't think I could get the same type of conversation with domestic adoptees. Not be afraid to think about it and journal about it. **What are you not being afraid of?**

01:45:26   B: Not being afraid of, sometimes when I think about it I think what my parents might think if I talk about my birth parents. Empathy. Feeling what they might feel. There was something about being a mom and she hoped we recognized her as our mom. She would worry if she doesn't see me as mom and hopes her children attach themselves to her as mom. And that made me think how she feels. I don't know what it is like to birth a child or adopt a child. And they are my children regardless. It's like discovery process and what you might find when exploring. And I think it is really healthy to talk about it with other adoptees like you two.

 01:47:28   **It like not just talk to anyone about it, but with people you know, on the same level and willingness to talk about it. College was kind of like an incubator for these relationships to take root.**

01:47:59   A: Mini revelation recently, thinking about something doesn't mean caring about something. You can think a lot about a subject, person, place. Especially if think about that for a long period of time you think you are caring about it, but you are just thinking about it or just missing it. You can relate it to missing like, college, but doesn't mean you care about it depending about how you are thinking about it. I think what ultimately sustains people is what they care about and if you think about something a lot you can think you care but sometimes you don't… Sometimes thinking about it means caring or sometimes not caring. But I think we learn that if we think about it a lot then it must mean we care about it. but sometimes we are toxic people and think about bad things that hurt.

01:50:52   **That's a beautiful revelation.**

01:51:00   A: Occurred to me in a relationship

01:51:45   **The power of reflection. One thing we mentioned earlier, about humor, what do you joke about in your adoption?**

01:54:26   A: I consider myself pretty American like 80% and 10% of my thoughts because I'm adopted. That's where the adopted-ness comes in

01:55:13   B: I feel much more happy and natural wearing things from where I study abroad than wearing or displaying Chinese things; difference in attaching yourself to a place that wasn't part of your identity before you went there and then it becomes a part of your identity once you've been there.

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02:01:27   **The care versus thinking part. Do you care, or just think about adoption.**

02:01:55   A: I think I just think about adoption. I cared a lot more about it my senior year of college and how it affected me and others and learning how it affects others to different extents made me care about it more and was like wow. The fact that [friend adoptee] was really interested in adoption and I was inspired how her freshman self wanted to know more, it made me care about it a lot more.

02:02:35   **Kind of sustainability part of having other people to riff off of and explore together**

02:02:45   A: I think about adoption. I don't care about adoption right now.

02:03:05   B: I care about adoption a lot, I think about it as well. But specific times I'm not going to mention it. but I wouldn't talk about some of my longest time friends who know I adopted, I never talked to them about it. moments like that I don't feel like opening up communication about that with them. I know there are times I just don't want to talk about it. I don't integrate it into my life as much as when I was at college, but the caring level is still there. It was really high when we are all together but now it is back to its usual level. But it's not out of my mind.

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02:36:44   **What is love to you?**

02:37:00   A: Self-love the way we talk about it at college is take a bath, long walk, reflecting, but eventually that thinking is self-love putting your emotions aside like I'll go take a nap and I'll feel better after. But self-love then was a way to procrastinate. I agreed with that and thought I don't know what self-love is, I just need to get my assignment in and destress. But I read this thing that self-love is not fantastic things, but its setting the mundane things like setting a bed time and sticking to it or taking medications every day, you need to take. Self-love is packing your lunch. It's not once a week thing, it's the everyday boring things you have to do. I really like that definition

02:38:45   B: I agree, every day I have a good breakfast and need to make my lunch and have to go to bed for work. Self-love making your bed (O: the boring things) Like hanging your coat up instead of putting it on the chair.

02:43:15   **Thank you both!**

Focus Group 1 Log

Researcher: Laura X. Williams   **Project Name:** MACS Capstone 2018

Date Logged: 3/14/2018

File Name: Focus-Group1_2.26.2018.WAV

Format: Digital file type: o BWF   **X** WAV   o MP3   o Other:

Length of recording: Hour(s):   00   Minutes: 59   Seconds: 39

Date Recorded (YYYY-MM-DD): **2018-02-26**   **Location**: Omitted

Interviewee/Event: Focus Group of 3 Chinese Adoptees attending college

Interviewer(s): Laura Williams

Subject: Chinese Adoptee Focus Group 1

Copyright Owner: N/A   **Restricted?** o No, **X** Yes, details: Confidentiality protocol

Summary: The facilitator held an in-person focus group of current undergraduate Chinese adoptees. Participant identities are coded as "C," "D," and "E." The interviewer's responses are in bold type.

Key words, names, & places: adoptee, China, parents, race, appropriation

Sound Quality: o broadcast   **X** good   o fair   o poor   o unintelligible

TIME CODE   CONTENT DESCRIPTION

(HH:MM:SS)

00:04:36   **How did you parents growing up connect you to Chinese culture? Any ways stick out to you? What did you experience growing up?**

00:04 :49   C: Friends, Chinese New Year, books, Chinatown, dress up, decoration around the house

00:05:54   D: I had a group of friends also adopted from China and we celebrated Chinese New Year and autumn moon festival. Woman from Hong Kong to babysit

00:06:41   **Did you celebrate Chinese New Year every year?**

00:06:47   C: Yeah very year

00:06:51   E: A list of things my mom did.

00:06:56   **What were the most meaningful to you?**

00:06:58   E: Adoption group, every year we did the meet up for Chinese New Year and adoption day, Chinatown, homeland tour with our parents. Books, Chinese food. Attempt Chinese class

00:08:29   E: Sometimes it was too much. I'll just say that right now

00:08:34   **Did you ever feel like that as well? [to the group]**

00:08:43   C: Not overbearing, I kind of appreciated it but when I was growing up I tried to distance myself in a way. I was the only adopted kid I knew, and I was the only Chinese person I knew

00:09:01   C: I kind of tried to distance myself a little bit and I wasn't as proud of it as I am now. Because I had to prove my identity

00:09:17   **Would you identify as a woman of color?**

00:09:19   C: Yeah

00:09:20   E: I didn't until coming here [to college]

00:09:25   **Why do you think being here has shifted that?**

00:09:28   E: It is emphasized and talked about.

00:10:00   E: At my high school, it didn't offend anybody because it wasn't said like that until I came here.

00:10:20   C: People would just identify as their ethnicity? (E: yes)

00:10:28   **How would you identify? [to E]**

00:10:30   E: I would say I'm Chinese and then they would be like oh I thought you're Pilipino (C: oh I get that a lot), that would happen all the time and when I got here they were like oh you should join the writers club for women of color then I went and it was really really awkward and I didn't feel like, you know

00:10:54   **race is prevalent, that makes sense you would think about it since then. You'd like to add anything? [to D]**

00:11:11   D: Yeah, times that I tried to get away from being seen as Chinese. There's been trying to figure out who I am

00:12:04   **I hear you about that tension, how do you all identify with being white?**

00:12:13   E: as a joke [laugh] people say I'm a white girl in a Chinese body

00:12:19   **Who is everyone?**

00:12:20   E: Significant other, I'm just think, alright whatever that means

00:12:28   **People who are close to you or more strangers?**

00:12:33   E: Significant other emphasizes, don't know how you're supposed to act 'white'

00:12:56   C: Assumptive comments 'you're so [adjective] for an Asian'

00:13:25   C: Visual signals do not align which typical notion

00:13:38   C: Even my voice and accent confuse people

00:13:48   **Like it didn't match in their mind so they were confused**

00:13:50   C: People question why are you like this because I am different

00:14:03   C: That's like the nature versus nurture but also stereotyping around culture

00:14:10   **Yeah, do you sometimes forget that you're Asian?**

00:14:12   C: All the time. [laugh]

00:14:14   **Sometimes I just forget until someone points it out or I look in the mirror [laughter by group]**

00:14:20   C: I would be late to school because I was like, I have to reinforce my identity because people don't believe me

00:14:48   **How do you relate to Chinese culture now? and did you want to add anything? [to D]**

00:14:54   D: Just that, I remember being in kindergarten and we were going over race, and I knew I was adopted and stuff and I couldn't figure out how Chinese was different from being white because I saw myself as white. As I got older I figured that out.

00:15:33   **This reminds me of conversations with other people about the [graduation ceremony for people of color]. Would you do it?**

00:15:57   C: It's hard because part of it is acknowledging that struggle, but I also don't want to overstep my boundaries and know that is not my space to claim in a way. It's for black students… So, I've thought about that like hmm, what am I going to do

00:16:24   **It's like all these different lines coming together.**

00:16:28   C: Yeah, because it could be like solidarity but in my mind, it could be solidarity but in someone else's could look at it as appropriation. So that's hard

00:16:40   **When you choose to be one over the other in certain contexts sometimes it's not what people assume**

00:16:49   C: My dad, when I was applying for colleges said, put down [family ethnicity]

00:17:06   **Like in the SATs having you check the box** (C: exacerbated exhale, uh yeah)

00:17:14   C: Other, or leave blank, you are not giving me enough options here.

00:17:22   D: Rather not say

00:17:29   E: What if you just filled in all three [all laugh]

00:17:43   **Was there ever a time where you fully identified as being adopted and you were most satisfied with being adopted?**

00:18:31   E: Using being adopted to get into college

00:19:01   **Are there other times where you used academia to explore adoption?**

00:19:02   C: Elementary school story about Chinese parents

00:19:30   C: English class

00:19:50   **Was it helpful?**

00:19:51   C: In middle and high school was when I separated myself the most

00:21:04   C: I don't remember writing anything then about being adopted or race

00:21:17   **How has Adoption Web influenced your thinking about adoption or not? What could have Adoption Web done differently or you thought was successful?**

00:21:50   C: I think for me the reason why I found myself not going, maybe it's going to change if I have the time, on the outside I saw it as a bunch of girls adopted by white families and I don't identify with that, so I felt kind of out of place and some people don't know how to go about that. And I have another friend on campus, she's black adopted by a black family. We talked about how the face of it, because it's the most common for Chinese girls to be adopted because of history and such but, that was in the beginning before I met you I was like uhm I don't know if I want to be part of that, I don't really connect with those people.

00:22:37   **Right, it's a totally different experience**

00:23:33   D: I really liked having that space. I think there should be like separate organizations because I feel like a lot of people also felt it was mostly Asian adoptees. So not sure how to break that barrier.

00:24:31   E: I asked my white friend to join and she said no [laughter]

00:24:35   **hah, why?**

00:24:36   E: If you [researcher] weren't leading it, I probably wouldn't have come to any meetings. Mostly Chinese, but there were others

00:25:10   **How is your experience different from Chinese-American experience? How is our experience as adopted different from Chinese-American experience?**

00:25:50   E: Different parenting styles, questioning parenting was because of race or style

00:26:23   C: It's very culturally different I think.

00:27:43   C: But I think if you're walking in the street, people will just see you in the face until they talk to you

00:28:24   **How do you feel when you go into a Chinese supermarket?**

00:28:38   C: I've gone with my mom a lot

00:29:02   C: My Taiwanese best friend, we go to Chinatown, and she gets dirty looks because she looks half white, half Taiwanese. All the old ladies smile at me then, this has happened multiple times, then bump her with their cart, or give her dirty looks, or mumble under their breath (E: They're shady!) Super shady, it's not her fault she's half. But getting spoken to a lot is very intimidating because then I feel bad because I'm like [shrugs shoulders] if someone is asking for directions. I can't communicate with you

00:29: 46   C: But the thing is, I like going to Chinatown because I like the food, the bakeries, the snacks but whenever I go it is pretty stressful because it's like oh please don't talk to me

00:29:57   **Why do you think the automatic reaction is to be sorry?**

00:30:01   C: Because I feel that they think that I'm ashamed because I don't think they see me as adopted, they just see me as a kid whose parents didn't teach her how to speak mandarin and so they are like shame shame shame on you. It's mostly the older people too. Because they go and whisper under their breath really fast and I'm just like oh you're shaming me for something

00:30:38   E: Asian restaurant workers talk to me about being Asian

00:31:37   C: Chinese delivery people ask and then I say I'm adopted. Awkward

00:32:02   C: But I know the recognition thing, but it's also nice to see someone I guess who is like you or looks like you and then make that connection.

00:32:18   **How worried would you say you are about presenting yourself in a certain way?**

00:32:40   E: Use to be embarrassed walking with mom. Now, staring doesn't bother me, we can have a conversation. Now it's just a fact.

00:34:00   **Do you think you didn't accept it as a fact when you were younger?**

00:34:09   E: Yeah, because when I was younger I wanted to be white and all that stuff, that's like a whole another thing. But now I'm just like yeah, I'm adopted, I like my hair, I like my eyes, I like that I can get tan it all works out

00:34:30   C: When around people from hometown, accentuate qualities to revalidate my identity

00:35:10   C: Problematic nicknames from peers and parents

00:35:43   **Is it ok with you if [they] call you that?**

00:35:45   C: Yeah because I grew up with that nickname. I've accepted, and now, I like spaces when I can express multicultural identity through dress. But problematic styled clothing

00:36:23   **Are you offended by that?**

00:36:24   C: Yeah, culturally I don't really identify as being Chinese, still recognize disrespected my people by doing that

00:36:37   C: I like in spaces when I can claim both [identities] at the same time.

00:37:08   **When were you most satisfied with your adoption?**

00:37:12   D: I don't know

00:37:23   C: I make a lot of adoption jokes which are really messed up sometimes, but I think are kind of funny. This is like the new big one, all my friends are into reading their star charts and I'm like, you can't read mine because I don't know my real birthday [louder voice like announcing] and they're like oh, and I'm like no I'm making a joke out of it because I can. If someone else says it, I'm like that's messed up. But I think I can make that joke because it's about me.

00:37:48   **I see, it's like you're claiming this unknown element**

00:37:51   C: Adoption movies, I have a reason to cry other than just being sad

00:38:03   **Have you seen *Lion*?**

00:38:06   C: Yes

00:38:34   **So, What would you tell your teenage adopted self?**

00:38:45   C: Quick point, every time adoption performance I cried, it became a joke

00:39:36   **Why do you think that was so powerful for you?**

00:39:38   C: Because I talk to my family about this a lot, not my parents, but my godparents, do you ever want to go back to China, do you want to find your real parents, and I'm like not really. I think for me, I've found a good community from home and I feel strong in that. I'm wondering in that. But I would like to see the two people who had sex to make me. I think that would be one thing to see what two people pro-created. What they look like.

00:40:11   **Just kind of like a picture? You wouldn't want to meet**

00:40:12   C: Yeah

00:40:13   E: Like see where your traits came from.

00:40:27   C: People assume body type expectations

00:40:44   C: Socio-biological expectations

00:40:53   **[Introduce the concept of 'birth' parents medicalizing biological parents, calling then Chinese parents] What do you think about switching the language to refer to birth parents as Chinese parents? I've humanized my birth mother as my Chinese mother, but I don't feel like I have with my birth father** (A: I've actually never thought about that)

00:42:14   C: I've never thought about the father

00:42:50   E: I haven't thought about it, I can't even remember what my mom calls them, I think she used birth mother for a long time, but I think she interchanged them depending on how we were talking. Maybe I don't even remember. She used birth mother when we were talking about birthing and babies, but I feel like she said 'your Chinese mom' too when we were talking about more China stuff

00:43:31   C: I don't even remember, now I feel like asking her

00:43:32   C: I think birth mother worked, I don't remember anything else…. I like the name Chinese mom, but the name Chinese mom for someone who is younger, birth mom is action with person, Chinese mom makes it more of a person in a way and I think it's all about how you were told when you were younger, which could really sway what that term means to you.

00:44:48   **Yeah it could be more confusing when you were younger**

00:44:50   C: That's where the question comes from, why aren't they [birth parents] here too?

00:45:00   **Brings me back to the question, what would you tell your younger adopted self?**

00:45:13   E: Embrace your different looks. I'd say you'll love it when you're older. Comments of self-hate, mom reaction was to say other people want to look like you

00:45:50   C: Similar parent response, I was like that's nice they can take mine I don't like them

00:46:23   **How did you take that when your mom said it?**

00:46:24   E: Feel misunderstood

00:46:54   E: I feel like I would tell my younger self, you don't have to embrace it now, but just don't hate on it

00:47:09   C: I'd tell myself don't let looks dictate your life

00:47:46   D: Suggest hair tips

00:48:13   C: Hair touching and micro-aggressive

00:49:21   **Our hair is just different**

00:49:34   E: Hair dressers would say it's difficult to cut Asian hair

00:50:07   E: Nose touching and micro-aggressive

00:52:30   **When did you feel most satisfied with your adoption? Or dissatisfied**

00:52:41   C: I'm thinking about the word satisfied… If it's like satisfied in the sense accepting then I think I got there either when I got here [college] because when I got here, am I going to tell people I'm adopted? That was something that was big. They are not going to see my parents, once for family weekend and I look like my parents, do I really need to tell people? Then I was like no this is part of my identity and who I am. So probably when I came to college, especially the process of writing my college essay and understanding the politics and sociological implications behind how I look versus how I sound and how I was raised. That big college life transition.

00:53:45   **Yeah, satisfaction is a nuanced word and can mean different things to different people**

00:54:02   C: I think it's interesting how culture can make people very different. Like the 3 of us are really different. That's pretty cool

Notecard closing activity

Focus Group 2 Log

Researcher: Laura X. Williams   **Project Name:** MACS Capstone 2018

Date Logged: 3/15/2018

File Name: Focus-Group2_2.27.2018.WAV

Format: Digital file type: o BWF   **X** WAV   o MP3   o Other:

Length of recording: Hour(s):   01   Minutes: 05   Seconds: 19

Date Recorded (YYYY-MM-DD): **2018-02-27**   **Location**: Omitted

Interviewee/Event: Focus Group of 3 undergraduate Chinese adoptees.

Interviewer(s): Laura X. Williams

Subject: Chinese Adoptee Focus Group 2

Copyright Owner: N/A   **Restricted?**   o No, **X** Yes, details: Confidentiality protocol

Summary: The facilitator held an in-person focus group of current undergraduate Chinese adoptees. Participant identities are coded as "F," "G," and "H." The interviewer's responses are in bold type.

Key words, names, & places: adoption, Chinese, Chinese-American, race

Sound Quality: o broadcast   **X** good   o fair   o poor   o unintelligible

TIME CODE   CONTENT DESCRIPTION

(HH:MM:SS)

00:01:40   **How did your parents connect you to Chinese culture growing up?**

00:02:01   F: Chinese language, TV shows. *Big Bird Goes to China*, (others reacting) from my mom

00:03:51   G: Chinese language, adoption group, good about celebrating adoption day, growing up I thought everyone did it the way I did it. Second birthday in a way. But I know that's not the case for everyone so in that case I think my parents did a pretty good job.

00:05:56   H: Adoption day, Chinese language, painting artsy things, Chinese brush painting, silk fans. Dress. *Mulan* and *Big Bird Goes to China*

00:07:20   H: Family homeland visit

00:08:19   **So do you all identify as a woman of color? Or being white?**

00:09:12   G: For me, I think that I really started identifying as a women of color when I came to college because before then I was surrounded mostly by white people and then the only time I was in a more diverse space was when I was dancing but even then, I was the only Asian

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person in the upper level so it was very like, black people/white people, and they lumped me with the white people and that wasn't a choice I consciously made, it just happened to me. Then I came to college and was exposed to a lot of different ways of thinking and the fact that college is a predominantly white institution. At first, I didn't see that because for me it was the first time I had been in a space that felt more diverse even though it wasn't to a lot of people, to me it was. And then I think that was a time people started talking more openly about race which was interesting my sister was still in high school and started talking about the same things. So, I think it wasn't an age thing or we're in different spaces thing, but a more global, U.S. conversation that was becoming open. It has been interesting here because I do identify as a person of color but also a lot of times I feel like I really don't deserve to claim that which is very very very strange. I'm not black and I can't identify with those struggles, that culture, but I'm not white and people look at me less as being white as they did before, if that makes sense, it's complicated, it's just a very in between place

00:11:39   G: Also, we're adopted so we didn't grow up with Chinese culture. Our parents are not Chinese, so we don't have that kind of history or culture.

00:11:50   H: Does it make you feel like you're more pushed on to the white side?

00:11:55   G: Yeah and its very strange

00:11:57   **Did you check white on the SATs? Or other?**

00:12:01   G: No, I checked Asian, but I do it because that's what I look like. It's confusing

00:12:13   H: I also had a similar experience. I identified as a person of color until someone said I wasn't black, made me question again

00:12:41   H: Mentor validated me, 'if you identify as a person of color, then you can identify as that'

00:13:07   H: When the elections happened of 2016, there was a space for people of color to debrief and it was mostly black people so I was one of the 3 Asians that went, and I got looks like "why are you here, you're not really supposed to be here" so that made me question again whether the world sees me as a person of color versus what I see myself as

00:13:35   H: Difficult in the classroom, black and white, makes it difficult to know how to talk about race when you do not seem to fit

00:14:42   **Do you have anything to add? [to F]**

00:14:49   F: I also grew up in a predominantly white area, I grew up considering myself white, today I don't… I check the box Asian. When people as my I say I'm Chinese because I know that's what they are looking for. They are not looking for me to say I'm American or I'm white. But internally I always struggle in saying in Chinese because I don't feel… My one friend immigrated when she was 4 and other friends whose parents were immigrants, and they were born here, and their parents are very much Chinese, and they pretty much grew up in Chinese

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culture. And I feel like it takes away from them almost to say yeah, I'm Chinese because I don't have any of the same lived experiences that they do.

00:15:42   F: 2nd grade saw difference in hair color, not so much race

00:16:14   F: I also had the adoption group, that's another way my mom kept me in contact with my culture a little bit. But that was so far removed and something fun we would do every once in a while.

00:16:36   **Do you ever forget that you're Asian? Like look in the mirror [surprised] (chuckle)**

00:16:42   F: Yeah, definitely throughout my elementary school years I would think that I was white and then somebody would be like "why are your eyes slanted" [higher pitched voice] (G: ugh)

00:17:03   F: Didn't identify as a woman of color coming to college, but Freddie Gray Trevon Martin walk outs

00:17:30   F: Student of color got upset some people wouldn't walk out.

00:18:19   F: Assumed I had experienced struggles of being black in America, but didn't disagree because didn't want to be attacked

00:19:10   F: I feel like me especially am a model minority because I have such a white mentality and the only minority thing about me is how I look it's not about my lived experience

00:19:55   **I hadn't thought of it that way, we kind of are a minority at the top of the minorities**

00:20:02   H: Asian are the second paid after whites, never at the bottom (**I feel like when you're adopted.**) you're even higher

00:20:12   F: Because you have that white last name, you inherit privilege

00:20:15   H: You have white experiences too. And my fear is when we get older, that is going to go away on some level, not every level.

00:20:25   H: As I've gotten older, me and my sister would go out to dinner with my parents and they automatically see like we're two different parties. They see this older white couple going out to dinner and then we say a party of 4. And at the airport, they will not take us as a family because they assume we aren't together. It's fine now, but I look like a 16-year-old, I don't know why they are assuming but I guess it's because we're getting older. It kind of makes me uncomfortable a little bit but it's going to happen so

00:21:02   **How do you think our experience is different than Chinese-Americans'?**

00:21:15   F: I just want to hit on what you said, I found myself the same situation, I feel like when I go out to dinner with my mom and her boyfriend, I feel strange going out to dinner with them because she is my mother, a white mother and a white daughter they stand closer, and

you can tell they are mother daughter and tell they are related. My mother and I are close, but I can tell the hostess is 'hmm strange'

00:21:47   H: People's assumptions are gross sometimes too

00:21:58   F: Similar story

00:22:23   **This makes me uncomfortable**

00:22:25   F: It was very strange (G: that's disturbing)

00:22:38   G: I don't really have that problem, but it is strange to think about what people see on the outside. And I think that I'm not as aware of it when I'm in it. But I remember very clearly my sister when it was her adoption day, years ago we went to Chinatown in NYC she felt weird being there with our white parents but in a space that's Chinese-American, emphasis on the Chinese part and we weren't, she and I, my sister is also adopted from China, were outsiders but we didn't look like outsiders but she felt like an outsider with my parents and it was very strange and I hadn't really thought about it in that way but it's true. So, it was an intense experience and she couldn't verbalize that to my parents she could only talk to me about it which was also interesting.

00:22:54   **When were you most satisfied with your adoption?**

00:24:09   F: I can say I'm most satisfied when I think about what my life could've been like.

00:25:03   F: Seeing poverty in China, I don't know how I can complain about my life where my life could have been so much worse.

00:26:12   F: That was a big moment for me. Sometimes I don't like it [adoption] and I just want it to go away. I feel out of place in [Chinese immigrant household] because they are very Chinese, and I am not. Think back to poverty in China.

00:27:07   **Is that survivor's guilt?**

00:27:10   G: I don't know, I don't necessarily feel guilty, but when you say guilty, I guess I do feel a little guilty, but you can't live with guilt about something that is out of your control. It was just fate in the universe

00:28:19   **Is this evoking anything, thoughts [to the group]?**

00:28:26   G: Interesting language. Strange to think in satisfaction.

00:29:29   **It can be contested, what satisfied means**

00:29:40   H: I also had this feeling of I don't know have I ever been satisfied with it? You also asked about dissatisfied, not like I'm dissatisfied with it, but there have been little moments of irritation, like parent's day. People say they are excited to see everyone's parents to make comparisons in looks, and I don't look like either of my parents, and if you say that I'm going to be really offended because we don't look anything alike besides we're human sometimes like

that it's dissatisfying, or sometimes when you go to the doctor, medical history, and they are like "why don't you know your medical history" and I say I'm adopted and they are like "oh…" [awkward] they get really uncomfortable. They get really uncomfortable about adoption. They're like "well that's not helpful" and I'm like that is also out of my control. So, some moments like that, I wouldn't say dissatisfied (G: oh, I hate that) but it's like irritating. A different vocab for me.

00:30:55   **It kind of builds up**

00:30:58   H: Makes you feel bad, genetics projects in school

00:31:49   **Genealogy is totally different than family**

00:31:56   H: Like the phrase blood is thicker than water, for family slogans, those irritate me because I'm not blood related to anyone in my family, so I don't know what that's supposed to mean how is that applicable here. (**It's excluding**) anyone that can be adopted that's not [inter] family adoption.

00:32:25   **Great segue into something I read, the term birth parents medicalize parents as birthing vessels and my parents called them [birth parents] my Chinese parents. What happen if we started calling birth parents according to the context they are from? What do you think about this?**

00:33:30   H: My parents called my birth parents, another phrase I forget. They tried to distance the relationship, so I wouldn't get attached but also not to distance myself too far. So, there was this weird push and pull

00:34:19   G: I grew up knowing the difference, you're supposed to say birth parents and not real parents (**that language is important**)

00:35:12   G: I think my parents tried to make an effort, but I don't think they really understood or they weren't able to really try to understand in a constructive way for me. (**they could never fully know, but not know how to go about trying to know**)

00:35:52   G: They kind of just accepted what they knew and what they thought I needed instead of actually trying to listen to the way I needed them to talk about it. I don't think I was able to verbalize at the time. We've had some conversation fairly recently that were just frustrating because they think they are trying really hard but it's not in the ways that I need them to be trying. Which then makes me feel like, well they will just never understand, so I don't want to talk about it with you anymore.

00:36:33   **That's off putting**

00:36:37   H: I've had that relationship with my mother and I've had it since pre-teen or angsty teen like "you never understand me" [rebellious tone] I don't know if that's amplified with adoption or not because there is a part they aren't going to understand unless your parent is also adopted, but even then, they can't know your own story. But I know a lot happened when I was adolescent, pre-adolescent/puberty that my parents, specifically my mom, I wanted her to

know but she just couldn't figure it out or know. So, she would try to help, "we could try to find you an adoption group or you could hang out with these Asians," and I'm like, just because they are Asian doesn't mean they are adopted. (G: or like I'm going to like them) or she'll like try to give me books or like "we should watch this Chinese movie." She bought me this Cinderella Chinese version and it's even weirder because of the finding thing, and I'm like "what are you trying to do here" It was very confusing and then it escalated as puberty hit, butting heads all the time.

00:37:42   H: So now she still tries to do that sometimes, but I tell her about college and Adoption Web and just talking with other adoptees and she has stepped back because she knows she cannot fill that space but she still wants to help me overcome it in a sense, but not overcome it, but just formulate self.

00:38:10   **What would you tell your younger adopted 'angsty' self?**

00:38:38   F: I went through a phase where I rejected adoption and identifying I was adopted. I didn't want to talk about it.

00:39:45   F: But I went through a phase where I was like maybe this is wrong to deny, not deny, but reject it. I don't know, you're very inspirational to me because you're so open to talking about it and you want to learn more about it and here you are setting this forum and connecting people through Adoption Web, just trying to give people this space to talk about it which I never think I had. Adoption group yeah, but we all just talked about our lives or our boyfriends or crushes. When you're ten, we didn't use the space the way the adults intended it to be.

00:40:25   F: To myself, just keep being you, there's nothing I would have done differently that would have brought me better or worse. (**it is what it is**)

00:41:15   G: I kind of agree. I would have given myself an Asian role model person, just to be close to, be as a mentor. It was hard looking back on it to have all my role models or people I sought advice from to not be able to share that experience of not being white or not being black.

00:42:17   G: In class, who taught you how to be resistant/resilient about race things? I didn't know I was supposed to seek that out. No one told me it was not ok for people to point out my eyes, touch my hair and talk about my nose. These things happened to me and I had no idea, it was just 'oh that's kind of weird'

00:43:20   G: I've had experiences where people would try and talk Chinese to me which still happens all the time. Now I know it's a micro-aggression, but I didn't know I was supposed to talk to anyone about it, nobody told me it was wrong. Couldn't tell my parents really, didn't know I should or could. So having someone, a group, I don't know, someone to share those experiences with but also just be a person I could look up to I think would have been helpful.

00:44:02   **We are such a visual society, that mirroring is important. Even if it's subconscious**

00:44:31   H: I would tell my ten-year-old self, just validation. What you're thinking is normal

00:45:04   H: Had an Asian adopted mentor, but she moved away when I was young

00:46:21   H: I went back to other inspirational role models or mentors who were white, it was harder for me to connect with that.

00:46:38   **So you would tell your younger self, it's ok, you can handle it?**

00:46:43   H: There are other people, adoptees that have gone through similar situations

00:47:46   **I hadn't thought about the micro-aggression towards adoption as what is normal. When you think about resisting against it as not normal, that is normal. I am doing an audit of Adoption Web, what could have Adoption Web could have done differently or had done well?**

00:48:18   G: For me it opened a safe-space, really for the first time, where I could really talk and think that part of my identity that I really didn't connect with deeply at all before coming to college. For me it was launching off point. But I think there's a little struggle that's kind of weird between Asian adoptees being in there with adoptees form other countries, and domestic, I don't think there were any domestic adoptees there, but also people who were just interested in adoption. That's really hard to control. I don't think that its necessarily ok to 'no if you're not adopted from any Asian country, you're not welcome' but I think that made it kind of a strange space. Also, I kind of wish there had been more people. But I don't know how to get that, but I think if it had felt more cohesive, that would have made it more sustainable.

00:49:53   G: But adoption is a strange topic to just have... Everyone is in a different place of where they want to think about it or the way they are ready to think about it, so you can't force people to do it, but I did find it frustrating that I knew people who were adopted who didn't want to engage with it in the way I did. So being in that space when I was in that space was great but then outside of it, I was like "well, what now."

00:50:34   **I've heard in the past how Adoption Web was inscribed with being Asian adoptees of white parents only. To be a club on campus it has to be open to everybody, making a weird space and dynamic. There was also one adoptee at the beginning…**

00:51:08   F: She did not understand the concept of take space and make space. Took a lot of space.

00:51:30   F: I do feel really bad about that because it was something… I do have this weird attitude about it, I think it could have gone away if I was able to talk more about my experience or hear more about your experience, or other Chinese adoptees girls who were there. But [one student] just took up the space.

00:52:04   F: So that was hard, you were like "yeah there was nothing I could do" (**I feel like I could have**) At that time I was not as confident as I am now. Definitely now I would tell her to be quiet.

00:52:43   F: That for me was the biggest short coming, it's hard, you can't control who enters. That was my problem with [Asian affinity group] as well.

00:53:53   F: I just thought it was kind of weird she was in [Asian affinity group]. Like that its people who are interested in adoption who get to show up like its people interested in Asian culture who get to show up about being Asian. We were screening "Fresh off the Boat" and it was weird because one girl was there just listening to our conversation and I knew she had nothing to do with Asian culture. It was just weird because I went to try and make friends who looked like me and feel that sense of belonging. (**That sense of belonging is important**)

00:55:33   F: Even having different types of adoptees, but I would have wanted an exclusive club of Chinese-American or Asian-American adoptees.

00:56:17   F: But I like this now. like right now. I like that I met you, I like that we are doing this now. Really this hour I actually enjoyed it quite a bit. Right before you asked the question about Adoption Web I thought oh maybe I should have stuck it out could actually be kind of fun.

00:56:40   H: I feel like Adoption Web from my year, was a good space to be a first year and find a club and just be able to talk with people. I remember talking with my parents about it [Adoption Web] it's one of those really good relief feelings of being able to talk to someone but not have to explain yourself. But we are talking about adoption and we are explaining your situation/story, but you don't have to explain what it is to be adopted. (**all this back stuff**)

00:56:07   H: Trying to talk to significant other who is not Asian, difficult to understand

00:57:53   H: AW was a really nice spot to be able to talk about difficult encounters

00:58:14   H: Non-adopted people asking wrong questions in AW space (**from people who were not adopted?**) Yeah, they took up more space

00:59:07   **Anything it could have done differently especially now?**

00:59:12   H: It would be nice if it was still an active club. There are three other adoptees in my class, there's a girl who is a first year who was looking forward to being part of Adoption Web and I was kind of crushed because she was talking about her identity and how she doesn't have one because she is adopted, she's like I know nothing, so I don't know who I am. I was like whoa, we are like at square one right there, I felt like the club could have helped direct her which way to face at least and then continue on if she continues at college.

00:59:50   H: So, I just feel like the club would be very helpful to a lot of people still. Like this is very helpful, I really miss talking with people. Helpful in that sense in not having to validate yourself all the time, it's just a relief

01:00:17   **Note card closing activity**

Follow-up Log 1

Researcher: Laura X. Williams   **Project Name:** MACS Capstone 2018

Date Logged: 4/1/2018

File Name: 3.5.2018.WAV

Format: Digital file type: o BWF   **X** WAV   o MP3   o Other:

Length of recording: Hour(s):   00   Minutes: 37   Seconds: 22

Date Recorded (YYYY-MM-DD): **2018-03-05**   **Location**: Zoom Meeting

Interviewee/Event: Follow-up 1 from Focus Group 2

Interviewer(s): Laura Williams

Subject: Follow-up 1

Copyright Owner: N/A   **Restricted?**   o No, **X** Yes, details: Confidentiality protocol

Summary: Researcher's one-on-one follow-up to Focus Group 2. Overall, participating in the focus group was positive experience. Some opposing opinions were identified against others in the group but valued nonetheless.

Key words, names, & places: validation, language, power

File Name: 3.5.2018

Sound Quality: o broadcast   **X** good   o fair   o poor   o unintelligible

TIME CODE   **CONTENT DESCRIPTION**

(HH:MM:SS)

00:00:04   **How did the focus group go for you? Initial reactions?**

00:00:12   Missed this, very different views

00:00:55   **Would you mind sharing what you wrote on your take away card?**

00:01:02   Validation is key and important.

00:01:15   **I have the card you gave me: adoptee language, phrasing, power dynamic, closed adoptee group, subculture of adoptee**

00:01:42   I wrote what I thought was coming up in the conversation and what was important. It was how they said it or the phrasing that kind of turned me off. We went into this conversation of a subculture of adoptee now that there are more of us we are getting together and talking about adoption, there are not already support groups, we are creating support groups now.

00:02:25   **What was one thing that stuck out to you that was off putting?**

00:02:43   I don't know if it was off putting, but it resonated with me. I think it was someone else who said it's important to be aware of language. And that's what I tell people all the time, words are really powerful in that sense and it can come off in a negative tone or positive. You can be saying the same thing, but people can interpret it differently.

00:03:25   **Adoptee intimacy?**

00:03:47   I think it shows up in our daily life. I think it came up in the group if parents try to help us build our identity around being Asian or adopted, they will just never be able to say the right thing. I feel like there is an intimacy issue there because identity is very intimate and when people try to help you build and find that identity and doing it "wrong" it's butting heads. My mom and I would always but heads and I always felt she never understood me, more so than the typical teenage angst but I think it has to do with adoption.

00:05:18   **Would you elaborate on what you meant by power dynamics?**

00:05:31   I've always felt that how you phrase things shows the power dynamic of who is running the conversation or who is making the assumptions first. I took a class on language word identity sociology class, so we were talking about that. when we were in the forum, a lot of what we were saying in class was represented here. Power and language with identity… We are in this forum because we are all adopted so you sort of feel like you should have a connection, but some things that were said I did not feel connected. It was a weird identity power shift but not in a bad way, just oh not everyone thinks the same way I do just because we are adopted.

00:06:55   **How would you say your views are different or the same as the others in the group?**

00:07:09   Dissonance with the grateful narrative

00:08:00   **Kind of goes back to power dynamics. Anti-adoption versus Pro-adoption, where would you locate trauma in your story?**

00:08:49   I don't have active memories of orphanage trauma but think about the effects

00:09:42   **The growth mindset could be that positive traumatic, why do you think you want to explore adoption more?**

00:10:17   A lot of my desire to look deeper into adoption is seeing if this is normal, do other people also identify with this, am I identifying with this correctly? Not that there is a right answer to this because everyone interprets adoption differently. But that's my main question, is this normal or are my thoughts ok to have because I am adopted? Because most non-adoptees won't have the thoughts I have

00:13:06   **Has sharing your experiences in the group format made you think about your adoption in new ways?**

00:13:21   I wouldn't really say so, but seeing how the lack of support group affects others

00:14:40   The forum reopened the gates and I'm aware and more in tune with it so when things happen or like in class when we talk about identity it will come back and circle around, it makes me think more about it

00:15:03   **Do you see a different between validation and affirmation?**

00:15:23   Not sure if there is a difference, I almost feel synonymous in my desire to be validated and affirmed in my experience.

00:15:45   **In terms of closed adoptee group and subcultures in adoption, what do you see this doing for the larger adoptee community?**

00:16:30   Closed group, just to have that space to talk about own experience and shared experience is really important to destigmatize adoption to get that validation to have a space to just ask questions that might not have answers to, in that sense is affirming. With that, the closed groups are making subculture groups, I'm thinking the online closed group, that's a really good place for kids, or not adults who have questions and essentially opening that space up to a wider group. I am hopeful and optimistic by asking these questions now it will formulate some sort of answer or advice, so kids who are adopted internationally they have a place to go and easier to connect with people and get that validation.

00:18:28   **We are weaving and creating these groups wherever we go. Going back to the conversation you had with someone who had adopted siblings, in what ways was that affirming and not affirming?**

00:18:57   Hearing their story, and questioning if the adoptee had choices

00:21:57   **Do you think the focus group was effective in sharing your thoughts about adoption?**

00:22:35   I do think it was effective, I felt it got a deeper level of adoption for me, hopefully for others as well. It was that space to not have to explain yourself but able to explain your story, if that makes sense. I touched on it in the forum, but that's what I liked about Adoption Web there's this underlying statement that there's something there it could be different for you and something different for me, but you don't have to explain that something, and that something is you are adopted or being an adoptee. It's a good relief feeling not having to justify your identity or part of your identity.

00:23:47   **Something about how we are willing to come to it with open ears and engage in this inquiry with each other. But I had someone not willing to come**

00:24:31   I think it is also eye-opening that not everyone is at that point to talk about it or want to talk about it.

00:24:40   **I have to respect that but at the same time, side feeling of if only, there is so much to explore**

00:25:00   Or like we can explore it together and it would be great, but I don't want to push you because it is your "journey".

00:25:49   **Would you say one-on-one conversation or group was most effective for you?**

00:26:04   I'd say it depends a little bit different for me since I was not super close to the other adoptees there so I would pause and hesitate on saying things, like should I say something, and then they would take it in different directions and I would loose my thought or opinion, but it was different than what I was thinking so then I had to think about how to follow-up, like yeah I had a similar situation, but maybe it was not that similar

00:26:55   Thinking about one-on-one conversations those were really raw good conversations, but I like both of them. I don't think it's a bad thing to talk about my experience with people I am not super comfortable with because sometimes that will bring light to an area I am not too comfortable talking about or maybe it's a surface area topic and then I have to dive deeper. So, I think both experiences are good to have. I don't know if I like one more than the other. It is a good coin toss, either one would make me feel better

-------------------Section Omitted------------------------------

00:32:00   **I feel next wave of adoption is domestic and open adoption, the conversation will shift entirely**

00:32:30   That would definitely change my perspective on adoption if my birth parents and adoptive parents… I'm sure there are some families where the birth and adoptive parents are living in the same household working it out that way

00:32:48   **It reminds me of the birth mother we went and met**

00:32:52   She was very active in her child's life

00:33:00   **As an adoptee it's hard to see both sides and where it leaves you, how do you navigate the complexities? It being complicated is a given, but how do we navigate that?**

00:34:20   I don't think I have an answer for that, but you said navigate so I was thinking a journey of constantly moving forward but you are still exploring. You start here and then keep going forward, could go in circles or go visit the mountains twice, you're still navigating, so there's no end goal but in that self the journey is the rewarding part. Not about the end result, it's about the process and that's the self-fulfillment.

00:35:00   **That's beautiful! I do picture a navigating ship**

Follow up Log 2

Researcher: Laura X. Williams   **Project Name:** MACS Capstone 2018

Date Logged: 4/2/2018

File Name: 3.31.2018.WAV

Format: Digital file type: o BWF   **X** WAV   o MP3   o Other:

Length of recording: Hour(s):   00   Minutes: 37   Seconds: 22

Date Recorded (YYYY-MM-DD): **2018-03-31**   **Location**: Zoom Meeting

Interviewee/Event: Follow-up2 from Focus Group 2

Interviewer(s): Laura Williams

Subject: Follow-up 2

Copyright Owner: N/A   **Restricted?** o No, **X** Yes, details: Confidentiality protocol

Summary: Researcher's one-on-one follow-up to Focus Group 2. Overall, participating in the focus group was positive experience. Transformation is indicated in level of confidence to speak about adoption.

Key words, names, & places: adoption, parents, support, speak

File Name: 3.31.2018

Sound Quality: o broadcast   **X** good   o fair   o poor   o unintelligible

TIME CODE   CONTENT DESCRIPTION

(HH:MM:SS)

00:00:28   **How did the group setting go for you? I remember in the beginning you saying how you liked the specificity of the people who were there.**

00:00:45   I really enjoyed it. I was nervous going in didn't know how big it was going to be, if it was bigger you could get lost, but I liked it was just the 4 of us. I've never talked about adoption in a really formal setting other than our interview last year. So, I thought it was cool, great setting for take space and make space. We all just took turns talking and, in the end,, we felt more comfortable and able to talk in a more organic way and just had a conversation and I really liked that.

00:01:47   It was also easier, you only had to open up to two other people because I already know you, but less nerve-wracking being in a big group and have to be comfortable with so many people judging you or knowing personal things about you. It wasn't like a class "oh I'm judging you"

00:02:30   **When you left the forum, what do you remember from exiting?**

00:02:43   I would definitely do this again if you asked again, I would easily volunteer, it was fun, and I enjoyed myself. I enjoyed hearing other people's perspective about how they grew up, I rationally acknowledge that everybody's experience is different but at the same time, since I don't think about it as often I assume everybody growing up was very similar to me. So, it was cool to hear different perspectives

00:03:42   **Right, it's one thing to know its complex but then again how and so what**

00:03:53   That's exactly it, so it was really cool to hear more details

00:04:31   [talking about the cat playing, having out of body moments] **It sometimes feels like that with adoption, you go through life and the whoa, that was me**

00:04:38   I feel like anybody, that's just life.

00:05:14   **Would you say the focus group was like taking a step back? Has it made you think about adoption in a different way?**

00:05:30   I don't outwardly reject my adoption but it's not something I think about. And I don't like to use it as an identity to make myself different than other people, I'd rather be different in other ways. Part of the reason I was nervous was oh, I don't think about it that often am I going to be super far behind from everybody else, is everybody else going to be progressive in their thought. I kind of sometimes did feel that way.

00:07:01   So I was nervous I would be less advanced in my thinking and I do think I was, but I don't think I was far behind or it was a debilitating quality. I did end up learning a lot and I did end up appreciating having discussions like that more. If you asked me to do it again I would say yeah, it was kind of fun and cool to talk about it.

00:07:50   I still don't think about it every day, but if another adopted person came up to me and wanted to talk about it, I would be more willing to go get coffee and talk about it, Before I would be like that's really strange, don't target me

00:08:12   **I have your card here you wrote me: everyone different, but sense of reality and shared experiences are the same, good to talk about adoption and this part of my life and hear what other have to say. Do you have anything to add?**

00:10:29   It was nice to know, sometimes I feel in between not identifying as white and not identifying as Chinese and we touched upon that a lot. It was nice to know there is a whole-other group of people who feel in between races or in between identities. It was cool to talk about *Big Bird Goes to China*, it was this weird shared experience of our parents trying to get us to learn about our culture through Big Bird which is a very American way of looking at culture, so I thought that was funny, one thing that was odd, but I really enjoyed.

00:11:35   Comparing how celebrated adoption day. I guess my mom was not forcing me to really acknowledge it.

00:12:35   After talking with you I wish I called my mom sooner to talk about adoption. It's such a weird topic for me, I try not to talk about it with my mom because I know she has a lot of emotional feelings about it just because it was a big moment I came into her life.

00:13:22   I know shed be willing to talk about it but I'm always worried if we talk about it and our opinions are different, oh I don't feel this way or oh that part of my life was hard because of my weird identity or something, I would feel bad if I'd tell her that, I feel like she would cry or feel like she made a mistake.

00:13:46   **Like it's a check on her worth or parenting, even though it's not, it could be misunderstood**

00:13:54   Or like self-criticalness, she could rationally acknowledge I'm not being critical of her parenting but it's still an emotional thing.

00:14:18   It [focus group] also gave me something to think about because they also have adopted siblings, my sister and I never talk about being adopted to each other. I've never asked her about it. The only time was when my mom was in the room and we had a conversation about it. So, thinking back, I kind of wish I started a conversation about it [with my family] when that [focus group] was still fresh in my mind. Now maybe I will.

00:15:25   I realized my idea of being adopted is very different from other people, but it validated me in a way I dint feel ashamed in the way I handle my adoption. It was a fun validating experience in a way.

00:16:25   **It was really cool you could realize you wouldn't change anything. See similarities and appreciate differences.**

00:16:47   That's what I really took away. I didn't end up hating anybody or disliking any experience that was talked about or that I have experienced

00:17:04   **Since the focus group till now, how willing are you to talk about adoption? Speak to how curious or not curious**

00:17:50   Opening up the conversation to my mom and sister is something I'd be willing to do and talk about what camp up organically or by list. I would be half-uncomfortable but comfortable initiating that conversation. In terms of other people, I wouldn't say I'm comfortable initiating conversation, but if it came up I wouldn't stray away from answering the conversation. Before the focus group or before I would skirt away from the conversation

00:19:01   So I guess it's not only the focus group that has changed my opinion, but you also have changed my opinions. I would initiate conversation with my immediate family and would be more open to answering questions with another adoptee about adoption

00:20:33   If somebody was like 'hey I'm thinking about adopting can you tell me about your experience?' before I would be very awkward about answering that but now I'd be more comfortable saying "yeah, I had this great opportunity that I would never have if I was adopted and if you do adoption outside of America there is going to be this weird cultural identity thing

that happens for your child that you may not have considered, you may only considered how great it was going to be" that's what I think I would say, I wouldn't necessarily elaborate on it but would say weird cultural identity things go on for a child that you adopt

00:21:25   **How can we have an ethical partnership with our parents?**

00:23:20   I definitely think that it's a progression, for me the interview planted the seed in my mind about adoption. You're a very validating person and encouraged me to say anything I want about it because you made me feel like what comes out of my mouth is important and that helped me open up to you, and after you and I had a conversation I take it home and think about it. So, the larger group setting I was more comfortable to talk to it. And I took something from it and now here we are, maybe I will bring it up to my mom sometime. It is a progress for me that's true.

00:24:22, 24:51   In terms of parenting… Support groups- is a place you can be genuine about your identity and all identity crisis and why you feel like you do or don't fit in. So, then it is a place where you'd be supported or validated or given a different perspective but a different perspective within the same type of experience. Like if I talked to my mom and she just really didn't understand, I could tell she was trying to understand but she didn't really understand this one thing. So, it would be validating. Then on the other end having adoptive parents being able to have their own support group like my mom in her focus group, then other parents learned from others and feel now I can feel like I can handle it. So not like a training, but a place to talk with others who have a similar experience like you.

00:26:34   **Much more organic, balance between structured and unstructured way to talk about it?**

00:26:47   Just having a structured place with certain people would be helpful but it doesn't need to be a curriculum. If an adoptee and parents started some partnership group where everybody meets on Thursdays and parents bring their adopted children and you talked with the adopted children and your parents talked with the adoptive parents, like if an adoptee and adoptive parents started something like that I think it would be helpful at least for me and my family. I don't know about my mom, but her being able to ask questions without me being responsible for telling her how I want to feel about it. I don't think I can tell her how to feel but I know she values what I say so one day you might feel one extreme and the other day another extreme and then you're stuck in the middle. Like, how do I react?

00:28:10   **I'm hearing you are more confident in talking more openly to people who matter in your adoption and that chips away at adoption stigma and contributes to social change**

00:28:26   You have been the catalyst for that change. You are definitely the reason why I think and talk about it more.

00:28:56   **Thank you, that does validate my work. That does sustain me in my work.**

00:29:32   And I think you are a good focus group leader too and that's important.

00:30:40   But I think you have a good approach and you plan it out and good at reading the room so if there were pauses you would make sure everyone doesn't have something to say before moving on whereas he [the teacher] is like oh there is some silence, we should move on.

00:31:20   **Interesting, I'm thinking about the difference between community and belonging.**

00:31:59   I think you're right. I think I belong with you and in our focus group, but I wouldn't say that we are a community, but we have the potential to be a community. I think that's a good way of looking at it and explaining it to somebody. I guess you can be part of a community like a neighborhood, but you don't belong in the community.

00:32:41   **Yeah, some may say in order to have community you need people in place and that place is belonging. You belong in that place you must belong in that community.**

00:32:53   Hmm, but do you have to belong? I think of a neighborhood, extreme example but white flight, some black people made it into a white suburban neighborhood and made it into that community, but they didn't belong. So then white people started moving out because they didn't want them [black people] to be part of that community.

00:33:21   **Makes sense to strengthen the argument they are two different things. They are not mutually exclusive.**

00:33:40   I think community is a rectangle and belonging is a square because they had time and place but they weren't part of the community.

00:34:55   **That's just making me think it's not even the square rectangle thing, but they [community and belonging] are two separate things and they can intersect each other but you can have one without having the other.**

00:34:38   **I'm also thinking about dichotomies, black/white, pro/anti, parent/child, feeling oppositions and they can't be together. But when adoptees grow up if they adopt, it gets layered.**

00:35:53   **Now that I'm talking, agencies and non-profit adoptee support? Altruism versus money**

00:36:04   For the agencies want to help the children but profiting off of suffering of other people, but non-profit making no money but out of the good of their heart

00:37:02   Like what we talked about in the focus group, not being white, but not being a fresh off the boat Asian we are much our own identity it doesn't necessarily have a label

00:37:45   In parents, people want to be validated to do a good thing, and in adopting it kills two birds with one stone like I'm helping somebody in need and I'm also gaining something and I don't necessarily think that's a bad thing because you're helping and you're gaining, but it could be seen as an opposition like I'm [an adoptive parent] doing this selfless act but I'm selfish because I want to have a child. Maybe not, I don't know

Laura X. Williams Interviewed by Peer Chinese Adoptee

Researcher: Laura X. Williams   **Project Name:** MACS Capstone 2018

Date Logged: 3/16/2018

File Name: 2.6.2018.WAV

Format: Digital file type: o BWF   **X** WAV   o MP3   o Other:

Length of recording: Hour(s):   01   Minutes: 05   Seconds: 19

Date Recorded (YYYY-MM-DD): **2018-02-27**   **Location**: Omitted

Interviewee/Event: Laura X. Williams interviewed with own interview guide

Interviewer(s): Peer

Subject: Researcher's reflexive interview

Copyright Owner: N/A   **Restricted?**   o No, **X** Yes, details: Confidentiality protocol

Summary: Researcher was interviewed with the interview guide by a peer Chinese adoptee who was not part of the original project. Interviewer's dialogue is bolded. Main topics of the missing historical perspective, adoptive family integration, and opinions about the presentation of adoption.

Key words, names, & places: adoption, culture, Chinese, parents, perspective, reflection

Sound Quality: o broadcast   **X** good   o fair   o poor   o unintelligible

TIME CODE   CONTENT DESCRIPTION

(HH:MM:SS)

00:00:17   **First question, where were you born?**

00:00:22   I'll give you an overview of my adoption. From Yi-Wu, at 7 months, grew up in NJ small white town. Access to adoption services and Chinese groups

00:00:57   **What is the structure and demographics of your adoptive family?**

00:01:02   Mom, dad, me, no siblings, cats. No one else adopted in my family. Mom youngest brother married Jamaican woman with biracial children.

00:1:45   **You're not the only person of color, but are the only one adopted. Can you recall any culturally centered resources where you grew up?**

00:01:58   Public Chinese school with them [parents] since 4 years old, Asian parents with Asian kids, me and my parents all in same classroom learning Chinese. My parents put themselves in a situation I would be in the rest of my life.

00:03:55	I tell my mom, "one thing I wish you did differently was to keep pushing me to do Chinese dance or being involved with Chinese culture in that way." My mom was like I don't know what happened, and I said I lost [Chinese dance teacher] and my mom said "oh, that's a big insight" there wasn't any follow-up or awareness of that situational loss

00:04:22	**Were your parents not aware of your relationship with her**?

00:04:24	I don't think at the time, my mom realized this two years ago when she had the chance to reflect on it, so it has been a reflective process now, especially living away

00:05:30	I'm realizing, a lot of little Chinese social groups my parents inserted me into. They liked it too. Dinner with Chinese teachers. They accepted her [my mom], and she was really integrated in the community as well.

00:05:52	**Do you ever recall a time of tension when interacting with your birth culture?**

00:06:07	More so now. I've travel back 3 times. 1st time bubble feel I didn't care as much, 2nd time I didn't care as much my peers were first generation Chinese-Americans that took care of me, they could speak Chinese. High school was with a high school group. My blonde hair blue eye friend would get stopped pictures taken like a celebrity, and I made a point that's never going to happen to me, I'm never going to feel that…. It's weird, you're [blonde hair blue eyes] signaled as different and regarded as exotic in their [Chinese people] eyes, but I'm never going to be exotic in the two places I'm connected to. I never experienced that approachability or that regality where ever I am.

00:08:30	I was never really self-conscious about walking down the street with my parents growing up but felt that with my parents when we were in Europe. When I felt already a foreigner, and my parents were with me in the foreign context, I felt tension that people [my adopted peers] were saying in America when they were nine years old.

00:09:15	**During your reflection period, would you change anything about your relationship with your birth culture growing up?**

00:09:25	No actually I would change my relationship to the people within the birth culture growing up. I would want to change an understanding of how I was projecting adoption related thoughts on to the people I was interreacting with and realize how important those social relationships were and then had been more willing to lean into them more and accept them and that would have given me a better self-confidence and worthiness about it.

00:10:44	Growing up I had terrible tensions with my mom because I was going through these adoption related tensions, independence, "you don't need to love me" ugly thoughts

00:11:25	Now I feel like I've come totally around, and my mom after I have come to recognize my birth mother as a human. Now I'm going through process of accepting my birth father. Coming to terms with what a father means to me which is causing tensions now with my dad.

00:11:47   **Really, you find a parallel between your birth father and your adoptive father?**

00:11:51   Not a parallel but more of a feeling, a connection between, trying to figure out what a blank means to me, so what does Chinese-ness mean to me, what does American-ness mean to me. Working though what a father means to me.

00:12:19   **And that's effecting your relationship with your adoptive father?**

00:12:25   Yeah, I told him that and it's hard for him to hear, he's going through his own adoption story as I'm going through mine. It's all about acceptance and it's not equating one of the other, it's more in order to be at peace with one you need to accept the other.

00:12:47   **So you are not quite at peace with your adoptive father?** (yeah) **because?**

00:12:52   It's more about exploring and articulating my relationship to a birth father figure. And going through life, thinking about humanizing process of my birth mother has led me to think about how to equate different things in my life to that overall understanding.

00:13:28   The birth mother idea is very enigmatic, it's not a yes or no, it's more of an understanding and a deeper appreciation for because you can understand at different levels and appreciate at different levels

00:14:26   **Can you quickly define what humanizing is?**

00:14:29   Recognition and understanding that someone has thoughts and feelings and the little daily things instead of just being a label or a word. She [birth mother] had to eat every day or be warm or cold. Those things never occurred to me when I was 17 or 18 (**right**)

00:15:12   **Talking about now, how do you ethnically identify yourself?**

00:15:18   Chinese-American-Adoptee. Chinese first, then American, then Adoptee. Some people on similar level of conversation than I am agree, some of other people don't think that way. My mentor, has had to reconcile her in-laws, constantly have to understand where she lies in that. My point, she talks about taking a long time to claim all three of those identities separately and then together. Kind of like same destination, different ways getting there like a math problem.

00:17:17   I still feel like I'm stepping into the Chinese part of that identity, still something really difficult for me to understand and reconcile.

00:15:54   **Interesting that you identify as Chinese first, but it's still in the works of what it means to you and your relationship with that part of your identity. For me when you said it, it was like, you need to know that first. That's just number one, boom, Chinese. Just interesting how open you are about it. It kind of relates to how open you are to explore that part of who you are. But also seems like it's not the most comfortable part. But at the same time that's there first, that's the first thing people connect something to you. Before you even say American-Adoptee, people maybe wouldn't even guess your adopted.**

00:19:20   Good point, when I say that order, Chinese had to come first because I was born there then I had no choice to be adopted to America and adopted.

00:19:44   **When you meet someone for the first time, how willing are you to disclose your adoptee status?**

00:19:50   So willing

00:21:09   I went through this period, of I am adopted hear me roar. I would say when I first meet someone, this is something you need to know about me. I feel like it's important to me and you [stranger] must know that before we take our friendship further.

00:21:42   **In some ways I see that as heads up. At the same time, I hear how you're expressing that in a way it's coming off as pride, but also something you need to understand. Very different from some other stories I've heard, "you don't really need to know that, I don't identify with it" So it really shows how in-touch you are with that part of your identity and I think sharing that with other people helps develop that pride and comfortability with being more open. It sounds like "oh yeah no problem I'm adopted," boom. It also sounds like you know when you want to share it, how much you want to share about it, with whom you want to share it with and when you want to stop talking about it. I think that's really important and allows you to take control over that part of who you are because it is a vulnerable time. And I think not every adoptee out there understands that they don't have to always talk about it, and don't have to share all of it at once and can share bits and pieces. It sounds like you're aware of each situation and each conversation. How that helps you become more willing to disclose that about yourself.**

00:24:05   Recognizing that control does have a place in reclaiming your story and how you're sharing it with others.

00:24:46   **In what ways have you engaged with your birth culture this year?**

00:25:12   The first thing that is coming to mind, speaking to first generation Chinese-American, Asian cultural festival in the U.S.

00:26:57   **It was like an interpretation of what Asian culture is in the eyes of Westerners. And you still consider that birth culture. That's complicated. It's also very uncomfortable to think about that, in a very American way. The interpretation is not the honesty of Chinese culture.**

00:27:52   **I feel like the interpretation of an art piece made by a first-generation immigrant from China verses a second-generation Chinese person from China creating art about Chinese culture are going to be very different.**

00:28:32   I think it's very nuanced, and something we can use as a catalyst, used in a good way to lift up pride identity, I and you are on the older end of the wave adoptions from China so there's a sense of urgency and responsibility, an energy there of being on the forefront of changing perceptions and changing adoption in general. Also, a messy thing about being a face of adoption, you don't do that in any ethical way, it's not the way to do it.

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00:30:50 **One thing to add, I think it would be interesting to hear the perspective of Chinese adoption from those who live in China who don't have any exposure to American culture. The perspective of international adoption in the U.S and the reason for adoption, I don't feel it correlates with the same purpose of international adoption in China. The transaction between the two countries. The two countries work differently. I've met people working at a Chinese restaurant in their older 40s and they are aware of adoption they are like "I know this" all this information I don't hear from white adoptive parents. It's like wait, tell me more because I have never heard of that side of adoption before from the Chinese culture. I've only heard it from the white American way of looking at international adoption, the way they look at Vietnamese, Chinese, Korean, they are not the same. When I talked to this waiter, he was just telling me more about the history and what happens to babies who don't make it to the orphanage or don't have the opportunity to be adopted. The families don't even think about adoption or the idea of giving up their child. I also met another first-gen who is Chinese, who told me stories about what his mom's friends go through back in China. All these different stories I didn't hear about. For my whole life thought it was for this reason or that. It's almost catching adoptive parents in awkward position "are you making this up? Where are you getting this information from?" There are people from China who know people who has went through this and they are telling me something completely different about their experience. Even though adoptive parents and people in China have different experiences of being adopted, I think it would be really helpful for adoptive parents to be aware and listen to these stories about the history and about how China is connected to these adoptions happening in America.**

00:34:26 **There's so much conversation about how these children with white parents living in America, but the history of adoption and how their country reacts to it and responds to it is really important and gives a different perspective than just the American other than what it's like being Chinese as an American adopted person.**

00:35:08 There is that historic element that's missing, just think of Families with Children from China appropriated, there's just so much to know about Chinese culture it can be overwhelming for us and our parents.

00:35:59 **It's also partly about what do they already know and how much they want to explore. When I talk about Chinese history, my dad only brings up the economic relationship between China and the U.S. ok that's great but I'm not even worried about anyone correlating that with me, I've never had issues with that. The only issues I've had were any social, identity issues. Never been about money.**

00:38:27 **Seems when adoptive parents talk to their child at a young age, when the question comes up, "why was I given up for adoption? Why am I not with my birth parents? where are my birth parents?" these questions are in your child's head whether they say it or not it's happening. It's reasonable to expect adoptive parents to be proactive to have these conversations and not just go along with the regular answer that feeds the stigma of adoption "oh you're lucky, we don't want to think about the bad, just think about the great opportunity, the land of opportunity, country of freedom" we are just not going**

to talk about it. If a child grows up like that, no wonder they are going to be so surprised "oh, I did research on my providence and I found all this information and maybe that's why" If the child does all this research on their own and talks to other adoptees, the stories their parents are telling them don't line up. (Do they feel betrayed?)

00:40:15   **Not betrayed but tricked. There's a line between being realistic and not scaring a child at a certain age, but I think the child is already scared at a young age when they think why they were given up.**

00:41:18   I had this revelation my parents are just at scared as I am every day because each day is a new day as an adoptive parent. That's another way to humanize people everyone is equally as scared as you are.

00:41:43   You're thinking more about process and approach rather than outcome and there needs to be that more build out of adoptive parents' tool kit (**there does**)

00:42:03   **The resources adoption agencies provide are not providing enough readiness, preparedness to have these conversations that not every parent is used to having because they didn't grow up that way. I think it's a very safe thing to do to tell you adopted child "you're so lucky" is that really the reason why? I don't think its harmful for adoptive parents to say we really don't know and reassure its ok we don't know. That's kind of what makes our family different. The acceptance and acknowledgement of being different. The child is going to know that from physical appearance before they can understand cognitively.**

00:44:14   **So the parents set the tone**

00:46:14   **Leaving out the word adoption, forgetting that because, I've heard from adoptive parents "I just see them as my daughter or son, I love them so much" it's funny cause love can make an adoptive parents blind sometimes to other identities they are not aware of because they are not a part of that community**

00:47:12   **So I can see why adoptive kids when they are at our age, they start reflecting or at a point where they are reflecting, they realize… I think I've come to some truth about some stuff that I wasn't taught or told at a young age which can cause frustration between your peers, adoptive parents, mentors, leaders, people you looked up to, you listened to, you trusted. And you figure out "wait a minute, I don't know if that's really…" I don't know.**

00:48:05   That reflection is how you're trying to navigate those relationships with that new lens

00:48:14   **And it's hard to do that, hard to adapt to it so quickly because you're like "I grew up that way, knowing this" it's kind of developing your own way** (Just because you've always done it that way doesn't mean it's the right way) **Right and that can be very challenging developing a healthy relationship with your adoptive parents because they may**

not be on the same wavelength as you, because they are not going through the same process about who they are anymore. (Well, depends on their outlook on life) **That's true**

00:48:55   **It has become more of a routine… A routine of surviving, a routine of taking care of chores and duties in order to find control in your life. being comfortable, feeling safe**

00:49:40   Do you have to feel safe to feel happy?

00:49:43   **I think it helps** (You don't have to be happy to be safe, but you have to be safe to be happy?)

00:49:59   **For me, being safe makes me happy** (But when you are safe, are you sometimes unhappy?) **No, because when I know I'm safe I'm happy, when I'm unsafe I'm unhappy**

00:50:22   I'm just thinking about refugees, or people who practice calligraphy may be happy but unsafe in oppressive environments because of that practice.

00:55:30   **Is there anything else you wish to share regarding your cultural adoption experience in the U.S?**

00:55:42   I want to think about appropriation, the word 'appropriate' is like acceptable, and then appropriation is what is being taken and then can be made presentable to the public. Interrogated deeper about knowing the who puts on certain Lunar New Year events in America.

00:56:48   My parents really found a great niche, Jane brown is known for being hard on adoptive parents and strict, my mom and dad would joke "what will Jane Brown beat us up with this time" I had a weird dynamic with other adopted kids then.

00:58:31   Sometimes that's the first time some adoptees may be surrounded by other adoptees, and that's a big deal, same with Holt Camp, (**it's overwhelming**) Even if you're not talking about adoption, just knowing that all these other kids are adopted

00:58:58   I went to an adoption picnic, that was the most diverse space I had ever been in. of transracial families. That for me was overwhelming. Same kind of thing. Pushing that envelop and challenge yourself to dive into more diverse spaces and interrogate it

01:01:42   **Is there a quick story or community to further situation the role of birth culture in your childhood?**

01:01:52   I asked about a "so adopted moment?" I've thought about this question a lot and mine is this clear picture of sitting at Holt Camp, and all these children and counselors playing together, and I felt very adopted because this is a time and a space all these kids are adopted playing together, not talking about it, and they are ok together. Also, whenever we were in China with my parents and the waiter would look to me to help when ordering food and I would not know.

01:03:33   I don't feel very adopted when I'm with my great aunt and cousins. I don't feel adopted when I'm learning about my namesake or hearing stories about my great aunt traveling, I feel very connected to her [great aunt] because she is the closest relative to my namesake [great grandma Laura] I asked when her birthday is, her laugh, what kind of person she was. So being able to explore that makes me feel less adopted.

01:06:07   When do you feel most satisfied with your adoption? (**how can you know now?**) I think I'm most satisfied when I'm surrounded by other adoptees or others who have felt a similar oppression, tensions with birth culture, living as not white in America, living with tense relations with parents, and living into their difference. I relate to many levels of that, we just get it, what is the it, we just get it. To define what it is, realizing people are human beyond these qualifiers maybe

01:11:11   My dad was recently reflecting on his trip to get me, and he said you have to relinquish all control, they get handed a baby and then shuffled through programing and trips and signing papers. So, he was saying give up control of time and space (**don't they know that?**) Yeah, they know that, but he was just mentioning it. But I think as an adult adoptee going back for the first time, it might be hard to do that [give up control in that way]

Appendix B: Program Development Examples

The following includes examples of a story preparation workshop, agile project management project plan, and agile project management timeline.

Example Workshop Schedule for "Sharing You Story, Sharing Yourself" Workshop

Date/Time:

Duration: 5 hours, with 1-hour lunch break

Location:

| Time	Action
9:00 AM	- Mingle - Introduction - Agenda - Ask about goals of the group - Agreements about how to be with each other
9:15 AM	*What is your adoption story now?* Map personal story web, document significant memories that have shaped your adoption identity (10-15 mins) - Facilitator shares an account of an adoption story (5 mins) - Discuss what was noticed about the story (10 mins) - Share another account of an adoption story (5 mins) - Discuss what was noticed (10 mins)

10:00 AM	• Revisit story web to add anything you might have missed in a different color (5 mins) • 15-minute Break
10:30 AM	• Regroup and overlap everyone's map into a larger group map, *what are significant themes important to the group?* (40-45 mins)
11:15 AM	• Revisit story web to add anything you might have missed (5 mins)
11:30 PM	Community lunch hour
12:30 PM	• Work in pairs; practice listening and speaking about your adoption, share a time when you felt the need to be listened to with regards to adoption (30 mins, 15 mins each)
1:00 PM	• Debrief how that went (15 mins) • 10-minute Break
1:30 PM	• Revisit original personal story web with a new color and reflect on how it has changed or stayed the same after the workshop (15 mins) • Final debrief and brainstorm next steps to practice and continue to think about the evolution of your story (15 mins)
2:00	• End

Example Agile Project Management Work Plan[216]

Project Name	Chinese Adoptee Focus Group Series				
Project Manager	Laura Williams				
Project Deliverable	A series of three gatherings of Chinese adoptees to develop a community arts project.				
Scope Statement	Ending result will be a public project set to run for one month in an independent gallery.				
Start Date	3-Sep				
End Date	5-Oct				
Overall Progress	20%				
Task Name	Responsible	Start	End	Days	Status
Focus Group 1	Laura	9/3	9/13	10	Complete
Scope and Expectations	Natalie	9/3	9/7	4	Complete
Desired Outcomes	Sarah	9/7	9/12	5	Complete
Logistics Coordination	Faith	9/9	9/13	4	Overdue
Focus Group 2	Rachel	9/16	9/24	8	In progress
Work Plan	Sierra	9/16	9/17	1	In progress
Development	Jade	9/17	9/21	4	Not started
Projected Application	Ashley	9/22	9/24	2	Not started
Focus Group 3	Theresa	9/25	10/5	10	Not started
Confirmation	Erin	9/25	9/29	4	Not started
Production	Natalie	9/24	10/2	8	Not started
Final Preparation	Laura	10/2	10/5	3	Not started

[216] "Agile Project Plan Template," SmartSheet, accessed April 30, 2018, https://www.smartsheet.com/agile-project-management-excel-templates.

Example Agile Project Management Timeline
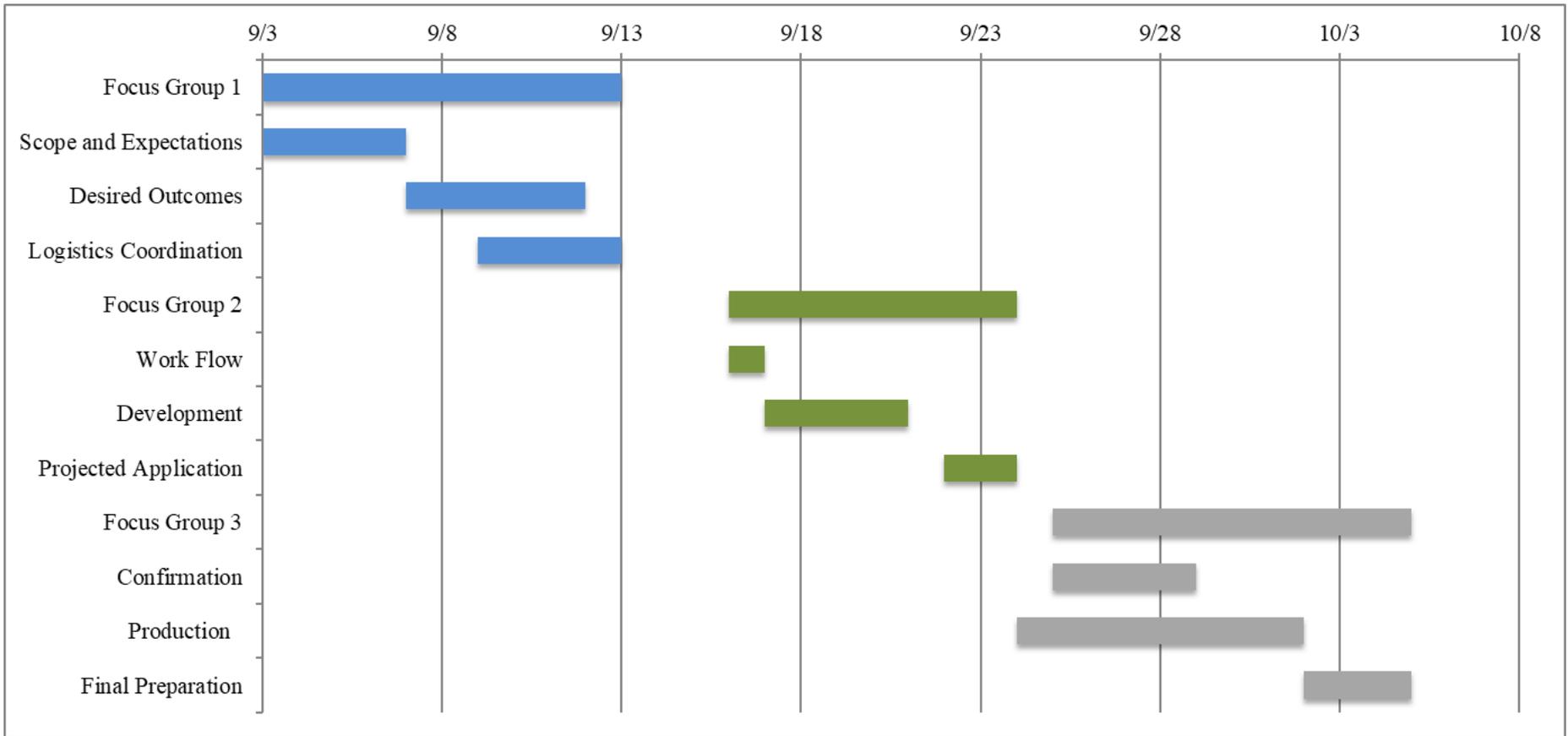
Appendix C: Self-Reflection Tools

The following two self-reflection tools grounded me as an adoptee working in adoption. Thinking through these tools allowed me to do cultural work I intended to do. My hope is for future adoptees working in adoption (or those working closely with their own communities) to benefit from working with the basic concept of these two guides.

The Me-irror Chart

Through the most intensive parts of my capstone, I would sit at my writing desk with a mirror on the shelf in front of me. I kept it there to remember where I came from, what I am doing, and where I am going. I also created this "me-irror" chart as a way to document where I picked up some of my habits of mind and body. The basic concept is to graph characteristics I recognize in myself reflected in the habits of those around me. For example, I am a planner, and I have observed this same characteristic in my mother. Likewise, I appreciate music and have observed this same quality in my father. Future iterations of this non-exhaustive and indefinite chat may include the habits of significant role models or extended family members that I have integrated into my ways.

What Laura observed in herself and in Mom	What Laura observed in herself and in Dad
- Planner - Nature appreciation - Thoughtful and caring - Observant	- Calculative - Music appreciation - Questions how things work - Patient
What Laura might get from Chinese parents - Strong willed - Looks - Taste palette	What we might get from each other as a family - Human projection of emotions - Human compassion - Human appreciation for one another

What are I when I am not _____?

In the intersection of immersive research, life passion, *and* one's life being, I find it important to recognize how we subconsciously "compartmentalize" discordant thoughts or feelings to avoid cognitive dissonance.[217] I draw from one of my sociology classes where we often think, "if we can identify what a system/structure/process is *not*, we then may ask what it *is*." The question *what are I* suggests that there are multiple influences on what *I am*. This allows me to recount for the intersectionality of identity. But to that point, the very fact that *it* exists in me, means that it does in fact exist. I would encourage conscious, self-identifying beings to account for pluralistic identities to ask oneself *occasionally*, what are you when you are not "you"? It balances my self-concept.

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[217] Stephen Strack and Theodore Millon, *Handbook of Personology and Psychopathology*. (Hoboken: Wiley, 2005).