

Newsletter of the China Adoption Research Program

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Mission: The China Adoption Research Program at the University of South Florida seeks to conduct rigorous research on child and family outcomes associated with the adoption of children from China, and to use the findings of such research to inform active and prospective adoptive families as well as policy makers, managers, consultants, support groups, and agencies involved in the adoption process.

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MESSAGE FROM PROGRAM DIRECTOR/RESEARCH TEAM LEADER, DR. TONY TAN

Dear Parents,

It has been over a year since I was in touch with you last time. I want you to know that I have kept on doing research on the adopted Chinese children and their families. It is important that I keep pushing for policy changes in orphanage care and equally importantly, for adoption policies and practices that are informed by research instead of politics.

Since the last e-newsletter, I have made many efforts to communicate with the CCAA officials and orphanage directors about the importance of adequate care. I have actively used the research findings from the study that you have been part of to argue for more friendly policies regarding international adoption, especially restrictions on parental age, income, homeownership and marital status. I honestly do not know how much of an impact these efforts might have had but I am determined to keep on trying. In my recent meetings with Dr. Zhu Liqin from the Institute of Psychology at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, I learned that last year's earthquake in Sichuan province (where I grew up) has unexpectedly heightened the awareness of institutional care and adoption. As a matter of fact, I was told that many Chinese government agencies (e.g., Civil Affairs Ministry) were vying for involvement in the caring of the earthquake orphans. Hopefully, the government agencies and the public will continue paying attention to the broader context of infants and children at-risk, especially those who are being cared for in the orphanages. In my recent interactions with many children adopted from China at an older age, I see many challenges that these children face in adjusting (especially academically) in their new homeland. These challenges are partially, in my opinion, a result of lack of adequate learning experience in the orphanage. Of course, I also believe that some teachers and schools here are not as experienced in working with these children.

In this newsletter, I would like to share with you the research progress that I have made recently. I hope you find it informative. Below I briefly summarize the papers that I have been working on.

Q1. How do Chinese citizens feel about Americans adopting Chinese children?

As more and more parents and their children are taking homeland trips, I feel it is necessary to provide parents with some insights regarding how the Chinese citizens view international adoption. Recently, I wrote an article on this topic with Prof. Fan Xiaohui from Xi'an Jiaotong University. We interviewed people in China and found that while most of the people had a positive view about international adoption, many wondered the motivation of Americans adopting "unwanted" orphanage children in China. The people we interviewed felt that adopted children were "lucky" and the act of adopting was "rescuing" the unwanted to orphanage children. Also we found that male and female Chinese citizens feel differently about international adoption. Rural women focused mostly on the pain of losing a child. This article will be a chapter in a book about homeland visits titled *Home to Homeland* that will be published soon. Recently, I also wrote a chapter called "Adoption" for the *Berkshire Encyclopedia of China*. I have included both articles in the end of this newsletter. Berkshire will offer a 5% discount for adoptive parents.

Q2. What is the adopted Chinese children's adjustment like in families with biological children already?

As about 30% of the adoptive families have biological children, I was interested in how the adjustment of the biological child, the biological child's initial reaction to the adoptive sibling might have an impact on the adopted child. I focused on 40 families (each family had a biological child and an adopted child). The 40 biological children were on average 7.9 years; the 40 adopted Chinese children were on average age 3.5 years. Data provided by the adoptive mothers showed that the biological children's average age was 5.3 years when the adopted child arrived. While 95% of the adopted children and 40% of the biological children were girls, both groups of children showed favorable adjustment (as measured with the Child Behavior Checklist). The adopted children were more likely to have adjustment difficulties if they had difficulty adjusting to the adoptive mothers early on and if the biological children had adjustment difficulties themselves and showed difficulty accepting the new

sibling. Sibling rivalry might play a role in this. The magnitude of the effect, however, was small. While I did not look at whether a similar finding would occur to families with more than one adopted children, it is possible that this would be the case (as rivalry would similarly occur to adoptive siblings). This article was recently published by *Adoption Quarterly*. I will be asking an online group moderators Ms. Cindy Morrison (mom of two girls) to share the article.

Q3. What is the relationship between the pre-school-age adopted Chinese children's sleep problems and their family sleep arrangements?

Sleep difficulty is one of the areas that many parents with young children are concerned about and is a major source of parenting stress. Some parents and professionals feel that adoptive parents are the "culprit" of some of the less acceptable sleep arrangements in the Western culture (e.g., bed-sharing).

In order to better understand the motivation behind family sleep arrangements, I looked into how the children's sleep problems/difficulties might play a role from a dataset on 480 children under the age of 6 years. After carefully examining the descriptive and qualitative data, it was concluded that sleep arrangements reflected parental responsiveness to children's sleep behaviors. In other words, children's sleep problems tend to lead parents to adjust family sleep arrangement, not the other way around. Most parents would gladly have their children sleep alone if their children had no sleep difficulties. Children with more sleep problems were more likely to have more sleep locations and to co-sleep with parents or share a bedroom with parents. Parents of children with more sleep problems were more likely to seek advice on co-sleeping. When they did, pediatricians were more likely than extended family members and fellow adoptive parents to recommend against co-sleeping. This paper (co-authored with my colleague Dr. Kofi Marfo and Dr. Robert Dedrick, who had two nieces adopted from China) will be published by *Infant and Child Development*. I will ask Ms. Cindy Morrison to share the article.

Q4. How does early delay affect later academic performance?

While most adopted Chinese children in the study were rated by their teachers as having average or above average academic performance, I wanted to see if there was a relationship between the adopted children's delays at the time of adoption (data retrospectively collected from parents), attention problems around age 8 years (in 2005), and academic performance at age 11 years old (in 2007). I looked at data on 177 school-aged adopted Chinese girls. At both times, higher degrees of pre-adoption adversity were related to poorer Academic Performance. Children who were adopted at older ages also had poorer Academic Performance. Children with more severe delays at the time of adoption had more attention problems at age 8 years. More attention problems at age 8 years were related to poorer academic performance at age 11. Results also revealed that over a two-year period, there was a significant increase in number of children with clinical Internalizing problems (e.g., anxiety). As the children got older, they seemed to have become less assertive but more responsible. This paper will be published by the *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*. I will ask Cindy to share this article.

Q5. How do children fare in adoptive homes without a father?

Family structures in Western society are becoming more diverse as single women and lesbian couples seek to adopt children. Yet, some countries (such as China) have prevented such adoptions due to the lack of a father and/or fear that the mother might be a lesbian. We compared the behavioral adjustment of children from two types of fatherless households (i.e., families headed by 31 single mothers and 31 lesbian couples) with their peers from 31 married heterosexual households. The children in the three types of families were matched on age at adoption, age at assessment, and number of adoptive siblings. Their behavior adjustment (e.g., Internalizing Problems, Externalizing Problems and Overall Behavioral Problems) was measured with the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL). We found little difference between children in these three types of families. I co-authored this paper with my colleague Dr. Jennifer Baggerly, who is an adoptive mother with a child from Kazakhstan. This paper is undergoing some minor revisions. If the revision is accepted (I am con-

fident it will), the paper will be published in a special issue by *Adoption Quarterly*.

Q6. What concerns parents most about their children during preschool years?

Children's behavioral difficulties are a major source of parenting stress. In order to learn what behaviors in the preschool-age adopted Chinese children were most concerning to the parents, I looked at data from 422 mothers on 480 adopted Chinese girls (average age=3.7 years). These girls were adopted at 3 to 60 months of age (average age at adoption = 13.8 months) and had lived in the adoptive homes for at least 6 months (average = 30.2 months). Data analysis showed that 242 (57.3%) mothers (representing 274 girls) reported one to three concerning behaviors per child (Total = 323 concerns), including behaviors that indicated attachment problems (107 or 33.1%), poor social skills (46 or 14.2%), language/speech problems (42 or 13%), sleep problems (29 or 9%), health/physical problems (24 or 7.4%), and problems in other areas (e.g., potty training) (75 or 23.2%). The mothers with prior experience of raising adopted children, but not biological children, were more likely to report concerning attachment behaviors than first-time mothers. This paper will be published by *Adoption Quarterly*.

One of my graduate students recently looked at whether the mother's concerns changed after the children entered school. He found that from preschool to elementary school, there was a large increase in concerns about peer interactions, anxiety, mood and low self-esteem, and learning disabilities. At the same time, there was a large decrease in concerns about language/speech problems, sleep problems and attachment problems.

Q7. Did Chinese children's age at adoption predict how teachers and parents would rate their social skills?

First of all, most children were adopted at a fairly young age. In the current sample, about 90% of the children were adopted before they reached two years of age (average for all children was about 16 months). It is important to keep this in mind when reading the results. For children who were adopted at

much older ages, it is likely that their experience would be different.

For the 3-5-year olds, teachers rated those who were adopted at an older age to have poorer social skills in *Cooperation*, *Assertion* as well as *Self-control*. For K-6th graders, children who were adopted at an older age were rated by the teachers as having poorer skills in *Cooperation*, as well as lower *Academic Competence*. For 7th-12th graders, those who were adopted at an older age were rated as having poorer *Academic Competence*. Parents' ratings did not seem to have much to do with the children's age at adoption. It is possible that at home, social demand is simpler but in school settings, there is a heavier demand on children's language skills and skills to decipher social cues. Children who were adopted at an older age are more likely to face tougher challenges in these situations. Overall, age at adoption seemed to matter, at least based on the adopted children's teachers' ratings

The Next step of the research

As you know, I periodically ask you to help me with the research on the adopted Chinese children. In the past, I had received overwhelming support from parents and adoption groups. Your help has made a tremendous difference for me professionally and in research on children adopted from China. Some results have been featured by news media and were used to inform policy.

I will soon be asking parents who had been in my previous studies to help me with the third phase of the study. In this phase, in addition to asking you to complete the surveys, I have also received a small grant to collect saliva sample from 200 adopted Chinese children (who had already been included in my study) to be analyzed at the Southeast University genetic lab in Nanjing, China. The lab was led by a well-known geneticist Prof. Lu Zuhong. Thanks to the connection of a friend, Dr. Linda Camras from DePaul University, Prof Lu has agreed to perform the DNA analysis for free. The DNA analysis will focus on one particular allele called serotonin transporter (5-HTT).

Some research has shown that different variations of the serotonin transporter 5-HTT (that is, long or

short) have been related to how children neuro-physiologically cope with stress. Some Chinese scholars (e.g., Prof. Zuhong Lu) have reported that the Chinese population differed from the Caucasian population in the distribution of the short/long variations of the 5-HTT. Knowing more about the adopted Chinese children's 5-HTT distribution can help understand how these children coped with the stress of orphanage living early on, and more importantly, their current risk and resilience in coping with potentially stressful situations. The 200 children will serve as pioneers in this study. When more funding becomes available in the future, I would like to help establish a DNA database for all the adopted children from China. This might help identify possible siblings among the adopted children. Hopefully it will also be helpful in identifying birthparents when the time comes.

In order to be more environmentally friendly, this year I plan to go paperless whenever possible. Soon I will be sending individual parents (who had participated in my study before) an email invitation. Once I hear back from you, I will send you a link to the online surveys. Through the survey, you will have the opportunity to inform me whether you would like your child to be a part of the pioneer group.

PUBLISHED AND FORTHCOMING ARTICLES FROM THE CHINA ADOPTION RESEARCH PROGRAM

1. Tan, T. X. (in press). Preschool-age adopted Chinese girls' behaviors that were most concerning to their mothers. *Adoption Quarterly*.
2. Tan, T. X. (in press). School-age adopted Chinese girls' behavioral adjustment, academic performance and social skills: Longitudinal results. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*.
3. Tan, T. X., Marfo, K., & Dedrick, R. F. (in press). Preschool-age adopted Chinese children's sleep problems and family sleep arrangements. *Infant and Child Development*.
4. Tan, T. X. (2009). *Adoption*. Berkshire Encyclopedia of China.
5. Tan, T. X., & Fan, X. H. (forthcoming). How do Chinese feel about Americans Adopting Chinese

children. In D. Jacobs, I. Ponte., and L. Wang (Eds.). *Home to Homeland: The Experience of Adopted Chinese Children and their Parents*. MN: Yeong and Yeong.

6. Tan, T. X. & Baggerly, J. (under revision). Adopted Chinese Girls' Behavioral Adjustment in Fatherless Families: Comparing Single-Mother and Lesbian-Couple Adoption with Heterosexual-Couple Adoption. *Adoption Quarterly*.

7. Tan, T. X. (2009). Impact of biological children on the adjustment of adopted children from China. *Adoption Quarterly*, 11 (4), 278-295.

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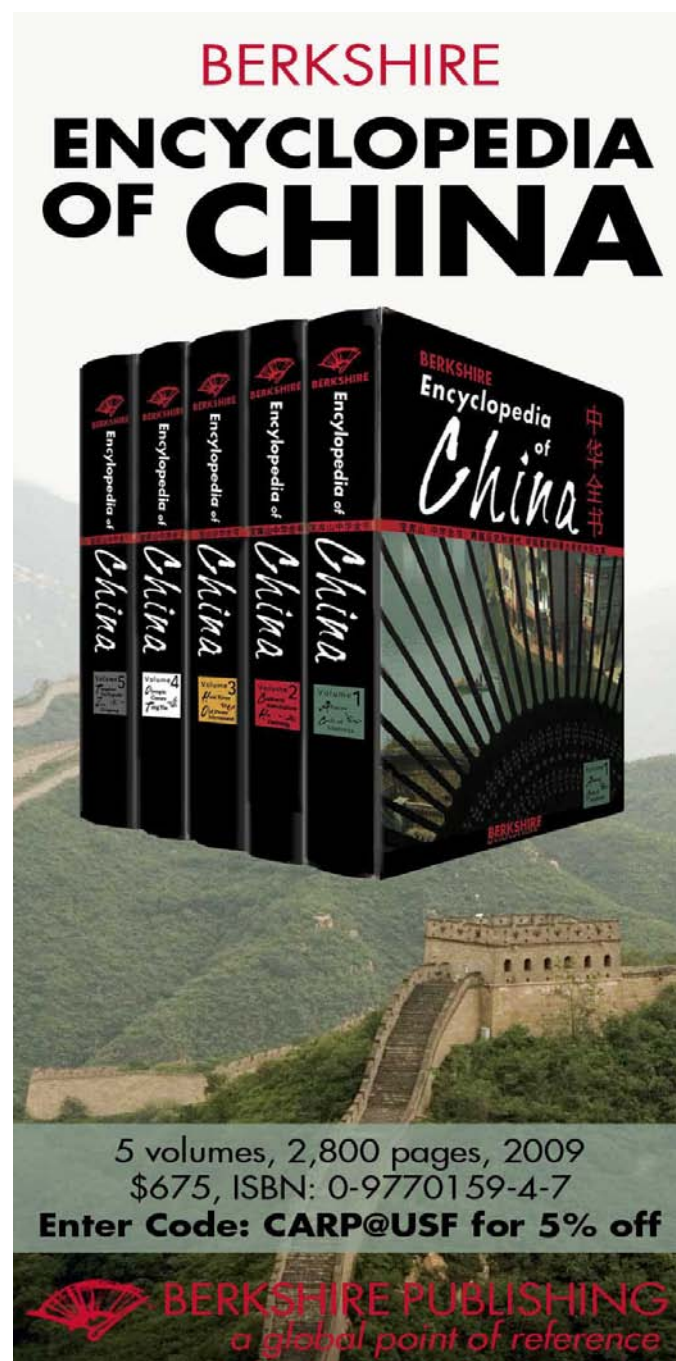
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Adoption

Shōuyǎng 收养

Most abandoned or orphaned children in China are adopted by relatives, but an increasing number of orphaned children are being adopted by families in foreign countries, including the United States. The China Center for Adoption Affairs applies strict guidelines in approving adoptive families; the results are well-qualified adoptive parents and successful social and academic adjustment of the children.

Since the normalization of relations with the People's Republic of China in 1979, exchange programs have brought together Chinese scholars, students, teachers, policy makers, and business people. These personal contacts have been an important part of developing better relations and new partnerships with other countries. But another type of exchange is having an impact, as a wide range of American couples, affluent and sometimes influential, have adopted Chinese children, most of them daughters. Since 1995, China has been the largest source of foreign-born children adopted in the United States. By the end of 2008, over 70,000 Chinese children had been adopted into American families.

Abandoned Children and Their Care

In 1979 China enacted what is commonly known as the one-child policy to limit most married couples to only one

child (exceptions are made for ethnic minority groups). While the intention of the policy was to reduce population growth, one unexpected consequence of this policy was a drastic increase in the abandonment of female infants. Birth parents of these abandoned babies are mostly married peasants in rural China who have already had two or three daughters. Because child abandonment is against the law, parents usually leave their children with little identifying information, in public places at night or early in the morning to avoid legal trouble. Abandoned children whose parents cannot be located by police are considered legally orphaned.

The motive for abandoning a female infant is usually the parents' inability to pay the fines for violating the one-child policy, often because they have already paid heavy fines for violating the policy once or twice before.

While there are no official statistics, it is estimated that at the end of 2002 there were about 300,000 to 400,000 orphans in rural China who were probably cared for by relatives (Shang Xiaoyuan et al. 2005). About 50,000 children (95 percent of whom were children abandoned by their parents) were cared for in state-run children's welfare institutes or in collectively owned rural welfare institutions. Orphanage children range in age from newborn to late teens; they also range in physical condition from very healthy—the abandoned children's prenatal experience in China has been considered better than that of many abandoned children in Russia and Eastern Europe because drinking, smoking, and teenage pregnancy among rural Chinese women are very rare—to severely disabled with conditions such as cerebral palsy, for example. Most abandoned boys have physical disabilities, some as minor



Yun Shi Yang Harcourt (b. 2004) in Sydney with her mother, Jo Bosben, and her father, Tim Harcourt, chief economist of the Australian Trade Commission (and author of “Australia-China Relations” in this encyclopedia).

as a cleft palate, or mental disabilities. Most girls do not have a physical handicap, but have been abandoned as a result of the one-child policy and Chinese society’s preference for boys.

Orphanages (called Child Welfare Institutes or Social Welfare Institutes), usually located in or near a city, are typically gated and off-limits to locals and visitors. They often have a small clinic on site. The size of the orphanage can range from small (less than fifty children) to quite large (several hundred children). Operating budgets usually come from provincial and central government as part of the civil affairs budget. Most orphanages are inadequately equipped to care for and educate children.

In the orphanages, children are usually divided into different age groups. Older children are required, if capable, to help care for the younger ones. The children’s daily routines include scheduled feedings and/or meals, organized group learning, and other activities. Caregivers are usually women from local communities. The caregivers provide the best care they can, but due to a large caregiver to child ratio, one-on-one care is rare if not impossible. Orphanages have recently started utilizing local families to provide part-time or full-time foster care for some orphans.

As noted, most orphaned and abandoned children do not go to orphanages; some are brought up by relatives, but many may simply be unaccounted for. These children, especially those in rural areas, often live in poverty without

access to social services. Government-funded subsistence allowances are available to orphaned/abandoned urban children and vary from region to region, but even the largest stipends are less than ordinary children’s living costs. Funds to provide the “five guarantees” (i.e., food, clothing, housing, medical care, and burial expenses) to orphaned and/or abandoned children in the countryside come from villages and towns. But the amounts of these funds are decreasing with agricultural taxation, putting more children at risk for inadequate care.

Domestic and International Adoption

Under the leadership of China’s Ministry of Civil Affairs, the China Center for Adoption Affairs (CCAA) in Beijing is the headquarters for domestic and international adoption: it governs policy and regulations. For international adoptions, the CCAA sets the quota, handles the paperwork, and matches children with potential foreign adoptive parents. By law, only an orphan under the age of fourteen is eligible for adoption. The orphanage must publish local newspaper ads regarding a child under its care and allow six months for birth parents to claim the child. The child is legally declared an orphan after that period and is thus allowed to be adopted. Open adoption

from the orphanage is almost never a possibility as the orphanage has no knowledge of the identity of the child's birth parents.

Chinese citizens can adopt either from the orphanages or from other channels (e.g., private adoption, kinship adoption). There are no statistics regarding kinship and private adoption within China. For Chinese citizens to adopt a child from the orphanage, they must first register with the county-level civil affairs office where the child's orphanage is located. In order to qualify for an adoption certificate, the applicants must be at least thirty years of age, infertile (with medical evidence), and medically and physically capable of caring for children. They also need to show proof of residence and marital status. A single male adopting a female child is additionally required to be at least forty years older than the child. Upon receiving the adoption certificate, the applicants are allowed to pick one child from three to four eligible children. Little is known about the development of domestically adopted Chinese children.

China first allowed a small number of children to be adopted by foreign families in 1985, when twenty children were adopted into the United States. (From 1985 to 1989, seventy children were adopted by American families.) In 1991, to relieve the heavy demands of a drastically increased number of abandoned children in the state-run child welfare institutes, China enacted adoption laws to permit a larger number of children to be adopted internationally. The United States adopts the most children. Since 1995 China has been of the largest source of transracial adoption in the United States, accounting for over 35 percent of the children involved in U.S. international adoptions. By the end of 2008, 71,753 Chinese children were adopted into American families (Families with Children from China, 2008). Chinese children have also been adopted into families in Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. There are no statistics as to the number of children adopted into many of these countries.

The Good Earth

Pearl S. Buck, an eminent twentieth-century novelist who won both the Pulitzer and Nobel prizes, was an adoptive mother and early proponent of interracial and international adoption. Buck was born in China to missionary parents and spent the first half of her life there. Her best-known book, The Good Earth, contains much about the plight of Chinese girl children and the suffering of parents who sometimes sold them into slavery to avoid starvation.

O-lan had been rinsing the rice bowls with a little water and now she piled them in a corner of the hut and looked up at him from the spot where she squatted.

"There is nothing to sell except the girl," she answered slowly.

Wang Lung's breath caught.

"Now, I would not sell a child," he said loudly.

"I was sold," she answered very slowly. "I was sold to a great house so that my parents could return to their home."

"And would you sell the child, therefore?"

"If it were only I, she would be killed before she was sold . . . the salve of slaves was I! But a dead girl brings nothing. I would sell this girl for you—to take you back to the land."

"Never would I," said Wang Lung stoutly, "not though I spent my life in this wilderness."

But when he had gone out again the thought, which never alone would have come to him, tempted him against his will. He looked at the small girl, staggering persistently at the end of the loop her grandfather held. She had grown greatly on the food given her each day, and although she had as yet said no word at all, still she was plump as a child will be on slight care enough. Her lips that had been like an old woman's were smiling and red, and as of old she grew merry when he looked at her and she smiled.

"I might have done it," he mused, "if she had not lain in my bosom and smiled like that."

Source: Buck, P. S. (1931). *The good earth*. New York: Harper & Row, 101.

Research shows that families in these countries have adopted children from over 530 Chinese orphanages in all twenty-three Chinese provinces (China considers Taiwan the twenty-third province), four of the five autonomous regions (no children have been adopted internationally from Tibet), and four municipalities (Beijing, Chongqing, Shanghai, and Tianjin), while the leading sending provinces are Guangdong, Hunan and Guangxi (Tan 2006).

QUALIFICATION AND COST OF INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION FROM CHINA

Since it first permitted international adoption, the CCAA has modified its regulations several times. In December 2002, the agency reduced the quota of single parent adoption from 33 percent to no more than 5 percent. In May 2007, in response to a decrease in the number of children available for international adoption, the CCAA drastically changed its policy, allowing only married heterosexual couples aged between thirty and fifty-five to adopt from China. The couple must have been married for a minimum of two years if it is the first marriage, five years if it is a second or third marriage, and no more than two previous marriages are allowed for either spouse. There must be no more than four children living in the home. Additionally, in section III of the new CCAA regulations, couples may not adopt if they have one or more of the following conditions:

- 1 AIDS
- 2 Mental handicap
- 3 Infectious disease within infective stage
- 4 Binocular blindness, binocular parallax (problems with depth perception), or monocular blindness; no ocular prosthesis
- 5 Binaural hearing loss or language-function loss (adoption of special needs children who have identical conditions will be exempt from this limitation)
- 6 A function or dysfunction of limbs or trunk caused by impairment, incompleteness, numbness, or deformation; severe facial deformation
- 7 Severe disease that requires long-term treatment and affects life expectancy, such as malignant tumor, lupus erythematosus, nephrosis (kidney disease), epilepsy, etc.

8 Major organ transplant within the previous ten years

9 Schizophrenia

10 Medication for severe mental disorders, such as depression, mania, or anxiety neurosis, within the previous two years

11 Body mass index over forty (BMI = weight in kilograms/height in meters²)

Further CCAA regulations make the following stipulations:

IV. Either the husband or wife must hold a stable occupation. The family annual income reaches \$10,000 for each family member, including the prospective adoptee; family net assets should equal \$80,000. Family annual income does not include welfare income, such as relief fund, pension, unemployment insurance, or government subsidy.

V. Both the husband and wife have an education at or above the level of senior high school, or vocational skills training at the same level.

VI. There must be fewer than five children in the family under the age of eighteen years, and the youngest one should have reached the age of one year. Adoption of special needs children will be exempt from the restriction as to number of children under the age of eighteen.

VII. Neither the husband nor the wife can have a criminal conviction. Both behave honorably, have good moral character, and are law-abiding. Neither the husband nor wife has any of the following:

VII a. A history of domestic violence, sexual abuse, abandonment or abuse of children (even if not arrested or convicted).

VII b. A history of taking narcotics like opium, morphine, marijuana, cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, or medication for mental diseases that may cause addiction among human beings.

VII c. A history of alcohol abuse or alcohol overconsumption within the previous ten years.

Adoption applications are given consideration on a case-by-case basis when either the husband

or the wife has less than three criminal records of slight severity with no severe outcomes, the time from correction of the wrong has reached ten years, or has less than five records of traffic law violation with no severe outcomes.

VIII. The adoptive parents are able to understand adoption and expect to provide a warm family for the orphaned children (or children with handicap and disability) via adoption and to meet the needs of the children adopted and ensure their good development. They have a correct understanding of intercountry adoption as well, and are fully mentally prepared for the potential risks within intercountry adoption and for the situations of children adopted, such as potential diseases, developmental delay, post-placement maladjustment, etc.

IX. The adopters, in the adoption application letter, make clear promises of being able to accept post-placement follow-ups and offer post-placement reports as required.

The cost of adopting a Chinese child from an orphanage can range from US\$20,000 to US\$25,000. At the time of receiving the child, the adoptive parents are required to make a cash donation of US\$5,000 to the child's orphanage to help improve the living conditions of the children who remain in the orphanage.

PROCEDURE FOR INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION FROM CHINA

According to Families with Children from China (FCC), adopting a child from China includes three phases: assembling application paperwork, waiting, and the trip to China to adopt the child. The application paperwork, generally known as the dossier, consists of ten or so documents that actually go to China and other documents required by local state, county, and adoption agency rules. After all of the documents are collected and authenticated, the entire package is sent by the adoption agency to the China Center of Adoption Affairs (CCAA) in Beijing. One of the major documents in the application is called a home study. This document, prepared by a licensed social worker employed by an agency with an approved China adoption program, describes the prospective family. A typical home study will involve three visits with the social

worker, one at home and two at the social worker's office. The family must have recommendation letters sent directly to the social worker. The final document, which usually runs to six pages or so, can be thought of as a short biography of the parents and an evaluation of whether they will be acceptable parents. It takes approximately thirty to thirty-six months from receipt of the completed dossier to referral of a child for adoption. Travel to China to pick up the child is normally scheduled three months after referral. Some of the major adoption agencies in the United States include Chinese Children's Adoption International (CCAI), China Adoption With Love, Inc. (CAWL), and Alliance for Children.

The actual adoption usually occurs at a hotel near the orphanage. The adoptive parents first meet with the officials from the civil affairs offices and orphanage directors to complete the paperwork and make the cash donation. Following that, the child is handed to the parents. The transition time is usually brief. Parents are usually not permitted to visit the child's orphanage.

Characteristics of Chinese Children at Adoption

The average age of a child at the time of adoption is about thirteen months. Most of the children have been reared in an orphanage since early infancy. Some have received foster care. Most children are girls, and about half of the children show some degree of developmental delay. While fetal alcohol syndrome, HIV, and prenatal drug exposure have not been reported, lead poisoning is common.

Children who were adopted through the special-needs program (called the Waiting Child Program) are usually older and/or have special needs due to physical conditions that can range from very minor (e.g., birthmarks, missing one finger), to moderately severe (e.g., cleft palate), to severe (e.g., cerebral palsy).

Post-Adoption Development

While initially, it is not uncommon for some Chinese children to show worrisome behavior such as sleep disturbances, eating problems, or attachment issues, research conducted in Canada, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway,

and the United States has provided compelling evidence that Chinese children adjust remarkably well in the adoptive home. Their language acquisition, social and emotional adjustment, and later academic performance have

all been reported as either similar to or more favorable than their non-adopted peers. Such a favorable adoption outcome has not been reported among children adopted from Eastern Europe or Latin America. Many researchers



Historical illustration of “A Baby Tower” from the 1885 book *Child Life in China*, written by Mrs. Bryson, a missionary from the London Mission in Wuchang. The author describes baby towers, infamously reputed to have been a means for disposing unwanted children, most often female, at the time of their birth. Although missionary reports of such methods of infanticide appeared in Western media, especially after the founding of the Republic of China in 1911, the author reviewing Mrs. Bryson’s book in *The China Review*, shortly after the book’s publication, comments on never having seen one during extensive travels in the southern part of the country. Bryson’s account resonates today when considering China’s one-child policy—of which an unexpected outcome was the dramatic increase in the number of abandoned baby girls.

speculate that the Chinese children's favorable adjustment results from a combination of the birth mother's reasonably good prenatal care, a fairly decent orphanage experience, and positive adoptive family environment (e.g., highly educated, high-income-earning parents). Chinese children adopted by single parents show similar adjustment to Chinese children adopted by married couples. Long-term outcomes (e.g., adjustment in later adulthood) are unknown. One aspect of concern in these children's future development lies in their possible desire to search for birth parents. It is unlikely that most children will be able to locate their birth parents due to the complex circumstances surrounding child abandonment in China. So far, there is only one child who was adopted by a Dutch couple who successfully located the birth parents.

Probably due to their favorable adjustment, about 75 percent of the families that have adopted from China adopt additional children from China. Recently some post-adoption disruptions have been reported. This mainly occurs to children who were adopted at an older age. As most of the adopted Chinese children are girls, many scholars and policy makers are becoming increasingly concerned about the gender imbalance in China. In some provinces the ratio is now 114 males for every 100 females for children under the age of four.

To help foster a sense of pride about the adopted children's cultural heritage, many adoptive parents actively involve their children in various Chinese cultural activities: language class, kung fu class, celebrating Chinese festivities. As the children get older, many parents go with their children to China to visit their orphanages and to learn about China. Major travel agencies have also been established to cater to heritage trips; one example is Lotus Travel, Inc.

Support Networks

To support each other, adoptive families have established numerous networks both online and offline. Families with Children from China (FCC), with local chapters worldwide, is the largest online community. The FCC has played an active role in engaging the CCAA in discussions about its policy.

Other online communities are also very active. Some of the organizations, such as Raising China Children, focus on Chinese adoptions in general. Other groups have a more specific focus, including groups for families of children adopted from certain regions of China and groups organized around specific developmental issues and topics, such as attachment, special needs, identity, and general post-adoption adjustment.

Adoptive families have also established charitable organizations to help improve the lives of children in the orphanages. One of the largest organizations is Half the Sky Foundation. Other foundations such as Our Chinese Daughters Foundation and China Care also play very active roles in improving children's lives.

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How Do Chinese Feel about Americans Adopting Chinese Children

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Introduction

China is a state "under the people's democratic dictatorship led by the working class." (<http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/constitution/constitution.html>). The working class consists of people (and their offspring) who were allowed to move and live in the urban areas around 1949. For many years, because these people resided in the city and typically worked in state-run factories, they are conveniently termed as *chengli ren* (urban residents) or *gong ren* (workers). The rest of the Chinese population lives in rural area. They are called *nongcun ren* (rural residents) or *nong min* (peasants). The two classes of people are separated by *hukou* (residence registry). An urban *hukou* is a prerequisite for receiving many government-provided educational opportunities, medical and occupational benefits. People with a rural *hukou* are often denied access to much of these resources. Consequently, rural residents of China lag considerably behind their urban counterparts in income, education and overall living conditions. Rural women suffer even more of this political victimization because of the Chinese culture's male preference. They are more likely to have lower level of education and higher level of emotional stress than rural men. As a matter of fact, rural Chinese women have the highest suicide rate in the world. The combination of cultural preference for boys, poverty, male-dominance in rural family decision-making, educational deprivation and one-child policy is considered a major cause of the relinquishment of female infants born to rural parents.

In recent years, despite the prosperity that many urban residents have experienced, life in many rural parts of China remained unbearably difficult and child abandonment continues to be a painful reality for some rural families. According to Professor Xiaoyuan Shang of Beijing Normal University, among the 400,000-600,000 orphans (not including children recently orphaned from the Sichuan earthquake) in China, about 50,000-60,000 were abandoned by parents (see *Welfare Provision for Vulnerable Children: The Missing Role of the State*, by Xiaoyuan Shang, Xiaoming Wu and Yue Wu. Published in *The China Quarterly*, 2005. pp. 122-136). The 50,000-60,000 children usually are cared for in the orphanages and are the major source of international adoption.

For over two decades now, Chinese children have been adopted internationally by families in countries like the United States, Canada, Australia, Spain, the United Kingdom, Norway, the Netherlands, Ireland, and Finland. The vast majority of these children's adoptive parents are keen on instilling in their children a sense of pride in their Chinese heritage. In addition to exposing their children to various cultural activities, many adoptive parents also travel (or plan to) to China with their children. These trips are deemed to play important roles in the adopted children's ethnic identity development and may help foster a better understanding of the meaning of adoption.

Current Inquiry

As more parents are visiting China with their adopted Chinese children, the fact that many Chinese children have been adopted by families from other parts of the world (especially Americans) has suddenly been "outed". These families often draw lots of attention from Chinese people because of the racial difference between parents and children. We are interested in how Chinese people feel about Chinese children being adopted by Americans.

We decided to ask people in both urban and rural settings because infant abandonment, as a social phenomenon, results not only from cultural values, but also from poverty caused by unequal distribution of resources between the urban and rural settings. We chose to ask about 30 urban residents in Xi'an City, where Professor Fan lives and works; we also asked a group of rural women in Sichuan Province, where Professor Tan was born and raised and where at least two women had relinquished their children. Finally, as most adopted children are now living in the United States, we also asked several Chinese nationals who currently reside in the United States. Below we first summarize what we found from the urban respondents, followed by rural residents and Chinese immigrants in the United States.

Summary of Findings

The urban respondents include college students, administrators, teachers, police officers, lawyers, public servants, businessmen and judges. Some of the respondents have their own children. Overall, most of the urban respondents do not feel it strange for foreigners to adopt Chinese children. The majority of the urban respondents focus on the benefits that adoption brings to these children, and a few question whether international adoption would truly serve the best interest of these children.

Of the 16 male respondents, 12 are appreciative of American parents' adopting Chinese children. As for the 15 female respondents, the picture is more complex: six are completely for international adoption, eight have mixed feelings towards it, and one is against it. The major themes that emerged from the urban respondents are described below.

International adoption is beneficial

Urban respondents perceive international adoption of Chinese children as a positive phenomenon. Their conclusion is largely based on their knowledge that these children would otherwise stay in the orphanage. For instance, a mother and teacher said, "Of course this [adoption] is better for the children than staying in the orphanage." A college sophomore also mentions that as there are so many Chinese children available for adoption, it is a good thing that Americans are willing to adopt them. Another student feels that adoption is good for both parents and children.

Some respondents view adoption as a good thing because it "shows the universal human love and a reflection of human spirit: helping each other" (Male Ph.D. candidate). Interestingly, a 32-year old male teacher cites it helps solve China's population problem by saying that this "population relocation is beneficial to both China and the US". He is probably unaware that most of the "relocated" children are girls.

Some also feel that it is conditionally positive, as commented by a male Ph.D. candidate:

If the adoptive parents are patient, and give the children encouragement and support, things will all be fine. Human beings, especially children, are receptive and reciprocal to love. Love and time will help wash off all differences. Family is about love and trust, not blood.

Adopted children are lucky

These adopted Chinese children are lucky because they leave the orphanage and have got someone who really cares about them. Whoever the parents may be, as long as they show love for the children, the children will live a better life than before. (30-year-old Female, Teacher)

This 30-year old teacher's comments nicely summarize how 11 of the 30 plus urban respondents, 4 male or 7 female, feel about Chinese children being adopted by American parents. Many emphasize the importance of a family in children's growth because good financial resource and emotional support are essential to children's development. Many respondents regard adopted Chinese children to be lucky because they are given a family and will have the opportunity to receive a good education, especially better English language education, and many other benefits that the United States offers to children. Finally, the respondents feel that these adopted children are lucky because the United States is more advanced than China socially, culturally, and economically.

The educational and developmental benefits of being adopted by American parents can be further illustrated by the comments of three mothers with school-age children.

All three mothers express quite some degree of envy towards the adopted Chinese children. These parents use as a comparison their personal experience of raising children who are exposed to constant pressure to study from kindergarten on. These mothers feel that the adopted children are having a much happier childhood and much less miserable school experience in the new country because they do not have to study as hard in order to go through all kinds of entrance exams. These mothers are quite knowledgeable about the American educational system. They know that American primary school and junior high school students have much less homework than their Chinese counterparts, who spend most of their time studying.

In short, respondents feel that these children are lucky because they will have a family that is equipped with solid financial resources and emotional support in a more advanced society where children enjoy a better growing up experience. They feel that these children will have a brighter future in the United States than in China and the overall quality of life will also be significantly better.

Adoption is a rescue act

Several respondents seem to view adoption as rescuing an abandoned child. For instance, a 40-year old police officer says: "The charitable American parents must feel that they are doing something merciful." Another public servant (male) actually uses the term "humanitarian rescue" to describe adoption. A 30-year old lawyer is "grateful" towards the American parents.

More respondents are touched because love, in adoption, indeed transcended national and racial boundaries. They trust that American people are loving and responsible and the children's life is forever changed by American couples:

The American parents show great internationalism by adopting Chinese children. They have to take the trouble to go through strict procedures to adopt children in China. Most of them show unselfish love to the Chinese children, who seem to have their fate changed for the better overnight. (Woman, 35-years old, Teacher)

Two female respondents reflect on their own observations of a few American couples who adopted Chinese children. The Americans just adore the children and treat them as if they were their biological children, which has always been a very important criterion many Chinese use to evaluate the adoptive parents: Good adoptive parents see no difference between adopted and biological children; bad adoptive parents treat the adopted children as if they are inferior to biological children.

Interestingly, no respondents (except one who feels that adoption is good for both parents and child) view adoption as an opportunity for the parents to fulfill the dream of having a family, besides giving the "second-chance" to an abandoned child. The respondents' lack of recognition that parents also benefit from adoption is another indication that adoption is viewed by many as a rescuing act of an abandoned child by unselfish parents.

Racial difference matters

Three male respondents have worries about the adoption although they approve of the practice. They are concerned about the racial issue because skin color still matters in the United States. They wonder how these children will fit in. For instance, a Ph.D. candidate wonders if the racial difference might create extra challenges in the child's learning. He also wonders if these children will be particularly rebellious in adolescence because of their apparent racial difference. A 27-year lawyer says that while he believes that love indeed exists, he is also somewhat skeptical about American's motivation in adopting a racially different child because to many people, skin color still matters. Finally, a 40-year-old police officer argues that as the racial difference might affect the child's entire life, it is best that Chinese children be adopted by Chinese. A judge holds that while a good social and educational system benefits a child's development, his/her future is largely determined by his/her efforts and talents (thus it would be unlikely that the adopted child would benefit much from adoption). He encourages foreign couples to adopt children from their own country.

Eight female respondents hold mixed views. While they praise the Americans for adopting Chinese children, they are not so certain about the Chinese children's fate in the new country. They wonder if the American parents will really take a good care of the children and whether the children can live really happily in a new country with such a big cultural difference. These respondents also worry about discriminations against the Chinese and other Asians. They point out that it should be ensured that these adopted children are well protected and have a fair environment to grow in. Interestingly, a 28-year old teacher provided a very interesting observation. She says:

If this child is raised in America, I think it should be a fortunate thing; but if she lives in China with an American couple, it won't be good for her because the Chinese will be talking about her behind her back.

Cultural heritage is important

One female respondent who holds a totally negative attitude towards international adoption thinks it is improper because the child can easily find herself different from the parents. This will have a negative impact on her and is not conducive for the parents to raise the child. Three female respondents with mixed feelings about adoption are concerned about the adopted children's cultural identity. Deep inside, they feel a little bit strange to see the adopted Chinese children because they look Chinese from appearance, but Americanized inside: Speaking fluent English, having little knowledge of Chinese culture although China is their native country. As one respondent puts it,

They speak native English, but they can't pronounce their Chinese names clearly. They use chopsticks to eat western food and black eyes to read English books. I feel both sorry and happy for them. They were unfortunate to be abandoned in infancy while they were lucky to have an integrated family. I feel sorry for them because they are American kids in my eyes.

The respondents worry that some adopted children may find themselves rootless when they grow up. Because of racial and culture differences, the adoption may have negative effects on the children's future. One of them even doubts that the children will truly have a better living environment and it is beneficial to their growth. The respondents feel it is crucial that the adoptive parents encourage their children to learn Chinese culture and not to forget about their Chinese roots.

Comments from Rural Women and Chinese Immigrants

We also have an opportunity to learn from a group of rural women from Professor Tan's home village about their view of international adoption. We find that they offer a different perspective from the urban residents. When asked about how they feel about international adoption, these women immediately start talking about the tremendous pain that the birth mothers must have gone through. They believe that if the birth mothers had any say in their family-decision making, they would not give up their children. Overall, the rural women focus on the mother's psychological state (e.g., anguish, shame, helplessness) and the challenges they face in handling pressures from family. As it is such a sensitive topic among the rural women, we did not feel comfortable probing into deeper discussions about their experience.

We find that Chinese immigrants in the United States tend to focus on the importance of adjusting to the host society and finding a good place psychologically in order to thrive in the adoptive environment. Of the six immigrants, all three females (all Ivy educated) believe it is important for the adoptive parents to ensure that their children will have a solid sense of bi-cultural identity (e.g., being bilingual and bicultural). They believe that cultural exposure and language learning will be helpful for the children's identity formation. The three male Chinese immigrants (Ivy educated as well. All were fathers with sons), however, refused to provide any comments. One of them had previously vehemently denied that his home province (Hunan) is one of the largest sources of the US international adoption from China. We interpret the three men's denial as an indication of shame that they feel about female infant abandonment in China.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall, responses from urban residents reflect what is highly valued in the Chinese society: family, educational opportunities, and the living standard of the adopting country. Respondents appear to evaluate international adoption by weighing on whether the child will have a good family who will provide financial stability, love and educational opportunities. Additionally, the respondents also valued the overall living standard in the United States. Respondents felt that adoption needs to serve the best interest of the child (i.e., the children are happy and healthy under the American parents' care), and do not forget their cultural heritage. More female respondents show mixed feelings about adoption than male respondents, interestingly.

From parenting perspective, it might be important to teach the children that people in China may have different views about their adoption. The children need to be prepared so that they can handle comments such as "you are so lucky!" The adoptive families might need to make extra efforts to educate the Chinese people on the street in order to help promote a better understanding of international adoption. We feel it is especially important for parents to continue educating others so more people know that parents often feel lucky to adopt a child.

I have recently learned that the two families in my home village had spent years searching for the daughters they gave up around 1980. Both families entrusted someone from the local area (called “zhongjian Ren” which means “go-between” or “middle person”) to find a home for their daughters right after birth. Naturally when the two families started searching, they tried to locate the go-between first. Fortunately one of them was still alive. She told that family that a couple from the local city had adopted their child but the child (now a 30-year old woman with her own family) had no knowledge that she was adopted. With a burning desire to meet her lost daughter, the birth mother secretly arranged a meeting with her in a market in the city. The physical resemblance was striking and there was little doubt on both sides that they were biologically connected. However, because the adoptive parents never told their daughter about the adoption, the woman was torn, confused and angry. The birth parents felt relieved that their daughter was alive and doing well. That feeling was gradually replaced with shame and anger. They had hoped that their lost daughter would “ren” them (i.e., re-establish a relative-like relationship) but she was unwilling to. Additionally, since she was adopted by a family that was better off financially and was having a better life in the city, the birth parents were hoping that she could offer them some financial help. Since the initial meeting, they have not had any further contacts.

The other family has not been able to find their child because the go-between had passed away.