

Made in Canada:
Cultural Connections in the Lives of China Adoptees

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores the experiences of young Canadian women who were adopted from China in the early years after it opened for international adoption. The adoptees, products of a movement among parents to expose children to their birth culture, share their views on identity, their place in Canadian society, and the impact of efforts to educate them about their heritage. Interviews with nine adoptees reveal they are far from bicultural; rather, they feel little or no connection to their Chinese roots, other than their ties to each other. Yet, a portrait emerges of young women who feel comfortable in the milieu in which they were raised, be it English-Canadian, French-Canadian, or Italian-Canadian. There has been limited study in the last 20 years about outcomes of international adoption in Canada. This thesis concludes there is a role for international adoption, based on the experiences of these adoptees.

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Introduction

We first met our daughter in a chaotic government office in Changsha, the capital of China's Hunan province. Anna wailed as the director of her orphanage handed her over to her new mother, a Caucasian stranger speaking a foreign language. I was euphoric but Anna was having none of it. As my husband snapped photos of the pivotal moment in all of our lives, Anna frantically tried to negotiate her way back into the arms of her caregiver. She knew something big was happening and she wanted to return to the only life she knew: the Qiyang Social Welfare Institute, where she had lived since she was found in a flower garden at only five days old.¹ At 14 months, she was terrified of what lay ahead.

Anna shed tears again two weeks later, when our plane lifted off the runway in Beijing, destined for her new home in Canada. The departure was bittersweet. I remember my voice breaking as I told our frightened daughter to wave goodbye to her birth country.

It's a story that has unfolded thousands of times in the last two decades, as Western parents from 16 countries took home more than 130,000² children from China. The vast majority have been girls, abandoned by their birth parents as a

¹ Information obtained in Anna's "abandonment paperwork" provided by Chinese authorities in December 2004.

² Peter Selman, "International Adoption from the People's Republic of China, 1992-2011," Peter Selman (Blog) November 16, 2012. <https://blogs.ncl.ac.uk/peterselman/2012> (accessed December 5, 2012).

result of the government's one-child policy, adopted in 1979 to control the ballooning population.³

This thesis, using analytical journalism, draws from the personal narratives of adoptees and adoptive parents to explore how this experiment of transplanting China-born babies into mainly Caucasian families has played out in Canada.

In particular, it examines the impact of a movement within the adoption community, promoted by social workers, adoption agencies and scholars, to expose children to their birth culture, in hopes that it will help them form healthy identities.

Unlike past generations of transracial adoption, when assimilation was the norm, many families with children from China have formed a subculture of sorts, built around their desire to give their children a taste of their Chinese roots. They fit the standard dictionary definition of a subculture, which is described as “an ethnic, regional, economic, or social group exhibiting characteristic patterns of behavior sufficient to distinguish it from others within an embracing culture or society.”⁴ It's standard practice for such families to nurture “cultural connections,” a phrase which, for the purposes of this thesis, refers to a common set of practices. Parents, for example, arrange to spend time with other families with China adoptees, celebrate Chinese holidays, and maintain their daughters' Chinese names as their middle names. Some parents also sign up their children and themselves for Mandarin lessons, culture camps, Chinese dance, martial arts or cooking classes. The more zealous also make dumplings or give China-related presentations at their

³ The history of adoption from China will be detailed in Chapter 1: Why China?

⁴ Merriam-Webster online dictionary. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/subculture> (accessed Jan. 14, 2013).

children's schools, to familiarize their children's Chinese backgrounds among their peers. Parents also scour stores and websites for Chinese dolls and other paraphernalia, and try to make inroads with the local Chinese-Canadian community. In recent years, it has become common practice to fly to the other side of the world on organized "homeland visits" or "roots tours" to China. Families bond through support groups such as Families with Children from China (FCC),⁵ or maintain ties with other children from their daughters' orphanages. There are community groups and international online forums connecting families who have adopted from China. The oldest adoptees, the first products of the cultural connections movement, are now on the cusp of adulthood and they have stories to tell.

These stories, which, to my knowledge, chronicle for the first time in Canada the experiences of coming-of-age China adoptees in a substantial work of journalism, are told in Chapter 3. This thesis, therefore, taps into this new generation of firsthand experts in the international adoption field.

I interviewed nine young women, aged 17-26, to assess the impact of cultural connections on their lives, along with their views on identity and growing up in Caucasian families in multicultural Canada. These young women shared their homes and their thoughts during our semi-structured, open-ended interviews of at least one hour each, conducted during the summer of 2012.⁶

⁵ There are about 100 FCC chapters in North America, including many chapters in Canada. See: Toby Alice Volkman, *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2005), 86.

⁶ See Appendix B for list of interview questions. Six adoptees were interviewed in their family homes, while three were interviewed by telephone.

While I have a personal interest in this topic, it is also an issue of public importance. As this thesis will show in Chapter 1, Canadians are major participants in international adoption. The federal and provincial governments have embraced it as a means of forming families at a time of dwindling birth rates and fewer healthy babies available for domestic adoption, the outcome of increased access to abortion and less stigma attached to single motherhood.

Canadians adopt approximately 2,000 children from abroad each year.⁷ That is equal to about two-thirds of the 3,160 babies born through in-vitro fertilization in 2009,⁸ but significantly more than babies born through surrogacy, which is comparatively rare in Canada because it is illegal to pay surrogates.⁹

Despite Canadians' enthusiastic participation in international adoption,¹⁰ exploration of outcomes in Canada has been scarce.

⁷ Robin Hilborn, "Canadians Go Abroad to Adopt 1,946 children in 2010," *Family Helper*, October 27, 2011. <http://www.familyhelper.net/news/111027stats.html> (accessed November 15, 2012).

⁸ The Canadian Fertility and Andrology Society, "Human Assisted Reproductive Live Birth Rates for Canada," September 25, 2011. www.ivf.ca (accessed December 6, 2012).

⁹ Government of Canada, *Assisted Human Reproduction Act, 2004*, Department of Justice. <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/A-13.4/page-2.html> (accessed December 6, 2012). Some Canadians have "outsourced" surrogacy to such countries as India, but the numbers do not come close to those of international adoption. See, for example: Sharon Kirkey, "Desperate Canadians Resort to World's Baby Farms," *Vancouver Sun*, December 13, 2010. <http://bit.ly/QKAb4z>. (accessed December 6, 2012).

¹⁰ Canada ranks 5th worldwide in adopting children from abroad. See Chapter 1.

The federal government is Canada's chief "central authority,"¹¹ responsible for overseeing international adoption and coordinating with the provinces, which have jurisdiction over child welfare. The provinces accredit adoption agencies and approve individual applications to adopt offshore. Yet, no significant government-sponsored studies have been conducted since the 1990s.¹²

While a few academics have considered international adoption in the Canadian context, I do not believe there has been any substantial journalism about the issue in recent decades.

As will be discussed in Chapter 2, research on the outcome of cross-cultural adoption in Canada has been mainly confined to the experiences of children adopted from Korea after the Korean War, and to aboriginals in Canada who were adopted into Caucasian families from the 1960s to the 1980s.

Pam Daniel, a federal government official with more than 20 years of experience working on the intercountry adoption file in Ottawa, decried the lack of post-adoption research in a recent online article:

¹¹ The 1993 Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption requires "central authorities" in sending and receiving countries to oversee the process. See Chapter 4.

¹² Confirmed by Michele Salmon, federal manager of Intercountry Adoption Services at Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, in an email to author, October 26, 2012. A survey of Canadian literature shows the most significant studies of international-adoptee outcomes were conducted in 1991-92, when academics Anne Westhues and Joyce Cohen interviewed 155 adoptees born mainly in South Korea, Bangladesh and Vietnam; and in 1995, when psychologist Elinor Ames studied the development of 46 small children adopted from Romanian orphanages in the early 1990s. See: Anne Westhues and Joyce Cohen, "The Adjustment of Intercountry Adoptees in Canada," *Children and Services Review*, no. 20 (1998): 115-134; Elinor Ames and Kim Chisholm, "The Development of Romanian Orphanage Children: Final Report," Simon Fraser University, 1997.

Many intercountry adoption issues require further research. For example, much more information is needed on the outcomes for internationally adopted children compared to children raised in orphanages; how to prepare parents to adopt internationally; the impact of intercountry adoptions on both receiving countries and the countries of origin.¹³

Anne Clayton, head of adoption services in British Columbia, laments that adoption professionals rely on outdated research, mainly from the United States.¹⁴

“There has been very little in Canada, we don’t have enough Canadian-based research,” she says. “We need more of that to happen.” She notes that B.C., which holds mandatory training sessions for international adoptive parents in waiting, coaches them to expose their children to their birth culture. However, the assumption that such exposure is necessary for healthy identity development and self-esteem is based on the negative experiences of aboriginal adoptees decades ago, says Clayton.

Chinese adoptees are a logical starting point for updated research into this area. They are the largest group of international adoptees in Canada. It is within this community that the cultural connections movement has been the most pronounced. My anecdotal findings, which are complemented by existing literature, are a contribution to an examination of this movement. As mentioned, it usually encompasses traditional cultural celebrations, language exposure, education about China, and socializing with other adoptees from the same ethnic background.

¹³ Pam Daniel, “Intercountry Adoption Services,” *Human Resources and Skills Development Canada*. <http://bit.ly/Jh38Ti> (accessed May 1, 2012).

¹⁴ Anne Clayton, interview with author, August 7, 2012.

This research also adds to larger discussions around Canadian accountability on adoption from China and, by extension, international adoption, at a time when China, for one, is on the retreat. Its shift in focus – to keeping its children in their country of birth¹⁵ – has sharpened debate about the merits of international adoption.

The downturn in China is part of a wider trend of a dramatic global decline, amid state efforts to counter baby trafficking, and a move toward domestic adoption, in the spirit of the Hague Convention on International Adoption.¹⁶ That 1993 blueprint, which endorses international adoption as a last resort in favour of domestic adoption and requires participating countries to regulate the industry, is gaining traction as more nations ratify the pact.¹⁷

At the same time, child-advocacy groups, such as UNICEF and Save the Children, also recognize international adoption only after in-country care solutions have been exhausted, based on their contention that children should grow up in their birth cultures. The position is rooted, in part, in an escalating neo-colonial debate about whether babies are being “kidnapped” or “rescued” from the world’s poorer

¹⁵ *Children from China* magazine (2008), in Monica Dowling and Gill Brown, “Globalization and International Adoption from China,” *Child and Family Social Work* (2009): 6. China’s retreat will be examined in Chapter 4.

¹⁶ See Chapter 4: International Adoption: Baby Boom Going Bust

¹⁷ The Hague Convention builds on the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which recognized international adoption and called for an international policy framework to reflect the best interests of the child. This is discussed in Chapter 4.

countries and transferred to the rich.¹⁸ Two international conventions — the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Hague Convention — also affirm that cultural heritage should be considered when placing children for adoption.

Conversely, international adoption advocates, such as Harvard University's Elizabeth Bartholet, argue that "millions" of children worldwide are languishing in orphanages as a result of the international adoption chill because there are not enough in-country alternatives for countries that are pulling back. The decline of international adoption, and the subsequent debate, will be explored in Chapter 4: International Adoption: Baby Boom Going Bust.

Overall, this thesis begins to fill the gap in the current research climate where adoptee outcomes are a key factor. They have been described as "the bottom line"¹⁹ in evaluating international adoption, both for sending and receiving countries.

"Stakeholders want to know whether the children are healthy, have made good attachments with their adoptive parents, are doing well in school, are making friends, etc. In short, they want to know how are the children doing in the receiving country," write scholars Richard Tessler, Huang Bang Han & Jiang Hong.²⁰

I caution that my China-born interviewees are not necessarily illustrative of international adoptees in general. One important difference is that not all adoptees

¹⁸ Karen Dubinsky, "Babies Without Borders: Rescue, Kidnap, and the Symbolic Child," *Journal of Women's History* 19, no. 1 (2007): 142.

¹⁹ Richard Tessler, Huang Bang Han & Jiang Hong, "The Racial Attitudes of Chinese Adoptees in America: Comparisons with Children Being Raised in China," *International Journal of Child and Family Welfare* no. 8 (2005): 3.

²⁰ Ibid.

are members of a racial minority in Canada. Even among those who are, the experiences of Chinese adoptees might not be the same as those of other minority groups, such as children adopted from Ethiopia or Guatemala.

It's important to note the difference between international, transracial, and cross-cultural adoption, terms I use throughout this thesis. International adoption, also called intercountry adoption, refers to all adoptions from outside Canada.

Transracial adoption involves adoptees whose race differs from that of their adoptive parents, accounting for the vast majority of children adopted from China and many other of the dozens of countries with which Canada does business. There is also a distinction between transracial adoption and cross-cultural adoption. Some adoptees, such as those from Russia, have crossed cultural boundaries but not racial ones because, in most cases, they are adopted by Caucasians. Both terms — transracial and cross-cultural — apply to most China adoptees because they are usually adopted by Caucasians.

As this thesis raises questions about identity development in adoptees, it is important to define identity. The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute in New York notes: "The concept of identity has been used in various ways to refer to a personal "sense of self," developed through both internal representations and relationships with others; social identity, as defined by society in roles and statuses [sic]; and collective identity, for instance, self-awareness of national or ethnic groups."²¹

The institute points out that many scholars who have studied the development of

²¹ Hollee McGinnis, Susan Livingston Smith, Scott Ryan, and Jeanne Howard, *Beyond Culture Camp: Promoting Healthy Identity formation in Adoption*, Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute (New York: November 2009), 13.

ethnic identity concur that it is an evolving process, marked by stages in which an individual moves from exploration to denial of differences, to eventual awareness and pride.²²

As Chapter 3 will show, the young women whom I interviewed are works in progress. They have weak connections to their Chinese side, identifying mainly with their Caucasian families and friends. Their views and feelings, however, represent a snapshot in time and they could evolve as they age.

It should be pointed out that many international adoption academics are adoptive parents of children from abroad. Those cited in this thesis include Queen's University historian Karen Dubinsky, anthropologist Toby Alice Volkman, international adoption proponent Elizabeth Bartholet, and David Smolin, an intercountry adoption critic who is the father of two children from India who were stolen from their birth mother, unbeknownst to him and his wife before they adopted.²³

Also, all of the Canadian parents who were interviewed are Caucasian. They also are all mothers. Although I tried to recruit fathers as well, only mothers responded to my email inquiries.

I interviewed a cross-section of adoptees, recruited through Families with Children from China, or through word of mouth. I did not confine my search to FCC because I did not want to interview only those whose parents were or had been active in the group. Rather, I sought a mix of those who had been exposed to Chinese

²² Ibid.

²³ Russell Goldman, "An Adoption Nightmare," ABC News, May 14, 2008. <http://abcn.ws/RLehm7> (accessed November 8, 2012).

culture and those who had not, as well as those who grew up in big cities and those raised in small towns.

On a personal note, I have been fascinated by the subculture spawned by Chinese adoption, of which I have been a participant. As a family, we probably encourage cultural exposure at least as much or more than most adoptive families. Our daughter, now 9, takes weekly Mandarin lessons, and she has several DVDs designed to teach adoptees about language and life in China. Her middle name is the Chinese name given to her by her orphanage caregivers (Qile, pronounced Chee-le). We host an annual Chinese New Year party for China adoptees and their families, we get together frequently with Anna's orphanage mates who live in Ottawa, and we're planning a group "homeland" visit to China in 2014. My husband and I have taken Mandarin lessons and I am a voracious reader about adoption from China. We are a typical adoptive family, trying to squeeze cultural education (as we imagine it to be), into our daughter's busy life. By encouraging a love of China, we hope to instill a love of self.²⁴ As several adoptive parents told me in interviews, efforts at cultural connections tell our children that where they come from matters, and by extension, that they matter.

This thesis adds to the understanding of the cultural connections movement, and asks whether it helps mitigate loss of birth heritage by providing a sense of community and self-worth, as well as a foundation for adoptees to pursue the ethnic side of their identities in the future.

²⁴ In her book *Culture Keeping*, Heather Jacobson described this as a primary motivation of many of the adoptive parents whom she interviewed.

In a period when intercountry adoption is in transition, it's a question worthy of examination.

Chapter 1: Why China?

In the winter of 1991, Ginette Munson was treating her young son to lunch in the Jianguo Hotel, a western-type oasis where ex-pats liked to escape the dispirited dullness of Beijing in the days when it lacked the vibrancy of today.

The Jianguo was the sort of place where you could get a decent cup of coffee, and buy goods that were hard to come by, like milk and potato chips. You could also feast on top-quality New Zealand beef that was a cut above the standard fare regularly on offer in the staid Chinese capital, which was shrouded in smog, pollution and the suspicious aftermath of the Tiananmen Square massacre 20 months earlier.

Munson, a convivial Franco-New Brunswicker and the wife of then-CTV China correspondent Jim Munson, wasn't used to hearing French spoken during the four years she had lived in Beijing. So she turned her head with anticipation when she heard her mother tongue. "I heard these Québécois voices and accents and I turned around and there were four or five couples all holding Chinese babies," recalls Munson. "It just blew me away."²⁵

She had caught rumblings a few months earlier of Chinese babies being adopted by Westerners and she knew of a couple who had applied for a passport for their infant girl at the Canadian Embassy in Beijing. Munson approached the families to chat — and to ask whether they would agree to be interviewed by her husband so he could bring their story to a national audience in Canada.

²⁵ Ginette Munson, interview with author, June 26, 2012.

That night, Jim Munson met the new parents in a Beijing hotel, then travelled with an enthusiastic Canadian immigration officer to the southern Chinese city of Changsha, the capital of Hunan province, where the babies had lived in an orphanage for the first months of their lives. The families were all from Quebec, and they had arranged their adoptions through Montreal-based Enfants Du Monde (Children of the World), one of the first adoption agencies worldwide to secure approval from Chinese authorities to do business there.

Munson was initially suspicious about Chinese babies moving to Canada. He says he had “that classic reporter skepticism that somebody was on the take.”²⁶ But he walked away feeling there was no downside: needy babies got families and needy families got babies. “It was right up there, that story,” says Munson, now a Canadian senator who has a strong interest in children’s issues. “You really felt like you’d done something, rather than just doing the good-guy, bad-guy story. What would you call it — journalistic advocacy? I walked away from that story feeling really good inside. It was a really positive good-news story.”

Jan Wong, the China correspondent for the *Globe and Mail* when Chinese adoption was in its infancy, tells a similar story. “When I was a foreign correspondent in Beijing, ‘good news’ stories were hard to find,” Wong writes in the foreword to *The Lucky Ones*, a collection of essays by Canadian adoptive parents of children from China.²⁷

²⁶ Jim Munson, interview with author, September 1, 2012.

²⁷ Jan Wong, Foreword to *The Lucky Ones*, ed. Ann Rauhala, (Toronto: ECW Press, 2008), 1.

“I had been posted there in 1988. One year later, the Chinese government slaughtered hundreds, perhaps thousands, of unarmed protesters. Try as I might, for several years after that it was hard to write on any subject that was not somehow, directly or indirectly, connected to the Tiananmen Square massacre. The one shining exception was the Chinese adoption story. It was a win-win situation, or to put it in Chinese terms, double happiness.”

Wong, who is now a journalism professor at St. Thomas University in Fredericton, N.B., writes about how she began noticing Caucasians carrying Chinese babies around Beijing. “I talked to the parents and noticed they were almost all Canadians. A few quick calls to the Canadian embassy confirmed that the number of adopting parents was growing rapidly. Canada initially dominated the trend, apparently because a few pioneering Canadians had set up agencies specializing in Chinese adoptions.”²⁸

Wong’s first story, published in the *Globe* in March 1991, heralded the “win-win situation” of “China’s latest export” pleasing everyone.²⁹ The news feature ran across the bottom of the front page, under the headline “Sino-Canadian baby boom gives infant girls a chance.”

She credits Canada’s early inroad into Chinese adoption to “publicity shy” Pierrette Malo, who ran an adoption service out of her Montreal home. Malo herself had adopted a two-year-old who had been abandoned twice, once by birth parents

²⁸Ibid., 2.

²⁹ Jan Wong, “Bundles of Joy: China’s Latest Export Pleases Everyone as Unwanted Children Find Homes and Childless Couples Get Babies Sino-Canadian Baby Boom Gives Infant Girls a Chance,” *Globe and Mail*, March 21, 1991.

and again by adoptive parents from China, who returned her to the orphanage at 21 months.

“The flood of Canadians is so great that one Beijing hotel, the Kunlun, has bought 15 cribs and a fleet of strollers, and has set up a studio for photos,” Wong writes.

China opened for international adoption informally in the late 1980s to ease pressure on orphanages, many of which were overflowing with baby girls who had been abandoned by their birth parents. The social phenomenon was attributed to what became known as China’s one-child policy, implemented in 1979 to curtail the country’s exploding population.

Chinese tradition, based on patriarchal family values, dictates that sons care for aging parents, making girls less valuable than boys.³⁰ In her book *Wanting a Daughter, Needing a Son*, China scholar Kay Johnson points out that boys are considered key to a family’s financial security, given that they have been the traditional money earners, particularly in rural farming communities, where the majority of citizens do not have pensions.³¹

While the policy is referred to as a one-child policy, the restriction is mainly confined to urbanites and government employees. Rural families have been permitted since the mid-1980s to have more than one child if their first is a girl.

³⁰ Kay Johnson, *Wanting a Daughter, Needing a Son* (St. Paul: Yeong and Yeong, 2004), 5.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 37. This has changed in recent years. China is taking steps toward a program to extend public pensions to more rural residents. See, for example, The Economist, August 11, 2012. <http://www.economist.com/node/21560274> (accessed Sept. 20, 2012).

“Acknowledging parents’ desire for a son to take care of them in their old age, and carry on the family name, most provinces implemented a slightly more lenient ‘one son/two child’ policy for rural residents,” Amy Klatkzin, an adoptive parent and author, writes in her introduction to Johnson’s book.³²

The relaxed law, however, brought stricter enforcement. In the last two decades of the 20th century, families caught violating the policy risked a significant fine, which could involve monitoring a household’s reproductive behaviour, “persuasion” (at times involving direct coercion), stiff escalating fines, and sterilization for “over quota” births.³³

Abandoned baby girls started turning up in public places, such as parks, markets, and police stations. Others were dropped off at orphanages, which were ill equipped to handle the skyrocketing numbers. Some institutions were so strained that infants were crammed, two to a crib, in large drafty rooms. There were more cribs spilling into the hallways.³⁴

China’s Ministry of Civil Affairs reported in 1991 that there were 140,000 orphaned and abandoned children, including “tens of thousands” of children being cared for in more than 5,000 orphanages and state-sponsored foster homes.³⁵

Enforcement of the one-child policy has been more relaxed in recent years, in

³² Klatzkin, Introduction to *Wanting a Daughter, Needing a Son*, xx.

³³ Ibid., 82.

³⁴ Ibid., 19-23.

³⁵ Ibid., 9.

part because boys now dramatically outnumber girls.³⁶ In 2011, the ratio at birth was 118 boys for every 100 girls.³⁷ The imbalance has been attributed to sex selection before birth, non-registration of female births, and the exporting of baby girls through international adoption.³⁸

Chinese orphanages in the 1990s were dire places, according to Johnson, with a mortality rate of 40 to 50 per cent and not nearly enough state funding to feed foundlings, let alone cover their medical bills when they got sick.³⁹ “With so many babies requiring treatment for pneumonia and other ailments, the pressure against ‘wasting’ scarce resources on a child who might not survive or whose bills would be prohibitively expensive was great and growing,” Johnson writes.⁴⁰

Enter foreign adoption. China’s official adoption legislation — “Measures on the Adoption of Children by Aliens in the People’s Republic of China” — came into effect

³⁶ Clifford Coonan, “China Eases Rules on One-Child Policy,” the *Independent*, April 1, 2011. <http://ind.pn/fPiwS7> (accessed November 21, 2012); Zheng Caixong, “City Eases One-Child Policy,” *China Daily*, May 7, 2007 <http://bit.ly/TUP6J9> (accessed December 9, 2012); Malcolm Moore, China Begins Lifting Strict One-Child Policy,” *Telegraph*, July 24, 2007. <http://bit.ly/I05Do> (accessed December 9, 2012).

³⁷ *Xinhua News Agency*, “China’s Sex Ratio Declines for Two Straight Years,” August 6, 2011. <http://bit.ly/rawzOp> (accessed April 3, 2012).

³⁸ Kay Johnson, “Politics of International and Domestic Adoption in China,” *Law and Society Review, Special Issue on Non-biological Parenting*, (2002): 379-396; David Smolin and Elizabeth Bartholet, “The Debate” in *Intercountry Adoption: Policies, Practices, and Outcomes*, edited by Judith L. Gibbons & Karen Smith Rotabi, (Williston, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 394; Patti Waldmeir, “China’s Abandoned-Baby Shame,” *National Post*, August 17, 2011.

³⁹ Johnson, *Wanting a Daughter, Needing a Son*, 32

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* A 1996 report by Human Rights Watch Asia, entitled *Death by Default*, also detailed the high mortality rate in Chinese orphanages, as did a 1995 BBC documentary, *The Dying Rooms*.

in April 1992. Although adoption had been happening on an ad hoc basis for several years, it hadn't been nationally regulated, so agencies or lawyers representing foreigners made arrangements with provincial governments in China, or with individual orphanages.⁴¹

The legislation formally removed barriers for foreigners to adopt. It was one of the most lenient policies in the world at the time, permitting adoptive parents of all sorts, including those who were considered undesirable in their home countries for such reasons as being too old, too poor, or gay or lesbian.⁴² The law only required that adoptive parents be at least 35 years old and childless.⁴³ They also had to pay a cash "donation" of US \$3,000 to the adopted child's orphanage.⁴⁴

"Beijing seemed eager to increase foreign adoption in an orderly way as a means of funding state welfare institutions and to alleviate one of the dire consequences of their population policies — abandonment of female children," writes Johnson.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Families with Children from China, "Legal Status of International Adoption in China," December 24, 2009 <http://bit.ly/PsNgfz> (accessed September 20, 2012).

⁴² Sara Dorow, *Transnational Adoption: A Cultural Economy of Race, Gender, and Kinship*, (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 59. Until the late 1990s, China turned a blind eye to gay and lesbian adoption. It is now banned.

⁴³ The criteria were relaxed in 1999, when the law was amended to lower the age to 30 and eliminate the need for childlessness. In 2007, saying there were more prospective parents than babies available for adoption, China tightened its criteria again. This will be discussed in Chapter 4.

⁴⁴ The China Centre of Adoption Affairs, the central regulator for international adoptions, says on its website that parents are "encouraged" to donate the requisite amount to their child's orphanage. However, in practice, the "donation" is mandatory, as adoption agencies require parents to pay it as a condition of adoption. The cash payment has been a source of controversy, mainly because there is a lack of accountability on where the money goes. This is raised in Chapter 4.

“Beijing’s willingness to facilitate such adoptions also reflected the new mood of openness and reform.”

It’s been more than 20 years since China opened its doors to international adoption, which produced the largest single-gender diaspora in history.⁴⁶ There are more than 130,000 Chinese adoptees living outside their birth country, the overwhelming majority of whom are girls.⁴⁷ Comparatively, 160,247 South Korean children, both male and female, were placed in Western families from 1953-2007, representing the largest contingent of international adoptees from a single country to date.⁴⁸

Canadians have been among the main recipients of adopted Chinese children. A strong preference for Chinese orphans has elevated Canada to China’s third-largest sending country, behind the United States and Spain.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Johnson, *Wanting a Daughter, Needing a Son*, 34.

⁴⁶ Peter Selman, “The Rise and Fall of Inter-country Adoption in the Twenty-First Century,” *International Social Work* 52 no. 5 (2009): 575-594.

⁴⁷ Peter Selman, “Global Trends in Inter-country Adoption,” *Adoption Advocate* no. 44 (2012): 5.

⁴⁸ Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare. “Overseas Koreans 2008,” in McGinnis, Smith, Ryan, and Howard, *Beyond Culture Camp: Promoting Healthy Identity formation in Adoption*, 10.

⁴⁹ Selman, *Adoption Advocate*, 8.

Table 1. International Adoption from China: Top 10 Receiving Countries

Country	1991-1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	1992-2011
USA	18,697	5,058	4,705	6,116	6,857	7,038	7,903	6,493	5,453	3,912	3,000	3,401	2,589	81,222
Spain	562	475	941	1,427	1,043	2,389	2,753	1,759	1,059	619	573	584	664	14,848
Canada	4,535	604	618	800	1,112	1,007	973	608	658	431	451	475	343	12,615
Netherlands	960	457	445	510	567	800	666	362	365	299	283	306	197	6,217
Sweden	585	165	220	316	373	497	462	314	280	206	248	190	107	3,963
Norway	644	126	216	310	298	308	299	176	156	85	106	88	66	2,878
France	87	105	130	210	360	491	458	314	176	144	102	100	97	2,774
UK	667	176	175	111	108	165	188	187	127	32	11	16	13	1,976
Denmark	344	129	134	145	178	164	207	157	139	69	89	65	40	1,860
Belgium	211	110	95	138	138	205	203	153	110	54	77	59	29	1,582
TOTAL	27,385	7,468	7,776	10,257	11,226	13,404	14,492	10,740	8,740	5,970	5,077	5,477	4,399	132,411

Source: International Adoption Demographer Peter Selman⁵⁰

Chinese children, accompanied by predominantly Caucasian parents, seem to be everywhere: they live in every province and number more than 13,000 nationally.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Peter Selman, "International Adoption from the People's Republic of China, 1992-2011," Peter Selman (Blog) November 16, 2012. <https://blogs.ncl.ac.uk/peterselman/2012> (accessed December 5, 2012).

⁵¹ Selman, (Blog), 2012 for (1992-2011 figures); news reports from the early 1990s in the *Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star* for 1989-1991 estimates.

They are by far the biggest group of international adoptees in Canada. Since the early 1990s, no other country has come close.⁵²

Canadian agencies have licenses to operate in dozens of other countries, and they are permitted to do so unless the Canadian federal and provincial governments decide to blacklist a country, which is usually by consensus after investigating reports of corruption, such as baby trafficking.⁵³ Canadians have been able to adopt, on and off, from India, Russia, Haiti, the United States, Philippines, Jamaica, Vietnam, Romania, Guatemala, Thailand, South Korea, Ethiopia and many other countries.⁵⁴ Roughly half of all Canadian international adoptees came from China until the numbers plummeted after 2006. The drop was mainly a result of Chinese authorities tightening eligibility rules, saying that there were more prospective parents than available babies. Nonetheless, China remains the top country for prospective Canadian parents.

⁵² Government of Canada, "The Monitor," Fall 2003. *Citizenship and Immigration Canada*. <http://bit.ly/LFo7yf> (accessed April 5, 2012).

⁵³ Anne Clayton, British Columbia director of adoption services, in interview with author, August 12, 2012.

⁵⁴ Government of Canada, "The Monitor," 2003.

Table 2. Where Canadians Adopt: Top 10 Countries

Country	2008	2009	2010
China	431	451	475
Haiti	147	141	172
U.S.	182	253	148
Vietnam	111	159	139
Ethiopia	187	170	112
Russia	91	121	102
South Korea	98	93	98
Philippines	118	86	88
Colombia	53	41	62
India	54	59	55
All countries	1,915	2,122	1,946

Source: International adoption researcher Robin Hilborn.⁵⁵

While adoption from China rapidly accelerated in Canada from the outset, it was slower to catch on in the United States, where Russia was the top choice until it was eclipsed by China in the mid-1990s.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Robin Hilborn, *Family Helper*, October, 2011. <http://www.familyhelper.net/news/111027stats.html> (accessed August 12, 2012).

⁵⁶ Robert Johnson, ed. "Historical International Adoption Statistics, United States and World." *The Johnson Archive*. May 20, 2012. <http://bit.ly/OHo4VG> (accessed September 20, 2012).

What made Canadians such early and enthusiastic adopters of children from China?

The reasons are many. Some are uniquely Canadian, such as the head start by the Montreal-based Children of the World agency, which made China a popular choice in the days when the Internet was just getting started, permitting adoptive parents to spread the word online. There were also factors that applied in both Canada and the United States. A shortage of healthy domestic babies available for adoption, a strong preference for healthy infant girls, China's stable and accessible program, an affinity for China as a country, and the desire for a "clean break" from birth parents were among the drawing cards.⁵⁷

"We have four boys and this was our way of getting a girl," recounts Barb Singleton, a retired high-school principal from Campbellville, Ont. "Our doctor said if you want a girl you're pretty much going to have to switch husbands. Or adopt."⁵⁸ Singleton and her husband, Paul, adopted two girls from China in the early 1990s — Samiee, who was born in 1991, and Emma, born in 1992.

The Singletons did not consider domestic adoption because of their strong desire for a girl. Barb Singleton, however, acknowledges there were other factors in their decision to go overseas, such as her fascination with China. "I've always liked Asian things, like I had a sabbatical and went to Japan and lived there," she says. "If I thought about Libya or one of those countries, that would have been harder for us.

⁵⁷ Jay Rojewski and Jacy Rojewski, *Intercountry Adoption from China: Examining Cultural Heritage and Other Post-Adoption Issues*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing, 2001), 161; Dorow, *Transnational Adoption*, 60, 67.

⁵⁸ Barb Singleton, interview with author, July 24, 2012.

But China had just opened up and we wanted a girl and we were comfortable with Asian. It was a good fit. Any of the countries with cultures I don't know it would have been harder and I do think you have to be comfortable with the culture."

Eleanor Thompson, an adoptive parent from Parksville, B.C., tells a similar story. "We just wanted to have a bigger family, we wanted a sibling for our first daughter, we thought that the China program was going really well so that is the reason we chose China," says Thompson, who adopted Rebeka, now 17, from Guangdong province in southern China when she was six months old. "We had a friend who had adopted from China and we saw how the process went really smoothly for them and they were really happy with the situation so we thought we would just do the same thing."⁵⁹

China's adoption process has been widely considered one of the most stable and predictable in the world. Although wait times have varied over the years, parents in the 1990s and early 2000s were confident that they would have a babe in arms within about a year of submitting a completed, provincially approved application to China. The overall fees were less than they were for most other countries, costing parents about US \$20,000.⁶⁰ The tally, which has risen in recent years and varies between Canadian provinces and adoption agencies, includes a "home study" by a provincially accredited social worker to assess parental suitability, adoption agency

⁵⁹ Eleanor Thompson, interview with author, August 3, 2012.

⁶⁰ Johnson, *Wanting a Daughter, Needing a Son*, 206. Fees for China are now estimated at \$30,000-\$36,000 according to the Adoption Council of Ontario. <https://www.adoption.on.ca/international-adoption> (accessed November 22, 2012).

fees, paper work in Canada and China, the aforementioned orphanage fee, parental travel to China and accommodation for the two weeks it takes to complete the adoption.⁶¹ The Canadian portion of the process is the same for adoptions from all countries, but once a prospective parent's dossier leaves Canada, the proceedings are in the hands of the country of adoption — hence the attraction of China's orderly system.

Unlike the Singletons, the Thompsons considered private domestic adoption before turning to China. But they encountered a barrier that had been percolating since the 1970s: a shortage of available, healthy Canadian babies. In Canada, as in the rest of the Western world, birth rates were falling as women delayed motherhood. The number of infants available for adoption domestically had plummeted, as a result of increased access to abortion and less stigma attached to single motherhood.⁶² As will be discussed in Chapter 2, Caucasian cross-cultural adoption of aboriginal and black babies within Canada had dropped dramatically as well, following an outcry about the “cultural genocide” children suffered by being adopted outside their race and culture in the 1960s and 1970s.⁶³

⁶¹ Expenses incurred by the author during adoption process in 2004-2005.

⁶² Kirsten Lovelock, “Intercountry Adoption as a Migratory Practice,” *International Migration Review* 34, no. 3 (2000): 908; Kathryn McDade, *Introduction to International Adoption in Canada: Public Policy Issues*, (Ottawa: Institute for Research on Public Policy, 1991), x.

⁶³ Karen Dubinsky, *Babies Without Borders: Adoption and Migration Across the Americas*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 79; Margaret Philp, “The Land of Lost Children,” *Globe and Mail*, December 21, 2002.

Like many prospective parents in their 40s, the Thompsons discovered they were considered too old to be attractive candidates for private domestic adoption, in which the often-young birth parents select the adoptive parents. “We had wanted to adopt in Canada, but because we were older parents, that could have taken us — who knows? — forever, and maybe never,” says Thompson, a retired elementary-school teacher.

Debbie Harris, a retired potter from Montreal, also tried to adopt domestically, but abandoned the idea before turning to China. “We had tried to adopt for a number of years and we had tried to adopt domestically in Canada and the United States and it wasn’t working out well,” says Harris, who was infertile and wanted to parent a second child after giving birth to a son eight years earlier. “I found, in talking to various people who were involved with domestic adoptions, that I was considered old as an adopting mother by girls who were generally very young. I was already into my 40s at the time,” Harris explains. “I found that in China they were not concerned about mothers being older, in fact they were happy about mothers being older, so we thought that was a good way to go.”⁶⁴

Indeed, Chinese culture awards deference to elders, giving would-be parents in their 40s and even their 50s an option that was no longer available to them in Canada if they wanted an infant. “Through most of the 1990s, China’s openness was striking, and coincided with increasing acceptance of single parenting and other non-traditional ways of making families in North America,” Toby Alice Volkman, an

⁶⁴ Debbie Harris, interview with author, July 16, 2012.

academic and adoptive parent of a Chinese daughter, writes in *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*.⁶⁵

Lee McCoy, an Ottawa college professor, was among a large cohort of singles who adopted before the Chinese government made marriage a requirement in 2007, as parental demand outstripped infant availability.

“My motivation for adoption is that I was single and I thought that would be a great way to build a family,” says McCoy, mother of Aisling, who was adopted in 2000. “I did try to adopt domestically through public adoptions through the Children’s Aid Society. I had fostered for about four years in hope that would develop into an adoption and it didn’t. At the end of that I made the decision to switch to international adoption and at that time adoption from China was very popular, it seemed to have a good outcome, the children were young, the children were female, which was what I was looking for, and it just looked like a good, reliable situation.”⁶⁶

U.S. academic Heather Jacobson, in her book *Culture Keeping*, writes that adoption agencies advertised the health of Chinese babies, who were orphaned for cultural reasons. She is among those who assert that pregnant women in China likely take good care of themselves during pregnancy, in hopes they are carrying a boy. On the other hand, mothers forced to give up their babies for reasons of poverty or other social problems, might be less able or inclined to produce healthy

⁶⁵ Toby Alice Volkman, *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2005), 10.

⁶⁶ Lee McCoy, interview with author, July 25, 2012.

offspring. Sociologist Sara Dorow thus describes China as “a natural choice,”⁶⁷ given that babies wound up in orphanages as a result of China’s one-child policy.

Another factor that cannot be overlooked in determining the pull toward China is the positive treatment the program received in the Canadian media. Karen Dubinsky, a Queen’s University historian and international adoption specialist, described adoption from China as “an initially unblemished story.”⁶⁸

Thompson, Harris, and McCoy acknowledge they had considered other countries, but they were scared away by horror stories of baby trafficking, health problems, and adoption programs that were unreliable at best and corrupt at worst.

“We looked at Russia, we were pretty close to adopting from Russia but there was [sic] a lot difficulties, a lot of children who were coming from Russia had fetal alcohol syndrome and that was for us a big worry,” says Thompson.

Lee McCoy said she considered Guatemala, and she even had contact with a Guatemalan orphanage. In the end, however, she considered the country’s on-again off-again international adoption system to be too volatile.

“Sometimes it would be open and sometimes they would say it was being shut down temporarily, it was unreliable and that kind of concerned me,” says McCoy, who was turned off by reports of baby trafficking in the Latin American country.

Debbie Harris says she also considered Latin America, but she soured on the idea after reading reports about corruption. On the other hand, she knew a couple who had adopted from China and she was satisfied from her research that the process

⁶⁷ Sara Dorow, “Racialized Choices: Chinese Adoption and the ‘White Noise’ of Blackness,” *Critical Sociology* 32, no. 2-3 (2006): 366.

⁶⁸ Karen Dubinsky, interview with author, July 16, 2012.

was above board. “I had considered some countries in South America and I just heard too many stories of adoption procedures that didn’t look to be well regulated,” she says. “I was really concerned about not buying a child, not stealing a child.”

In at least two leading Canadian newspapers, the *Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star*, the media coverage of adoption from China was generally portrayed in a positive light through the 1990s, while stories about adoption from other countries were, for the most part, negative.⁶⁹ The dominant themes in stories in the *Globe* and the *Star* were about corruption (baby buying and selling by adoption officials) and the cumbersome and unpredictable adoption process. China was an exception in a sea of negative coverage.

Romania, which opened for business at about the same time as China, received particularly critical coverage, with prominently placed stories portraying the system as a disastrous free-for-all, absent of any regulation and rife with corruption.

Both the *Globe* and the *Star* ran several stories on adoption from Romania, which mushroomed after the 1989 ouster and execution of dictator Nicolae Ceausescu. Westerners flocked by the planeload to overcrowded, decrepit state orphanages, a legacy of Ceausescu’s decades-old population-growth policy, introduced in the 1960s to increase the sagging birth rate.⁷⁰ Contraception and abortions were illegal and taxes were imposed on childless couples.

⁶⁹ Janice Tibbetts, Media Content Analysis of the *Globe and Mail* and *Toronto Star*, 1991-2001. Unpublished, completed in March 2012.

⁷⁰ Veronica Strong-Boag, *Finding Families Finding Ourselves: English Canada Encounters Adoption from the Nineteenth Century to the 1990's*, (Don Mills: Oxford

Western parents, who upon arriving in the country discovered that children in orphanages had contracted hepatitis B or the AIDS virus, instead sought non-institutionalized children who were healthy, which prompted impoverished and overburdened parents to sell their children.⁷¹ “Baby brokers took parents to poor homes rather than orphanages,” writes international adoption specialist Kirsten Lovelock.⁷²

The Canadian government, to cope with a flurry of adoptions, stationed a visa officer in Bucharest in 1990 to fast track the process.⁷³ The majority of the nearly 663 children adopted by Canadians in 1990-91 gained entry on special “minister’s permits” issued at the discretion of the immigration minister, rather than through normal immigration channels in place at the time for international adoptees.⁷⁴

Lovelock, citing a 1997 article in *Canadian Living* magazine, recounted how one Canadian woman reportedly handed over a transistor radio to a father in a small village in exchange for his baby daughter. “The exchange was made, but prior to boarding the flight to return to Canada the adoptive mother . . . learned that the natural mother had not wanted to relinquish the child and was devastated by what

University Press Canada, 2006), 203; McDade, *International Adoption in Canada: Public Policy Issues*, 43; Margaret Evans, “New Hope for Ceausescu’s Littlest Victims,” *Globe and Mail*, July 31, 1993.

⁷¹ Lovelock, “Intercountry Adoption as a Migratory Practice,” 930.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ McDade, *International Adoption in Canada: Public Policy Issues*, 44-45.

⁷⁴ Lovelock, “Intercountry Adoption as a Migratory Practice,” 930.

her husband had done,” writes Lovelock. “The adoptive mother described feeling moved by this — nonetheless she boarded the flight to Canada with the little girl.”⁷⁵

The difference in media reports about adoption from countries such as Romania compared to those from China is perhaps best encapsulated in two stories, which both ran on the front page of the *Globe* in March 1991. Two weeks after Wong wrote her glowing piece on adoption from China, Alana Mitchell, who was then the *Globe’s* social trends reporter, wrote a story about adoption from Romania, under the headline “Adoption May Sow Seeds of Grief.”⁷⁶ The story details how adoptive parents may be taking on more than they bargained for in adopting from Romania because many of the babies were sick and maladjusted. Likewise, a *Toronto Star* article two years later focused on the stigma associated with Romanian adoption.⁷⁷ “Westerners who had been hailed as heroes for rescuing abandoned Romanian children were now viewed with alarm in their own countries,” the *Star* reported. The article said Canadians endured jibes from friends such as “Doing a bit of shopping in Romania?” Or “How much did this kid cost you?” The story concluded that some parents “don’t want their children labeled as Romanian” because of the negative sentiment attached.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Alanna Mitchell, “Adoption May Sow Seeds of Grief,” *Globe and Mail*, April 21, 1991.

⁷⁷ Catherine Dunphy, “The Romanian Adoptions: New Lives for Children of Turmoil,” *Toronto Star*, Aug. 22, 1993.

Through the 1990s and early 2000s, there were similar tales about the hazards of adopting from other countries as well, among them Guatemala and Russia.⁷⁸

Eleanor Thompson acknowledges she was influenced by media coverage. “I sure did listen to a lot of it,” she says. “And we met a family who had adopted from Romania and we knew families who adopted from Russia, so we saw how there were a lot of difficulties with those programs. We went into it knowing nothing’s perfect, we don’t know what’s going to come of it, but we had a positive idea that this is the best we can do.”

Adoption from China also was cast in a favorable light in several TV programs in the 1990s. Sara Dorow notes that the shows *Sex and the City*, *The Simpsons*, and the briefly popular *LAX* about the Los Angeles airport, featured episodes that made adoption from China appear to be “a shining exemplar of all that is good about transnationalism.”⁷⁹

International adoption experts assert that one reason would-be parents were attracted to China was because they wanted to be free of keeping in touch with birth parents. Abandoned babies represented a “clean break.”⁸⁰ The desire to sever ties with birth parents at the time can perhaps be partially explained by a widely

⁷⁸ Geoffrey York, “Adoption in Russia Rife with Corruption,” *Globe and Mail*, May 1, 2000; Graeme Thompson, “Baby Snatchers Who Thrive on Poverty,” *National Post*, July 29, 1999. International adoption from Guatemala and Russia will be covered in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

⁷⁹ Dorow, *Transnational Adoption*, 10.

⁸⁰ Sara Dorow, “Racialized Choices: Chinese Adoption and the ‘White Noise’ of Blackness,” 386; Pamela Anne Quiroz, “Transnational Adoption: Reflections of the Diaper Diaspora,” *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 28, no. 11-12 (2008): 443.

publicized custody battle in the early 1990s that was recently described as “one of the most famous American family law cases of the last 20 years.”⁸¹ The “Baby Jessica” case, in which birth parents Cara Clausen and Dan Schmidt changed their minds after agreeing to their baby’s adoption, spawned a legal battle that dragged on for more than two years, ending in a 1993 ruling in the United States Supreme Court, where adoptive parents Jan and Robert DeBoer ultimately lost.⁸² The child whom they had called Jessica was returned to her biological parents, who named her Anna. The case likely instilled fear in prospective adoptive parents, “reminding them of the possibility that, if they adopt domestically, the biological mother could seek to reinstate her rights to the child long after adoption,” writes Bethany Parsons.⁸³

Academics also point to another factor that may have popularized China: the myth that Asians are a “model minority,” stereotyped as smart, hard working and high achieving.⁸⁴ “Such youngsters . . . benefitted from their commonplace association with intelligence and good behavior more generally,” contends Veronica

⁸¹ Clark Cunningham, “Deciding to Let the Windmill Win: The Baby Jessica Adoption Case.” Presented to the 2009 Conference of the International Bar Association, Madrid, Spain (2009): 1.

⁸² Tami Maisel, “Adoption, Michigan Style: An Overview and Update of Private Adoption Placement, *Michigan Bar Journal* (2001): 29.

⁸³ Bethany Parsons, “Intercountry Adoption: China’s New Law Under the 1993 Hague Convention,” *New England Journal of International and Comparative Law* (June 2009): 66.

⁸⁴ Strong-Boag, *Finding Families, Finding Ourselves*, 207; See also: Dorow, *Transnational Adoption*, 38; Jacobson, *Culture Keeping*, 34; Pamela Anne Quiroz, “Cultural Tourism in Transnational Adoption: ‘Staged Authenticity’ and its Implications for Adopted Children,” *Journal of Family Issues*, (2012), 541.

Strong-Boag, a gender and education professor at UBC.⁸⁵ “Unlike the proliferation of sad Russian and Romanian stories, the media regularly profiled good outcomes with youngsters from across the Pacific.” Adds Queen’s University historian Karen Dubinsky: “I think people have talked about how Chinese adoption fits into the larger pattern of how North America thinks of Chinese immigrants — the good immigrants, the assimilable immigrants, the model minority,” says Dubinsky, who speculates that the stereotypical perception contributed to China’s popularity.⁸⁶

Adoptive parents interviewed for this thesis, however, balk at the suggestion that they bought into the idea of Chinese superiority. “We didn’t see them as a model minority, we thought of them only as Asian and, of course, we got the model minority slapped in our face when our girls weren’t good at math, didn’t go to university, those kinds of things,” says Barb Singleton. “There are a lot of false expectations for many of the adopted girls in my opinion.”

Heather Jacobson, in *Culture Keeping*, says that adoptive parents, while they may personally reject the idea of Asian stereotypes, felt the myth would make it easier for family and friends to accept a child from another race and culture. Jacobson bases her conclusions on interviews with dozens of adoptive parents in the United States.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Strong-Boag, *Finding Families, Finding Ourselves*, 207.

⁸⁶ Karen Dubinsky, interview with author, July 16, 2012.

⁸⁷ Jacobson, *Culture Keeping*, 46.

While the numbers of adopted Chinese children in North America are too small to be much more than a footnote in total immigration,⁸⁸ the attention given to this emerging diaspora at the end of the last century was remarkable. The *Wall Street Journal*, for instance, in an article published in Canadian newspapers in October 1998, asserted that families with children from China, as a well-educated, upper-middle class group, were catching the attention of advertisers.⁸⁹

Prospective parents and needy orphans were not the only ones perceived to be the winners in international adoption from China. Canada and China, as nations, also were perceived to benefit.

For China, the advantages were clear. Permitting international adoption eased pressure on overcrowded orphanages. The required cash payments from parents also improved the living conditions in these institutions, many of which were renovated thanks to Western money. There are also additional fees that adoptive parents pay while in China, and adoption agencies, which want to nurture their relationship with Chinese authorities, pressure parents to lavish gifts on government officials and give generous tips to government-provided tour guides.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Citizenship and Immigration Canada statistics show that 280,681 newcomers came to Canada in 2010. <http://bit.ly/ONmlst> (accessed Sept. 21, 2012).

⁸⁹ Lisa Gubernick, "Hawking the Stork," *Wall Street Journal*, in the *Globe and Mail*, Oct. 8, 1995.

⁹⁰ Experiences of the author while adopting her daughter in China in 2005.

Also, when adoptive parents return home with their children, some retain links with China by contributing money to domestic NGOs and charities that support Chinese orphanages and other child-welfare programs.⁹¹

International adoption is credited, as well, with creating a “cultural bridge to the West” at a time when China was waking up from three insular decades in which Communist leader Mao Zedong had cut off ties to Western countries as he embarked on his Cultural Revolution.⁹²

North American parents were encouraged by Canadian adoption agencies and social workers to expose their children to Chinese culture, which helps forge links between China and receiving countries, where adopted children were dubbed China’s “little ambassadors.”⁹³

In a 1999 speech to the Seminar of the Adoption Organizations of the Four Scandinavian countries, Guo Sijin, then director general of the state-run China Centre of Adoption Affairs, gave his take on the benefits of intercountry adoption, over and above helping individual children and families. “It is our firm conviction that through intercountry adoption, those children will become friendly ties and

⁹¹ Monica Dowling and Gill Brown, “Globalization and International Adoption from China,” *Child and Family Social Work* (2009), 1,2. There are numerous charitable groups and individual endeavors among China adoptive parents to raise money for Chinese orphanages. One of the biggest international efforts is Half the Sky, a charity created by an American adoptive mother in 1997. Many adoption agencies, such as Ottawa-based Children’s Bridge, have their own foundations and adoptive families organize their own initiatives.

⁹² Nili Luo and Kathleen Berquist, “Born in China,” *Adoption Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (2005): 29.

⁹³ Karin Evans, *The Lost Daughters of China* (New York: Penguin Putnam: 2000), 180.

bridges of the people-to-people envoys of friendship between China and foreign countries in the twenty-first century,” he said.⁹⁴

China scholar Kay Johnson takes a more cynical view, questioning why the Chinese government kept in place through the 1990s strict criteria that effectively discouraged domestic adoption. She argues that China was enticed by the \$3,000 fee that foreign adoptive families paid to orphanages. “The orphanage donations have been significant from the perspective of the welfare institutes that reap the lion's share of these funds for funding improvements and daily operations,” she writes. “Hence, international adoption has been a reasonably effective means of bringing funds into the welfare system at a time when it was sorely strapped and barely able to cope with the increasing numbers of children in its care.”⁹⁵ In 2004, the peak year for China adoption, parental payments would have raised US \$40.2 million for the orphanage system.

Xiaobei Chen, a Carleton University sociologist who specializes in Chinese adoption, agrees that money was a major inducement at the time, but she says the Chinese also were convinced that international adoptees were moving to a better life. “It’s not just revenue, but that’s a part of the picture,” says Chen.⁹⁶ “But they also feel these children have gone to heaven, they think ‘my god why don’t you come to

⁹⁴ Karen Miller-Loessi and Zeynep Kilic, “A Unique Diaspora?: The Case of Adopted Girls from the Peoples Republic of China,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 10, no. 2 (2001): 254.

⁹⁵ Kay Johnson, “Politics of International and Domestic Adoption in China,” *Law and Society Review, Special Issue on Non-biological Parenting* 36, no. 2 (2002): 388.

⁹⁶ Xiaobei Chen, interview with author, July 25, 2012.

adopt me.' People actually say those things. They feel the children have a better life, an amazing turn of fate, so they do genuinely feel happy for them, that this is a good outcome."

It's noteworthy that the advent of adoption from China coincided with the June 1989 massacre at Tiananmen Square in Beijing. China's human rights record at the time was under intense international scrutiny, particularly from the United States. The presence of adorable baby girls in North American neighbourhoods arguably served as an antidote to China's tainted image.

Canada, as a nation, also stood to gain by endorsing international adoption in general and China in particular. Among other things, adoption helped foster ties with an emerging giant and enhanced Canada's policy of multiculturalism by creating inter-racial families. China, as the largest source for healthy infants, also provided a partial solution to the problem of a shortage of healthy domestic babies available for adoption.

"I think adoption from China was primarily personal choice, but as background to making that personal choice, China had become, particularly before Tiananmen, particularly popular and it was the subject of keen interest in Canada," says Earl Drake, Canada's ambassador to China from 1987-1990. "There was a sense that the world was changing and China was waking up and becoming more western, more democratic, more open and when you could actually adopt a Chinese baby, it just seemed like a wonderful thing for people who were trying to adopt a baby anyway."⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Earl Drake, interview with author, September 6, 2012.

Drake acknowledged that adoption from China came along at an opportune time for Canada — just as it was trying to make overtures to build a relationship. He was part of a team assembled by then-prime minister Brian Mulroney to devise a China strategy. “The government — this wasn’t a partisan thing — were [sic] saying Canada needs to open more to Asia, we need to understand Asia more, we are a Pacific country as well as an Atlantic country,” says Drake, whose granddaughter was adopted from China.

He contends there was a “lot of sympathy” for Chinese foundlings in the early years of adoption and Canada’s desire to help coincided with its interest in building a relationship with China that went beyond trade. “It was a good news story for us, Canadians felt good about it,” Drake says. He recounts an anecdote about arranging the evacuation of Canadians after the Tiananmen Square massacre. A couple adopting a baby was put on the first plane out, despite the paperwork for their adoption being incomplete. “The entire plane was nervous when a soldier got on before taking off and began scouring everyone’s paper work,” Drake says. “He looked at the baby’s, then smiled and said to have a good trip.” Almost everyone on the plane was relieved.

Canada’s enthusiasm for Chinese adoption was apparent in yet another front-page *Globe and Mail* story, appearing on July 1, 1995 — Canada Day — under the headline “Canadian adoptions of Chinese babies soar — 99 per cent are girls abandoned by families.” The story asserted that immigration officials at the Canadian embassy in Beijing were happy to work overtime if it meant faster

processing of adoptee paperwork. “We drop everything to make sure they get their papers right away,” immigration counsellor Dennis Scown told the *Globe*. “Let’s face it. This is a good, clean program. It gives babies a chance for a better life.”⁹⁸ The article outlined Canada’s expanding relationship with China, reporting that a record number of Chinese citizens were visiting Canada and that, in November 1994, then-prime minister Jean Chrétien had led a Team Canada trade delegation to China, composed of nine premiers and hundreds of businessmen. Immigration from China also was increasing, with Canada starting to accept skilled workers, while previously only family reunification permitted immigration to Canada.

There also was a potential national gain for Canada that was not specifically confined to adoption from China, but applied more broadly to international adoption in general. Ever since the 1970s, when Canadians adopted 700 children orphaned by the Vietnam War, supporters of international adoption have “often firmly linked their cause to multiculturalism,” asserts Strong-Boag, in *Finding Families, Finding Ourselves*.⁹⁹ Strong-Boag, giving an example of the thinking at the time, quotes a representative from the Kuan-Yin Foundation, who told a 1974 Parliamentary committee studying international adoption that the benefits went beyond humanitarian motives of rescuing orphans from abroad. “To have a Chinese face, a black face, a brown face with almond-shaped eyes smile at one and say ‘I am Canadian’ is perhaps the greatest compliment that can be paid to our country,”

⁹⁸ Rod Mickleburgh, “Canadian Adoptions of Chinese Babies Soar — 99 Per Cent are Girls Abandoned by Families,” *Globe and Mail*, July 1, 1995.

⁹⁹ Strong-Boag, *Finding Families, Finding Ourselves*, 204.

Strong-Boag writes, quoting foundation head Helke Ferrie, an advocate for finding homes for hard-to-place children from the developing world.¹⁰⁰

Three years earlier, in 1971, then-prime minister Pierre Trudeau had rolled out a ground-breaking multiculturalism policy, declaring that the “government will encourage and support the various cultures and ethnic groups that give structure and vitality to our society.”¹⁰¹ The policy evolved into law, becoming the 1988 Multiculturalism Act, which has prompted increased immigration quotas and has been a symbol of how Canada distinguishes itself, both at home and abroad.¹⁰²

As will be discussed in Chapter 2, sentiment persisted in the 1990s that international adoption helped enhance multiculturalism. “I think Chinese adoptions, and I would say the same thing for Latino or Soviet adoptions, the more popular international adoptions, fit very conveniently into a multicultural script,” says Queen’s University’s Karen Dubinsky, author of *Babies Without Borders*.¹⁰³ “That was naïve and romantic and I think it overlooked one of the fundamental questions,” she says. “I think we have to go back and look at what is producing these children in the first place. Don’t only celebrate something that might have origins in other kinds of tragedies.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Sarah Wayland, “Immigration, Multiculturalism and National Identity in Canada,” *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 5, no. 1 (1997): 1.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Karen Dubinsky, interview with author, July 16, 2012.

¹⁰⁴ Links between international adoption and multiculturalism will be explored more thoroughly in Chapter 2: Cultural Connections.

After rapid acceleration through the 1990s and early 2000s, adoption from China peaked among Canadians in 2003, when parents brought home 1,100 children.

Adoption from China has now plummeted, reflecting a global decline in international adoption, as a result of stricter eligibility rules for prospective parents and tighter laws against illegal adoption practices. Global numbers fell 35 per cent between 2004 and 2009 as countries involved in international adoption, both as senders and receivers, began implementing the 1993 Hague Convention on International Adoption, a blueprint for ethical adoption practices. The fallout from the convention, which imposed international standards on the adoption industry, will be discussed in Chapter 4.

China remains the top source for Canadians, in part because the country is still working its way through a backlog of parents who have been waiting for years for healthy infants. However, the “golden age”¹⁰⁵ of adoption from China is over, and experts predict a further slide as the country becomes increasingly prosperous and can take care of its own.

¹⁰⁵ Andrea Gordon, “Golden Age of China Adoptions Fading,” *Toronto Star*. Jan. 10, 2007. <http://bit.ly/R31mpt> (accessed September 29, 2012).

Chapter 2: Cultural Connections

On a frigid February evening in the Toronto suburbs, dozens of Asian girls and their Caucasian parents clip across the parking lot of a bustling strip mall. Colourful Chinese dresses and pant suits peek out beneath bulky ski jackets as families shuffle into the Diamond Banquet Hall in Newmarket, nicknamed Toronto's "Chinatown North." It's Chinese New Year 2012 and some 300 members of the Toronto chapter of Families with Children from China are gathering for an eight-course feast to ring in the Year of the Dragon. Inside the brightly lit restaurant, vendors staff booths selling everything from dragon T-shirts to Chinese videos and dance lessons. Parents hustle to snap photos as their children traipse after a giant "lion" weaving its way around dozens of tables, amid the thump of a drumbeat. The party is a unique blend of North American and Chinese culture. Children shake ketchup on their Peking duck, and then stab it with disposable chopsticks before washing down the renowned Chinese dish with Pepsi or Sprite.

Similar scenes unfold in communities across Canada, as families with Chinese adoptees gather in restaurants and private homes during the Chinese New Year, seeking to acquaint their children with a piece of their birth heritage.

American academic Heather Jacobson coined the phrase "culture keeping"¹⁰⁶ to describe the "social phenomenon" of adoptive parents making efforts to educate

¹⁰⁶ Heather Jacobson, *Culture Keeping*, (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2008), 1.

their children about Chinese heritage, in hopes that taking steps to foster pride in their children's roots will help them form healthy identities.

Jay and Jacy Rojewski, U.S. adoptive parents and academics, refer to cultural exposure as “a genuine social movement” that is “fundamentally different from past waves of international adoption.”¹⁰⁷

Journalist Karin Evans, the California mother of two Chinese daughters, describes adoptive parents, who bond in their communities and online, as their “own global village,” distinguished by “an unprecedented attempt by thousands of parents to honour their children's origins.”¹⁰⁸

While there is consensus in the international adoption community that cultural connections are a vital part of identity development, there is debate on how much exposure to birth culture is enough and whether Caucasian parents are capable of educating their children about a foreign land where most have never lived. An offshoot of this discussion is how adoptive parents actually interpret culture, a concept that incorporates everything from colourful cultural trappings, such as Chinese New Year, to Confucian-based cultural values, including respect of elders and saving face.¹⁰⁹

Undoubtedly, the cultural connections movement has become a hallmark of transracial adoption in recent decades, a departure from past generations of

¹⁰⁷ Jay Rojewski and Jacy Rojewski, *Intercountry Adoption from China: Examining Cultural Heritage and Other Post-Adoption Issues*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing, 2001), 58.

¹⁰⁸ Karin Evans, *The Lost Daughters of China*, 186.

¹⁰⁹ To be discussed later in this chapter.

international cross-cultural adoption, where the general practice was assimilation and ignoring differences. “Through the 1960s, standard adoption procedures matched children as closely as possible to adoptive parents. If differences did exist — whether racial, ethnic, national origin or religious — they were subverted, downplayed, hidden and ignored,” Jacobson writes in *Culture Keeping*. “Children were to be mainstreamed . . . as quickly as possible. The acknowledgement of difference was discouraged since the pretense of biological kinship was thought to be psychologically beneficial to the adopted child.”¹¹⁰

Families with Chinese adoptees have been the most vocal and visible example of the move to engage in cultural education, in large part because they represent the biggest international adoption contingent of the last two decades.

Cathy Murphy, acting executive director of the The Children’s Bridge adoption agency in Ottawa, estimates about half of families with children from China take part in organized cultural education, whether it is attending organized events, taking Mandarin lessons, or joining homeland tours.¹¹¹ Others partake on their own or through small, informal get-togethers. Most are dabblers, but there is a sizeable group of diehards.

“We made a decision to adopt transracially and I personally think that families need to try,” says Murphy, mother of a 16-year-old China adoptee. “If we don’t offer, we’re negating a part of our child’s heritage and that’s not OK with me.”

¹¹⁰ Jacobson, *Culture Keeping*, 3-4.

¹¹¹ Cathy Murphy, interview with author, July 26, 2012.

One of the popular offerings at The Children's Bridge these days is the two-week roots tour, in which the agency arranges accommodation, sightseeing, and an orphanage visit in China. The trip costs roughly \$7,000 for a family of three, excluding international airfare.¹¹² Other adoption agencies also offer homeland visits and the Chinese government provides free culture camps for adoptees in Beijing.

Adoptive mothers said in interviews that they consider cultural education to be particularly important for children from China, in part because it is a means of forming a narrative about their past — a stand-in of sorts for their lack of knowledge about their personal history. Given that child abandonment is against the law in China, it is extremely rare for adoptees to know anything about their birth families.

A unique aspect of adoption from China, which also makes parents more likely to pursue cultural connections, is that it is the only country where parents travel in groups to adopt their children. Families often bond with each other and develop a fascination with China during daily tourist expeditions, arranged by their adoption agencies. When families return home, they network with other adoptive families, both locally and internationally. Chinese adoptees have grown up in the Internet era and parents have formed online support groups, some of which are grouped by orphanage. They also network online and in their communities through their adoption agencies and such groups as Families with Children from China, an

¹¹² The Children's Bridge, "China Homeland Visits," <http://www.childrensbridge.com/homelandvisits/index.html> (accessed September 23, 2012).

extensive parent support and cultural organization that began in New York City in 1992 and now exists in about 100 cities across the United States and Canada.¹¹³

Another potential reason China adoptive parents are more likely to embrace cultural education is that Canada has a relatively large Chinese community, compared to other ethnic communities, making traditional cultural events more visible and accessible than is the case with other cultures. Almost 1.35-million Canadians self-identify as Chinese, the largest visible minority group in Canada.¹¹⁴

Parent Barb Singleton says she and her husband, Paul, a child psychiatrist, feel they “absolutely” have a duty to offer Chinese culture to their adopted daughters, Emma and Samiee.¹¹⁵ “If you don’t, you shouldn’t be adopting because if you don’t support their heritage, you’re not supporting them,” says Singleton. “They are Chinese, and if we don’t do it, we’re saying that’s not good enough, we want you to be somebody else.”

The Singletons are admittedly more hard-core than most families. They cook Chinese food at home. When their daughters, who are now college students, were growing up, the family hosted an annual Chinese New Year feeding frenzy and fireworks display and “we had all these Chinese people who I didn’t even know come and people who had adopted with Chinese children who I’d never met,” says Singleton. The girls had a Chinese nanny when they were preschoolers. When they were school age, they went to Mandarin lessons on Saturday mornings with their

¹¹³ Volkman, *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*, 86.

¹¹⁴ Government of Canada, “Ethnocultural Portrait of Canada,” Statistics Canada (2006). <http://bit.ly/bWtY5l> (accessed December 11, 2012).

¹¹⁵ Barb Singleton, interview with author, July 24, 2012.

mother and youngest brother. “Language to me was tremendously important, so early on they always had Chinese lessons and we always made a big deal of a new Chinese word, it would be on the fridge, so the whole family would know xie xie (thank you),” says Singleton, a founding member of the Toronto chapter of Families with Children from China. The Singletons even moved to China for three months in 2001, putting the girls in public school, “where you get your knuckles rapped if you don’t speak properly,” she says.

Parent Lee McCoy, who took her daughter, Aisling, on a “homeland” visit three years ago, when she was 10, doesn’t consider cultural connections to be an obligation as much as an unanticipated pleasure. She says she fell in love at first sight with China, when she went there for the first time in the summer of 2000 to adopt her daughter. “I think at the beginning I was kind of oblivious to what that would mean, adopting a child from another country, and I don’t think I really thought that much about the whole international aspect,” McCoy says.¹¹⁶ “Since Aisling’s been home, we’ve really become a Chinese-Canadian family, as much as I can make it, with art and culture and food and experiences and friends and that sort of thing.”

The McCoy’s shop in Ottawa’s biggest Chinese supermarket and cook Chinese food at home. They celebrate the Chinese holidays with friends, took Mandarin lessons before touring China three years ago, and once took in a Chinese boarder for a year.

¹¹⁶ Lee McCoy, interview with author, July 25, 2012.

McCoy considers one of the most important cultural connections for her daughter is keeping in close touch with other families who were in the same adoption travel group. McCoy says it gives Aisling strength, knowing there are other children like her. Twelve years after meeting during their two weeks in China, the McCoy's still get together with their travel group about twice a year. Most recently, six families rented a cottage for five days in Mont Tremblant, Que. Last year, they all got together in Toronto to watch the premiere of *Somewhere Between*, a 2011 documentary about four adolescent China adoptees who live in the United States.

McCoy says the girls are "a bit like cousins" and that their shared experience of living in the same orphanage help fill the void of not knowing much else about their history. "They are definitely replacing a personal history that we don't have, she doesn't know of birth parents or birth siblings but she has her travel-group girls," says McCoy.

Vancouver Island parent Eleanor Thompson, who also has worked hard to bring Chinese culture and people into her teen daughter, Rebeka's, life, believes that it is more than a pleasure or an obligation. She saw it as her daughter's right to be introduced to her birth heritage when she was young. "I felt it was a right, I felt we had the responsibility to do that for her, to give her the background, or at least the exposure," says Thompson.¹¹⁷

When Rebeka was a preschooler, Thompson created her own "Chinese school" for her daughter and other adoptees, and found a Chinese teacher through the local multicultural association. When Rebeka was school age, her mother enrolled her in

¹¹⁷ Eleanor Thompson, interview with author, August 3, 2012.

Mandarin lessons, made friends with members of the Chinese community, helped organize parties for Chinese holidays and made dumplings at Rebeke's school every Chinese New Year. Three years ago, Thompson took Rebeke and her older sister (Thompson's biological daughter, Mary) on a trip to China. Thompson also has helped organize fundraisers to send money to China, notably after the deadly 2008 earthquake in Sichuan province.

While she acknowledges that celebrating Chinese culture has enriched her life "big time," she tempers that with the admission she and Rebeke's father clashed on the need to tap into their daughter's birth heritage. "My husband doesn't feel the same way I do about this stuff. In fact, it's been a source of conflict at times," Thompson says.

These three women, — Singleton, McCoy and Thompson — although not representative of all mothers of children from China, are part of a sizeable contingent who believe that fostering a love of things Chinese will contribute to their daughters' sense of self worth. The mothers also say that even if their daughters reject Chinese cultural education, at least it has been offered, perhaps giving them a foundation, should they decide to pursue that side of their identity in the future.

Adoption agencies and social workers push cultural connections; in fact, engagement in another culture has been used as a marketing strategy by agencies, some of which operate for profit. Child-advocacy groups promote cultural education as well,¹¹⁸ as does the Canadian Paediatric Society, which says that doctors should

¹¹⁸ Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children, "Right to Family, Identity and

encourage adoptive parents to explore their children's birth culture because "there is consensus in the literature that transracial adoptees, whether domestic or in-country, need to create an identity that accepts their own physical appearance, their birth heritage and their heritage of upbringing."¹¹⁹

Furthermore, maintaining links to birth culture is also reinforced in the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, which stipulates, in cases of adoption, "due regard shall be paid to the desirability of continuity in a child's upbringing and to the child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background."¹²⁰

"The social pendulum has swung from the virtual denial of adoption and the biological beginnings of the adopted child to an insistent ideology that without embrace of those beginnings there will forever be a gaping hole, a primal wound, an incomplete self," notes anthropologist Toby Alice Volkman.¹²¹

There is even a common belief in the adoption community that there is an edict from the Chinese government requiring parents to expose their children to Chinese culture. While this is not the case, it is widely believed to be so. The supposed

Culture," *Report to UN Committee for the Rights of Children*, 2011. <http://bit.ly/JQ9cv4> (accessed April 7, 2012).

¹¹⁹ Canadian Paediatric Society, "Position Statement on Transracial Adoption," September 2006. <http://bit.ly/VOfSG7> (accessed April 27, 2012).

¹²⁰ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Convention on the Rights of the Child," <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm> (accessed May 7, 2012).

¹²¹ Volkman, *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*, 43.

mandate has been reported in books about adoption from China and it has circulated around the international adoption community.¹²²

How did this practice of making cultural connections become mainstream, when only half a century ago, the norm was to downplay or even suppress differences?

As discussed below, there is a consensus among transracial-adoption experts and stakeholders that the cultural connections movement flourished for a number of reasons: it evolved in tandem with multiculturalism; and, grew out of lessons learned from “the Sixties Scoop”¹²³ of aboriginal children into Caucasian homes, as well as the backlash against the cross-cultural adoption of black children. Another contributor has been the “cautionary tales”¹²⁴ of Korean children who were adopted in North America after the Korean War.

Multiculturalism

Four decades ago, Canada became the first country in the world to adopt multiculturalism as an official policy. As discussed earlier, the groundbreaking move, the brainchild of then-prime minister Pierre Trudeau, is credited with giving Canada its longstanding international reputation as a “cultural mosaic.” The policy

¹²² Sara Dorow, *Transnational Adoption: A Cultural Economy of Race, Gender and Kinship*, (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 43; Jacobson, *Culture Keeping*, 56; Rojewski and Rojewski, *Intercountry Adoption from China*, 163.

¹²³ This widely used term to describe the era was coined by researcher Patrick Johnson in a 1983 report for the federal government entitled *Aboriginal Children and the Child Welfare System*.

¹²⁴ Jacobson, *Culture Keeping*, 4.

evolved into law with the adoption of the Multiculturalism Act in 1988. The act formally rejected the idea of assimilation by acknowledging “the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage” while promoting “the full and equitable participation of individuals of all origins . . . in all aspects of Canadian society.”¹²⁵

Multiculturalism is reinforced in the 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which recognizes “the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians.”¹²⁶ It is also viewed as a vital element of the national identity.¹²⁷

Multiculturalism has become synonymous with cultural diversity in Canada, driving Canadian immigration policy, which is based on the assumption that newcomers can retain cultural ties to their countries of origin while at the same time identify with Canadian life. “Since 1971, Canadian immigration policy has been developed based upon the premise that ethnic and racial identification is important both to one’s personal sense of identity, and to the multicultural identity that we are trying to build as a nation,” write international adoption scholars Anne Westhues

¹²⁵ Sarah Wayland. “Immigration, Multiculturalism and National Identity in Canada,” *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 5, no. 1 (1997): 1.

¹²⁶ Government of Canada, Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982. Department of Justice. <http://bit.ly/SSnmRM> (accessed October 2, 2012).

¹²⁷ Government of Canada, “The Current State of Multiculturalism in Canada and Research Themes on Multiculturalism 2008-2010,” Citizenship and Immigration Canada. <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/publications/multi-state/section1.asp> (accessed October 9, 2012).

and Joyce Cohen.¹²⁸

Xiaobei Chen, of Carleton University, is among several international adoption experts who contend that the cultural connections that are promoted by the adoption industry have been strongly influenced by official multiculturalism. Chen, however, challenges what she calls “the remarkable consensus derived from official multiculturalism” that demands that China adoptees be exposed to their birth culture. “I think the message that parents have got through the professionals and through various training sessions and seminars . . . is that you must foster a strong cultural, and in some circumstances, a racial identity,” she says.¹²⁹ “As a sociologist, I question that . . . We have taken for granted that if a child was born in China, she is Chinese culturally even though that may not be her cultural reality.”

There also is a strong movement in the United States to expose adoptees to their birth culture. Even though the U.S. has no official multiculturalism policy or law at the federal level, the idea of multiculturalism has evolved with society and thrives in many pockets of the U.S., including urban centres where many adoptees live.¹³⁰

Contrary to the U.S.’s longstanding reputation as a cultural melting pot, international adoption scholars Richard Tessler, Gail Gamache and Liming Liu contend that American society is steadily showing more interest in “roots” and

¹²⁸ Anne Westhues and Joyce Cohen, “Ethnic and Racial Identity of Internationally Adopted Adolescents and Young Adults,” *Adoption Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (1998): 34.

¹²⁹ Xiaobei Chen, interview with author, July 25, 2012.

¹³⁰ Jacobson, *Culture Keeping*, 71, 73, 82; Volkman, *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*, 10; Richard Tessler, Gail Gamache, and Liming Liu, *West Meets East: Americans Adopt Chinese Children*, (Wesport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1999), Kindle edition.

cultural identity. “Americans are more likely than ever to recognize the value of multiculturalism,” they write. “The celebration of differences provides a philosophical basis for choosing to help one’s child stay culturally connected to China.”¹³¹

The Sixties Scoop

When the British Columbia Ministry of Child and Family Services holds mandatory seminars for parents planning to adopt internationally, it draws from lessons learned from the Sixties Scoop.¹³² The term is used to describe the adoption of about 11,000 aboriginal children, about 70 per cent of whom were put in Caucasian homes, mainly in the 1960s and 1970s, after the federal government delegated its responsibility for aboriginal child welfare to provincial governments.¹³³

Anne Clayton, B.C. director of adoption services, says the province believes that coaching parents of internationally adopted children to honour an adopted child’s culture is the right thing to do, based on maligned assimilation practices of past decades and the painful stories of aboriginal adoptees. “We use our aboriginal

¹³¹ Tessler, Gamache, and Liu, *West Meets East*, Kindle edition.

¹³² Anne Clayton, B.C. director of adoption services, in interview with author, Aug. 7, 2012.

¹³³ Raven Sinclair. “*All My Relations: Native Transracial Adoption*,” (PhD diss., University of Calgary, 2007). Cites statistics from the federal Indian Affairs Department, 1960-1990.

experience and translate that to other cultures,” says Clayton,¹³⁴ who bemoans a shortage of Canadian research on the role that cultural connections play in the lives of international adoptees.

Many aboriginal adoptees have publicly lamented, in writings and at public forums, they felt culturally isolated and experienced deep personal problems and an inability to connect with their adoptive families. They reported that they also encountered racism while trying to fit into mainstream society.

One of the harshest and most enduring criticisms of the Sixties Scoop came from the late Edwin Kimelman, a Manitoba judge who led an inquiry into aboriginal adoptions in the province in the early 1980s. His scathing report condemned the practice of “over-zealous” child welfare workers as “cultural genocide.”¹³⁵ Manitoba called the inquiry amid an outcry from aboriginal leaders that even the most well-meaning white families were killing identity development by turning a colour-blind eye to their children’s race and heritage, thereby giving them no pride in who they were, or the tools to help counter racism.

Kimelman’s conclusions have been widely echoed over the years and corroborated by stories of adoptions gone wrong, many from aboriginal adoptees themselves when they came of age. One of Kimelman’s key recommendations — that aboriginal children be adopted into white homes as a last resort — sparked a nationwide retreat, with child welfare agencies focusing instead on keeping the

¹³⁴ Anne Clayton, Aug. 7, 2012.

¹³⁵ Edwin Kimelman. *No Quiet Place: Final Report of the Review Committee on Indian and Métis Adoptions and Placements*, (Winnipeg: Manitoba Community Services, (1984), 51.

children in their extended families or even resorting to foster care in an aboriginal home.

At the height of the scoop era, one in four status Indian children had been separated from his or her parents and they represented 30 to 40 per cent of all legal wards of the state, according to journalist Suzanne Fournier and aboriginal activist Ernie Crey in their 1997 book *Stolen from our Embrace*.¹³⁶

One of the most high-profile cases in Canada was the troubled adoption of Michel Chrétien, the aboriginal son of former prime minister Jean Chrétien and his wife Aline. The Chrétiens adopted Michel from an orphanage in the Northwest Territories in 1970, when he was 18 months old and Chrétien was Indian Affairs minister. Michel, who was raised as if he were a white child alongside the Chrétien's biological children, encountered problems with drugs as a teen and spent time in jail for sex assault as a young adult.¹³⁷

In another case that garnered attention, Barbara Frum, the late CBC radio and TV journalist, and her husband, Murray, adopted an aboriginal infant, Matthew, in the 1960s. Despite his privileged upbringing, he ran into trouble with the law as a teenager. He eventually left his upper middle-class family to renew ties with his

¹³⁶ Suzanne Fournier and Ernie Crey, *Stolen from Our Embrace*, (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1997), 83.

¹³⁷ Brad Evenson, "The Sixties Scoop," *Calgary Herald*, April 19, 1998. News reports have attributed Michel Chrétien's problems to Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. See, for example: Marie Wadden, "Where Tragedy Falls off Canada's Map," *The Atkinson Fellowship in Public Policy*, (2002). <http://bit.ly/UrzLxa> (accessed December 14, 2012).

birth parents and reclaim his roots.¹³⁸

“Even supposed adoption success stories, such as folk singer Buffy Sainte-Marie, went public to question whether the adoption of native children into non-native families is a good thing,” Veronica Strong-Boag writes in *Finding Families, Finding Ourselves*.¹³⁹

Debate has been periodically rekindled over the years, including in 1999, when the Supreme Court of Canada fanned the flames by awarding custody of a three-year-old aboriginal boy to his adoptive grandparents in the United States, rather than his biological grandfather who lived on a reserve north of Winnipeg. The high court, in an oral ruling from the bench, sided with an earlier decision from the B.C. Supreme Court. The lower court concluded that, even taking the child’s aboriginal heritage into account, his “best interests” were better served by living with his adoptive grandparents, who offered superior parenting and a better family environment than his biological grandfather, a welfare recipient.¹⁴⁰

The aftermath of the Sixties Scoop persists, with aboriginal adoptees filing lawsuits in recent years. In 2011, Sharon Russell launched a civil suit against the

¹³⁸ Margaret Philp, “The Battle over Native Adoption,” *Globe and Mail*. Feb. 23, 1999.

¹³⁹ Veronica Strong-Boag, *Finding Families Finding Ourselves: English Canada Encounters Adoption from the Nineteenth Century to the 1990s*, (Don Mills: Oxford University Press Canada, 2006), 161.

¹⁴⁰ Janice Tibbetts, “Adoptive family wins custody of native boy: Supreme Court will not deliver written reasons for ruling,” *National Post*, Feb. 18, 1999. <http://bit.ly/RWNVqY> (accessed November 22, 2012); D.H. and M.H. v. H.M. and M.H., Supreme Court of British Columbia Court File No. F950814, September 26, 1997. <http://www.courts.gov.bc.ca/jdb-txt/sc/97/13/s97-1357.txt> (accessed Jan. 14. 2013).

federal government for allegedly abdicating its responsibility and paving the way for provincial child welfare authorities to apprehend children by the thousands. Russell, who was 54 when she filed her lawsuit, alleges in a statement of claim that “social workers wiped out my family” by snatching her and her siblings when she was seven years old, splitting them up among non-aboriginal foster families.¹⁴¹ She claims she turned to drugs and alcohol and even attempted suicide as a result of being denied the ability to practice her native Giksan language and cultural values. In Ontario, Marcia Brown filed a similar suit in 2010.¹⁴² Both cases are still before the courts.

It should be pointed out that a significant element of the Sixties Scoop controversy, which provoked a strong reaction among aboriginals, was the imperialistic nature of adoption, in which child welfare officials forcibly removed children from their birth parents. Adoptees from China, on the other hand, were given up by their birth parents, rather than taken from them. Thus, identity problems arising from theft of birthright and cultural domination are not the same for both groups of adoptees. Nonetheless, the thinking of the era, that birth culture should be ignored or downplayed in order to fit in with the adoptive family and mainstream society, fell out of favour following the aboriginal experience, contributing to the current trend of cultural embrace. “The adoption of Aboriginal children by whites is

¹⁴¹ Skogamhallait also known as Sharon Russell v. The Attorney General of Canada, “Notice of Civil Claim,” Supreme Court of British Columbia, Court File No. VLC-S-S-113566, May 30, 2011. The case is still before the court.

¹⁴² Linda Diebel, “Ontario Native Class-action Suit Stays Alive,” *Toronto Star*, June 12, 2012. <http://bit.ly/xjZF79> (accessed November 22, 2012).

now invoked, constantly and almost automatically, by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal writers and scholars alike, as an instrument of colonization,” writes Queen’s University historian Karen Dubinsky. “Social workers and other adoption professionals acknowledge the profound lack of empirical research on the lives of cross-culturally adopted children. Yet anecdotal evidence and practical experience led many, if not most, Aboriginal adoption professionals to oppose cross-race placements.”¹⁴³

Indeed, adoption of aboriginal children into Caucasian families is now a last resort. Preference is given to them being raised by their birth families, followed by aboriginal foster care, which has sparked another divisive debate over whether children should be blocked from having permanent families in the name of preserving cultural identity.¹⁴⁴

Raven Sinclair, an aboriginal social worker who was adopted by Caucasian parents during the “scoop” era, recently completed a doctoral thesis suggesting that some aboriginal children adopted into white families were satisfied with the way their lives have turned out. Her study of 17 adoptees found that the majority hold professional jobs, are well-educated, lead stable lives and are exceptionally attentive to their children. “Some have acquired advantages from being adopted by ‘being able to traverse Aboriginal and ‘white’ worlds with ease’ and they have a

¹⁴³ Karen Dubinsky, *Babies Without Borders: Adoption and Migration Across the Americas*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 79-80.

¹⁴⁴ Laura Eggertson, Testimony to the House of Commons Human Resources committee, Dec. 7, 2010. <http://bit.ly/VXdBpJ> (accessed October 2, 2012).

sense of personal satisfaction in terms of education, career and economic success,” Sinclair writes.¹⁴⁵

She asserts, however, that the outcomes indicate the incredible resilience of children, rather than the result of them being raised with better opportunities than children who remained in their birth families. She recommends, among other things, that in the event Caucasian parents adopt aboriginal children, they consider themselves aboriginal families.

That’s precisely how Laura Eggertson, an adoptive parent of two Ojibwa daughters, sees it. “We became an aboriginal family when I adopted my children,” Eggertson told a House of Commons committee in 2010 as it studied federal services for adoptive parents.¹⁴⁶ Eggertson, now president of the Adoption Council of Canada, told members of Parliament that she filled her home with aboriginal books and art, made contact with aboriginal groups and communities, and took her oldest daughter to her home community in northern Ontario when she was 16. “I was committed to adopting an aboriginal child and to fostering that child's culture and heritage,” Eggertson told the committee. “My children know who they are and I’m proud of that.”

¹⁴⁵ Raven Sinclair, “Identity Lost and Found: Lessons from the Sixties Scoop,” *First People Child and Family Review* 3, no. 1 (2007): 75.

¹⁴⁶ Laura Eggertson, Testimony to the House of Commons Human Resources committee, Dec. 7, 2010. <http://bit.ly/VXdBpJ> (accessed October 2, 2012).

In Canadian writings on cross-cultural adoption, the lessons of the Sixties scoop are routinely cited as a reason to expose children to their birth culture, whether adopted domestically or internationally.

African-Canadian Adoption

When making a case for cultural connections, international adoption scholars also consistently refer to the domestic adoption of black children by white families, which was viewed as a product of the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

A group of adoptive white families in Montreal was at the forefront of interracial adoption in North America, according to Dubinsky, pushing against “racially restrictive child welfare practices” at the time by mounting a campaign to encourage the adoption of black children by white parents.¹⁴⁷ The group of parents formed the Open Door Society (ODS) in Montreal in the late 1950s. It started as a parent-support network but quickly evolved into an advocacy group for interracial adoption of children who were living in foster homes, writes Dubinsky. The parents attracted extensive media attention, which contributed to the establishment of similar organizations across Canada and the United States:

Over the next 20 years, Montreal’s ODS maintained an extensive interracial communications network, lobbied government to change antiquated adoption laws, worked with Montreal’s black community to adopt civil rights, and teach black history and culture to adopted children, held workshops in black beauty salons to learn how to do their black daughters’ hair, swapped tips with each other about where to buy black dolls or Christmas cards with black Santas, organized international conferences, and prompted the first stirring of academic

¹⁴⁷ Dubinsky, *Babies Without Border*, 58.

research on race and adoption, all the while searching for a politics of transracial adoption that was unifying, not colonizing.¹⁴⁸

However, by the early 1970s, interracial adoption sparked ferocious resistance from the black community in the United States. It culminated in an often-cited position statement in 1972 from the National Association of Black Social Workers, which affirmed it was “taking a vehement stand against the placement of black children in white homes for any reason because white families are unable to help black children cope with the racism they encounter in their everyday lives.”¹⁴⁹ Dubinsky says there is no evidence of a similar statement in Canada, but opposition in the U.S. nonetheless sparked a backlash against interracial adoption across North America.¹⁵⁰ The association softened its stand in the early 1990s, in recognition that too many black children were growing up in foster care instead of permanent families.¹⁵¹ In 1994, the U.S. passed the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act, which paved the way for interracial domestic adoption by prohibiting the denial or delay of adoption placement on the basis of race, colour or national origin.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 61.

¹⁴⁹ National Association of Black Social Workers, “Position Statement of Trans-Racial Adoption, September 1972,” *The Adoption History Project, University of Oregon*, February 24, 2012. <http://pages.uoregon.edu/adoption/archive/NabswTRA.htm> [accessed October 4, 2012].

¹⁵⁰ Dubinsky, *Babies Without Borders*, 77.

¹⁵¹ Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, *Finding Families for African-American Children: The Role of Race and Law in Adoption from Foster Care*, (New York: 2008), 4, 14.

¹⁵² Ibid.,15.

In Canada, where provinces have jurisdiction over domestic adoption legislation, a similar law has never been passed.¹⁵³

Korean Adoptees

While there is limited research on identity outcomes for adoptees from China, stories and literature about Korean adoptees, mainly in the U.S., are often used as a warning against repeating the mistakes of decades past when it comes to interracial adoption. Adult Korean adoptees have written memoirs and poetry and they've created art and documentaries that "highlight the childhoods they spent in relative isolation from other Asian Americans and Korean culture," writes Jacobson. "These cautionary tales from the past have had a profound effect on how the adoption community (and industry) approaches the ethnic socialization of internationally adopted children. Contemporary adoption practices, policy and international adoption discourse now emphasize the importance of culture keeping."¹⁵⁴ Adds Toby Alice Volkman: "It is in part awareness of the Korean experience that motivates parents of Chinese children to provide *something* — pride in culture,

¹⁵³ Sinclair, "Identity Lost and Found: Lessons from the Sixties Scoop," 69. While domestic adoption law is outside the scope of this thesis, a sampling of legislation and court rulings that have shaped cross-cultural adoption in Canada can be found in Chapter 2 of *Finding Families, Finding Ourselves*, by Veronica Strong-Boag. She notes that Ontario and the Yukon passed legislation in the 1980s recognizing that birth culture should be protected in domestic adoption. There also have been several court rulings dealing with adoption of aboriginal children into non-aboriginal homes, with varying outcomes, based on the particular child's best interests, including the case mentioned on page 59.

¹⁵⁴ Jacobson, *Culture Keeping*, 4.

pride in being Chinese.¹⁵⁵

Adoption from Korea began primarily to find permanent homes for children orphaned by the Korean War, or those fathered by American soldiers, but the practice continued for decades after the war ended in 1953. Korea was the world's leading sending country, until it reined in international adoption in the 1980s amid mounting criticism, first from North Korea, then from the international community during the 1988 Seoul Olympics, that the country was using its children as an export commodity.¹⁵⁶

“Humiliated before the entire world, the Korean government imposed new limits on the number of children allowed to be adopted internationally,” according to authors Tessler, Gamache and Liu.¹⁵⁷

Only small numbers of Korean children who were placed overseas joined Canadian families.¹⁵⁸ The vast majority of the 160,000 adoptees were raised in the United States.¹⁵⁹ However, the sentiment in Canada's transcultural adoption community is that there are valuable lessons to be learned from the testimony of

¹⁵⁵ Volkman, *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*, 90.

¹⁵⁶ Tessler, Gamache, and Liu, *West Meets East: Americans Adopt Chinese Children*, Kindle edition.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Strong-Boag, *Finding Families, Finding Ourselves*, 195.

¹⁵⁹ Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare. “Oveseas Koreans 2008,” in McGinnis, Smith, Ryan, and Howard, *Beyond Culture Camp: Promoting Healthy Identity formation in Adoption*, 10.

adult adoptees, who have gone so far as to declare it “child abuse”¹⁶⁰ to pluck children from Korea and raise them in homogeneous white communities where nobody else looked like them.

“The reflections of Korean adoptees, which are quite painful and thought provoking, has been one of the major influences on this shift in adoption practices,” affirms Xiaobei Chen, a sociologist at Carleton University. “The adult (Korea) adoptees we’ve talked to have given a very clear message that the more diverse the schools the kids go to, the more culture they’re immersed in, the more diverse a university they go to, the better they do,” adds Cathy Murphy, of The Children’s Bridge adoption agency. “There are some pretty strong feelings out there and I really do think we have to honour those who have gone before us and try to do it better.”

The U.S.-based Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, in a 2009 report, concludes that many of the programs and services that have existed for the latest wave of international adoptees — such as culture camps and homeland tours — are a result of the backlash from Korean adoptees. While the vast majority of 179 Korean adoptees who were surveyed considered themselves white — or wanted to be white — when they were children, most have sought to reclaim their birth heritage, mainly by visiting and trying to learn more about their birth country. Most self-identified as Korean or Korean-American and many reported they were able to move comfortably between two cultures.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 41.

While there is consensus among international adoption stakeholders that cultural connections are an important component of identity development, the interpretation of culture and how to practice it are left up to parents, most of whom are Caucasian. Among other things, parents must negotiate the concept of Chinese culture: what it means in practical terms, how much cultural exposure is enough, and whether it matters that they are mainly restricted to token gestures, given that they did not grow up in Chinese families.

There is agreement that culture goes beyond books, art, food, history, music and celebrations, write educators Jay and Jacy Rojewski. Rather, culture is viewed as “a comprehensive approach, a sum total of living, used by a group of people to help them interpret and negotiate the world.”¹⁶¹ The Rojewskis, along with other academics, argue that China adoptees cannot actually be taught their birth culture “without actually sharing Chinese perspectives, values and beliefs.”¹⁶² Thus, there are two clear distinctions when examining Chinese culture: celebratory culture, such as food and holidays; and cultural values, which are harder, if not impossible, for Western adoptive parents to embrace. Chinese values, based on Confucian tradition, call for an upbringing that breeds modesty, saving face, relentless hard work, strength through collectivity, deference to elders, and bringing honour to the family.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Rojewski and Rojewski, *Intercountry Adoption from China*, 74.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 76; Tessler, Gamache, and Liu, *West Meets East*, Kindle edition.

¹⁶³ Rojewski and Rojewski, *Intercountry Adoption from China*, 75.

Authors Tessler, Gamache and Liu, assert that children “raised in the Chinese way” are expected to control their impulses; to conform; to respect the authority of their elders, including their parents, grandparents, and teachers; to accept discipline, to focus on what’s good for the family, and to achieve academically:

The ultimate goal is to achieve honor for the family rather than for the individual. Conversely, if children do not achieve, the family is shamed. Because family honor is at stake, children tend to work hard and to respect authority, both at home as well as at school. Thus, in adolescence, Chinese children appear to be less rebellious, less delinquent and more disciplined than their American counterparts.¹⁶⁴

Amy Chua, a Harvard University law professor and mother of two daughters, preached some of these values in her provocative 2011 book *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, sparking a debate over extreme parenting and causing some North American commentators to balk at the strict, Chinese-style approach to child rearing.¹⁶⁵ This suggests many Western parents are not only incapable of transmitting Chinese cultural values, they also don’t want to because those values are incompatible with their own child-rearing beliefs, such as individualism, and speaking one’s mind: As Tessler and colleagues explain:

Rather than emphasize Confucian beliefs, many adoptive parents choose to emphasize Chinese cultural traditions. They ignore political holidays and many of the traditional Chinese values . . . They

¹⁶⁴ Sing Lau, ed., *Growing Up the Chinese Way: Chinese Child and Adolescent Development* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1996) in Tessler, Gamache, and Liu, *West Meets East*, Kindle edition.

¹⁶⁵ See, for example: Peter McMartin, “Chinese Tiger Mom Raises Controversy; Mother’s Demands for Success for her Children Rub Many the Wrong Way,” *Vancouver Sun*, Jan. 27, 2011 <http://bit.ly/ThRj8n> (accessed November 22, 2012); Alexandra Freaan, “Mommy Meanest? Amy Chua Brought up her Daughters the Chinese Way, and her New Book about it has Ignited a Firestorm of Criticism,” *Ottawa Citizen*, Jan. 15, 2012. <http://bit.ly/ThSwWV> (accessed November 22, 2012).

are critical of the hierarchical family structure as well as the idea in traditional Chinese culture that men are superior to women. Nor do American parents want to instill other traditional Chinese values, such as modesty, not showing feelings in public and deferring to parental judgment, even in adulthood. These are not the things that most American parents consider when they think about bicultural socialization.¹⁶⁶

It's noteworthy that these values, associated with traditional Chinese society, are being challenged these days in China. Modern Chinese values are becoming harder to define as the increasingly prosperous society becomes more materialistic and individualistic.¹⁶⁷

The adoptive parents interviewed for this thesis all acknowledge that they do not have the expertise and experience to transmit Chinese cultural values to their children, but they seem to accept that, given that their children have been raised in Canada and will never be fully Chinese. "Traditional culture, quite honestly, we cannot do," says Cathy Murphy. "We try to do as much as we can . . . but at the end of the day, I'm not Chinese, so the experience I'm going to give my daughter is very different from the experience she would have if she grew up in a Chinese family." Instead, parents focus on the enjoyable and accessible aspects of Chinese culture, involving celebration, food, books, and connections with other families like their own.

Several parents say they have also tried to connect with members of the local Chinese community, by doing such things as inviting them to celebrations organized

¹⁶⁶ Tessler, Gamache, and Liu, *West Meets East*, Kindle edition.

¹⁶⁷ Evan Osnos, "A Collage of Chinese Values," *The New Yorker*, March 21, 2012. <http://nyr.kr/GGeCJs> (accessed November 23, 2012).

by the adoption community or hiring them as nannies or language teachers. But at the end of the day, parents concede they do not bond as strongly as they do with other adoptive families who are more like them. Thus, they collectively partake in a particular brand of cultural connections in which they pick and choose the aspects they consider palatable.

Academic Pamela Anne Quiroz is highly critical of the way adoptive parents of Chinese children engage in “culture keeping.” Their efforts are sporadic, at best, and they are more aptly described as “cultural tourism,” she writes.¹⁶⁸ “The major influences on adoptive parents are other adoptive parents, adoption agencies and professionals, and popular adoption books, all of which reflect the views of members of the dominant culture — hardly a template for developing cultural straddlers.”¹⁶⁹

It is not lost on adoptive parents that their efforts could be easily construed as superficial. Parent Eleanor Thompson says it has crossed her mind from time to time that she has made merely token gestures, but notes that she doesn’t worry about it because she has a sense from members of the local Chinese community “that anything we do is a bonus.”

While some parents reject cultural exposure because they can neither transmit nor relate to Chinese values, they also want their children to feel secure about being full-fledged citizens in their adopted country, rather than trying to plant one foot in

¹⁶⁸ Quiroz, “Cultural Tourism in Transnational Adoption: ‘Staged Authenticity’ and its Implications for Adopted Children,” 529.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 548.

China solely because they were born there. Still others say cultural exposure has been dropped off the family roster because they are already trying to juggle too many extracurricular activities, especially as their children get older.¹⁷⁰

Parent Debbie Harris says she and her husband, Philippe Coutu, decided when their daughter, Melanie, was young that she had enough on her cultural plate, growing up in Montreal with an American mother and a francophone father. “In our family we were already dealing with two cultures and we decided that was enough,” says Harris.¹⁷¹ “We made a decision to bring our kids up as francophone Quebecers, but I wanted them to speak my language. That was a lot, visits to the United States, keeping in touch with my family there and a third culture just seemed a bit much.” Harris also ascribes to a “child’s choice” school of thought — she says Melanie never showed any interest in Chinese cultural activities and Harris saw no need to force the issue. That said, the Harris-Coutu family travelled to China in 2009 “so we could go back to Melanie’s roots,” she says.

The question of how to educate children about their heritage is far from confined to the international adoption community. First-generation Canadians face a similar dilemma. “I am involved in the Chinese community but the dilemma is there,” acknowledges China-born Xiaobei Chen. She and her husband, an English-Canadian, have a five-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, and Chen says it is “an uphill battle” for her child to learn Chinese as she becomes increasingly influenced by her “English

¹⁷⁰ Jacobson, *Culture Keeping*, 95-99.

¹⁷¹ Debbie Harris, interview with author, July 16, 2012.

dominant” world outside her bicultural family. And although they go to Chinese celebrations, “one has to recognize that they simply aren’t the real thing,” says Chen. “The new year’s celebration, for example, I try to take her there, but the struggle that I have is first to explain this is a festival, that people are just doing the best that they can but that is not the Chinese New Year that I have in mind, which is about family reunion and we can’t do that.” For Elizabeth, “the Chinese thing to do” is to go to Dim Sum on the weekends, although Chen says the traditional cart-wheeling Sunday brunch is a Cantonese tradition and she never tried it herself until she was in her 20s.

Chen says it doesn’t matter if the adoption community’s attempts at Chinese culture are “inauthentic” because “the real thing” is unattainable. That doesn’t mean adoptive parents shouldn’t try, she says. “I think it should be offered, not for the cultural acquisition aspect, but for a sense of norm, a sense that there are other people like me who have the same circumstances,” says Chen. “I think for that, for a loose sense of community, that support, the affirmation, I think that’s useful, that’s important.” She notes that children of Chinese immigrants also derive benefits from connecting with others like themselves. “It’s like when the second-generation gets together and they gossip about their parents and the pressure to learn Chinese,” Chen says.

She suggests that adoptive parents, in their quest to make cultural connections, should continue to celebrate Chinese New Year and go to Dim Sum, but they should add some extra value by reading about the history of the events, or about the

evolution of Chinese restaurants in Canada and the immigration history of Chinese-Canadians.

Adoptive parents agree with Chen that there is no way that they can instill Chinese cultural values, or even authentically replicate celebratory culture. But neither appears to be their goal. “Essentially, Aisling is a Canadian girl and she is not a Chinese girl and she will never be a Chinese girl, I mean a culturally Chinese person,” says Lee McCoy. “So what she experiences is the best I can offer her in terms of being Chinese and culture. It’s not authentic and it can never be authentic because I can’t offer her first-person experience of what it is like to be Chinese in Canada, but as a Canadian girl with Chinese roots, this gives her at least a taste of it.”

Despite her enthusiasm for things Chinese, Barb Singleton acknowledges that her college-age daughters have long abandoned Mandarin lessons, they no longer speak the language, and their early taste for Chinese food was replaced years ago by a zeal for McDonald’s hamburgers and french fries. Rather than embrace their heritage, “they deny it,” she says. But she says she’s fine with that — at least for now. Her aim, she says, was to make an offering, and give her daughters a sense of pride in who they are and the choice of whether to pursue Chinese identities in the future.

Cathy Murphy compares cultural connections to religion — if you don’t offer it, they don’t know whether they want it in their life. “I think you always offer and you allow your children to choose,” she says. “If you expose your kids, they’ll know a little bit about language, they’ll know a little bit about culture, or martial arts, or whatever their interest was, and it will be easier for them to go back to it when they get older. You’re kind of laying a foundation.”

Chapter 3: In their own words

In a downtown Toronto bar, three young women who have known each other since their toddler years get together to celebrate Samiee Singleton's 21st birthday. The trio, adopted from China in the early 1990s, share pitchers of draught beer and french fries as they catch up on each other's news.

In Ottawa and Dartmouth, N.S., identical twins Janda Shames and Flannery Head talk on the phone daily, can't wait to see each other during school breaks, and often thank their lucky stars that their parents have kept in close contact ever since the China-born girls were adopted into different families when they were 11 months old.

In Halifax, across the harbour from Dartmouth, 26-year-old Daisy Cobden likes to surround herself with other adoptees, with whom she keeps in constant contact and describes as her "sisters." If she ever has children, she says she would like to move them to China for part of their childhoods, so they could experience Chinese culture.

These young women are the senior citizens of China adoption in Canada, the pioneers who are now embarking upon adulthood. They are among nine adoptees interviewed for this thesis, sharing their thoughts on everything from the cultural education they experienced as children, whether they self-identify as Chinese-Canadians, and their views on growing up with parents and friends of a different skin colour.

As trailblazers, the experiences of these coming-of-agers are likely to be played out again and again, as the bulk of China adoptees in Canada are now approaching their young teens.

The interviewees, aged 17-26, are spread across Canada, have diverse interests and widely varying opinions on the importance of adoption and cultural exposure in their lives. They are not a monolithic group and in many ways they defy pigeonholing. Nonetheless, a picture emerges of adoptees who are far from bicultural and more closely aligned with the milieu in which they were raised, be it English-Canadian, French-Canadian, or Italian-Canadian. They feel little connection to their Chinese roots, other than their ties to each other. They feel culturally separate from the Chinese immigrant community, whose members the adoptees consider to be the “others” — the ones who speak Chinese in the school cafeteria or student lounge, bring Chinese food for lunch, listen to Asian bands, and strive to get straight A’s.

The China adoptees interviewed for this thesis were raised in relative privilege, the children of middle- and upper-middle-class parents who were able to provide comfortable homes, access to extra-curricular activities of their children’s choosing, trips to China and other vacations, cottages, and post-secondary educations. They grew up as skiers, dancers, and piano players, among other things. The majority has excelled in school, securing spots on the honour roll. They all seem to exude self-confidence. To varying degrees, all the girls were exposed to at least some Chinese culture while they were growing up. However, most abandoned these opportunities as they got older. They all have Caucasian parents, they date Caucasians, and most

of their friends are Caucasian, although most also say they also have friends of other ethnic backgrounds, including African-Canadian, Chinese, Indian, half Thai and half aboriginal.

Snapshots of the nine young women

Lia Ying Wei Calderone, Beaconsfield, Que.

A 21-year-old student in athletic therapy at Concordia University, Lia is a high-achiever who excels in academics and karate, earning her black belt when she was 16. She was raised in an Italian-Canadian family. For her, the mother country is Italy and she recently travelled to her parents' birthplace on her first international trip with friends. Lia's mother, [Lidia Nazzaro](#), owns a clothing factory in China, and the family moved there for a year when Lia was five. During our interview, she digs up photos of herself on Chinese soil, clutching a kindergarten diploma in a class picture. She speaks English and French and she's trying to learn Italian. While she took Mandarin as a child, she remembers almost nothing, although she says she would like to take another crack at it someday. Lia, 21, lives with her parents and younger sister, Alissa, who was also adopted from China. Their spacious home, with a swimming pool in the backyard, overlooks the Beaconsfield lakeshore. Lia keeps in touch with three other girls who were adopted at the same time. They try to get together at least once a year — the last time they did so they went shopping and then to a movie.

Alissa Zhongzhou Calderone, Beaconsfield, Que.

Alissa, 18, is a CEJEP student who hopes to go to college to study fashion. She is much more boisterous than her serene older sister — and she considers herself to be much less academic. Alissa’s hobbies are socializing, shopping and fashion. She travels in an ethnically diverse circle. She says she has friends of many races and nationalities, including Italian and Chinese. She considers herself culturally Italian, and her dream destination is Italy. She recently took an Italian language course, but she has no immediate plans to pursue Mandarin classes. While she has no interest in exploring her Chinese roots, she is nonetheless proud of being born elsewhere.

Flannery Head, Dartmouth, N.S.

An 18-year-old nursing student at Dalhousie University, Flannery has little interest in things Chinese. She and her twin sister, Janda, are the only two interviewees who have not returned to China for a visit. While her parents offered up Chinese cultural opportunities as a child, she says she just wasn’t interested and they never forced the issue. I’d pretty much say I’m indifferent,” she says.¹⁷² Much of her parents’ energy went into ensuring she spent time with her twin. “My mom thinks since I have my sister, it makes me not as curious about all that because I already have someone who’s related,” Flannery says. “ The twins, found on the side of the road as infants in the southern Chinese province of Guangdong, were given to different families. Their parents were not told about the connection until just before they travelled to China to collect their babies in late 1994. Janda’s family lived near

¹⁷² Flannery Head, interview with author, July 31, 2012.

Flannery's until they were in Grade 9, when Janda moved to Ottawa because her father got a new job there. The two families enrolled their daughters in Chinese culture classes when they were young, but they both say, in separate interviews, that the only thing they liked about the lessons was seeing each other. As children, they had sleepovers every weekend and they still vacation together on school breaks.

Janda Shames, Kanata, Ont.

Janda, a first-year commerce student at University of Ottawa, shares her twin's lack of interest in the Chinese side of her identity, and has no curiosity about her birth country. When her mother, Sandra Forbes, travelled to China in 2008 as a board member of the The Children's Bridge adoption agency, Janda had no desire to tag along. She knows very little about her past and, during an interview in her Ottawa-area home, she frequently turns to her mother to fill in the blanks.¹⁷³ She describes the short-lived Mandarin classes that she took as a child as a course "in some sort of Chinese language." Chinese art adorns the walls of the spacious family living room, a gift from a Chinese exchange student who stayed with the Shameses when Janda was in Grade 6. Janda says she was thrilled at the time to make a new friend, but she was indifferent to the fact that their extended visitor was from China. Janda was an honours student in high school and her favourite hobbies are dance,

¹⁷³ Janda Shames, interview with author, July 9, 2012. While Janda's mother, Sandra Forbes, was in the room for the first portion of the interview, during which the author asked Janda about her adoption history, Forbes left the house after 10 minutes and the remaining hour of the interview was one-on-one.

especially hip-hop, and socializing. She has a racially diverse mix of friends, and she says some of them used to get together weekly for “foreign Friday” gatherings, at which nobody was Caucasian.

Lou Doyon, Canmore, Alta.

Lou, who describes herself as a cultural francophone, is a second-year student at University of Toronto. She grew up speaking French as her first language, she learned English when she went to school, and she took Chinese lessons for about four years with her friend Samiee Singleton, another China adoptee. As a child, Lou’s parents read her “a plethora of books” about interracial adoption and China, and they were active members of Families with Children from China in Toronto, where they attended events “with loads of delicious food.” When she was 10, her family spent a month in China, a trip that included a visit to her orphanage in Hunan province. When Lou was in Grade 3, her family moved to Canmore, in the Rocky Mountains, where she became a serious downhill ski racer, only attending school two or three days per week for eight months of the year. Her friends and classmates were almost all Caucasian, and she considers herself a “mountain girl,” even though she now lives in Toronto during the school year.

Samiee Peipei Singleton, Campbellville, Ont.

Samiee, a vivacious college graduate who works in a Toronto sportswear shop, chuckles as she describes her mother’s enthusiastic pursuit of Chinese cultural exposure when Samiee and her younger adopted sister, Emma, who is also China

born, were growing up in a small town 50 kilometres west of Toronto. “I don’t really care too much about my background but my parents are really strong about it,”¹⁷⁴ says Samiee, whose mother, Barb, was a founding member of the Toronto chapter of Families with Children from China. The house was full of Chinese books, videos, dolls, and music. The family regularly cooked Chinese food at home, and the girls had a Chinese nanny when they were preschoolers. The family took Mandarin lessons for years and spent three months in school in China when the girls were tweens. Samiee’s birth date, chosen by her mother, is Oct. 1, because it is a lucky day on the Chinese calendar. The family hosts an annual Chinese New Year celebration that draws both adoptive and immigrant Chinese families. “I remember every night there was this weird cassette tape of Chinese music, of this woman singing in Chinese, but I never knew what she said,” recalls Samiee with a laugh. “I remember we always used to sleep to that.” While Samiee thinks her parents went overboard at times by forcing her to regularly attend China-related events, she seems proud of her mother’s devotion to Chinese culture. Samiee, unlike most interviewees who were adopted as babies, did not join the Singleton family until she was three years old.

Melanie Guo Gui Coutu, Montreal, Que.

Melanie Coutu, an 18-year-old fashion-merchandising student at Lasalle College in Montreal, has had little exposure to her birth culture. She was raised by an American mother and a francophone father, who decided that emphasizing a third

¹⁷⁴ Samiee Singleton, interview with author, October 16, 2012.

culture would be too much for their daughter. Melanie is the only adoptee interviewed who did not take Chinese language lessons as a child. She explains that she has a learning disability and it was difficult enough for her to learn two languages — English and French. Her family has kept in sporadic touch with their travel group to China, but Melanie says she feels no special bond with her orphanage mates. Nor does she feel any connection to anything Chinese. Despite Melanie's stated lack of interest in her birth culture, the extended family took a month-long trip to China three years ago. The vacation, described by her mother, Debbie Harris, as "returning to Melanie's roots," was the family's first big international trip. They took a pass, however, on visiting Melanie's orphanage because she thought her travel group of eight was too big for sharing what she considers to be a personal event. She would like to go back and visit her orphanage on her own, or perhaps with her mother. During our interview, Melanie wears a flowing black and red skirt that she bought on her China trip.

Rebeka Thompson, Parksville, B.C.

Rebeka, who at 17 is the youngest interviewee, is a high-school senior in a town near Nanaimo on Vancouver Island, where she is a straight-A student who intends to pursue post-secondary education, perhaps journalism, when she graduates. Her mother, Eleanor Thompson, is an organizer with the B.C. branch of Families With Children from China, and Rebeka is one of the oldest adoptees to still attend group events several times per year. She says that she accompanies her mother because "I like the food, I guess." When Rebeka was a child, her mother organized a Chinese

preschool with other adoptees. Rebeka continued in Mandarin classes until the end of elementary school, when her mother finally let her quit. Living in a small community, she still sees some of the girls with whom she attended language school as a child, but they have drifted apart over the years and they aren't really friends, she says. However, she keeps in touch with two friends who were in her parents' China travel group, and she visits them occasionally when she goes to Vancouver, "but not every time because they have busy lives, too, I guess."¹⁷⁵ While she grew up in a predominantly Caucasian community, where she was one of the only Asian faces, she says she does not ever remember feeling like an outsider, probably because she has travelled in the same circle since elementary school. Rebeka has fond memories of a trip she took to China with her mother and sister three years ago, and she would like to return for another visit some day. But she has no aspirations to ever live in her birth country, mainly because she says that she feels her inability to speak Mandarin would be a barrier to belonging.

Daisy Zhi Yu Cobden, Halifax, N.S.

Daisy, adopted at age 11, tells a different story than those who were adopted as babies and have no memories of their homeland. She speaks with a Chinese accent, lists her name in English and Chinese on her business card, and she still feels China is a very significant part of her identity. In her Halifax home, where she lives with her parents, Michael and Jane Cobden, the fridge is plastered with photos of China adoptees. A picture of water jugs, painted by one of her orphanage friends in China

¹⁷⁵ Rebeka Thompson, interview with author, July 11, 2012.

in classes that Daisy helped pay for by holding a Halifax fundraiser, hangs on the living room wall. She has a godson in China and still keeps in touch with her orphanage “brothers and sisters.” She describes herself as “a Chinese-Canadian, for sure.”¹⁷⁶ Daisy, who as an infant was left in a box outside an orphanage in southern China, spent a substantial part of her childhood there because she had clubfeet, making her unadoptable when competing with healthy infant girls with no disabilities. Several years after she had an operation to repair her feet, the Cobdens adopted Daisy in the summer of 1997. She describes her landing in Canada “as a huge culture shock” and was incredibly lonely. She missed the constant hubbub of orphanage life, craved “real” Chinese food, knew no English and yearned to speak her mother tongue. At school, she suffered racial taunts, mainly because she could not speak English. She wasn’t religious, but she joined the local Chinese church for the socialization. Eventually, her best friend from her orphanage, Maria, also was adopted by a Nova Scotia family, and she now lives a few streets away from Daisy. “She is my best friend and sister,” Daisy says. While she now speaks almost exclusively English — even to her Chinese friends — and replaced her Chinese passport years ago with a Canadian one to make it easier to travel, she considers China “part of my blood . . . my home and it always will be.” She has made several return trips with her parents. She says that when she has children, she would like to move to China with them for a while — but not permanently — so they could experience the rich culture and be exposed to Chinese cultural values, like parental respect. Daisy said that she was raised that way in her orphanage, and that she was

¹⁷⁶ Daisy Cobden, interview with author, August 1, 2012.

also pushed to achieve in her school work while living there, although she acknowledges “they gave up on me” because she was a poor student. “China is so strict, with their beliefs in how they bring up their children, but I like the Canadian way too, so I would like my children to have a combination.”

In interviews with the adoptees, several themes emerged, which reveal:

- An ambivalence, even confusion, over identity
- An indifference about their birth parents and being abandoned
- Little attachment to their birth country
- An appreciation of parental efforts to expose them to Chinese culture
- An abandonment of cultural connections when their parents stopped forcing the issue
- An inability to speak Mandarin
- Strong connections to other adoptees
- Little or no connection to the Chinese-Canadian community
- Pride in being China born, despite a lack of identification with their birth country
- Interchangeable use of the terms “Asian” and “Chinese”
- Satisfaction with their physical appearance and no desire to look like their Caucasian family or friends
- No recollection of experiencing what they consider to be racism

Identity

Of the nine adoptees, Daisy Cobden, who lived in a Chinese orphanage for the first 11 years of her life, is the only one who solidly self-identifies as a Chinese-Canadian. Samiee Singleton, whose mother was more dedicated than most in pursuing Chinese culture, also says she is Chinese-Canadian. But when pressed about what that means to her, she acknowledges that she only identifies that way because her mother has drilled it in that she is not to forget that she is a Chinese-Canadian. Samiee obliges by describing herself that way.

Four were raised biculturally — two as French-Canadians and two as Italian-Canadians. They say their Chinese background is a complication in the mix.

“I don’t really know how I see myself,” says Lou Doyon, who acknowledges she struggles with her identity. “I feel I am not Chinese *enough* to call myself Chinese. But I am not just strictly French-Canadian. I do identify with being Canadian, but that has turned into a very broad profile, which I’m proud of.”

Melanie Coutu, who is also French-Canadian, says she does not feel any connection to her Chinese roots and that she would therefore never describe herself as being Chinese. “If I’m introduced to somebody and somebody asks, I say I’m from Quebec but I was adopted from China,” she says. “My origin is China, but I’ve grown up with an American mom and a Quebec dad . . . It’s like the earth is Chinese, but the branches are English and the flowers are Quebec,” she says, chuckling at her self-description.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Melanie Coutu, interview with author, July 12, 2012.

The Calderone sisters park themselves in the Italian camp. For them, the mother country is Italy and they both aspire to speak Italian. They both say they revel in huge, loud, family gatherings, because that's how they were raised. It bothers Alissa when others challenge her claim to being Italian. "You don't expect a Calderone with an Asian face," she acknowledges. "People say 'you're not really Italian,' but I *am* Italian, it's my culture," she says.¹⁷⁸ Alissa tells people whom she meets that she's Italian, but that she was adopted from China.

Janda Shames says she doesn't know what to tell people. "I don't know what my inner core is," says the 18-year-old University of Ottawa student. "I don't think of myself as white, but I have the same values as my family and stuff. I don't know what Asian values really are, but I don't think I'd fit in with them."

Flannery Head, Janda's twin, says she doesn't look the way she feels. "I look Asian but I don't feel Asian," she says. "All of my friends think of me as Canadian, they tell me that they forget I'm Chinese and stuff . . . But when I look in the mirror, I'm Asian."

Janda says her identity is complicated by her suspicions that she may be of mixed ethnicity, rather than strictly Chinese. She says that other Asians whom she meets tell her that she looks "more exotic" than ethnic Chinese people. "I don't like to call myself full Chinese," she says. "My parents say that I'm Chinese, but other people have told me different . . . the majority of people think I'm Filipino and I tell them I don't really know what I am." Flannery, who is identical in appearance, doesn't voice those suspicions.

¹⁷⁸ Alissa Calderone, interview with author, June 27, 2012.

Lou Doyon, however, shares Janda's feeling that she might not be entirely Chinese. "I have insecurities, for lack of a better word, about this topic because in the last few years I have been told I do not look Chinese," she says. "I have gotten Malaysian, Singaporean, Thai, Vietnamese and anything in between. If I tell people that I am Chinese, they always seem surprised."¹⁷⁹

It's noteworthy that both girls are from southern China, where many of China's 55 ethnic minorities are concentrated.¹⁸⁰ In the search for identity, the fact that 8.5 per cent of the Chinese population is not part of the Han Chinese majority¹⁸¹ is a potentially complicating factor, because adoptees could be part of an ethnic minority within China. Also, there is no guarantee that babies who end up in Chinese orphanages are actually born in China. For adoptees, an uncertainty about ethnic status could be a contributing factor in identity confusion.

A divide: adoptees and Canada's ethnic Chinese community

Most of the adoptees had little or no exposure to Canada's ethnic Chinese community as children. Their connections, through their parents, were mainly with other adoptees. In short, the culture these girls pursued was China-adoptee culture.

¹⁷⁹ Lou Doyon, interview with author, October 10, 2012.

¹⁸⁰ There are 55 minorities in China; the largest is the 17-million-strong Zhuang Chinese, who live in the southern provinces, according to www.travelchinaguide.com. (accessed November 26, 2012).

¹⁸¹ Xinhua News Agency, "Han Chinese Proportion in China's Population Drops," Apr. 28, 2011. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-04/28/c_13849933.htm (accessed Apr. 12, 2012).

As teens and young adults, they say they do not relate to their non-adopted, ethnic Chinese peers and even feel uncomfortable around them.

“I find a lot of non-adopted Chinese people hang out with other non-adopted Chinese people and I wasn’t brought up like them, so I can’t relate,” explains Lia Calderone.¹⁸² Growing up in the multicultural Montreal area, Lia says she has had plenty of exposure to ethnic Chinese people over the years, particularly when she was in CEJEP, where the student lounge was nicknamed the “Asian lounge” by the student body because “it was full all the time with Asian students.” She confesses to feeling “really awkward walking in there” with her Caucasian friends because she could be mistaken for a non-adoptee.¹⁸³ “I don’t speak Chinese, which most of them did in the lounge,” Lia says. “I felt like if someone in the lounge were to look at my Caucasian friends they wouldn’t expect them to act like Asians, whereas if they look at me, they kind of expect me to act in a certain way.” By a “certain way,” Lia clarifies that she could be caught out because she can’t speak Mandarin and she knows nothing about Chinese or Asian pop culture, such as music. Also, she confesses to being turned off by the “smelly fish” in the lunchboxes of Chinese students and their relentless drive to get “100 per cent on a test.”

Flannery Head shares the sentiment that there is a divide between adopted and non-adopted Chinese girls. She says she does not feel any connection to the non-adopted set, and in high school she had no desire to be part of the “Asian group” that used to hang out in the cafeteria. She felt more comfortable, she says, in the

¹⁸² Lia Calderone, email to author, November 23, 2012.

¹⁸³ Lia Calderone, interview with author, June 27, 2012.

company of other China adoptees who went to her school. "I'd say anyone who was adopted from China was not in that group," she says. "It's not that it makes me uncomfortable, I almost feel like they're a different culture than me. I'm more Canadian and they're more into Asian stuff and if I'd try to be in that crowd, I would not fit in, you know."

Flannery's twin, Janda Shames, a social butterfly who travels in ethnically diverse circles, recalls reaching out to her non-adopted counterparts by going out for bubble tea with them after hip-hop dance class. Their connection, however, ended when their cups were empty. "They'd have their Asian families to go back to, their culture," says Janda. "I didn't have the culture, I didn't feel like I fit in. It's just weird. I felt awkward."

In defining their identity, several adoptees take their cues from their friends. Janda reports that one of her friends told her they'd never have become friends if she were like the "awkward Asians who sit at their desks all the time." Melanie Coutu emphasizes that her friends tell her she's "not a real Chinese girl," and Flannery Head says that her friends tell her she's more "Canadianized" than other ethnic Chinese girls in their school. She's part of the crowd because she has been socialized in much the same way as the cultural majority in her community. This carries with it the suggestion that broader social acceptance among peers is based on a distinction being made between China adoptees and those considered to be the "other" sort of Chinese girl.

Not all adoptees reject the idea of befriending non-adopted Chinese girls. Rebeka Thompson, for instance, says she became quite good friends several years ago with

her Chinese teacher's daughter. But the relationships only went so far. Rebeka, herself an honours student, recalls that she had trouble relating to the pressure imposed on her friend to succeed in school — how she was sent to summer school one year because she got a B instead of an A in physical education class.

Montrealer Melanie Coutu tells a similar story. One of her best friends, Jessica, comes from an ethnic Chinese family. Although they have been friends for years, and Jessica often visits the Coutu household, Melanie has never been to Jessica's house, nor has she ever met her family. Also, Jessica, unlike Melanie's other friends, has never been allowed to attend sleepovers, which Melanie finds a bit of a curiosity. However, the friends never discuss the issue, nor do they talk about the fact that Melanie has never met Jessica's family. Melanie confesses that she isn't even sure what language Jessica speaks at home. Melanie has another close friend, Emilie, who was adopted from China. The girls met while working at a part-time job, and Melanie says they had an immediate connection. "We really clicked," Melanie says. "We realized right away that we were both adopted from China. You kind of know when the person is from an adopted family, the way they interact, the way they speak," she says. Both Melanie and Emilie have Quebec accents, she explains. Also, francophones (such as herself and Emilie) have a more aloof manner, she says. Melanie describes her friendship with Emilie as a "closer match" than her friendship with Jessica.

Daisy Cobden, who spent the better part of her childhood in China, is the only adoptee who feels a connection to the Chinese-Canadian community. Still, she acknowledges that most of her Chinese ties these days are with other adoptees. Her

godmother, Judy Anderson, is the former president of the Halifax chapter of Families with Children from China. Daisy works in Anderson's popular Halifax jewelry store and has steady contact with Anderson's two children, both adopted from China. Daisy is a bit of a mentor to the younger adoptee community in Halifax; she recently organized a lunch for a group of them. After 15 years in Canada, she is far more entrenched in the adoptive community than in the Chinese-Canadian immigrant community, although she credits the latter with helping her through her early years of "culture shock."

Cultural connections

Most of the interviewees have parents who bought into the idea that exposing their daughters to their Chinese heritage would foster pride in their roots and help them form healthy identities. The nine girls are among the first wave of internationally adopted children who are products of the cultural exposure movement. Today, however, most of the young women have abandoned the Chinese cultural initiatives that their parents pursued when they were young. They speak no Mandarin, despite the lessons they say they were forced to endure as children. They acknowledge they have made no independent efforts to learn anything about their birth country or heritage, asserting that it is not a priority in their lives.

Nonetheless, several adoptees — Samiee Singleton, Lou Doyon, Lia Calderone, and Rebeka Thompson — say they appreciate their parents' efforts at cultural connections. Their reasons are fourfold: they say it gave them a foundation to build

on, should they decide to pursue their roots when they're older; it sent a message that their background was important enough to matter; it made them comfortable with the fact that they were adopted; and, cultural exposure included meeting and forming lasting relationships with other China adoptees.

"I don't have any cousins so I consider them cousins," Lou Doyon says of her friends Samiee Singleton, and a few other girls whom she's known since she was a toddler. "They are definitely more than friends, they are family in a different way than my actual adoptive family. We definitely have a closer bond than other friends I have." Lou believes her life would have been "radically different" without her parents' attempts to teach her about her background. She feels it has made her both proud and open about who she is because it created a sense of normalcy about being a China adoptee. "I don't think I would be as open about my adoption as I am now. It isn't like I go screaming from rooftops that I am adopted, but I don't hide it if it comes up . . . Those connections also provide people to turn to and talk to when I might have doubts or concerns or just thoughts about adoption, and even about things in life that don't relate to adoption whatsoever."

Samiee Singleton also values her parents' enthusiastic efforts. "I definitely 100 per cent say I appreciate it all a ton," she says. "I know they wanted me to learn my background and being who I am, I never would have done anything (myself) because I am just so happy with the way everything is."

Lia Calderone and Rebeka Thompson also affirm that parental efforts to explore their Chinese roots produced enduring relationships with other adoptees. Rebeka warns, however, that parents should avoid pushing Chinese culture and language on

their children “because sometimes it can backfire and they can resent it.” She elaborates that she was annoyed for years that she had to endure the drudgery of Chinese school, and that she held it against her mother for forcing her to attend. Janda Shames, who rejected her parents’ overtures, agrees. “Parents should give their kids an option but it’s up to the kid in the end,” she says. “You know it’s out there and if you want that security, you can get it.”

The birth country, birth parents, and abandonment:

As a group, the adoptees interviewed for this thesis express little interest in their birth country, asserting that they feel little or no connection to their homeland, other than casual interest as a tourist. While most say it’s on their to-do list to visit China as older adults, none has any desire to spend any amount of time there or to live there. They don’t try to learn about China on the Internet, nor do they read books about China, or even keep up with China in the news.

All of the young women, except Daisy Cobden and Samiee Singleton, were adopted as babies, so they have no memories of their birth country.

“I don’t really care about China, I don’t feel proud of being Chinese or anything,” admits Melanie Coutu, who travelled to her birth country three years ago with her family. She says she didn’t feel the least bit sentimental and the only souvenirs she brought back were gum and some subway tickets.

“I would never say China is home,” says Lou Doyon, who spent a month there when she was 10 years old. “I almost see myself as a weird kind of foreigner because technically I should belong. China is the place I was adopted from, China is

the place where I was either taken from or given away, China is where I could have been.”

Janda Shames also acknowledges feeling no connection to China. “I guess I should, it’s weird, but I’m just glad that I didn’t grow up there. I’m thankful for my life here.” She struggles to explain, finally offering that being “born on the edge” in China is a complicating factor in her feelings about her birth country. She doesn’t resent her humble beginnings, but they make her appreciate her comfortable life in Canada, where she lives in the upscale neighbourhood of Kanata Lakes on the outskirts of Ottawa. Janda says she and her sister, Flannery Head, are far more interested in visiting New York City than in returning to China.

Samiee Singleton, Lia Calderone, and Lou Doyon, who would all like to return to China someday, contend that their inability to speak Mandarin would make them feel like outsiders in their birth country. Lou says that she would feel out of place because people would expect her to fit in, and her inability to do so would make her uncomfortable. “I just feel like no matter what, I would feel out of place in the weirdest way, mostly because I would fit in with the majority on the outside, but I would feel so incredibly foreign in every other way.”

While several girls would like to try again to learn Mandarin, they rate it as more of a distant goal than an immediate plan. Despite her stated detachment from China, Melanie Coutu acknowledges that there might be a strategic advantage in learning Mandarin someday, given China’s growing economic significance. “With business the way it is in China, it could be good at some time,” she says.

The apparent indifference, or in some cases ambivalence, about China extends to their feelings about China's one-child policy. They harbour no apparent resentment that they were probably abandoned because of a state policy that resulted in parents giving up their girls. Rather, some take comfort in the assumption they were forsaken as the result of a state policy. Effectively, they feel it frees their birth parents of personal responsibility because they had little choice in the matter.

"I don't blame them because of the circumstances," says Rebeka Thompson, expressing the sentiment of the majority. Flannery Head surmises that her birth mother was probably pressured by family members to surrender her twin girls. "It's not like I'm mad or anything," she says. "I understand the conditions, and that it probably wasn't her choice and it probably worked out for the better. My mom told me that girls are thought of as a curse and they want boys to take care of the elderly people and work in the field and all that and they'd have their grandparents saying 'we can't have a girl in the family, we need a boy and you have to give her up' and stuff like that. With two girls, that must have been really hard."

Perhaps surprisingly, half of the girls know very little about the circumstances of their abandonment — they say they lacked the curiosity to ask. Much of this information (such as where they were found) is given to adoptive parents in what is known as "abandonment paper work," supplied by Chinese authorities. Alissa Calderone says she knows almost nothing about her early life, and she refers to the Chinese orphanage, where she lived until she was eight months old, as "the hospital." Janda Shames, when asked about her orphanage and how she got there,

yells to her mother in another room to join in the interview to help fill in the blanks. Her twin sister is also sketchy on her Chinese past.

Despite an undercurrent of detachment about their roots, several girls say they are nonetheless “proud” of being China born. When asked to elaborate, some clarify they are pleased that they were born outside Canada — no matter where — because it distinguishes them as unique. “It’s not like I feel pride, I’m just happy to be different than everyone else,” says Flannery Head. “It makes me different,” echoes Alissa Calderone. “Who wants to be born in Canada? Not me.”

Another theme, which perhaps indicates a strong sense of self, is that all of the interviewees claim that they never wished they looked like their Caucasian parents or friends. Some even smirked at the suggestion, caught off guard that it was a possibility worth contemplating. While they don’t particularly identify with China, they are pleased with their physical appearances.

Racism

Most adoptees in this thesis quickly dismiss the question of whether they’ve encountered racism, saying they don’t recall ever being singled out because of their ethnicity or made to feel like an outsider. Only Daisy Cobden, adopted at age 11, said she endured racial taunts at school when she was still learning to speak English.

“I can’t think of anything, and if there was racism, I would have probably held on to it for a while,” says Samiee Singleton.

Rebeka Thompson, who grew up in a small town on Vancouver Island, says she’s gone to school with the same people all of her life, and she feels she was

unconditionally accepted from the start. Her mother, Eleanor Thompson, confirms that she doesn't recall a single incident of discrimination against her daughter because of her skin colour.

Montrealer Melanie Coutu stresses that she "never" felt out of place because of the way she looks.

Alissa Calderone, who grew up in a Montreal suburb, also affirms that she never felt excluded because she has a Chinese face; in fact, she says Montreal is so diverse that "I don't think I could tell you what a Montreal person looks like." Yet, when pressed, she tells an anecdote that she finds both amusing and unsettling. When she goes to nightclubs in Montreal she sometimes produces her sister's identification for admittance, although they look nothing alike. "Some people just see Asian hair, an Asian face," she says, adding that she always tells her friends that the bouncers who don't question her photo are "racist."¹⁸⁴

Others, upon reflection, also recall incidents that they say left them annoyed. Janda Shames, Flannery Head, and Lou Doyon remember friends telling anti-Chinese jokes in their presence. But they all say they wrote off the incidents as normal events of childhood. Janda explains that her friends didn't mean to target her, because they don't consider her to be Chinese. "It's not directed at me personally," she says. "'People tell me "Janda, you're not even Asian, you're white . . . But I *am* Asian. It's annoying but I don't say it." She elaborates that she remains

¹⁸⁴ Alissa Calderone, who was 17 when she was interviewed in June 2012, has since turned 18, the age of majority in Quebec.

silent because: “I don’t want to come across as arrogant and rude. It’s also because people don’t really think anything of those types of jokes.”¹⁸⁵

Melanie Coutu offers a different explanation, however. Growing up in Outremont, an ethnically diverse Montreal borough, she says that she was raised to accept and embrace racial diversity. If she hears someone cracking a racist joke, against Asians or anyone else, she says she looks down on them, rather than being personally offended. “I just feel annoyed and think ‘you’re stupid if you think that.’ It doesn’t hurt me, I just feel sorry for the person,” she explains.

While it seems that none of the adoptees but Daisy strongly identifies with her birth culture, scholars and older adoptees caution that identity is a fluid and evolving process.¹⁸⁶ Thus, these adoptees could change as they age.

That makes sense to Cathy Murphy, of The Children’s Bridge adoption agency. “It’s a process for them. The teen years are hard enough without the adoption piece and the cultural piece and all that. They’ve got a lot on their plate and they’re trying to wade through it all with all the regular teenage drama,”¹⁸⁷ says Murphy. She adds that her 16-year-old adopted Chinese daughter shows no interest whatsoever in anything connected to her birth heritage.

Murphy says that older cohorts of international adoptees have shown a pattern of “accept-reject-accept” when it comes to their roots. Even if Chinese identity is

¹⁸⁵ Janda Shames, email to author, Dec. 16, 2012.

¹⁸⁶ Toby Alice Volkman, *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*, 90.

¹⁸⁷ Cathy Murphy, interview with author, June 29, 2012.

dormant through the teen years, it could surface or resurface in early adulthood, she says. “They tend to go back around 25, our kids just aren’t there yet — our oldest ones are just coming up to 21,” says Murphy. “It will be interesting to see what does happen.”

In Murphy’s years with The Children’s Bridge, she has noticed that even the most devoted children reject Chinese cultural activities along with their Chinese identity by their early teen years. Families with Children from China (FCC) has experienced the same thing. At FCC Toronto’s 2012 Chinese New Year banquet, for instance, the only teens present were the two adopted daughters of organizer Cindy Boates. Wearing jeans and hoodies instead of traditional Chinese finery, they played on their iPods, seemingly oblivious to the festivities around them.

“It has to be that way because that’s child development,” offers parent Barb Singleton. “Younger children in all cultures are willing to do what their parents say early and they have a good time at it, then they will try to move away from you and do the independence movement, that’s healthy and that’s what you want, but if the base is there, you don’t have to worry about it, it will come back when she’s 20 or 30 or 40.”¹⁸⁸

Jennifer Jue-Steuck, a 34-year-old adoptee from Taiwan who grew up in Laguna Beach, California, has spent five years connecting with younger adoptees from China, as founder of the fledgling international social network Global Girls/China

¹⁸⁸ Barb Singleton, interview with author, July 24, 2012.

Adoptee Links.¹⁸⁹ “I think from my perspective, they are only beginning their journeys at 18 or around that age,” she says. “I think that they will grow and change,” says Jue-Steuck, who is completing a doctoral thesis on transnational adoption at the University of California, Berkeley.¹⁹⁰

Jue-Steuck, who was raised by an Asian-American family in a predominantly Caucasian community, said she considered herself a “southern California beach girl who wore flip flops just like everybody else.” She began exploring her Asian-American identity as a teen and older. “I’ve gone through so many different stages,” says Jue-Steuck, who maintains that she has “a flexible identity,” depending on the company she keeps.

A striking difference between Jue-Steuck and the majority of younger adoptees she has encountered, she says, is that she grew up in an Asian-American family. “Younger girls who were adopted from China, who grew up in completely white families, what really struck me is how uncomfortable a lot of them feel around other people of Asian ancestry,” says Jue-Steuck. “They talk about how they feel very white, which makes sense, you just feel who you are surrounded by is who you are. I feel I can fluidly move between both worlds. I feel I have a great sense of pride in my identity.”

An extensive study on Korean adoptees reinforces the argument of identity shifting with age. The New York-based Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute

¹⁸⁹ The website for the group, which bills itself as “the first global group for China adoptees, can be found at <http://www.chineseadopteeLinks.org>

¹⁹⁰ Jennifer Jue-Steuck, interview with author, Aug. 8, 2012.

reports that 28 per cent of those surveyed considered themselves to be Korean-American when they were adolescents, but by the time they were adults, 64 per cent described themselves that way.¹⁹¹

Academic research on outcomes for China adoptees, beyond the early years after adoption, is virtually non-existent in Canada and it is in its early days in the United States.

A newly published U.S. study, claiming to be the first in which China adoptees spoke for themselves, examined the role that adoption, ethnic identity and academic functioning play in the overall feelings of self-esteem of 234 China adoptees, who were part of a longitudinal study previously completed by their parents. The adoptees were 13.6 years old on average, 96 per cent female, and living in the United States, Canada, and several other countries. Fifty-four of the young adoptees in the study are Canadian.¹⁹²

Authors Tony Xin Tan and Brittany Jordan-Arthur, psychologists at the University of South Florida, found their subjects were academic achievers, demonstrated high self-esteem, but were relatively weak on their sense of ethnic identity. The researchers noted their subjects “are still in the process of constructing their ethnic self,” which they concluded is not surprising, given their young age. They added that their parents, 97 per cent of whom are white, are outsiders to their children’s birth culture, and therefore cannot provide an environment that lets them “explore their

¹⁹¹ Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, *Survey on Adult Korean Adoptees: Report on the Findings*, 1999, 1.

¹⁹² Tony Xin Tan, email to author, Jan. 5, 2013.

birth heritage in daily life.”¹⁹³ Nonetheless, most parents have attempted to expose their children to their birth culture, which may have helped combat feelings of alienation and boosted their feelings of self worth, the authors assert. “Our study shows that cultural socialization that encourages the adoptees to develop a strong sense of ethnic pride can positively contribute to their self-esteem,” they write.

Educators Jay and Jacy Rojewski, in their 2001 book *Intercountry Adoption from China*, predicted a wobbly sense of ethnic identity for China adoptees, based on past research of other transracial adoptees. “While their views toward their Chinese heritage may not be negative, they are likely to be weak because of the constant presence of American cultural values and influence in their homes, schools, neighborhoods and so forth,” write the Rojewskis, the adoptive parents of two daughters from China.¹⁹⁴

A Canadian survey of international adoptees living in British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec, conducted in 1991-1992, also revealed a weak sense of ethnic identity among the 155 who were interviewed. The adoptees, the vast majority of whom were born in Korea, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Haiti, and India, had a mean age of 17.3 years at the time they were interviewed and they were 3.1 years old when they were adopted. The research, conducted by Canadian academics Anne Westhues and Joyce Cohen, found that despite weak racial identification, the interviewees were

¹⁹³ Tony Xing Tan and Brittany Jordan-Arthur, “Adopted Chinese Girls Come of Age: Feelings about Adoption, Ethnic Identity, Academic Functioning, and Global Self-Esteem,” *Children and Youth Services Review* 32 (2012): 1506.

¹⁹⁴ Rojewski and Rojewski, *Intercountry Adoption from China*, 151.

comfortable with their ethnic background and that they were a well-adjusted group.¹⁹⁵

The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute notes that recent research into the effects of cultural socialization is beginning to provide a link between parental efforts, ethnic identity development, and psychological adjustment for transracial adoptees.¹⁹⁶ The institute's 2009 report cites, for instance, a 2000 study of 241 Korean adolescent adoptees, which found that "parental support of ethnic socialization was related to a positive sense of ethnic pride, and that ethnic pride was related to subjective well-being."¹⁹⁷ In addition, a 2006 study of 82 adult transracial adoptees found "parental engagement in cultural socialization correlated significantly with their children's positive self-esteem, greater sense of belonging in their adoptive families and fewer feelings of marginality."¹⁹⁸

The outlook of most of the Canadian interviewees in this thesis indicates that they remain works in progress in terms of identity and the enduring impact of cultural connections. Even the most indifferent, however, say they haven't closed the doors on pursuing their Chinese side.

¹⁹⁵ Anne Westhues and Joyce Cohen, "The Adjustment of Inter-country Adoptees in Canada," *Children and Youth Services Review* 20, no. 1-2 (1998): 119, 129-30.

¹⁹⁶ Hollee McGinnis, Susan Livingston Smith, Scott Ryan, and Jeanne Howard, "Beyond Culture Camp: Promoting Healthy Identity formation in Adoption," *Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute* (November 2009): 18.

¹⁹⁷ Dong Pil Yoon, "Casual Modeling Predicting Psychological Adjustment of Korean-born Adolescent Adoptees," *Journal of Human Behaviour in the Social Environment*, no. 3 (2000): 65-82 in *Beyond Culture Camp*, 18.

¹⁹⁸ J. Mohanty and C. Newell, "Adjustment of International Adoptees: Implications for Practice and a Future Research Agenda," *Children and Youth Services Review* 28 (2006): 384-395 in *Beyond Culture Camp*, 18.

“Maybe someday,” muses Janda Shames. Fifteen hundred kilometers away, her twin sister shares her thought. “Maybe sometime in the future, but not anytime soon,” says Flannery Head. “Maybe after I’ve grown up, had a family and all that, but definitely not right now.”

Chapter 4: International adoption: Baby Boom Going Bust

Lou Doyon can't shake the image. A decade after visiting the Chinese orphanage where she lived for the first 16 months of her life, she still vividly remembers walking through the front door with her parents and immediately spotting two girls who lived there. They appeared to be about 10 — the same age as Lou at the time. "I remember breaking down and crying because I thought I was so lucky to have been adopted nine years ago and now I was back almost rubbing it in their face," says Lou, now a second-year student at University of Toronto. "I felt like a horrible person."

It is one of the few memories that she has of the month-long China trip, which she took with her family the summer before she entered Grade 5 in Canmore, Alta. Lou's feeling that she had won the adoption lottery —because she had a permanent family and everything she could want — still makes her feel guilty. "It was simply heart-wrenching to know that those girls were likely to never be adopted," she says. "It's one of those days in my life I'm not going to forget about because it was so powerful."

Lou is well aware that she could have been one of those girls, and that either one of them could have ended up with her comfortable life in Canada, where she went on to become a downhill skier racer, scholarship winner, and summer employee in Banff National Park, and to attend one of the most respected universities in the country. "I'm grateful for how things turned out, but it's always 'what if': what if things had been different, what if I hadn't been adopted?" says Lou, 19.

Flannery Head, adopted at 11 months from an orphanage in the southern Chinese province of Guangdong, is less circumspect when reflecting on what her life could have been like if she had been raised in an orphanage or adopted domestically in China. “I feel like it would suck to be them and live there,” she says, flatly rejecting the philosophy that children are better off if they are raised in their birth country.¹⁹⁹ “It seems horrible to the babies to take them out but once they can get out, it’s a good experience,” says Flannery, an 18-year-old nursing student at Dalhousie University in Halifax. “It’s good that they’re trying to keep their culture together in China and everything but there’s better living here and there are more opportunities here.”

Other China adoptees mirror the sentiment that they personally benefitted from international adoption, because the probable alternative for them would have been to grow up in Chinese orphanages, many of which in the 1990s were crowded, provided their young residents with sub-standard care, and had high mortality rates.²⁰⁰ “I think it’s important for kids to have a home, whether it’s over here or China,” says Lia Calderone, a 21-year-old Concordia University student. Daisy Cobden elaborates. “I don’t think the country matters, it should be about finding a family,” says the 26-year-old Halifax resident. “It’s not a competition. It should not be about ‘Canada should be first’ because the child is from Canada. It should be about what family can actually take care of that child,” she says.

¹⁹⁹ The principle that children should be raised in their birth culture will be discussed later in this chapter.

²⁰⁰ Johnson, *Wanting a Daughter, Needing a Son*, 32.

A lot has changed since prospective Western parents flocked to China to bring home babies such as Lou, Flannery, and Lia in the years when international adoption was flourishing. After dramatically increasing through the 1990s and early 2000s, international adoption is in steep decline. China, in terms of numbers, is leading the retreat.²⁰¹ In the existing climate, there is a greater likelihood that orphans will be adopted domestically and, in some countries, not at all.

International adoption plummeted from a peak of 45,000 globally in 2004, to 24,000 in 2011, as a result of stricter eligibility rules for prospective parents, a crackdown on baby trafficking, and a stated desire by many sending countries to make domestic adoption a priority.²⁰²

“International adoption is under siege,” writes Elizabeth Bartholet, a Harvard law professor and adoptive mother of two grown children from Peru.²⁰³ “Several countries with huge orphanage populations and often horrendous orphanage conditions have severely limited international adoption.”²⁰⁴ Her concerns are echoed by the New York-based Centre for Adoption Policy, which says that international adoption is “at a crisis moment” after six decades of growth.

²⁰¹ Peter Selman, “Global Trends in Intercountry Adoption,” 6. *International Adoption from China* tumbled from a high of 13,407 in 2004 to 5,471 in 2010.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁰³ Elizabeth Bartholet, “International Adoption: The Human Rights Position,” *Global Policy* 1, no. 1 (January 2010): 91.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 92. Bartholet cites Vietnam, Guatemala and Romania as examples of countries where tighter controls are keeping more children in orphanages.

“As new countries open up to international adoption and begin to release their unparented children to adoption abroad, they tend to close down again either partially or totally as the result of newly restrictive regulation,” the centre says in a policy paper. “Yet, the needs of unparented children in these countries and worldwide for the nurturing homes that international adoption provides have not diminished.”²⁰⁵

The decline has been brewing for more than a decade. A key contributor has been the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption, a 1993 document that is gaining increasing strength as more countries sign on. Eighty-nine have ratified the pact, including Canada, which did so in 1996.²⁰⁶ China ratified in 2005 and the United States followed in 2007. There are still key sending countries that have not ratified, such as Russia, although it agreed in principle by signing the convention in 2000.

The convention contains international standards for stricter controls and transparency to counter “the abduction, sale, and traffic of children,”²⁰⁷ the outcome of too many prospective parents in rich countries seeking babies in poor countries.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ Centre for Adoption Policy. “Policy Statement on International Adoption.” <http://www.adoptionpolicy.org/who.html> (accessed November 16, 2012).

²⁰⁶ Hague Permanent Bureau, “Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption.” http://www.hcch.net/index_en.php?act=conventions.text&cid=69 (accessed May 7, 2012).

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ David Smolin and Elizabeth Bartholet. “The Debate” In *Intercountry Adoption: Policies, Practices, and Outcomes*, edited by Judith L. Gibbons & Karen Smith Rotabi. (Williston, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 384.

The convention, colloquially dubbed “GATT for Kids,”²⁰⁹ in reference to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, was crafted during an escalation in international adoption in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Member countries of the Hague Conference on International Private Law first agreed on the need for a convention at a 1988 meeting, in recognition that international adoption was becoming an unregulated worldwide phenomenon. Sending and receiving countries begin drafting an international framework in 1990 on ethical adoption practices. A report prepared for that gathering, by the organization’s secretary general Hans van Loon, emphasized the need for an international instrument to counter escalating baby trafficking.²¹⁰ Three years later, the convention was adopted unanimously by 55 participating countries.²¹¹

In an effort to encourage ethical adoption and to counter corruption, the convention called for the establishment of central government authorities in participating countries to oversee the process. Birth parents, if they exist, must

²⁰⁹ Strong-Boag, *Finding Families Finding Ourselves*, 199; Lovelock, “Intercountry Adoption as a Migratory Practice,” 942.

²¹⁰ Canadian public policy analyst Kathryn McDade writes that adoption corruption in Romania, in the post-Ceausescu era, was a factor in creating the Hague Convention. See: McDade, *Introduction to International Adoption in Canada: Public Policy Issues*, 43. For details on the chaos in Romania, see Chapter 1.

²¹¹ G. Parra-Aranguren, “Explanatory Report on the Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption,” *Hague Permanent Bureau* (December, 1993): 1-91; See also: David Smolin, “Abduction, Sale and Traffic of Children in the Context of Intercountry Adoption,” *Hague Permanent Bureau*, (2010). <http://www.hcch.net/upload/wop/adop2010id01e.pdf> (accessed January 15, 2013).

consent in writing that a child is adoptable, and verify that they have not been paid.²¹²

A crucial element of the convention is that it created a hierarchy of principles that recognized international adoption as an option, but made it a last resort in favour of a child being raised in a family setting in his or her birth country. The preamble states that “intercountry adoption may offer the advantage of a permanent family to a child for whom a suitable family cannot be found in his or her state of origin.”²¹³

The Hague Convention builds on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), a 1989 document that confirms children under 18 as rights holders. The CRC also contemplated international adoption as a possibility only when in-country care options had been exhausted. The convention then called for follow-up “bilateral or multilateral arrangements or agreements” to ensure international adoption is carried out in “the best interests of the child.”²¹⁴ The Hague Convention, which was a response to the CRC’s push for an international policy framework, affirms the CRC’s bedrock principle of protecting a child’s best interests.²¹⁵

²¹² Hague Permanent Bureau. “Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption,” http://www.hcch.net/index_en.php?act=conventions.text&cid=69 (accessed May 7, 2012).

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Convention on the Rights of the Child,” <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm> (accessed May 7, 2012).

²¹⁵ The principles contained in these two conventions are the framework for debate on international adoption, which will be explored later in this chapter.

The Hague Convention, however, goes further than the CRC in endorsing international adoption. The CRC ranks it last, behind in-country alternatives, including foster care. The Hague Convention, on the other hand, places the permanency of a family, via international adoption, ahead of foster care in a child's birth country, but behind domestic adoption. The CRC asserts that being cared for "in any suitable manner in the child's country of origin," trumps international adoption, while the Hague Convention stresses that international adoption can occur if a "suitable family" is not available in-country.²¹⁶ The Hague Convention, therefore, "moves intercountry adoption up one notch," observes Richard Carlson, a U.S. law professor.²¹⁷

Carlson, who was a member of the U.S. State Department Study Group on International Adoptions from 1990-1994, describes the politics when officials from sending and receiving countries met to craft the Hague Convention. The final document ended up being a compromise between two camps.

"Receiving nations such as the United States tended to be most eager to endorse intercountry adoption and facilitate the adoption process," he writes. "On the other side were those participants and observers who believed the Convention should be primarily restrictive: to eliminate abuses such as baby-selling; to protect a child's right to grow up in the land of its birth, or a nation's right to prevent the loss of its

²¹⁶ These two conventions also serve as a framework for debate on whether children have heritage rights to be raised in their birth culture. This issue will be discussed later in this chapter.

²¹⁷ Richard Carlson, "Seeking the Better Interests of Children with a New International Adoption Law," *New York Law School Review* 55, no. 1 (March 2011): 737.

natural resources — children — to other nations; and with the possible effect of reducing intercountry adoption.”

Leading child-advocacy groups, such as UNICEF and Save the Children, are supporters of the Hague Convention. UNICEF endorses international adoption only from countries that conform to the Hague standard, saying it represents the best hope to weed out “the sale and abduction of children, coercion or manipulation of birth parents, falsification of documents and bribery.”²¹⁸

International adoption advocates argue, however, that one consequence of the convention is that “millions” of children are now growing up in orphanages, as the international adoption process becomes more rigorous.²¹⁹ Bartholet, for one, maintains that children are languishing in institutions because “foster care does not exist in a meaningful way in most sending countries.” Domestic adoption is also problematic, she argues, because “desperately poor people” are not in a position to offer care, either temporarily or permanently.²²⁰

Bartholet acknowledges a need to clean up corruption — although she maintains there is “no persuasive evidence that adoption abuses are extensive.” In any event, she argues, there should be more focus on cracking down on perpetrators, rather than limiting international adoption, when the effect is that children are kept in

²¹⁸ UNICEF, *Position on Inter-country Adoption*, UNICEF Press Centre. http://www.unicef.org/media/media_41918.html (accessed April 27, 2012).

²¹⁹ Jane Aronson, “Six Views on Intercountry Adoption,” *Adoption Advocate* no. 13, (2009): 4; Elizabeth Bartholet, “International Adoption: The Human Rights Position,” 91; Scott Baldauf, Sarah Burton, Ezra Fieser, Kathie Klarreich, and Fred Weir, “International Adoption: A Big Fix Brings Dramatic Decline,” *Christian Science Monitor*, March 14, 2010. <http://bit.ly/9autid> (accessed April 27, 2012).

²²⁰ Bartholet, “International Adoption: The Human Rights Position,” 93.

foster care or orphanages. “The response to adoption abuses should be the same as in other areas of law violation — enforce existing law, strengthen the law as appropriate and punish those violating the law,” Bartholet writes.²²¹

The three largest sending nations through the 1990s and early 2000s — China, Russia, and Guatemala — are among the countries that have effectively shut down to prospective parents seeking healthy infants. Their reasons, however, are not all related to the Hague Convention. They have their separate and unique motivations as well.

China

The number of children adopted from China dropped to 5,471 in 2010, down from a worldwide peak of 13,407 in 2004.²²² The downturn is attributed to the state shifting its focus to domestic adoption, an easing of the one-child policy, and the ability of increasingly prosperous Chinese nationals to pay fines for over-quota children.²²³ There are also state concerns over a significant gender imbalance,²²⁴ which is largely blamed on abortions resulting from the one-child policy.²²⁵

²²¹ Smolin and Bartholet, “The Debate,” 378.

²²² Selman, “Global Trends in Inter-country Adoption,” 6.

²²³ Kay Johnson, 379-396; Interview with Cathy Murphy of Children’s Bridge adoption agency, June 29, 2012; Michele Salmon, email to author, Oct. 26, 2012; Andrea Gordon, “Golden Age of China Adoptions Fading,” *Toronto Star*, Jan. 10, 2007; Peter Selman, “The Rise and Fall of Inter-country Adoption in the Twenty-First Century,” 590; Kayla Webley, “Why Americans are adopting fewer kids from China,” *Time* magazine, April 28, 2009, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1902824,00.html> (accessed November 30, 2012).

After ratifying the Hague Convention in 2005, China's Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) served notice the following year that the country "will henceforth favour national adoption to the disadvantage of international adoption." The MCA said its move was inspired by "a strong growth in living standards for Chinese people, a cultural change and application of the Hague Convention of 29 May 1993."²²⁶

In 2006, China announced stricter eligibility rules for prospective foreign parents, saying that there were no longer enough babies to meet ballooning international demand. The new criteria eliminated those who are over 50 years old, obese, have other health problems, earn an income of less than \$80,000, are single, or have a history of depression, among other restrictions.²²⁷ "The purpose of the undertaking of adoption is to find families for children instead of finding children for families," the China Centre of Adoption Affairs wrote in a letter to international adoption agencies in December 2006, warning them China was tightening its criteria to give a dwindling number of adoptees a better chance of the best life possible.

International adoption stakeholders say, based on anecdotal evidence, there are not nearly as many abandoned infants in China now, and once-overflowing

²²⁴ *Xinhua News Agency*. "China's Sex Ratio Declines for Two Straight Years." August 6, 2011. <http://bit.ly/rawzOp> (accessed April 3, 2012).

²²⁵ *Children from China* magazine (2008), In Monica Dowling and Gill Brown, "Globalization and International Adoption from China," *Child and Family Social Work* (February 2009): 6.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

²²⁷ China Centre of Adoption Affairs, "Priority Rules in the Review of Intercountry Adoption Applications Dossiers," Oct. 31, 2007. www.china-ccaa.org (accessed April 27, 2012).

orphanages are sparsely populated, mainly with older children with special needs.²²⁸

Despite China's stated focus on domestic adoption, it is noteworthy that the country's retreat from the international arena coincided with the exposure of a baby-buying ring that attracted wide international media attention, embarrassed Chinese officials and led to jail sentences for 10 orphanage directors and other state officials in the southern province of Hunan. The ring involved the purchase of as many as 1,000 babies over four years from neighbouring Guangdong province, with black marketers selling them to Hunan orphanages for \$400 to \$538, according to reports in Chinese state media at the time.²²⁹

The *Washington Post* noted how the US \$3,000 cash fee that adoptive parents pay orphanages — a sum nearly twice the average annual Chinese income — spawned a “tragic irony” that “transformed once-unwanted Chinese girls into valuable commodities worth stealing.”²³⁰

²²⁸ Stuy, Brian, “Putting the ‘Quota’ Myth to Bed,” *Research-China.org* (Blog), April 19, 2011. <http://research-china.blogspot.ca/2011/04/putting-quota-myth-to-bed.html> (accessed November 30, 2012); Cathy Murphy, acting executive director, Children's Bridge adoption agency, interview with author, June 29, 2012. The author of this thesis, a member of a private Yahoo group of parents who adopted from China, has read several postings from families who returned to their children's orphanages in recent years, to find them sparsely populated, downsized, or refurbished to accommodate senior citizens as well as orphans.

²²⁹ See, for example, Patricia Meier and Zhang Xiaole, “Sold into Adoption: The Hunan Baby Trafficking Scandal Exposes Vulnerabilities in Chinese Adoptions to the United States,” *Cumberland Law Review* 39, no. 1 (2008-2009): 87-130; Beth Loyd, “China's Lost Children,” *ABC News*, May 12, 2008. <http://abcn.ws/WDZfrW> (accessed December 1, 2012); Peter Goodman. “Stealing Babies for Adoption,” *Washington Post*, March 12, 2006. <http://wapo.st/SYqnRw> (accessed November 15, 2012).

²³⁰ Goodman, “Stealing Babies for Adoption,” 2006.

Tales of family planning officials taking babies from poor families rather than imposing fines have persisted, casting further suspicion on an adoption program that was once considered the gold standard. The issue gained international attention in 2009 when the *Los Angeles Times* published an investigative piece, based on interviews with Chinese villagers, alleging baby snatching was commonplace in parts of rural China.²³¹

With international adoption of healthy infants winding down, the country has shifted its focus to its “waiting children” program, designed to find homes abroad for hard-to-place orphans with serious disabilities, such as cerebral palsy and Down syndrome. Most adoption agencies in Canada no longer take applications for healthy Chinese infants because the wait time is estimated to be about six years.²³²

Russia

Russia, the second largest player in international adoption through the 1990s and early 2000s, also has pulled back, saying that it is losing interest in exporting its children.²³³ Russia turned to international adoption in the early 1990s, when the

²³¹ Barbara Demick. “*Chinese Babies Stolen by Officials for Foreign Adoption*,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 20, 2009. <http://bit.ly/UIpyv> (accessed November 15, 2012).

²³² Cathy Murphy, The Children’s Bridge adoption agency, interview with author, June 29, 2012.

²³³ *RIA Novosti*, “Putin Urges Limiting Foreign Adoption of Russian Kids,” March 7, 2012. <http://en.ria.ru/society/20120307/171836130.html> (accessed May 29, 2012); Anne Garrels, “Russian Attitudes Colder Toward Foreign Adoption,” *NPR*, Dec. 17, 2008. <http://n.pr/YnUTvy> (accessed November 30, 2012).

country was dealing with the social problems, mainly poverty, brought by the collapse of the Soviet Union.²³⁴ At its peak in 2004, Russia sent 9,417 children to foreign adoptive homes; by 2010 the numbers had dwindled to 3,387.²³⁵

Russia's program has been hampered by accusations of corruption since its inception, with stories of private brokers buying babies from desperate birth parents, and then selling them to orphanages for a handsome profit.²³⁶

Russia has taken steps in recent years to clean up international adoption practices — such as requiring agents to be licensed. In 2007, Russia put a temporary halt to new applications from overseas as it embarked on reforms.²³⁷

International adoption also has been a political issue in Russia,²³⁸ where President Vladimir Putin, in one of his first policy statements after securing re-

²³⁴ Heather Jacobson, *Culture Keeping*, 22.

²³⁵ Selman, *Global Trends in Intercountry Adoption*, 2012.

²³⁶ Geoffrey York, "Adoption in Russia Rife with Corruption," *Globe and Mail*, May 1, 2000; Carolyn Wheeler, "Babies-for-Sale Trade Faces a Global Crackdown," *Guardian*, Nov. 24, 2004, <http://bit.ly/VeyNDY> (accessed November 30, 2012); *Christian Science Monitor*, "Adoptions Stalled: Reform or Red Tape," 2000. <http://bit.ly/Uaoznl> (accessed November 30, 2012).

²³⁷ Lynette Clemetson, "Working on Overhaul, Russia Halts Adoption Applications," *New York Times*, Apr. 12, 2007, <http://nyti.ms/QgAVPU> (accessed November 15, 2012); Wendy Koch, "Russia Curtails American Adoptions," *USA Today*, Apr. 11, 2007, <http://usat.ly/UBWb1S> (accessed December 2, 2012).

²³⁸ In late 2012, the Russian Parliament passed a law banning foreign adoptions to the United States, in response to U.S. President Barack Obama signing a law barring Russian citizens accused of violating human rights from travelling to the U.S. or to own property there. See, for example: David Herszenhorn and Erik Eckholm, "Putin Signs Bill That Bars U.S. Adoptions, Upending Families," *New York Times*, Dec. 27, 2012. <http://nyti.ms/12SrdFj> (accessed January 11, 2013); *Associated Press*, "Kremlin Spokesman Says Adoption Agreement with U.S. will remain valid until 2014," Jan. 10, 2013. <http://bit.ly/ZMENEf> (accessed January 11, 2013).

election in 2011, declared that foreign adoptions should become a “rare exception” and that “we should try to ensure that most children find their families here in Russia.”²³⁹ He was seizing on a growing cynicism about international adoption, which escalated following several cases of maltreatment of Russian adoptees by adoptive parents in the United States, particularly one high-profile case in 2010, when an adoptive mother from Tennessee sent her seven-year-old adopted son back to Russia alone on a Moscow-bound plane.²⁴⁰ Russia has recently imposed stricter standards for adoption agencies to secure approval to do business in the country.²⁴¹ Also, there is a mandatory six-month search for adoptive parents in Russia before a child can be adopted abroad, to increase chances of finding domestic adoptive parents.²⁴²

²³⁹ *RIA Novosti*, “Putin Urges Limiting Foreign Adoption of Russian Kids,” March 7, 2012.

²⁴⁰ Clifford Levy, “Russia Calls for Halt on U.S. Adoptions,” *New York Times*, April 9, 2010, <http://nyti.ms/bPQrWP> (accessed December 3, 2012); Tralee Pearce, “The Painful New Realities of International Adoption,” *Globe and Mail*, Feb. 17, 2012, <http://bit.ly/S0KwqV> (accessed November 15, 2012).

²⁴¹ Nataliya Vasilyera, “Intercountry Adoption: Russian Parliament Ratifies Russia-U.S. Pact,” *Christian Science Monitor*, July 10, 2012, <http://bit.ly/SqBtjm> (accessed December 2, 2012); Reuters, “Russia Signs Tougher Adoption Deal with the U.S.,” July 30, 2012. <http://ca.reuters.com/article/idCABRE86T15320120730> (accessed November 15, 2012).

²⁴² Family Helper, “Country News: Russia,” *Adoption News Central*. May 18, 2007. <http://www.familyhelper.net/news/russia.html> (accessed November 30, 2012).

Guatemala

Guatemala, where impoverished parents have been more likely to relinquish their children than those in any other sending country, has been considered to have one of the worst international adoption programs in the world. The Latin American country has been lambasted as “corrupt” by the Hague Conference on Private International Law,²⁴³ and accused by the U.S. Department of State of being “rampant with fraud.”²⁴⁴

Adoption from Guatemala began during the country’s protracted civil war, but ballooned into a significant industry after the conflict ended in 1996.²⁴⁵ A decade later, just before Guatemala imposed a much-needed overhaul in response to growing international pressure, the country sent one out of every 100 infants abroad for international adoption, according to international adoption demographer Peter Selman.²⁴⁶ China, in comparison, relinquished .05 per cent annually at that time.²⁴⁷

One of the biggest complaints about Guatemala was that international adoptions

²⁴³ *Hague Permanent Bureau*, “Report of a Fact-Finding Mission to Guatemala in Relation to Intercountry Adoption,” Feb. 26-March 9, 2007. <http://bit.ly/PWXHej> (accessed November 15, 2012). The report noted that birth parents could be paid thousands of dollars to relinquish their children.

²⁴⁴ David Crary, “U.S. Advises Against Guatemalan Adoptions,” *Associated Press*, March 17, 2007 <http://bit.ly/VBtTkE> (accessed Dec. 11, 2012).

²⁴⁵ Shuster Institute for Investigative Journalism, “*Adoption: Guatemala*,” Brandeis University. <http://bit.ly/ZSow56> (accessed November 15, 2012); Letta Tayler. “*Adoption Under Scrutiny*,” *Montreal Gazette*, Nov. 6, 2003.

²⁴⁶ Selman, *Global Trends in Inter-country Adoption*, 6.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

were brokered by private lawyers who oversaw the entire process, from witnessing signatures of birth mothers signing away parental rights, to assigning the child to foreign adoptive parents.²⁴⁸ Sizeable amounts of money — reported to be as much as US \$35,000 per child²⁴⁹ — changed hands without any state oversight.

In late 2007, Guatemala suspended all adoptions as it prepared to implement a new law,²⁵⁰ designed to guard against lawyers paying impoverished mothers for their newborn babies. Guatemala's crackdown, which followed its ratification of the Hague Convention, also imposed a two-year wait for children to be declared legally abandoned, and required that all international adoptions be approved by a judge.

Guatemala's cleanup came six years after Canada cut ties by banning Canadian agencies from doing business there, in light of reports that its system was plagued by child trafficking.²⁵¹ Canada has still not reinstated Guatemala, which has plummeted from being a top baby supplier to running a relatively small program.

Other countries are also in retreat. Bulgaria, after ratifying the Hague Convention in 2002, now requires a child to be rejected by three Bulgarian families before he or she can be adopted outside the country.²⁵² Ethiopia, an international adoption hot

²⁴⁸ Shuster Institute for Investigative Journalism, "Adoption: Guatemala," 2012.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ E.J. Graff, "The Lie We Love," *Foreign Policy* magazine (2008), 63.

²⁵¹ Family Helper, "Guatemala," *Adoption News Central*. June 26, 2007. <http://www.familyhelper.net/news/guatemala.html> (November 15, 2012).

²⁵² U.S. State Department Bureau of Consular Affairs, "Intercountry Adoption: Bulgaria," <http://1.usa.gov/11dG5gN> (accessed November 28, 2012); Katrina Onstad, "Bursting the Chinese Baby Bubble," *Maclean's*, May 7, 2008, <http://bit.ly/XMXbmk> (accessed June 12, 2012)

spot after the collapse of China, announced in 2011 that it would process only five international adoption files per day, down from 50, focusing its resources instead on “other priorities” for vulnerable children.”²⁵³ The African nation, although not a signatory to the convention, has been under pressure internationally to clamp down on baby trafficking.²⁵⁴

Romania, plagued by baby selling, suspended international adoption in 2001, three years before it finally restricted foreign adoptions to parents who also hold Romanian citizenship. The new law effectively took Romania out of the international adoption business at a time when it was being pressured to do so in order to join the European Union, which asserted the country’s system was rife with corruption.²⁵⁵

Receiving countries also have stopped doing business with some countries, amid reports of corruption in their systems or a failure to comply with the Hague Convention. In Canada, federal and provincial adoption officials have severed ties not only with Guatemala, but also Georgia, Nepal, Liberia, and Haiti.²⁵⁶

²⁵³ *Family Helper*, “Ethiopia,” March 17, 2011, <http://www.familyhelper.net/news/ethiopia.html> (accessed November 15, 2012).

²⁵⁴ Miriam Jordan, “Inside Ethiopia’s Adoption Boom,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 8, 2012, <http://on.wsj.com/IrvTvT> (accessed December 2, 2012); Andrea Poe, “Ethiopian adoptions may be in peril,” *Washington Times*, March 11, 2011, <http://bit.ly/hDXpc6> (accessed November 28, 2012).

²⁵⁵ Peter Selman, “The Rise and Fall of Intercountry Adoption in the Twenty-First Century,” 590; Harry de Quetteville, “EU Forces Romania into Ban on Foreign Adoptions,” *The Telegraph*, Jun 17, 2004, <http://bit.ly/U6oYa8> (accessed November 30, 2012); Bartholet, “International Adoption: The Human Rights Position,” 92.

²⁵⁶ Government of Canada, “Intercountry Adoption in Canada,” Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, Aug. 24, 2011. <http://bit.ly/QFvaGL> (accessed Nov. 16, 2012).

The Massachusetts-based Shuster Institute for Investigative Journalism reports that more than 40 per cent of the top 40 sending nations to the United States during the late 1990s and early 2000s are effectively closed, mainly due to concerns about corruption, child trafficking and abduction.²⁵⁷

Another contributor to the drop in international adoption has been a contested belief that children have rights to maintain continuity with their culture, language, and country.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Hague Convention frame the debate on this issue, with both documents endorsing cultural protection of adoptees by affirming that it should be a consideration when placing them. The CRC states that “due regard shall be paid to the desirability of continuity in a child's upbringing and to the child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background.” The Hague Convention says authorities, after determining that a child is adoptable, should give “due consideration to the child's . . . ethnic, religious and cultural background.” Neither document, however, specifies how much weight should be given to cultural considerations.

Some child-advocacy groups, such as Save the Children, promote the idea of maintaining “cultural identity,”²⁵⁸ which goes hand in hand with the group ranking international adoption below “a range of family care options” in a child’s country of

²⁵⁷ E.J. Graff, *The Lie We Love*, 2008.

²⁵⁸ Save the Children, “Intercountry Adoption Policy Brief,” June 2012. <http://bit.ly/TLQc8b> (accessed December 12, 2012).

birth. UNICEF, citing the CRC and the Hague Convention, also puts international adoption at the bottom of the pecking order, superior to orphanages, but not necessarily to being raised in foster care in one's country of birth.²⁵⁹ The group does not specifically align its position with cultural rights. However, the principle of exhausting a range of options in a child's birth country before turning to international adoption is generally accepted to be tied to the idea of maintaining continuity with culture, language, and community, according to U.S. law professor David Smolin.²⁶⁰

Smolin vigorously disputes critics who gloss over or downplay the significance of birth culture. "Some dismiss the connection of children to the nation, community, or culture of their original family as mere national or group ownership of children in derogation of children's rights," he writes. "Stripping a child of her identity and familial community and cultural heritage is a severe deprivation of rights, as the child generally has no choice in the matter and has her fundamental orientation to herself and the world altered without her consent."²⁶¹

The positions of Save the Children, UNICEF, and international adoption critics such as Smolin are opposed by proponents such as Bartholet and Jane Aronson, who

²⁵⁹ UNICEF, "Position on Inter-country Adoption." *UNICEF Press Centre*, July 22, 2010. http://www.unicef.org/media/media_41918.html (accessed April 27, 2012). UNICEF states that international adoption may be the best permanent solution for children who cannot be cared for in a "family setting" in their country of origin, a position that does not rule out foster care.

²⁶⁰ David Smolin and Elizabeth Bartholet, "The Debate," in *Intercountry Adoption: Policies, Practices, and Outcomes*, edited by Judith L. Gibbons & Karen Smith Rotabi. (Williston, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 383.

²⁶¹ Bartholet and Smolin, *The Debate*, 383.

argue that growing up in a permanent family more than makes up for culture loss. They say that the top priority, if acting in the best interests of the child, should be to get children into permanent families as early in life as possible, whether it's through domestic or international adoption. "It amazes me that someone would argue that heritage and cultural identity are what matter most in a child's life," writes Aronson, an American medical doctor who specializes in international adoptees. "To throw out all the thoughtfulness of developmental psychologists and pediatricians around the need for a child to grow up as part of a family is mind boggling."²⁶²

Bartholet, who adopted two boys from Peru in the 1980s, argues that it makes no difference whether children are adopted inside or outside their home country, as long as they join permanent families as early as possible in their lives. It's retrograde thinking, she writes, to argue that children have heritage rights:

Science provides no basis for believing that children are better off if raised in their community of origin. Nor does common sense. Was Barack Obama, the biological son of a father born in Kenya and a mother born in Kansas, deprived of his heritage by being raised in Hawaii and Indonesia? Was he deprived or enriched by virtue of his complex national, racial, and ethnic heritage? His testimony, as revealed in books and speeches, indicates that he feels enriched and empowered to act more effectively. We live in a world increasingly defined by globalization, with adults eager to cross boundaries for economic and other opportunities . . . In this world it would be laughable to argue that adults should be prevented from leaving their country of birth so they could enjoy their heritage rights.²⁶³

The idea of a permanent home trumping growing up in one's birth country was a factor in the high-profile legal battles in Malawi involving pop star Madonna, who

²⁶² Jane Aronson. "Six Views on Intercountry Adoption," *Adoption Advocate* no. 13, (2009): 4.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 92.

ignited an international adoption firestorm before she ultimately won the right to adopt infant David Banda in 2006 and four-year-old Chifundo James in 2009. In approving Madonna's 2009 adoption, the Malawi appeals court waived a residency requirement that prospective parents must have been living in the country for at least 18 months at the time of adoption, a restriction interpreted as an effective ban on international adoption. The judge concluded that Madonna offered a true home and financial stability that was unavailable to the little girl in her birth country. Furthermore, Madonna, founder of the children's charity Raising Malawi, "could not be described as a sojourner" and "in this global village, a man can have more than one place in which he resides," the court ruled.²⁶⁴

Three years earlier, the Malawi high court had reached a similar decision in the David Banda case, despite opposition from dozens of child-advocacy and human-rights groups, including Save the Children, which had unsuccessfully argued that the rich should not be permitted to skirt the rules, and that the state should try to find Malawi parents for children before allowing them to be transplanted overseas.²⁶⁵

Another irritant among child welfare groups was the fact that David Banda had a father, who had placed the infant in an orphanage because he could not afford to

²⁶⁴ Banyma Dawit Mazmur, "Acting Like a Rich Bully?": Madonna, Mercy, Malawi and International Children's Rights in Adoption Law," *International Journal of Children's Rights* (2012): 34; Miguel Marquez, "Madonna Wins Right to Adopt Merci from Malawi," *ABC News*, June 12, 2009. <http://abcn.ws/Ujio2j> (accessed December 1, 2012).

²⁶⁵ Bartholet, "International Adoption: The Human Rights Position," 9, 17.

care for him — sparking cynicism that Madonna was able to effectively buy a child whose birth family couldn't afford to raise him.²⁶⁶

The Madonna affair highlights another contentious debate: the number of true orphans in the world. International adoption critics, such as E.J. Graff, argue there are few healthy infant orphans, and those who need homes are usually “sick, disabled, traumatized and older than five.”²⁶⁷

UNICEF estimates that there were more than 132 million orphans in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean in 2005. However, the vast majority of those children — 119 million — had lost only one parent and/or were living with a surviving family member, such as a grandparent. UNICEF says that 95 per cent of orphans are older than five.²⁶⁸

International adoption proponents, such as Bartholet and Aronson, contend that what really matters is that there are “millions” of unparented children.²⁶⁹ The National Council for Adoption in the U.S. takes a similar position. William Rosen, chief of the council's international committee, asserts that the “current and continued decline in intercountry adoptions is neither right, nor good for

²⁶⁶ Kerry Bystrom, “On ‘Humanitarian Adoption’: Madonna in Malawi, *Humanity Journal* 2, no. 2 (2011): 215.

²⁶⁷ E.J. Graff, “The Lie We Love,” 59.

²⁶⁸ UNICEF, “Orphans,” *UNICEF Press Centre*, May 25, 2012. http://www.unicef.org/media/media_45279.html (accessed November 30, 2012).

²⁶⁹ Bartholet. “International Adoption: The Human Rights Position,” 91; Jane Aronson. “Six Views on Intercountry Adoption,” 4.

children.”²⁷⁰ The Adoption Council of Canada does not have an official position.²⁷¹

The *Christian Science Monitor* points to Guatemalan preschooler Silvia Sebac as an example of an orphanage dweller who fell through the cracks as a result of tougher laws and regulations governing international adoption. Silvia, whose mother dropped her off at an orphanage in 2008, became eligible for adoption just as her country was imposing strict new rules. The newspaper, in an article examining how “the big fix” of the Hague Convention has brought a dramatic decline, recounts how Silvia ended up in a Guatemala City orphanage at a time when parents still believed that their offspring would be quickly adopted into a better life abroad. But Silvia, one of the first children affected by Guatemala’s new two-year wait to declared legally abandoned, had “no takers”²⁷² when the time was up.

“Today, when asked who her mother is, Silvia points to an orphanage caretaker and says, beaming, “Mama Nico,” writes the *Monitor*. “A slight, pretty girl, Silvia flashes four stubby fingers when asked her age: “Cuatro.”

The perils of international adoption are not lost on Canadian adoptive parents. Two decades after adopting their children, four mothers said in interviews that they

²⁷⁰ William Rosen, “The Continued Decline in Inter-country Adoption,” *Adoption Advocate* no. 44 (2012):15.

²⁷¹ Laura Eggertson, president of the Adoption Council of Canada, in email to author, Nov. 13, 2012.

²⁷² Scott Baldauf, Sarah Burton, Ezra Fieser, Kathie Klarreich and Fred Weir, “International Adoption: A Big Fix Brings Dramatic Decline,” *Christian Science Monitor*, March 14, 2010. <http://bit.ly/9autid> (accessed April 27, 2012).

believe the trend toward domestic adoption in China meets a child's best interests to be raised in his or her birth culture. That is not to say they don't support international adoption in some cases — as they did when they flew to China to collect their own children in the days when China had more orphans than it could manage through in-country adoption. But they consider it to be progressive that more Chinese nationals are adopting, that the one-child policy is more relaxed, and that China is now prosperous enough to find viable in-country solutions for unwanted children. In other words, they support international adoption but they are relieved that it is no longer as necessary in their daughters' birth country.

“If I were running a Chinese orphanage and I could get out my children just as fast and just as well to people who are in the country, I would do that first,” says Barb Singleton, mother of Samiee and Emma, who were adopted from China in the early 1990s. “But if I couldn't get the children out, and that's what was happening in China because of the one-child policy, then yeah, foreign adoption goes to the top of the heap because an orphanage life is not the life to lead.”

Singleton, who has devoted a lot of energy to exposing her daughters to their birth culture, says she believes in domestic adoption over international because origins matter:

Your home is your home. If not, why are we doing all this work culturally when we've got the kids over here if we don't believe that the homeland is worthy? I'd like to think that if there were parents in China who couldn't have any children and desperately wanted them but couldn't adopt because the government was keen on having foreign adoption to bring in some revenue, I think I might be a little bit ticked with that.²⁷³

²⁷³ Barb Singleton, interview with author, July 24, 2012.

Parents Lee McCoy, Eleanor Thompson and Debbie Harris concur that raising children in their own culture should be a top priority, but that international adoption has its place because it probably spared their daughters from growing up in orphanages. Nonetheless, McCoy says she feels uneasy about the fee that she had to pay her daughter's orphanage when she adopted her in 2000. She wonders why she didn't question at the time why the money had to be in cash — new \$100 bills. "I do think of that whole money situation, and there is no good explanation of why you have to bring \$3,000, in cash, and hand it to somebody, you know," says the Ottawa mother and college professor. "Where does the money go? I don't know."²⁷⁴

Montreal parent Debbie Harris concedes that she'll never know whether the adoption of her daughter, 19-year-old Melanie Coutu, met the crucial test of being in the best interests of the child:

It's hard to say. When Melanie first arrived she was very malnourished, she probably had a stimulus deprivation . . . and she turned into an incredibly attached and affectionate and pretty balanced kid. But who knows how a kid is going to adapt. It's a huge risk and undertaking to leave everything that you know, the smells, the tastes, the sounds, and get on a plane, you're totally dependent on these new people. The fact that Melanie has been offered incredible financial wealth, the opportunity to go to school, to be well nourished, she has all kinds of opportunities, I guess it's pretty different from what she would have had if she stayed in China. Would she have survived even? But I'm loathe to say it's better, I really am. I didn't save my daughter. I needed a daughter and my daughter needed a family and I ended up being her mother.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ Lee McCoy, interview with author, July 25, 2012.

²⁷⁵ Debbie Harris, interview with author, July 16, 2012.

In the coming years, more and more children will be adopted within their birth countries, predicts international adoption demographer Peter Selman.²⁷⁶ International adoption programs will continue to shrink in many countries, including China, and the only adoptees available to foreigners will be older children with medical needs. In Canada, as in other countries, agencies that specialize in international adoption have already started to dramatically downsize or close their doors.²⁷⁷

Some adoption stakeholders hope this trend will mean increased interest in the thousands of children available domestically through Canada's public adoption system, the majority of whom are over six years old. Many also have special needs, having spent years as Crown wards. Ontario, which saw only nine per cent of almost 10,000 Crown wards adopted in 2007-2008,²⁷⁸ is already reporting that adoptions have increased 21 per cent in the last three years.²⁷⁹ In British Columbia, Anne Clayton is aiming for the same traction. "The pool of adoptive parents is only so big, so going international takes away from domestic," says Clayton.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁶ Selman, *Adoption Advocate*, 14.

²⁷⁷ Robin Hilborn. "Adoption Agencies Hit Rough Patch in Canada," *Family Helper*, Jan. 27, 2012. <http://www.familyhelper.net/news/120127hope.html> (accessed April 27, 2012); Tralee Pearce, "The Painful New Realities of International Adoption," *Globe and Mail*, Feb. 17, 2012. <http://bit.ly/S0KwqV> (accessed November 15, 2012).

²⁷⁸ Government of Ontario, "Forever Families: Ontario's Adoption System," Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services. April 27, 2010. <http://bit.ly/ZwVKYF> (accessed November 13, 2012).

²⁷⁹ Pearce, *Globe and Mail*, 2012.

²⁸⁰ Anne Clayton, interview with author, Aug. 7, 2012.

Laura Eggertson, president of the Adoption Council of Canada, agrees that the decline in international adoption could present a golden opportunity for Canadian children in government care.

“Given that even children adopted internationally are now often older — not infants — I think we need to do a better job of working to inform people about what children and youth are available through domestic adoption.”²⁸¹

²⁸¹ Laura Eggertson, email to author, Nov. 13, 2012.

Conclusion

Interviews with nine China adoptees, as they enter early adulthood, indicate that they have found a unique and satisfying way to belong in Canadian society.

Educated, achievement oriented and self-confident, they feel separate from the Chinese-Canadian community and more attuned to their adopted culture, However, other than Daisy Cobden, they express feelings of ambivalence and even confusion when asked how they self-identify, saying that their Asian descent is a complicating factor.²⁸²

Even so, most say they are proud of their distinction of being Asia born, and they are comfortable with their background and their physical appearance. Many of them live in ethnically diverse communities or see diversity every day at school and they say they don't feel out of place in society.

Most of these coming-of-agers were part of a movement within the China adoptive community to expose children to their birth culture, through the celebration of traditional Chinese holidays, language lessons, connections with other adoptees from China, and "homeland" visits.

²⁸² Lou Doyon is an example of the identity confusion and/or ambivalence expressed by the majority of those interviewed. As she says in Chapter 3: "I don't really know how I see myself. I feel I am not Chinese *enough* to call myself Chinese. But I am not just strictly French-Canadian. I do identify with being Canadian, but that has turned into a very broad profile, which I'm proud of." Alissa Calderone, who considers herself to be culturally Italian, acknowledges being "kinda confused" about how she self-identifies, as do twins Janda Shames and Flannery Head. Says Flannery: "I look Asian, but I don't feel Asian."

Despite the exposure to things Chinese, these young women are nowhere near bicultural; they can't speak Mandarin and they say they know nothing about traditional Chinese values. They say they can easily relate to each other, but not to their peers who grew up in Chinese immigrant families. They are the products of their upbringing — the children of Caucasian parents whose Chinese connections, for the most part, were confined to the adoption community.

They fit the mold of what has been described as “the transracial adoption paradox”²⁸³ — that is, “being a part of a minority group in society by virtue of their birth, but identifying with members of the majority culture due to their adoption.”

Despite the fact that the CRC and the Hague Convention have identified cultural protection as one of a number of important considerations, it does not appear that the young women interviewed for this thesis feel they have lost anything of value by leaving their birth country or receiving relatively minimal cultural exposure, particularly since, with the exception of Daisy Cobden, they were adopted as babies.

In Daisy's case, she feels that she has maintained her connection to her homeland, and she says she would like to live there again, although not permanently.

As for the others, they say they have not closed the door on learning more about the Chinese side of their identity in the future. Most value their parents' efforts and they all feel cultural connections should be offered as an option. They also appreciate the relationships to other adoptees that they met through organized

²⁸³ Richard M. Lee, “The Transracial Adoption Paradox: History, Rescue and Counselling Implications of Cultural Socialization,” *The Counseling Psychologist* 31, no. 6 (2003): 711.

activities. Their stories add anecdotal credence to a number of reports and studies, cited previously in this thesis, which show international adoptees generally adapt well and benefit from cultural connections.²⁸⁴

It is also worth noting that it is difficult to compare their experiences to those of Korean adoptees, since China adoptees have grown up in a less-insulated era. Globalization, the Internet, friendships with other adoptees and increased acceptance of diversity have made their journeys different and, in all likelihood, easier.

It would be hard to argue, since these young women were retrieved from Chinese orphanages in the dark years of the early 1990s, that their best interests have not been served.

The Canadian parents and adoptees in this thesis live with the knowledge that there were not many alternatives for abandoned baby girls in China in the early 1990s. They would have languished in overcrowded orphanages, and perhaps even died, if they had not been adopted internationally.²⁸⁵ Western fees and donations are also credited with building a stronger orphanage system.

Not all adoptive parents, however, can claim the same comfort. My own daughter

²⁸⁴ Xing Tan and Jordan-Arthur, "Adopted Chinese Girls Come of Age," 1500-1508; Rojewski and Rojewski, *Intercountry Adoption from China: Examining Cultural Heritage and Other Post-Adoption Issues*, 21; Richard Carlson, "Seeking the Best Interests of Children with a New International Law of Adoption," 747; McGinnis, Smith, Ryan, and Howard, "Beyond Culture Camp: Promoting Healthy Identity formation in Adoption," 18.

²⁸⁵ Kay Johnson, *Wanting a Daughter, Needing a Son*, 32. A 1996 report by Human Rights Watch Asia, entitled *Death by Default*, also detailed the high mortality rate in Chinese orphanages, as did a 1995 BBC documentary, *The Dying Rooms*.

was adopted from a Hunan orphanage in 2005, the same year that orphanage officials at an institution only 100 kilometres down the road were charged in a baby-trafficking scandal. It makes the overall question of international adoption, on the whole, more complicated than it was for China in the early 1990s, when it seemed to be a win-win situation: children needed homes, and prospective parents from other countries wanted babies.

While China says there are now more Chinese families wanting to adopt than there are babies available, this is not the situation in many developing countries around the world.

This raises the dilemma of whether Hague-inspired regulations against international adoption truly are in the best interests of children, if it keeps them in domestic state care, either in institutions or in foster homes, while they wait for permanent families that could take years to materialize, if at all.

As this thesis shows, international adoption is largely a grey area and there are strong arguments for and against keeping children in their birth countries. However, if the Hague Convention had been in place 20 years ago, and if China had signed on, it's clear that life could have turned out differently for the nine Canadian adoptees in this thesis, who appear to be thriving in their adopted homes and country.

As previously discussed, there is a consensus that identity is an evolving process, defined by such things as sense of self, social identity, and collective identity.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁶ McGinnis, Smith, Ryan, and Howard, "Beyond Culture Camp: Promoting Healthy Identity formation in Adoption," 13.

While there appears to be little evidence of discontent, China adoptees could collectively rise up and demand answers from their birth country on why they were abandoned and what China is going to do to make up for a social policy that resulted in more than 130,000 children, mostly girls, living their lives abroad. It could also turn out that they feel they have lost something of importance in leaving their birth country, and try to reclaim their roots, as many adult Korean adoptees have done in recent years.

Whatever their course, China adoptees who were interviewed feel that accessibility to their birth country is there if they want it, through travel, online connections, and the strong and extensive support system they have in each other.

They are testimony that international adoption has a role, and their stories indicate that parental efforts at cultural connections — such as spending time with other families with China adoptees, celebrating Chinese holidays, taking Mandarin language lessons and returning to China on “homeland” trips — did contribute to a feeling of satisfaction with their lives, including their origins.

Appendices

Appendix A: China Adoptees

Lia Calderone, Beaconsfield, Que., 21, Concordia University student, adopted from Hunan province at four months old

Alissa Calderone, Lia's 18-year-old sister, CEJEP student, adopted from Hunan province at eight months old

Flannery Head, Dartmouth, N.S., 18, Dalhousie University student, Janda Shames's twin sister, adopted from Guangdong province at 11 months old

Janda Shames, Ottawa, Ont., Flannery Head's twin sister, University of Ottawa student, adopted from Guangdong province at 11 months old

Rebeka Thompson, 17, high-school senior in Parksville, B.C., adopted from Guangdong province at six months old.

Lou Doyon, 19, University of Toronto student from Canmore, Alta., adopted from Hunan province at 16 months old

Samiee Singleton, Campbellville, Ont., 21, college graduate, Toronto sales clerk, adopted from Jiangsu province at age 3

Melanie Coutu, 19, Montreal, Que., student at Lasalle College, adopted from Hunan province at 11 months old

Daisy Cobden, Halifax, N.S., 26, jewelry store assistant manager, adopted from Guangdong province at age 11

Appendix B: Interview guide for China adoptees* **

Introductory questions: Where in China were you born, how old were you when you were adopted, where do you live now, what do you do, how old are you, describe your family and your friends.

What are your earliest memories of being adopted?

Were you exposed to Chinese culture as a child? If so, how? Did you have Chinese dolls, DVDs, books about China/adoption, eat Chinese food, learn to use chopsticks?

Did you enjoy cultural exposure? Do you still participate?

Did you get together with other adoptees from China, perhaps from your travel group, or FCC? Do you count other adoptees among your friends? How often do you see them? What do you talk about when you get together? What do they mean to you?

Do you think your cultural activities and connections with other adoptees have made a difference in your life? How so, or how not?

Did you make connections online? If so, do you think the Internet has helped in creating connections? Do you read about Chinese or Chinese-Canadian traditions/culture?

Do you think adoptive parents have an obligation to expose international adoptees to their birth culture? How would you rate your cultural socialization? Helpful? Not?

Do you speak Mandarin? Do you consider it valuable to speak and/or be familiar with Mandarin?

Can you describe how it felt to grow up as a member of a racial minority when parents are part of the racial majority?

Have you encountered racism?

How do you see yourself — as a Chinese-Canadian, a non-hyphenated Canadian, or somewhere in between? Do you feel a sense of being Chinese? Are you happy to be or Chinese origin? Do you talk about this with other adoptees?

Have you visited China? If so, tell me about it? If not, would you like to go?

Would you like to live or work in China?

Would you like to meet your birth parents? Why or why not? If you did, what would you ask them? How do you feel about them?

How do you feel about China's one-child policy?

Are you aware of the debate over international adoption, the idea that a child has both a right to a family and a right to a birth culture? Some adoption scholars and child-advocacy groups are against international adoption, saying it should be a last resort in favour of keeping children in their birth countries. What do you think of that?

Did you know that international adoption is in decline? Some say a desire to keep a child in his or her birth country is causing children to grow up in orphanages. Some programs are shutting down or Canada is opting out as a result of child trafficking.

How do you feel about this?

Do you feel you were raised Canadian yet treated Chinese by society? How so?

Do you feel different, not quite as integrated as your Caucasian peers/family? If so, do you resent it?

Have you been treated differently, since becoming an adolescent and becoming more independent, losing the protective umbrella of your family?

Are you expected, because of the way you look, to act a certain way (perhaps achieve high grades) and to know about your heritage?

Has there ever been a time that you wished you were the same race as your parents or friends?

Do you feel you live in a diverse community or experience diversity at school?

*** These questions served as a general guideline for interviews. Spin-off questions often arose during the course of the interviews.**

**** Due to the small pool of interviewees, the conclusions drawn from these interviews are based on anecdotal findings. Also, the interviewees are not necessarily representative of intercountry adoptees in general.**

Appendix C: Interviews

Alissa Calderone (China adoptee). June 27, 2012

Lia Calderone (China adoptee). June 27, 2012

Xiaobei Chen (sociologist at Carleton University). July 25, 2012

Anne Clayton (British Columbia director of adoption services). August 7, 2012

Daisy Cobden (China adoptee). August 1, 2012

Melanie Coutu (China adoptee). July 12, 2012

Lou Doyon (China adoptee). October 10, 2012

Karen Dubinsky (Queen's University historian and author of *Babies Without Borders*). July 16, 2012

Earl Drake (former ambassador to China). September 6, 2012

Debbie Harris (adoptive parent). July 16, 2012

Flannery Head (China adoptee). July 31, 2012

Jennifer Jue-Steuck (founder of Global Girls/China Adoptee Links International). August 8, 2012

Lee McCoy (adoptive parent). July 25, 2012

Jim Munson (Canadian senator and former CTV China correspondent). September 1, 2012

Ginette Munson (wife of former CTV China correspondent Jim Munson). June 26, 2012

Cathy Murphy (acting executive director of The Children's Bridge). June 29, 2012

Janda Shames (China adoptee). July 9, 2012

Samiee Singleton (China adoptee) Oct. 16, 2012

Barb Singleton (adoptive parent). July 24, 2012.

Eleanor Thompson (adoptive parent). August 3, 2012.

Rebeka Thompson (China adoptee). July 11, 2012.

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