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# Is She Chinese or American? On the Identity Communication Patterns between Caucasian Parents and their Adopted Chinese Daughters in the U.S.

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## Is She Chinese or American?

### On the Identity Communication Patterns between Caucasian Parents and their Adopted Chinese Daughters in the U.S.

#### INTRODUCTION

The laws of supply and demand have led to a boom in international adoption. Everyday, an average of 20 American families adopt children from overseas, mostly from Third World countries. Adoption of children from China by citizens of the United States began in 1992 when the Chinese government passed a law ratifying international adoption (China Adoption Website, 2007). As of 2001, more than 23,000 children born in China have left Chinese orphanages to join adoptive parents in the U. S. (Miller-Loessi & Kilic, 1999). In 2006 alone, Americans adopted 6,493 children from China, more than from any other country. About 95% of the Chinese children adopted by American families are healthy infant or toddler girls; a few others are boys with various birth defects at the time of adoption (Andrew, 2007). Most of these children were abandoned by their biological parents in China due to pressure from the “One Child Policy” which was instituted in 1979 to control the population boom. Traditional Chinese culture’s heavy reliance on male posterity discriminates against baby girls, especially in the rural areas where manual labor is needed and no social security system is established.

Relevant census information shows that most of the children adopted from China are girls, and most of them are adopted by married and single Caucasian parents (China Adoption Website, 2007). Chinese daughters adopted by Caucasian parents are the population of this study. This study focuses on the communication patterns of identity management between Caucasian parents and their adopted Chinese daughters. For all

adoptees, but especially for Chinese girls adopted by Caucasian parents, identity is a key issue in the course of their growth. For these adopted Chinese girls, the identity factors of being “racially and ethnically Asian and Chinese”, “culturally American,” “female,” “abandoned in China,” and “adopted by Americans” create an interesting dynamic as they grow up in “biracial” and “bicultural” families. Using qualitative methods, the researchers interviewed the adoptive parents on the identity management communication patterns and strategies used with their Chinese daughters.

The purpose of this study was five-fold. First, the findings will provide guidance for American adoptive parents in managing their international children’s identity. Second, we hope to benefit the international children being adopted, who otherwise would have very different lives growing up in foreign orphanages. Third, this research could provide American government agencies with information useful for forming adoption policy. Fourth, the findings will inform the practices of American and international adoption agencies concerning international and interracial adoption. Finally, the findings will help the Chinese government to track the identity formation process of Chinese babies adopted in the U.S.

### WHY DO AMERICANS ADOPT FROM CHINA

For several reasons, China has become a country of choice for Westerners adopting internationally. First, enforcement of China’s One Child Policy implemented in 1979 to control the population boom provided couples with only one pregnancy opportunity. Despite the fact that rural Han Chinese can have another baby if the first one is a girl, hundreds of children each year are born and cannot escape the fate of being abandoned

by their biological parents, sometimes because they are unable to provide for additional family members and adoption ensures the babies' survival. With a population base of 1.3 billion (China Daily Website, 2007) China has a large number of babies available for adoption each year.

Second, the Chinese adoption program is legalized, centralized and state-controlled so it is formal and predictable, resulting in a comparatively fast adoption process (Evans, 2000). The Chinese government turned to intercountry adoption of these baby girls for two primary reasons: to solve the problem of abandoned children and to end the pattern of Chinese self-containment (Miller-Loessi & Kilic, 2001). The Chinese government has a central adoption authority, known as the China Center of Adoption Affairs, that governs all adoption affairs and determines eligibility of both adoptees and adoptive parents. China has also been free from rumors of stolen children or other adoption abuses such as babies for sale and black-market profiteering. The application and waiting process of adoption in China at an average of 18 months tends to be faster than most other countries. China is more forgiving of older parents than are some other international adoption programs. In fact, China encourages couples of 35+ to adopt Children from China, believing that such individuals are more economically well off and able to care for the adopted children. The Chinese adoption program wasn't tainted by rumors of stolen children or babies for sale, or black-market profiteers. In addition, until recently, China allowed single parents to adopt in China, a policy that made it possible for many single women from the U.S. to adopt and become mothers without pregnancy.

Third, Chinese babies can be adopted at a younger age than in many countries which lessens the chances of attachment disorder. The children's health was **is** generally

good, with few cases of fetal alcohol syndrome or HIV infection. Pediatricians examining babies from Chinese orphanages found them generally well-cared for. Developmental delays due to institutionalization have been quickly overcome (Hurwitz, 2003).

Fourth, there is a shortage of Caucasian infants available for adoption in the United States. In addition, domestic adoption does not grant complete custody. Even if one adopts a baby in America, the adopted parents have a comparatively long wait before the adoption is finalized, and might have lose custody if a biological parent who was not informed of the adoption claims the child. There is also a long waiting time of usually at least three to five years for healthy Caucasian infants. Since birth mothers often choose the adoptive parents, the wait can be much longer. In contrast, China guarantees 100% immediate full custody to the adoptive parents because the abandonment of babies is illegal in China and thus the biological parents will never try to reclaim their children. Furthermore, parents adopting from China are advised to re-adopt the babies in the U. S. to gain the protection of U.S. law should Chinese legal policy change. Such international adoption provides complete custody to adoptive parents. These factors make international adoption very attractive to many couples considering adoption; in fact, couples often feel this is the only way they may be able to adopt a baby.

Finally, adopting from China is not only practical, but also more affordable than other alternatives for most adoptive parents. The Chinese government requires a donation to the orphanage of \$3,000 U.S. dollars for each child. As of 2001, Miller-Loessi and Kilic estimate the cost of adopting a baby from China to be between \$20,000 -\$25,000 U.S., including international travel expenses; domestic adoptions can cost twice or even three times that amount with no guarantee that the adoption process will result in a child

for a given set of parents. It is still more affordable than adopting from the U.S., even when international travel cost is calculated. Due to these and other reasons, hundreds of Caucasian parents decide to adopt from China each year.

Furthermore, most of the children in China waiting to be adopted are girls. As a consequence of the one-child policy, the Chinese society is traditionally patriarchic, resulting, particularly in rural areas, in a strong preference for sons needed “to uphold the spiritual and economic continuity of the family and to care for their elderly parents in the absence of a social security system for peasants” (Miller-Loessi & Kilic, 2001, p. 246). After all, according to Confucian teaching, “There are three ways in which one may be unfilial, of which the worst is to have no male heir.” (Zhang, 2006). As a consequence of the one-child policy, these factors combined to create an unprecedented situation: “orphanages overflowing with mostly health female children in need of government care” (Miller-Loessi & Kilic, 2001, p. 246).

A majority of the adoptive parents from the U.S are Caucasian. China’s foster homes require that their adoptive parents have a minimum of a Bachelor’s degree, provide financial statements, and be no younger than their early thirties. These prerequisites are all ingredients that favor adoption by middle to upper middle class families, especially Caucasian families. Therefore, this research focuses on the identity management patterns between Caucasian parents and their adopted Chinese daughters.

To illustrate, we present the narrative of participant Andrea. Andrea is in her fifties. She is married with twin daughters, ages ten years old, who were adopted from China. Andrea is a Christian, and her faith plays a huge role in her everyday decisions. Andrea and her family live in Canton, Georgia, and she home schools her daughters, teaching

them a wide variety of subjects including foreign languages such as French. After five years of marriage, Andrea and her husband decided to explore the option of adopting a child. A pregnancy crisis center opened through her church, and it was there that she connected with families who had adopted children. Around that same time, her husband went on a trip to Singapore, and she accompanied him. While she was in Hong Kong, she met a friend who had adopted four children from China through an adoption agency called Hope International. After a decision-making process, she and her husband decided to submit paperwork to adopt twin girls from China. A year later, they received twin girls that were seventeen months old. Andrea said that the reason she decided to adopt from China was because the Chinese were, for the most part, healthy people. She and her husband also did not want to deal with issues that came along with domestic adoption, such as having to give the child back to the biological mother within a certain amount of time.

For reasons such as Andrea's, other families have adopted daughters from China, so that for the past few years, China is the main country from which international adoptees enter the U.S. The literature indicates that these children are different from other immigrants and may face special identity issues as they become adults.

### IDENTITY ISSUES FOR ADOPTED CHINESE DAUGHTERS

The adoption of Chinese girls by Caucasian parents in the U.S. is different from other interethnic adoptions for several reasons. First, the adoptees likely have no memories of their country of origin and may have few encounters with members of their ethnic group to help them understand what it means to “be Chinese.” Second, if these

children had remained in their country of origin, their identities would have been vastly different, speaking a different language, engaging in different activities and customs, parentless, homeless, and/or denied other necessities of food, clothing, education, and medical attention. Third, once adopted, these Chinese girls will be woven into a preexisting racial and ethnic tapestry in the American society. Interracial adoption thus brings the families into the frontier of racial and ethnic stereotypes and discrimination. Fourth, these Chinese girls will create a gender imbalance within the Chinese American community since there are far more girls than boys being adopted.

Concerning stereotypes, the minute these adopted Chinese girls enter the U.S., they are viewed as “Asian,” “Chinese,” “female,” and “adopted daughters in biracial and bicultural families” (Phinney, 1989, 1990, 1991). In the U.S., Asians have been labeled as “model minority,” “eternal foreigners,” and Asian children have been associated with images of being “smart, good at grades, obedient, and athletically fit” (Liu, 2004). They step into a complex of ambiguous identities and become members of the Chinese diaspora (Cohen, 1997; Miller-Loessi & Kilic 2001).

Research shows that racial or ethnic identification is more closely related to self-esteem and psychological health for members of minority groups than for majorities (Phinney, 1990, 1991; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990). According to Friedlander (1999), the central question for adoptive parents is: "Does having strong feelings of identification with his or her culture of origin provide the child with a sense of security when faced with prejudice and discrimination, or does ethnic identification promote feelings of confusion, isolation, and alienation?" (p. 45). If adoptive Caucasian parents properly

answer that question, they can positively help construct identities for their Chinese daughters.

Most empirical studies, reviews of literature, and theoretical models focus either on African American, Native American adopted by Caucasian parents (Boykin & Tom, 1985; Demo & Hughes, 1990; Hughes, 2003; Mutisya & Ross, 2005; Phinney & Chavira, 1995; Scott, 2003; Stevenson, Cameron, Herrero-Taylor, & Davis, 2002; Tyler, Boykin, Boelter, & Dillihunt, 2005). Only recently, a few researchers have begun to extend their research to the ethnic/cultural socialization of international adoptees, especially Korean, Mexican and East European adoptees with their children adopted by Caucasian parents (Huh & Reid, 2000; Lee & Quintana, 2005; Rojewski, 2005; Tessler, Gamache, & Liu, 1999; Yoon, 2000; Mohanty et. al, 2006). In general, results suggest that transracially adopted children, compared with those in same-race families, do not differ on measures of self-esteem, academic progress, or family or peer relationships (Fanshel, 1972). In fact, internationally adopted children tend to have higher self-esteem than either domestically adopted children or nonadopted children (Textor 1991).

However, “several studies suggest that many children are confused about race and ethnicity and are poorly equipped to handle bias and discrimination (Triseliotis, 1993)” (Friedlander, 1999, p. 51). The identity of “race” is more a problem for the adoptees than “adoption” itself. For example, Benson, Sharma, & Roehlkepartain’s (1994) study of 881 adolescent adoptees with a large sample of Korean children adopted by Caucasian parents found that, for both Asian and other transracial adoptees, adoption was less problematic than race as an identity issue. While 80% of the Asian adolescents said they got along well with people of different races, 22% did not want to be Asian and

49% did not feel other Asians accepted them (Benson et al., 1994). Also, Asian adoptees in Benson et al.'s (1994) study scored lower than White children on measures of self-esteem.

Research shows that parental influences on child's ethnic identity and adjustment are critical. Yoon (2000, cited in Mohanty et. al, 2006) examined the relationship of ethnic pride, parental support for ethnic socialization, and parental warmth and communication to the psychological well-being of 241 Korean-born adolescent adoptees. The study found that parental support of ethnic socialization was related to the adopted children's positive sense of ethnic pride, which was consequently related to their subjective well-being. Similarly, Thomas and Tessler (2007) reported results from a two-wave study of adopted parents descriptions of and attitudes toward their Chinese daughters' Chinese cultural competence. Previous immigration research indicates that key factors in bicultural identity formation revolve around the children's parents: the racial makeup of the community in which they reside, the racial composition of their social networks, and their own attitudes toward the children's home culture and the importance of the child's maintaining ties to that culture

However, few have focused on communication aspects of the intercultural and interracial identity formation and management process. For example, even though Thomas and Tessler (2007) explore ability to communicate in the home culture as a key component of bicultural identity, they consider only the ability to communicate in the home language, rather than the factors that constitute effective communication from the perspective of the Communication discipline. Therefore, we decided to interview Caucasian adoptive parents concerning their hopes and actions related to their daughters'

identity formation processes. The research attempted to answer two questions:

*RQ<sub>1</sub>: What type of identity do Caucasian parents desire for their adopted Chinese daughters?*

*RQ<sub>2</sub>: What strategies do Caucasian parents utilize to manage their Chinese daughters' identities?*

### RESEARCH METHODS AND FINDINGS

A total of twenty semi-structured, in-depth interviews based on an in-depth interview guide (see Appendix A) were conducted, with each interview lasting between one and 1.5 hours. The participants were married and single Caucasian parents who had adopted one or more daughters from China. The interviewees were identified in metro Atlanta area via church visits and community gatherings. The in-depth interviews were designed to elicit narratives with respect to intercultural adoption and identity management strategies in the participants' communication with their Chinese daughters. These interviews helped to uncover the meanings behind actions, to test emerging ideas, and to gather data essential to this study. We report the research findings targeting the two research questions concerning the desired identity for the Chinese daughters and the parents' strategies to achieve it.

#### The Desired Identity – Chinese Americans

Our research shows that most Caucasian parents would like their daughters to grow up as Chinese Americans, and they love their adopted Chinese daughters no differently from their biological children if they have any. In addition, these Chinese

daughters are viewed as “saved angels of love from China,” “gifts from China,” “seeds from China,” and “children born of the heart not the womb.”

Christian religious beliefs have much to do with many Caucasian parents' decisions to adopt from China. Knowledge about China's one child policy and its consequential abandoned children led many evangelical parents to China to try to “save” their potential daughters from lives in orphanages. For example, Dan and his wife Susan have two daughters. Grace is their biological daughter, while Faith is their adopted daughter from China. Dan stated that his faith had not only led him to adopt from China, but it also played a role in selecting a name for his adopted daughter. He stated that, “God put it on his heart to adopt from China.” This led him and his wife to name their daughter “Faith.” Similar to Dan's experience, single mother Patricia stated that when she considered adopting, she was compelled to adopt from China and brought back two daughters.

Coming from such a religious mindset, many participants seemed to have mixed feelings about China as a country and a culture. They expressed feelings of resentment and gratefulness. Some looked at these children as victims. They were abandoned by their families, they were rejected by their culture and country, and nobody wanted them. These girls may face anger and hatred toward their origins, resulting in rejection of their background. These girls look Chinese, but speaking with a Southern twang is confusing to them as well as to others. Where do they belong and how should they act is a common question that was raised.

Participant Shari said: “Prior to traveling to China -- I hate to say this out loud because I hate to admit it, but -- I went over there with the attitude that I want to take that child and get her out of there. I felt somewhat resentful. I felt like how can you do this...

but when we got there I found the people to be so warm, and my husband and I got out with the baby, we would draw crowds of 20-30 people, and they all wanted to touch her and hold her ...every communication that we had with any Chinese person was so positive that it just it made me realize that people are abandoning these children because the government is forcing them to do it, not necessarily because they don't love the little girls.”

According to Miller-Loessi and Kilic (2001), adopted Chinese children are often framed as gifts of friendship from China. A gift makes the receiver feel indebted to the giver. This situation motivates adoptive parents to connect their adopted children with the country and culture of their birth. These "gift daughters will always, in this sense, belong to or be identified with China" (Miller-Loessi & Kilic, 2001, p. 247).

Another view is that these children are seeds planted by the Chinese government on American soil (Miller-Loessi & Kilic, 2001). From the growing numbers of Americans adopting Chinese girls, China has clearly planted seeds on American soil. When citizens of other countries adopt a Chinese girl, they are adopting part of China. Chinese girls who grow up American, or Canadian, or Norwegian, will face the issue of their relationship to their homeland. Typically, parents who adopt these girls try to raise them with awareness of their culture and homeland. For example, they try to celebrate Chinese holidays with their daughters to create a cultural tie to their history.

### Parent's Strategies of Cultivating The Desired Identity

Grovetant (1992) states, "Both ethnicity and adoptive status are 'assigned' aspects of identity, not 'chosen' ones" (p. 73). Internationally adopted children are faced with a

more complex identity dilemma than other children" (Friedlander, 1999, p. 46). Dorow (2006) analyzed the relative desirability of adopting Chinese children, saying they are seemingly unfettered by attachments, racially 'flexible,' and readily constructed as rescuable. The extremely young age of the adoptive Chinese girls makes it attractive and possible for the Caucasian parents to mold them into a desired identity – Chinese American. We find that the parents of adoptees use several strategies to achieve this goal: participating in various Chinese cultural activities, encouraging their daughters to learn Chinese language, mainting a support group of adoptive families, and communicating positive identity values to their daughters.

### *Positive Communication Mindset*

Positive communication is a top strategy. Ms. Hart communicated to her Chinese daughters about how beautiful her daughters were so that they were aware that they did not need to fit into any racial mold. When asked whether the families wanted the girls to identify with Chinese entertainers (movie stars, singers, etc.), families stressed that they would prefer the girls to be confident in who they are, by being themselves.

Subtle racism is an issue the girls are likely to face in American society. Candis stated that her life changed completely after she adopted her Chinese daughter. She recalled a story about some discrimination she experienced: "I went to a wedding of a family member, and this was before I got my first daughter, but I was in the process of adopting, and people knew that I was in the process of adopting from China, and this lady that's about -- I guess she was about ten years older than me -- she said to me, 'Why don't you stick with your own kind'? And I went, "What? Huh?" ...I was like "what?" She said, " I just think you need to stick with your own kind. We don't need to be going

over to another country and bringing children back here of a different race. You just need to stick to your own kind. What's wrong with you? Why are you doing' this? "... I have not let my daughters come close to her ever since."

Several families had experienced racism as a result of their choice to adopt internationally. Two families repeatedly commented on how this choice had made them see things differently and make personal changes within themselves. Both Mr. Chapman and Mrs. Hart discussed the surprise, disappointment and hurt that they had experienced as a result of discrimination. Mr. Chapman shared, specifically, how his parents did not speak to him for over a year after he told them of his family's plans to adopt a girl from China. He discussed how adopting Mimi had drastically changed him and the way that he viewed things.

Sometimes the parents' friends prior to the adoption process looked at them as if they were irrational for wanting to adopt a child not only from another country, but also at such a late age in their lives. The adoptive parents expressed feelings of being outcast by their group of friends. People who weren't going through a process of this kind simply did not understand where the adoptive parents were coming from. After the adoption process was completed, these parents' lives were turned inside out. Their daughters became the core of their being, and the loving feelings they have for these girls is unquestionable and virtually unexplainable.

### *Participating In Chinese Cultural Activities And Events*

Participants Phil and Sharon actively seek out Chinese cultural activities. They drive miles and miles just to experience a cultural fair. They use language software to learn Chinese and teach it to their Chinese daughter Olivia. They did not brag about what

they had done with Olivia. Instead, they explained where they had gone and why they had chosen to go there. Before adopting Olivia, Sharon was a world traveler. Her multicultural experiences have likely influenced the rest of the family. She knows first-hand what multicultural means. Phil and Sharon, who constantly promote Chinese culture, are not concerned with how Olivia will identify herself. They later explained that they will continue to promote Chinese culture as long as Olivia wants to participate.

Jessica stated that the community has readily accepted her children and their different cultural heritage. She integrates their culture with American culture by sending them to culture camps, celebrating Chinese New Year, and getting involved in any available Chinese programs or events in her surrounding area. She reports that they have educated their daughters about their birth culture and where they came from. She says that she makes an effort to answer any questions that the girls may have about China and their biological parents and foster parents. She says that one of the girls does not mention China or express any kind of loss towards her parents or her hometown. On the other hand, the other daughter does express a concern about her parents and the loss that she feels towards them and China. She expresses an interest in learning more about China and her origins. Jessica states that she wants her girls to think of themselves as "Chinese American." She wants them to have a balance between maintaining their birth culture, yet taking on the culture and society that they are currently living in. She vows to always answer the girls' questions honestly and truthfully and provide them with as many activities and traditions from China as they desire.

### *Encouraging Chinese Language Learning*

Some parents have gone so far as forming Saturday or Sunday Chinese language

schools for their adoptive and biological children, realizing the education is beneficial for their identity formation as well as for their occupational futures, with China becoming a major global player. In fact, we interviewed some parents while their kids were attending a Sunday Chinese school in Northern Georgia.

### *Maintaining Support Groups*

Support groups such as Families with Children from China (FCC) are essential in the lives of these adoptive families. Many of them form bonds when traveling to China to adopt the babies. Others get to know each other through attending cultural events designed for such adoptive families. Still others take the lead in forming support groups themselves so that they create a showcase of biracial and bicultural family norms to help the adopted girls feel comfortable. Mike, father of two Chinese daughters, stated that he exposed his daughter to Chinese culture and even started a networking group to give his daughter exposure to girls who share her experience because they have lived through the same circumstances. These parents want a network of people that are similar to them, their children, and their situation. They surround themselves with people who are like them, other people who have adopted Chinese girls, and who have gone through the same experiences they have. Parents have set their daughters up with friends who came from the same place as their own girls. It is important that these people have a community. Most parents expressed in the interviews that their social lives changed entirely once they adopted their daughter(s).

Participant Mary said: “I was talking to somebody at lunch with my husband and she said when you guys adopted her, I thought you all had lost your minds. We hear that all the time... We just we have such a love for our children in our hearts that is it’s

something that you can not describe it to somebody else, but when you're with other parents who have done the same, you just completely get it."

Bob and Amy are members of an Chinese cultural group. They formed a bond with the other parents that accompanied them to China to pick up their daughters. They refer to this group as their "tribal group." Sharon explained, "We all met in China, and we were together for the whole two weeks. We got the girls at the same time and everything. After that experience, I said I felt like I was in a delivery room with 17 other families." Phil and Sharon have remained in closer contact with this group than their local group. They meet for a "reunion" at least once a year. At this reunion, they look for local cultural activities. For example, one year the city where they met was hosting an Asian heritage exhibit at a local children's museum.

### *Balancing Chinese and American cultures*

Seven mothers we interviewed shared the idea that they wanted to incorporate Chinese traditions, such as holidays, into the family, but also wanted to encourage the children to accept the lifestyle and traditions of the family and of the United States. Most families felt that the community had accepted the children into society and did not express any negative racial or ethnic feedback. Similarly, they expressed the fact that there were several support systems that were readily available, like family, friends, school, camps, and the adoption agency. They believe in open communication and honesty to any questions that the girls may have. The parents never wanted to push their children to participate in any events, but readily encouraged the child if that event was desired. Andrea's situation differed from Judy's in that the girls are Andrea's only children, therefore her they have her undivided attention. Judy has two other children and

a job so her attention is divided; leading to the belief that Andrea may encourage her children to participate in Chinese traditions more readily than Judy.

Both families claimed that they encouraged their daughters to learn and grow in the Chinese culture, but only one family seemed to truly mean that. It seemed as though Bob and Theresa participated in cultural activities because it made them look good in the community. They liked the attention of the whole process and were more than willing to brag about their cultural activities. Unfortunately, the only cultural activity mentioned was the Chinese New Year celebration.

To these parents, raising these girls as Chinese-Americans or however they choose, will be a challenge that other biological children will not have to face. Through thick and thin these parents are devoted to overcoming any obstacle necessary to help their child in their identity management. The parents recognized the need for integration between the child's birth culture and American culture, therefore, encouraging the children to participate in some of the norms and traditions of China. Both families desire a "perfect" balance in participation between the two different cultures and believe that the way to achieve that is to maintain open and honest communication between their daughters. Future research is warranted in different regions and families across the nation to provide a more sound understanding of the identity communication patterns between Caucasian parents and their adopted Chinese daughters.

Jan and her husband adopted a Chinese girl in the 1990s. At the time, she did not understand what cultural challenges she, along with other adopting families, would face. She studied this adoption phenomenon because she wanted to understand the "parents'

fascination with the imagined ‘birth culture’ of their adopted children.” She starts with the history of Chinese-American adoptions before going into any “substance.”

Jan points out that like the adopted children, the parents also share the same “culture.” Because of this, the families stick together and form “social groups” for their children and also have created organizations such as Families with Children from China (FCC). Jan highlights the struggles faced by both the parents and the children. The parents eagerly adopt because of the lack of ties to the birth parents, but later find it unsettling to now know anything about the child’s natural family. The children (and the parents) face the problems of racial discrimination and a somewhat lack of cultural identity.

Many people are brought up to understand the concept of having a biological child. Girls watch their friends, family members, and women in society get pregnant, deliver, and raise a child. Something that our society today is not familiar with is intercultural adoption. The process is foreign to most, and the support system in our community is limited on insight for parents who seek to adopt from China. Another reason a strong support system or network is helpful is because it calms fears people have about entering a new country, and experiencing a new form of family. One thing many people in this world have in common is fear. When a parent seeks out to another country to adopt a child there are many intimidating factors associated with this process. There is a language barrier, a lot of waiting is involved, it takes money, and most importantly once you get your daughter one is entering into a relationship that is unknown. This unknown is different from the unknown associated with having a biological child. Typically, one can call on their mother, aunt, sister, or even girlfriend when they are having problems as a

new parent. The support system is there for people with biological children, but when one adopts, especially from another country, who do they call? When the baby will not sleep, when they experience anxiety from being torn away from all that they know and nightmares are haunting them. Where do they get these questions answered? These are all problems that parents face whether their child is biological or adopted, but for some reason the answers are unknown; whereas the situation is different from a having an adopted child from another country, parents have limited resources to call. Where is someone to say whether it is normal or not? Where do these adoptive parents go for answers? When one has questions about cooking a meal they resort to a handbook, and if they can not find the answer there, they turn to people that know how to cook. The problem with adoption is that where do people turn when they experience problems? A network or a support system is for things of that nature and people arm themselves with groups that they have things in common with. It is a sense of comfort, people identify with what they are familiar.

Paula, a forty-year-old stay at home mom, has a seven year old Chinese daughter Mia and two blond biological sons. She is married and she and her family live in Woodstock, Georgia. She also adopted Mia, from Hope International several years after her sons were born. She said that she came from an adoptive family, so she believed that it was only natural to adopt children. She works at the same school that her children attend and feels as if she sustains a good and healthy relationship with her daughter. She reported that the community has also accepted her daughter into the community without any problems. She says that there are several other children in her class that are adopted from other countries as well. She also stated that her family desires to have a balance

between Mia's birth culture and her American culture. They also celebrate the Chinese New Year and integrate any other Chinese traditions that arise into the family. She says that recently Mia has been expressing emotional feelings because of the loss of her biological and foster parents. She has begun to ask more questions about her culture and what her foster parents were like. She has also said that it has been a little difficult for Mia to cope with the fact that she has black hair rather than blonde hair, like the rest of the family. Judy has also tried to answer any questions that Mia may have towards her culture and about China, but also feels that Mia should accept American culture and integrate herself into the society that she resides in. Judy only encourages Mia to participate in something related to her culture if Mia requests it. Judy said that it was more of transition for her to have Mia as part of the family versus just immediately loving an adopted child, as most people say. She stated, "A lot of people say that they immediately fell in love with the baby and I think that that is bologna. It's different when they are babies, but when they are 17 months old it is difficult. There is this new person in your house and you are supposed to love them like they are your own. You have to have time to fall in love with the child. It takes time. Be prepared for an emotional roller coaster."

### Problems in identity formation

Our research shows that there are several problems in the identity management process of Caucasian parents for their Chinese daughters. We find there is a lack of theoretical guidance in identity management, sometimes mixed message is sent from mom and dad to the Chinese daughters concerning their identities, their support systems

tends to be convenient and superficial and they have yet to learn how to effectively deal with subtle racism, especially the racism in the South.

Though majority of parents would like their daughters to grow up as Chinese American, some families did not whole-heartedly believe in this concept. They leave the identification up to their daughter. They believed that it was her decision; but until she made that decision, they would continue to expose her to the Chinese culture. The most common answer parents gave was that they wanted their daughters to grow up however they felt most comfortable. Some parents even shelter their kids from the outside world by limiting their contacts with the seemingly unfriendly community members.

For example, participant Teresa wanted her Chinese daughters Katie and Molly to identify themselves as Chinese Americans, but her husband Bob did not want them to see themselves as Chinese. Bob stresses that promotion of the Chinese culture is not that important in his family. When asked the question “Do you want your daughters to think of themselves as Chinese, Chinese Americans, or simply Americans?” Emily immediately responded “She’s Chinese American.” Brian said, “I don’t want to raise her as Chinese...let them go the way they wanna go.” When asked the same question, Sherry and Trey responded, “It is up to her.” Trey went on to explain, “We’re never going to starve her of her heritage. But, it’s like anything else...In all honesty, we need to let her find her own identity. That’s my answer to the question. I don’t care...it’s her life. We’re just part of that.”

Despite an adoption friendly support system, the Caucasian parents seem to be reluctant in contacting members of the Chinese American community. Our research shows they do not have much contact with the local Chinese community. Further, some

of them do not stick to Chinese learning and their participation in Chinese cultural events seems to be superficial.

### CONCLUSION

This paper addresses the issues of identity communication patterns between Caucasian parents and their adopted Chinese daughters in the U. S. The research focuses on several different aspects: the background information of each family, the dynamics of the family and community relationships, and the identity management of any issues these girls may face. Twenty individuals, who had adopted girls from China, were interviewed face-to-face.

This paper presented findings on the designed “Chinese American identity” and the strategies to achieve this girl as well as problems associated with interracial identity construction. We believe the findings are of great importance for parents who are seeking to adopt and people who are interested in learning about multi-cultural adoption. We find that there exists a very strong union between a child and their parent, even if it is not biological. The parent and child may not be linked by heritage and bloodline, but by love and culture.

We hope to benefit the international children being adopted, who otherwise will have very different lives in foreign orphanages. We hope to verify that love is at work for international adoption. “We don’t give a child to a family; we give a family to a child,” says Mercedes Rosario de Martinez, founder of Colombia’s Foundation for the Adoption of Abandoned Children. “This is not a business; it’s total devotion to the children. Because of that, the world is a better place (Andujo, 2001, p. 530).”

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