

From China to Canada:
The Identity Formation of Chinese-Canadian Adoptees

by

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Abstract

There is a substantial amount of research done that examines the lives and experiences of Chinese-Canadian adoptees, yet not enough attention has been given to hearing from the adoptees themselves. This study engages with the personal experiences of adoptees themselves and examines how they make sense of their individual and social identities. Using an ethnographic approach, the analysis of this study is informed by semi-structured interviews from self-identified Chinese-Canadian adoptees who are 18-24 years old. The thesis expresses two findings. The first part of the analysis addresses when an adoptee self-identifies as adopted, where they believe “home” to be, when they were told they were adopted, and how adoption has been a meaning-making experience for them. Second, the analysis discusses social responses in encounters they have had with others. This includes racist remarks from others, an exploration of the family make-up of the adoptee, and where the adoptee experiences community and/or support. To understand the responses of the participants, I drew upon the methods of reflexivity and auto-ethnographic research. This study contributes information to the field of adoption work and how Chinese-Canadian adoptees make sense of their own identities.

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Note on Text

International adoption, also referred to as intercountry adoption or transnational adoption, is described as the procedure of having a couple or an individual legally and permanently become the parent(s) of a child from another country (Citizenship Canada, 2016). Interracial (sometimes said as transracial) adoptions, are different. This is the procedure when one adopts a child from a race different from their own (Nelson, 2016, xii). Often, international adoptions are also interracial adoptions. In this thesis, the terms international and interracial adoption are used when talking about Chinese-Canadian adoptees adopted by Canadian families.

Three groups of people are commonly spoken of in this thesis: Chinese-Canadian adoptees, birth family, and the adoptive family. I recognize that there are many different ways to talk about adoptees, birth families and adoptive families. The terms adoptee, birth parents, birth siblings, adopted parents and adopted siblings are not used with any particular political significance, rather my use of these terms reflects which were most commonly used by the individuals I interviewed for this project. Additionally, these are the terms frequently used in the community and from the scholars from whom I draw my work.

The adoptees referenced in this thesis are Chinese-Canadian adoptees. Many of these adoptees themselves do not identify solely as adoptees. Part of how they express who they are is by saying they are Chinese, Canadian or Chinese-Canadian. The term “Chinese-Canadian adoptee” used in this text is not used to contest the way someone may or may not identify but is simply a way of identifying the group of people who were adopted from China and brought to Canada after their adoption.

Chapter 1

Introduction

A Note to Fellow Chinese-Canadian Adoptees

It took a lot of courage for me to even consider writing this thesis. Anyone who knows me well knows I am not someone who would openly discuss my adoption story. In fact, I would shy away from it. When we had get-togethers with family friends who were Chinese-Canadian adoptees, I would often hide behind my mom as I was too nervous to interact with other individuals who looked like me. Being adopted was always a part of me, but not something I had wished to discuss with my family, friends, or peers, until recently. I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to discuss adoption in a sort of mini-thesis during my undergraduate studies. Through an independent reading course, I was able to learn more about international adoption, the history behind it and read stories from those working in the adoption field. I read many texts and wrote weekly reading reflections about what I had learned. After completing the final paper for this course, I knew I wanted to pursue a degree that would not only push me further to recount and relive some of my experiences as a Chinese-Canadian adoptee, but that would also help me foster a discussion with fellow adoptees, their families, and others contributing work to the adoption field. I have been fortunate to have grown up in a community that encouraged me and my fellow adoptees to discuss our backgrounds, history, and culture. While I struggled (and still do) to make sense of what it means to be adopted, I knew that discussing stories from fellow adoptees would help me understand my own journey, would hopefully inspire others to recount their own narratives, and perhaps allow me to offer something to the adoption community as a resource for those wanting to know more from the inside.

Recounting My Personal Story

I was adopted January 12th, 1998 at 17 months old by a single, Canadian-Caucasian woman. As was the case for many Chinese-Canadian adoptees, I have minimal knowledge about who I was and where I came from prior to being adopted. According to my mother, I was left outside of a police station in Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China and then brought to an orphanage shortly after. I was taken into the orphanage by wonderful caretakers and was given the name Lan E. Until I was adopted, I was in an orphanage with fellow kids, all of whom were in the same situation as I; all to be placed for adoption. When I was adopted in the New Year of 1998, the caretakers told my mother that I had been malnourished but that my diet generally consisted of eggs and noodles (still some of my favorite foods to this day). Shortly after I was adopted, my mother brought me to meet my extended family in Vancouver. For the first few months, as I adjusted to a new life far from China, I was in Vancouver. This is where I was surrounded by caring, loving, and supportive aunts, uncles, cousins, and my wonderful grandmother. Soon after I began adjusting to life in Canada, my mother and I came to Ottawa. This is where she had formed her career and where my family and I would call home for 20 plus years.

Growing up, I knew many Chinese-Canadian adoptees and participated in many events with them. Saying I am adopted is, and will always be, a huge part of my identity. In the Fall of 2017, I developed an interest in learning about adoption through an academic lens and discovered more about international adoption, the history of international adoption, and the effects adoption has had on adoptees and their families. I was pleasantly surprised to read that I was not alone in wanting to write about my upbringing and identity and that this was a

complicated topic to discuss, especially given the fact that many adoptees themselves have not chosen to share their own stories.

In December 2017, I submitted my first paper on international adoption. As this was the first text I had written on this topic, I had certainly experienced an emptiness when I was engaging with the literature. This came from not reading many papers written by adoptees themselves. Much of the literature I read revolved around the positionality of adoptive parents, the interests of scholars studying international adoption, or from birth parents wanting to find their birth children. The works I have read from adoption work scholars and adoptive parents such as Jen Pylypa, Xiaobei Chen, Peter Selman, Nancy Cohen and Kristen Cheney have all examined how adoptees have detailed their ethnic identities and their life experiences. And still, these scholars are not focusing on the adoptee experience itself. Why are the voices of Chinese-Canadian adoptees not heard as often? What do these individuals have to say? I was searching for narratives of experiences from fellow Chinese-Canadian adoptees that I could resonate with and that would help me voice my own experience. The decision to write this thesis was as an acknowledgement of the lack of research produced about and by Chinese-Canadian adoptees. It is the first stride for me in exposing the narratives of an adoption community and engaging with Chinese-Canadian adoptees in an academic way.

This thesis touches on concepts of identity, culture and belonging. It also briefly discusses the history of transnational and transracial adoptions. The purpose of this thesis is to see how adoption has touched the lives of adoptees and their families. In particular, the discussion in this thesis is from the perspective of the adoptees themselves, centering on how they recognize themselves as citizens, as adoptees, as individuals who have crossed borders and who may have a complicated relationship in understanding their connection to their current

country of residence and with their country of origin. On one hand, these individuals [Chinese-Canadian adoptees] can claim themselves to be who they are based on personal interpretations. Physically, they can formally be seen as Chinese individuals, but many of them may be detached from their country of origin as they were adopted into predominantly white Canadian families. Chapter Two discusses the self-identification of Chinese-Canadian adoptees. On the other hand, these adoptees could also claim to be Canadian and members of the same society as their adoptive families due to how they were socialized. Thus, Chinese-Canadian adoptees' identities are constructed with many countering views and many of their lives (like for some of the adoptees who spoke up in this thesis) are experiencing a divide in trying to be someone for themselves but also for the society which they interact with day to day. This idea is unpacked more in Chapter Three.

As suggested in the title, “From China to Canada: The Identity Formation of Chinese-Canadian Adoptees”, this thesis investigates the process by which a Chinese-Canadian adoptee constructs and narrates their identity. With this thesis, I aim to better comprehend the lives and connections Chinese-Canadian (and Asian adoptees as a whole) have with their cultures and identities. This is of course quite broad, but I wish to unpack how some adoptees are choosing to understand themselves. This idea will then act as an anchor, so others can understand how Chinese-Canadian adoptees express their identities. This thesis includes an overview of the history of international adoption, a look at the methods used for this research project and the reasons why they were chosen, and a discussion from the participants themselves of how they see themselves versus how they think society views them. In doing this work, I address the following questions: How do Chinese-Canadian adoptees choose to identify themselves? Do they identify as Chinese, Canadian, or Chinese-Canadian? An adoptee or not an adoptee? How do

they narrate their adoption stories? How do their stories impact those around them? How do their experiences shape our understanding of identity and belonging in Canada? In answering these questions, I seek to understand the reality behind what it feels like to be an adoptee, to belong, and to build community in Canada.

History of International Adoption

The next part of this chapter narrates historical articles and works from scholars who write about Chinese adoptions (primarily Canadian). In this, I uncover the effects of China's One-Child Policy and the effects of seeing other individuals coming to adopt orphans and the narratives that come from both sides. In this review of the literature section, I explore views from academics in the field, parents, and adoptees themselves.

Peter Selman studies the demography of adoption, adoption policies in the US and the UK, and trends in international adoption. Selman (2015), in his article on international adoption from Asia in the 21st century, demonstrates how parents from countries in Asian states preferred sons, and there was a pressure to abandon female infants in China. While the majority of adoptions from China used to be female, male adoptions are becoming more popular. Older children and children with special needs are also being adopted (Selman, 2015). This history of intercountry adoption from China can be connected to the One Child Policy (OCP). This policy allowed China's government to intervene with reproductive practices while trying to slow population growth (Feng, Cai & Gu, 2013). Having launched in 1979 and ending in 2015, the OCP was a social policy that reflected the fact that China had a higher birth rate than previous generations, and as a result, China was trying to bring its population growth under control (Potts, 2006). The OCP changed the nature of marriage arrangements and family formations around the world. Where in some families there would be multiple children (females and males), with the

OCP put in place, the shift went to having only one child in a family, often a male. One implication of this tendency was that if the wellbeing of the children meant that they could be adopted out into another family, that was what would occur.

There were a large number of Chinese- Canadian adoptions in the 1990s-2000s, but the literature surrounding this topic and these statistics is limited. By this, I mean to say the Canadian scholarly literature is limited. While there is an extensive amount of American literature produced on the topic of international adoption, there is less produced from the Canadian context. This will be unpacked below. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, my work is partially inspired by the work of Carleton University Sociology Professor Xiaobei Chen, and the reading course I did with her in the Fall of 2017. My research on international adoption first led me to one of Chen's papers on the topic of identity. Chen wrote a paper entitled "Not Ethnic Enough: The Cultural Identity Imperative in International Adoptions from China to Canada." Her paper suggested that Chinese identity should not be overemphasized in raising adoptive children from China for certain reasons. One of these reasons is the concern that having a strong ethnic or racial identity should not be the solution for adoptive families. She believed that a strong sense of one's ethnic and racial identity should not be the only thing that interracial adoptive families in Canada and North America in general strive for (Chen, 2015). I took from this that Chen does not see having a strong connection to one's ethnic and racial backgrounds to form one's identity as a be all or end all to forming a connection to one's cultural identity (Chen, 2015). In my research findings below, I explore this idea and look at what other Chinese adoptees are doing in forming their identities, and whether or not they have connected to their Chinese ethnic and racial backgrounds. If they have, I ask to what degree and how that has come about in their lives. I challenge this thinking of whether adoptees feel they ought to have a strong

connection to their Chinese ethnic and racial backgrounds in order to form their identity. As I discuss, many adoptees themselves do not feel they need to have a strong connection (or any connection at all) to their Chinese ethnic and racial backgrounds.

By examining the identity formation of Chinese adoptees, someone who may lack knowledge from this field may wish to look at preliminary work on international adoption. Selman (2005) states that from 1970-89, Korea was the leader in intercountry adoptions. They were the primary source in representing Asian countries. At the time, close to 50% of all intercountry adoptions were from Korea (Selman, 2015). The general arguments about adoption for key Asian states were that there was a preference for sons in many of these countries, and pressure to abandon female infants. While the majority of adoptions used to be female, adoptions of males are now becoming more popular. Bagley (1993) explains that males in the 1980s and 1990s were more common for miscarriages than females. Reading this to me meant that when a woman would give birth to a son, it was cherished. I understood this to mean that Chinese parents preferred males over females (Bagley, 1993). With this preference, more female babies were then given up for adoption. The explanation for families preferring males over females was that males were considered the breadwinners of their families. They were expected to be the ones to support the family, especially their parents as they got older and who would not be able to take care of themselves or their finances. While the males were supporting the families, the females were expected to marry out and help support their in-laws. With this theory, if a family were to only have one child, the preference would be for a son.

Bagley also discusses Erik Eriksson's ego-identity theory, something that is useful to know when thinking of adoptees' identity formation. Eriksson's theory suggests that some children go through identity-dilemmas whereby they are challenged with the difficulty of having

to narrate experiences or activities that may have occurred to them when they were younger (e.g. talking about adoption, when you were adopted, do you remember being adopted, etc.). I thought his theory was particularly useful to my project as a lot of those interviewed (and myself in part when I include auto-ethnographic work), have had this dilemma in narrating our identity. For questions such as “when have you experienced racism in your life” or “do you recall when you were told you were adopted?” the adoptee has to think back to instances when they were younger for their answers. As these stories may not be fresh in their minds, it highlights again, this difficulty they have in trying to recall their whole past. Bagley says this is particularly difficult for adoptees as they cannot recall the whole process, and most do not even know their whole stories. He brought in Eriksson once more in talking about the stages of life for individuals, which can also be related to the adoptee experience on its own. In Eriksson’s stages of life, children learn first about trust and mistrust. This can be seen through the adoptee lens when an adoptee is first handed to their adoptive parents. They have to suddenly adapt to being handled and taken care of by a complete stranger. In this sense, they have to trust or not trust their adoptive parents. Eriksson’s second stage of life that Bagley points out is about autonomy, shame and doubt. Like a young child learning to be independent and figuring out rights from wrongs, adoptees go through a time when they are told or discover that they are adopted. Some experience shame or doubt, and others take the information to grow and become more independent (Bagley, 1993). Bagley’s discussion of Eriksson’s stages of life are unpacked in the analysis chapters of this thesis when adoptees demonstrate how they trust or do not trust people in their circles. In this practice, they show how they have come to understand themselves as adoptees (or not) in their own ways or through others who have projected their opinions and expectations of the adoptees on them.

Cohen and Farnia (2011) have also written about the beginning of Chinese adoptions and the One-Child Policy. They discussed how children were given out to regulate population growth. This being said, those who were given up for adoption were relatively healthy and developing well (Cohen and Farnia, 2011). I chose to include Cohen and Farnia's work in this thesis as they a) discussed the beginning of international adoption and why children were given up for adoption and b) they examined a very significant process: the attachment an adopted Chinese child has with their parents. Cohen and Farnia had assessed 30 Chinese adoptees from babyhood (approximately 14 months) to 2 years after they were adopted. They compared their results studying the attachment of these children to 31 non-adopted Canadian girls, all who were at a similar age and who grew up in similar socio-economic family backgrounds. Their results showed that adopted children had a more significant attachment to their mothers two years after having been adopted. The evidence they had included to support their arguments said that, although the degree of emotional detachment these adoptees experienced from their Chinese caregivers and parents may have been high to begin with, it did not deter them from forming a strong attachment with their adoptive mothers. They concluded that attachment is not static and can be changed over time in different situations (Cohen and Farnia, 2011). I linked a bit of their work of attachment into one of my research questions when I had asked participants who the members of their family were, and if they were particularly close to one member more than another. What one will see in the upcoming chapters is that adoptees felt particularly close to their adopted siblings as they shared similar experiences, but that they were also attached to their parents. Most notably, they were attached to their mothers. This is similar to Cohen and Farnia's work as it deals with emotional and long-term attachment, showing that a parent can provide comfort and stability for a child regardless of if they are biologically related to them.

Ballucci and Dorow (2013) wrote about Chinese-Canadian adoptions and the best interests of the child. They said that Canada, like a lot of other Western countries, consider two big concepts when they think about adoptions: that of the innocence of the children and the best interests of the child. Both these concepts have been instrumental in creating an understanding for others about childhood. They say that this notion that children are and should be innocent in situations like that of adoption further creates state intervention to ensure strong citizenship and a good society (Ballucci and Dorow, 2013). What I understand from this, is that state intervention is allowed and encouraged to ensure a good working society and that if children should and are being adopted, it is because it is best for them, their lives and their interests.

Cheney (2014) says the children's well-being is at the center of development. Cheney discusses the understanding that intercountry adoption should be seen as social reproduction and not child rescue (Cheney, 2014). In her piece, she argues for adoption and that it is a way of giving children a 'better life'. How does this relate to my research project? It is not unknown in the field of adoption that people will debate whether or not adoptees are being adopted because the adoptive parents cannot conceive on their own and want to create a family, or because they want to share the wealth they have by 'saving' these children from the conditions (sometimes not the safest or most ideal) into which they were born. Cheney (2014) argues that parents should be focusing on providing the adopted children with a better life. She says it should not be about rescuing a child, but about providing a better life for them out of the best interests of the child, and not out of the best interests of the parent. Cheney's work relates to my own as I demonstrate how these children from China were given a better life. In the chapters discussing the stories from adoptees, readers will see how fortunate many of these adoptees feel themselves to be. Some shared that they do not feel as though they would have been offered the same opportunities

had they grown up in China; further implying that their best interests were kept in mind at the time of their adoption.

The work on identity, as with much of Chinese-Canadian adoption literature, is limited. That being said, one author that I can reference for this piece is Andrea Louie. Louie (2015) addresses Chinese-American teen adoptees voices in her book and also deals with the Chinese adoptee identity narrative. Chapter 7 of Louie's book, "Don't Objectify Me: Chinese Adoptee Teens," opens with a story of an adoptee named Xiao Hua. Xiao Hua and her mother met with Louie to talk about Xiao Hua's adoption story, but then after a while the mother left so Louie could speak privately with Xiao Hua about her identity and the narrative that goes with it. Xiao Hua described her identity in multiple ways. She began by saying that she has an 'English' voice, that her 'background' is Chinese, and that her 'culture' is American (Louie, 2015, p.226). What struck me from this excerpt was how well Xiao Hua expressed multiple sides to her identity. Xiao Hua is like many of the adoptees whose stories are brought into this thesis. Many like being Chinese and having that side to them available but may not regularly connect with it but appreciate also the flexibility of connecting to their Canadian side (or for Xiao Hua, her American side). Further to this point, Louie interviewed another adoptee, Arielle, who was also connecting through other ways as an adoptee. Like an average American teen, Arielle is described as athletic; she's into gymnastics and lacrosse. Not the biggest fan of school, Arielle mentioned how she strongly disliked math class. In her interview with Louie, she talked about how she does not feel smart. Knowing there are many ways to describe someone's intelligence, Arielle linked hers directly to math. She said, "I just don't think I'm one of those really smart people who is really good at math...I actually hate math" (Louie, 2015, p.248). With both of these excerpts, one can see a glimpse into the lives of Chinese adoptees and how they choose to

identify themselves and narrate their lives. What I believe Louie is trying to say here, is that some of the adoptees she has interviewed feel objectified. Objectification to me means treating someone as an object, in this context I believe it means that others are treating the individual based as either a commodity or an object and that they are not considering the personality of the individual. What is important with these experts of Louie is to highlight this limited research on Chinese adoptees and from their points of view. As readers continue to read this thesis, they too, will see examples of individuals who are mistreated based on the expectation's others had of them.

When addressing identity formation, Costigan, Su and Hua (2009) said that the operation of identity formation includes discovering and creating an identity that shapes the individual as unique from others, yet still includes a specific group (Costigan, Su and Hua, 2009). They address how it is not too hard for some people to connect to both Chinese and Canadian identities and social groups, for other individuals, the connection may not come so easily. These scholars interviewed Chinese adolescents in Canada who, from their study, showed positive connections to their Chinese heritage; the sense of belonging they had to their Chinese side and of pride for being Chinese, were high. Costigan, Su and Hua argue that these adolescents had an easy time in integrating the Canadian side of them into their overarching identity (Costigan, Su and Hua, 2009).

Bian, Blachford and Durst (2015) wrote about the cultural upbringing of Canadian adopted children from China, focusing on the parents' perspective. It is not hard to find articles about Chinese-American or Korean-American adoptees, but it has been more challenging to find work done on Chinese-Canadian adoptees. Bian, Blachford and Durst said that international adoptees' parents are faced with at least two difficulties in raising their children: how to

acknowledge that the child is adopted (the fact that they “look” Asian but are not perhaps brought up in the same culture) and trying to include discussions of birth culture into the lives of their children (Bian, Blachford and Durst, 2015). Bian, Blachford and Durst recognized that many adoptees struggle to connect their identity of their current country to that of their birth heritage. What they bring up, however, is that while it may be difficult to connect two identities and two cultures together, it can and should be done. In their work, I noticed that it would even be considered worse to cut the ties these children have with their ethnic heritage (Bian, Blachford and Durst, 2015).

Pylypa (2018) discusses the meaning of culture, and how discussions of culture can come up between adoptive parents and their children. She talked about ‘color-blind attitudes’ and how differences between race of the adopted children and their adoptive parents were often downplayed. Come the 21st century, Pylypa said that adoptive parents are being taught in courses and workshops that differences between race and birth culture are vital (Pylypa, 2018). Pylypa sought to understand the expectation from others in society that, in order for an adoptee to maintain a strong well-being, they must be dependent on having a strong connection to their cultural heritage (Pylypa, 2018). Pylypa (2018) argues that cultural socialization activities suggested to adoptive parents – such as encouraging them to expose their children to Chinese customs like studying Mandarin or eating Chinese food—are encouraged based on a false idea. This is the idea that culture is somehow only linked to genetics and that for Chinese-born kids to thrive, they need to ‘be Chinese,’ consume Chinese food, and partake in Chinese activities. What Pylypa has taught me, is that this idea is a superficial way to understand culture and that culture is in reality connected to the ideas, behaviors and attitudes that one grows up with. Despite where one comes from, it is about where you are living and not genetically linked. This explanation

comes as a preface to the discussion these adoptees have in the analysis chapters of this thesis. Looking at what a child needs and what is important to them, we can focus more on the individual and what they are going through (whether that is having to deal with racism or discussing birth parents, finding a way to connect to their country of origin, etc.).

Rojewski, Shapiro and Shapiro (1997) looked at the behavior of Chinese adoptees and how parents addressed said behavior. They identified struggles the parents and the children may have in acknowledging the adoptees' cultural heritage (from their country of origin) and how the parents were presenting the new adopted culture to their children. Rojewski, Shapiro and Shapiro talked about the lifelong journey of an adoptee discovering themselves and how many do not know who they are and who they are to become. They also touch more on the parent's perspectives, exploring how a parent faces a lot of trouble in acknowledging cultural heritage in the home, as well as how the parents have to cope with the family-child differences (that they look different from their children, may have different health struggles, etc.). The scholars also mention how important it can be to introduce birth culture to their adopted children (Rojewski, Shapiro & Shapiro, 1997). I thought it was interesting to hear from contributors to the adoption field on how it may look from the outside. From this perspective, adoptive parents have to go through a continuous journey of: "Am I doing the right thing?", "Should I somehow incorporate knowledge of my child's country of origin into their upbringing?" Their article was particularly relevant to this research project as it touched on this dilemma that many adoptees face in incorporating their identity from birth into the identity they have been forming through their adopted country. Their work is similar to my own, but it is talking about the parent's perspective. My thesis, in contrast, addresses the trouble Chinese-Canadian adoptees themselves have in

acknowledging their culture from birth and the culture in which they have been brought up in by living in Canada.

In a piece written by a Chinese-American adoptee, adoptee Isabelle St. Clair sought to understand the encounters of Chinese-American cultures and identities. One of her research questions, similar to what I examined in my project was, *How do young adult Chinese-American adoptees and other actors (such as parents and the media) narrate their adoption stories?* In asking this question, St. Clair aimed to investigate ideas of citizenship, belonging, and community-development in the United States (St. Clair, 2017). What differed from her MA work to these other, similar projects, was whether the environment of where the child grew up did or did not help them construct a more concrete sense of themselves. She also spoke of how adoptees understand and narrate their own life stories.

What has been unique to my own MA research, is that my project has directly involved adoptees. The scholars introduced above, are also tackling my question of whether an adoptee (in the case of my project, a Chinese-Canadian adoptee) ought to explore their identity and to discover a different side to who they are. However, my project has differed by exploring whether or not fellow adoptees feel they have to self-identify as something or someone based on their own personal understanding of themselves or based on what others have projected on them. What I proposed to study differently than previous work, was the Chinese-Canadian adoptee narratives themselves. I wanted to replicate what was done by other adoptees like how St. Clair and Chow are doing personal research. As seen above, instead of following their model of speaking about Chinese-Americans, I speak about Chinese-Canadians. The experience of talking to Chinese-Canadian adoptees in comparison to other Chinese adoptees is their upbringing. By this, I mean to say their upbringing in cities in Canada are certainly different than those adopted

to countries like the United States or say, France. In Canada, these adoptees may also have different access to health care, education, activities, etc. than the adoptee peers they have in other countries. Through this project, I also anticipated learning about different factors of class, economic, and social status. In learning from these adoptees, I hoped to have created a space where fellow adoptees who may be struggling to know who they can turn to, can read about these other adoptees and their experiences for inspiration.

In a piece titled “Subject and Power” Michel Foucault writes that power “applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize, and which others have to recognize in him” (Foucault, 1982, p. 781). This form of power recognizes individuals as subjects. Foucault says there are two ways to describe a subject. One is by being the subject to someone else in control and being dependent on them, and the other is linked to one’s own identity and the conscience of self-knowledge. This is exactly how I view internationally adopted individuals with their struggle for identity formation. They are either subjected to control by others who wish to contribute their own views on the adoptee’s identity formation, or it is left to the given individual to create their own identity.

As one can see from what was shared above, the literature surrounding Chinese adoptees is not usually presented by Chinese adoptees, nor is it rooted in the development of their identity. I viewed this as a sign that the current state of the field is lacking contributions from all involved. While the aforementioned authors (scholars in the field or adoptive parents) have contributed to the literature, I argue more needs to be done. In particular, more should be said from the perspective of adoptees themselves addressing whether or not they view it as important to explore their own identities and to connect to their Chinese roots. Why is it important that we

center our attention on adoptee narratives? To me, it is about challenging our positions and understanding of the world. Being an adoptee is a dynamic and ever-changing experience. Many of the adoptees presented in this work, myself included, do not understand our positionality and do not properly know how to express ourselves. The process of interrogating who we are means we are critiquing systems. We are critiquing adoption, sometimes critiquing our adoptive parents, the governments we are linked to and the policies that were created and that are related to adoption. In this, we are also critiquing our understanding of identity and race. I believe bringing awareness and visibility to the adoption community can enrich conversations and decisions made within this community.

From the scholars introduced above, I learned they too are tackling my question of whether or not a Chinese adoptee ought to question their identity and to discover a different side to who they are. In viewing what is presented in the literature above, I saw what I have been doing as similar to what other authors are doing, in that we have a common goal of informing others of international adoption and the challenges adoptees may face in forming their identities. The difference in our findings and contributions, are our perspectives. I acknowledged that I wrote from a position of bias, as I myself am adopted, and have a strong desire for others to continue the conversation or at least acknowledge adoption.

In the next section I give an overview of the methods used for this research project. I chose three different methods for this project. The first step was to hold semi-structured interviews and to transcribe them. I interviewed 15 Chinese-Canadian adoptees between the ages of 18 and 24 years of age. These adoptees were friends I knew well, friends of friends and strangers who became friends. More will be unpacked on this in the next section. The second method of choice was to conduct and to implement auto-ethnographic work into my study.

Readers will see the dilemma I had in including my own voice into this piece. As voiced throughout this project, I wanted this to be an opportunity to focus on adoptees' voices. It was not until fellow adoptees said they wanted to hear my voice and how I answered my own questions that I considered including a piece at the very beginning to acknowledge my own experiences as an adoptee. The third method I used was to include reflexivity work throughout my piece, in each chapter. The idea of reflexivity work is meant to explain the reason why a quote was added into a section and what stood out to me from that interview.

Methods

I chose to begin this thesis by talking about my personal adoption story with the intention of demonstrating the unique connection this work has had for me. Before describing my research methodology, I wanted to share a bit about my involvement with the international adoption world. For as long as I can remember, I have been involved within adoption communities. My family and I have been lucky to know many people in our neighborhood who are adoptive parents or children who are adopted. We celebrate birthdays, holidays and involve ourselves in cultural events with one another throughout the year. Before my teenage years, the adoption agency I was adopted from used to have a newsletter highlighting what was happening amongst its adoptees and also about upcoming trips for families to go adopt their children. I contributed work two times to this newsletter. This is where I shared my life stories with other adoptees. From that experience, I started an ad hoc meet- up with adoptees. Some of these meet- ups would be with our parents, other times we would go off just us adoptees to a cafe, museum or to chat in a park. The most notable experience I have had in contributing to my adoption community has been when I co-organized and MC'd the retirement celebration for the organizers of my adoption

agency. It was an event to recognize their hard work and the impact they have had on all of us adoptees and our families. Fellow adoptees and I sang a song to the organizers and also organized and performed in a talent show. This was an opportunity for them to see some of the creative and unique hobbies we all have. Since then, I have joined adoptee-only social media groups, connected with adoptees across North America through podcasts, documentaries, and news stories and have joined an adoption agency's Board of Directors. My involvement in these adoptee communities have provided me with a greater sense of pride and have made me feel more comfortable in conducting research about and alongside other adoptees.

In imagining this thesis, I knew I wanted to have an element of auto-ethnographic research and personal connection to my project. I wanted to follow in the steps of other adoptee activists and scholars such as Nicole Chung and Isabelle St. Clair. Nicole Chung's memoir, *All You Can Ever Know* resonated with me and what I wanted to do in my own work, as it accentuated the adoptee voice. Centered in memory, in-depth stories of personal experiences and self-reflection, the methodology of auto-ethnographic research allowed Chung to tell her story with few structural boundaries. After reading Chung's memoir, I came to the realization that storytelling should be the center of my piece and the best way to highlight the adoptees' voices.

As previously stated, I interviewed 15 Chinese-Canadian adoptees between the ages of 18- 24 years old for this project. After requesting that each adoptee sign a consent form, I made it clear that their stories were their stories. They could recount whatever they wished for the interview, they could consent to being recorded (or not) and ask to have the recording stop if and whenever they wanted. I wrote semi-structured interview questions but developed them in a way to allow the adoptee to answer the question however they wished to do so. Although I had known some of the participants since I was a child, many of them were recruited through friends of

friends. I met these interviewees for the first time via FaceTime or in-person. Fourteen of the 15 adoptees interviewed identified as women. The other was adopted as a girl but later transitioned in their teenage years and now identifies as a man. In terms of academic background, all are currently or recently graduated from a post-secondary institution. Furthermore, these children were all adopted by white parents, except for one -- her parents and adopted brother are all Chinese and biologically related to one another. The demographics from this study are limited and do not adequately reflect the different family make- up of adoptees. While many participants were adopted into two parent households with middle-class backgrounds, many had parents who later divorced, some had been adopted by single parents, some had siblings who were biologically related to the parents, others had siblings who were adopted from another country, etc.

In reflecting on my own identity throughout this research, I see myself as a Chinese-Canadian adoptee, educator, adoption work activist and researcher. It was of course difficult to know if and when to share bits and pieces of myself and my own experiences, but I do feel it adds to the piece. In conducting interviews with participants, I always encouraged questions and discussions about our shared adoption stories but never wanted my own answers to be the cause for them to say one thing or another. I put emphasis on their adoption story. That being said, one of the greatest challenges experienced through this process was to remove myself from the narratives I was hearing from the adoptees. Objectivity came into play here in that I wanted to separate my own personal stories and ideas from what I was hearing from my friends and colleagues. I certainly had reactions to some of what the others were saying but it was a welcomed challenge to navigate the process of seeing my identity as both an asset but also a contested voice.

The rest of this first chapter on “Methods” details the approach that was taken for this project. While semi-structured interviews from Chinese-Canadian adoptees were the root of this project, a substantial amount of research also developed from my own personal experiences. Having the option for adoptees to learn from my own experiences I think helped ease the discomfort the individuals may have felt in sharing personal anecdotes that revealed lives and their upbringing. While the auto-ethnographic notes are used to add to the piece, their inclusion is most certainly not intended to take away from anything the participants have said.

As readers have noticed, I began my thesis with my personal adoption story. This approach comes out of auto-ethnographic work. Readers will see how I have unpacked this dilemma I had in trying to relate to my participants and include my own voice, all the while trying not to take away from the much-needed discussion from my participants. Second, I discuss the semi-structured interviews I conducted and how I went about transcribing them. The last practice used for this project was reflexivity. As much as possible, I tried to be reflexive in what the participants said to me. I speak of both reflexivity and self-reflexivity in the coming pages.

Auto-ethnography

The auto-ethnographic research I conducted was the most personal approach I used for this project. I chose this technique because I strongly wanted to relate to the work I was doing, and to provide an insider perspective. I felt it was important that I put myself in the shoes of my participants to see what I was asking of them and to see if there were any sort of implications or emotional feelings I felt towards the work I was doing. Also, in being inspired by other adoptee writers, I noticed that they too would start their pieces with their own adoption story. There is something so real and uncontestable about someone sharing information about their personal life that I think really captures the reader's attention.

With the work I did on auto-ethnography, my findings led me to many new discoveries. I was not familiar with what ethnography was prior to my thesis work. I had heard about it briefly in undergrad and was introduced to it some more in the qualitative research methods course that I had taken in my first year of my Master's. Prior to these experiences, I did not know auto-ethnography existed. Michael Humphreys helped to introduce me to auto-ethnography and was the reason why I decided to use it in my research work. In his article, "Getting Personal: Reflexivity and Autoethnographic Vignettes," Humphreys describes auto-ethnography as an "autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (Humphreys, 2005, p. 841). I learned from Humphreys' piece that auto-ethnography is a "form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context. It is both a method and a text.... [and] can be done by either an anthropologist who is doing 'home' or 'native' ethnography or by a non-anthropologist/ethnographer. It can also be done by an autobiographer who places the story of his or her life within a story of the social context in which it occurs" (Humphreys, 2005, p. 841). In reading stories from Humphreys' work, I was able to develop this sense of evocative power and was able to prove to myself the power of reflexivity in research and why it was important to do research on international adoption through an adoptee's perspective. Through interviewing fellow adoptees and hearing different stories of their upbringing, troubles they may have encountered, and how they have involved themselves in their adoption networks, I constantly had to remind myself to take a step back. If I was hearing a story of an adoptee who had perhaps not chosen to interact with other adoptees, my first instinct was "you should tell them to get involved! You meet so many great people through the adoption community." But, through reflexive work, and reviewing my goals for this project, I had to remind myself to leave my own opinions and projections at the door.

These adoptees did not express interest in my study so that they could get advice from me. They volunteered their time, so they could share their stories. Humphreys also instilled within me the power of authenticity within auto-ethnographic work. I learned about the transformation of one's own auto-ethnographic work and how it can be authentic but presented in a way that others can understand. The authenticity of it looks at personal details, emotion, feelings of failure and success and is used to get readers to identify themselves.

Another important finding from this auto-ethnographic approach was learning about jot notes and field notes. Sarah Tracy's chapter 6 "'Field roles, fieldnotes, and field focus' in *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact*" helped me distinguish the two. Tracy says the field note process begins with raw records, also known as jottings or scratch notes. She explains that raw records are what you take at first. They are non-edited points about the field. Raw records are the first notes you take, unprocessed notations of the field that the individual is studying (Tracy, 2013). Tracy showed me how auto-ethnographic work can be used in qualitative research and how valuable components like having your jot notes and raw records available to you during the writing process can be. For projects like mine when including others own words, stories and memories, the jot notes and word for word memos are beyond useful. When deciding to have my thesis start with a personal bit on what it has been like to grow up as a Chinese-Canadian adoptee, I remember just sitting down and taking notes of everything I could think of when the word "adoption" was right in front of me. I wrote down stories from my past, wrote about how I connect to other adoptees, wrote about my family, and more. All these jot-notes turned into ideas that I could use for my auto-ethnographic story and starting piece to my thesis.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were the bulk of my research work. After going through the process of getting approval through Carleton's Ethics Board, I created my first post about my project. I posted to Facebook with the Research Poster (see appendix A) and I was off.

Within 24 hrs, there were more than 15 participants who said they were interested. Unfortunately, in order to give everyone a bit of time and space within the project, I had to cap the interviews at 15 participants. These 15 participants ended up being close friends who had read my post and expressed an interest in my project, friends that were more like acquaintances and whose adoption story I was not too familiar with, and friends of friends who had shared my post with their networks.

After solidifying my interviews, I was scheduled to meet with each person in person at a cafe or public space (like a school or library) of their choosing or online. Thirteen of the 15 participants were able to meet with me in person. One was more comfortable if I sent her the interview questions and she could answer them on her own time, and the last was not available to meet in person so we did a FaceTime interview.

For the semi-structured interviews, I had the challenge to come up with loose, open-ended questions I could ask my participants. I did not want to limit myself to these questions, nor did I want to make the questions the bulk of my interviews, but they did help me stay organized with each discussion and helped participants think of ways to contribute to my work (See Appendix C for the list of questions).

In conducting semi-structured interviews and transcribing each interview, I had lots of data from what my participants disclosed to me and how I took that information to make sense of it. Before each interview, I recall being nervous. I hadn't really had any experience or particular

training to help prepare me in discussing a sensitive topic (of adoption) and with adoptees themselves. I had been unsure of what the participants would think of me when doing this research and I had to consider the ethical and emotional implications this could cause for the participants and for myself. Part of the process of conducting data for my analysis, was to do research on how to present myself in an interview (what questions to ask, what to wear, how to act, etc.).

Rosanne E. Beuthin's article, "Breathing in the Mud: Tensions in Narrative Interviewing" prepared me for the process of conducting semi-structured interviews and her work instructed me about the approach for narrative inquiry. Beuthin (2014) began with a personal story on when she had conducted an interview, what she did before the interview and her reflection process after the interview. The most helpful lesson from this reading was to not over influence, and not to lead (Beuthin, 2014). For readers who may also be conducting qualitative research in the future, I would like them to take away how important it is to be listening and reacting to your participants. By this I believe she would like interviewers to focus heavily on the content from the participants and what they wish to say, instead of what the interviewer would like them to say. When she mentions that the interviewer should not lead, I understood that statement as their voice should not overpower the voices of the participants.

I read Chapter 7 of Sarah Tracy's book, *Qualitative Research Methods* before conducting the interviews and appreciated having the notes of suggestions on how to ask questions in the interview. Tracy offers types and examples of potential research questions one can ask their participant(s). For the generative questions, I tried to ask, "behavior and action questions" where I concentrated on the actions and emotions of the participant in settings like their home or school environment. I feel that acknowledging Tracy's advice of leaving really personal or political

questions at the end (such as asking about racist remarks adoptees may have heard), after I had developed a bit of a rapport with the participant. This is where I asked questions about barriers or challenges my participants may have faced as an adoptee trying to figure out their identity. To close the interviews, as this was an interview about identity formation, I asked an “identity-enhancing question” to, as Tracy says in her book, stimulate discussion for the respondent where they leave feeling appreciated of their time and where the interaction is left with them feeling like an expert, smart and well liked (Tracy, 2013). I include these notes from Tracy to again, hopefully encourage readers to read up on methods to qualitative research but to also be able to properly understand the process I undertook in gathering data for my own thesis.

I also took a minute after each interview to reflect on Sarah Tracy’s article “Qualitative Quality: Eight Big “Big-Tent” Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research.” I was curious to see how I positioned the research. The data I collected through the interview with my participants showed me how adoption is a “worthy topic” as it is a relevant topic and worthwhile for research purposes for adoptive children and their families, adoption agencies or policy developers from governmental organizations (Tracy, 2010).

Self (reflexivity) in research

Tracy argues that sincerity can be achieved through “self-reflexivity, vulnerability, honesty, transparency, and data auditing” (Tracy, 2010, p. 842). I felt my auto-ethnographic work demonstrated the two main components of sincerity that Tracy discussed: self-reflexivity and transparency. She says self-reflexivity is about being honest and authentic towards one’s self, one’s research and the people one is writing for (Tracy, 2010). Tracy says transparency is another practice of sincerity and argues that it’s about being honest with your research. In sum, I

learned that sincerity is about being earnest and vulnerable, and I think I demonstrated those sides of myself in my auto-ethnographic and semi-structured interview work above.

Self-reflexivity, Tracy says, is when one considers the past experiences and opinions of the researchers and those who were helping with the research with the environment of the research scene at hand (Tracy, 2013). Auto-ethnography, she says, is different. For Tracy, auto-ethnography is about connecting the understanding of one's identity, feelings, values of societal issues and culture all together (Tracy, 2013).

Ethical Considerations

To minimize any concern of deception, I communicated with my participants on any activity I may be involved with that could use some of my research and theirs. In the consent form I provided for them (see Appendix B), I acknowledged resource centers (adoption related or not) where they could go to or could call. To maintain anonymity and confidentiality, all participants were given pseudonyms. They were notified and if they wanted to know what their pseudonym was, they were told.

In conclusion, this chapter has been a way for me to open the scene of this thesis and open myself up to the readers. The first ten pages are my truth. They are meant to guide readers on an experience of what it is like to be a Chinese-Canadian adoptee, and to encourage them to read on as more adoptees share their lived experiences. Afterwards, I provided a brief literature review, an overview really, of what I have found to be helpful in knowing more about international adoption, the one child policy, parents' dilemmas, and challenges adoptees have (and continue) to face. This final bit of my first chapter took a look at the method and techniques used for this project. It showcased the inclusion and rationality of using auto-ethnographic work into the project and how engaging and touching it could be to start off the project on a very

personal note. Readers also saw how semi-structured interviews were decided on for this project as the main method and how I went about conducting each interview (location, professional, deciding on some general guiding questions, etc.). I hope it was also helpful for readers to read about reflexivity, also called self-reflexivity. Reflexivity was an ongoing approach that allowed for more back and forth work between participant responses and the engagement with each discussion. To clarify, reflexivity in the project is not used as a method, rather an analytical practice. It was an approach to my main method of qualitative interviews and a way to be more informed about what the participants said and how I could respond to their stories.

A Look into The Upcoming Chapters

Chapter 2, “From China to Canada: Stories on Adoption” demonstrates the adoptee perspective. It focuses on how adoptees think about their racial and ethnic backgrounds. It is important that one understands the dilemma these individuals have in preserving a connection to their birth culture but also in taking on ownership and connection to their adopted culture. This dilemma also stems from understanding how to be an individual for oneself while balancing the expectations and pressures of society around you.

Chapter 3, “Forming a sense of belonging in the community” is a chapter about growing from the stories told. The chapter explores the complications of how adoptees have had to construct and maintain community. Some of the adoptees interviewed expressed that they were brought up in environments where they were the only visible minority in their town, school or family. Others said they regularly interacted with fellow adoptees and that made all the difference for them in terms of developing and fostering a sense of community and belonging among the people they regularly interact with. This chapter focuses on the process of community

building by the adoption agency, the adopted families and the Chinese-Canadian adoptees themselves. The communities examined in this paper reveal a sense of adoptee culture that has emerged over the years. For the most part, this is a positive presence for adoptees. Finally, the chapter wraps up with some suggestions for analysts, adoption agency organizers and families, for how to create a sense of transnational space that can include both identities equally.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this piece is a transition from Chapter 3 discussing community building and how one can continue the conversation of adoption narratives. The conclusion, “Where to go from here? Telling narratives of adoptees in the 21st century” looks at the challenge Chinese-Canadian adoptees face in their communities and how said challenges could be resolved.

In closing this chapter, I want to highlight that this thesis is not answering the question of whether or not intercountry, interracial adoption should be supported. I believe that it should, but that is another topic in itself. This thesis argues that adoption, whether domestic or international, is a complicated procedure and practice. As I was told by the adoptees I interviewed in this study, no two adoptees share the same experience. This thesis introduces the voices of several Chinese-Canadian adoptees, ones that are unique and concrete. The message is clear: the stories, doubts, certainties, hopes and dreams that come with being an adoptee need to be heard. One cannot just focus on the glossy text in the media or from outside perspectives that do not come from a place of someone who is adopted themselves.

The conclusion also, more broadly, responds to the argument that was my starting point for this thesis, which was that Chinese-Canadian adoptees can experience a greater sense of

insecurity the more detached they are from their country. I believe that the thesis supports this original hypothesis, although I stress this is not to say all Chinese-Canadian adoptees feel this way.

Chapter 2

From China to Canada: Adoption Stories

Introduction

As discussed in the literature review, reports and studies produced by adoptive parents, adoption researchers, and the media, have helped define the narrative of what it is like to be a Chinese-Canadian adoptee. In this chapter, I showcase some adoptees perspectives. While dominant narratives that have contributed to the public's and adoptees' own understandings of adoption have not been adoptee centered, this chapter is rooted in adoptee experiences. It is about self-identification and it focuses on how adoptees understand and engage with their racial and ethnic backgrounds. The chapter captures what Chinese-Canadian adoptees have to say themselves about their adoption stories. The stories of these young adult adoptees provide those reading this piece with a sense of better understanding of what it means to be a Chinese adoptee growing up in Canada. I argue that these narratives that are shared offer a broad, but detailed sense of how some Chinese-Canadian adoptees claim to create their identities. In explaining these identities, readers will see how I claim to believe Chinese-Canadian adoptees experience insecurities and how these insecurities are brought out more when they are not connected to their country of origin. What I wish to express, is that I am not claiming that these particular narratives create everyone's identities. It is a small sample to help the readers better situate themselves in the adoptees' experiences.

I have divided the stories from the adoptees I spoke with into different sections in order to answer the questions created for this research project: 1) How do Chinese-Canadian adoptees navigate the dilemma of preserving a connection to their birth culture? 2) How have Chinese-Canadian adoptees integrated their new adopted culture into their identity/sense of self? The three subsections of this chapter are: how 'home' is defined, whether the adoptee identifies as

adopted and when/why they feel this way and finally, how being adopted has been a meaning making identity experience for them.

Creating A Space for Adoptee Narratives

While reading about international adoption, the history, policy, and non-fictional work, I have found the work to be very broad. This chapter is about creating and providing a space that is only used to tell stories about adoption that were told by the adoptees themselves. In writing this chapter I wanted to have an inclusive piece where both members directly affected by adoption (adoptees, adoptive parents and birth parents) could relate to what is being said, but that others who are working in the adoption research field but who may not have direct connection to adoption, could resonate with as well. The stories and experiences that these adoptees have shared with me are both truths and ideas; the thoughts may not be conclusive, yet they are attending to the real stories of the adoptees' lived experiences. By this, I mean to say that the examples they share with me of their own lived experiences are not necessarily facts about adoptees as a whole group but can perhaps pertain to many individuals. Again, this shows this sense of uncertainty for adoptees in their experiences and to know who they are. By providing and connecting with their narratives, I am able to display how adoptees want their stories to be shared, perceived and recalled.

As I get into this chapter, I want to mention how much of what adoptees know is centered on ideas from their parents and from their social worlds (school environments, work, extracurricular activities, etc.). Sara Dorow (2006) says that many adoptees who were adopted as babies were too young to recall the moment when they were adopted. What they do recall are the stories that were shared to them by their parents, their friends or from the media. Essentially,

Dorow taught me that the narratives adoptees create for themselves are based on others' memories and not their own. I do not feel this means that their stories are not real or relevant. Instead, it leads to a gap in wanting to know more about an adoptee (Dorow, 2006). The stories that the adoptees are constructing regarding their adoption journey are far more revealing and important than the ones created by other people. They are more personal and offer a sense of reflection and education that cannot accurately be told by their adoptive parents and that cannot be properly captured by those outside of the adoptees' personal experiences.

The Story of Home for Chinese-Canadian Adoptees

I asked participants semi-structured interview questions including the question: "What city are you from/where did you grow up?" This was a question that had varying and very intriguing responses. The question, to me, is fairly simple but to my surprise, the question was harder for the participants to answer. Many participants had valuable feedback. In her first interview, one of the participants, Maisy, said she was from the city of Ottawa and that she and her family had lived there pretty much her whole life. After the fact, however, Maisy had mentioned the question was confusing and could have been clarified. She recommended that for future interviews, I should clarify what I am looking for as a response to this question. I took a moment to digest this feedback and reevaluate the question asked. That is when I made the call to leave it as it was. After sleeping on it, I reflected on how revealing this question could be. Maisy was not the only adoptee who hesitated when answering this question. From the 15 participants interviewed, 8 of them immediately responded to living/growing up in Canadian cities and that to them, a place in Canada was where they define 'home'. The other 7 had immediately spoken of Chinese cities and without further questions. In following with the

narrative of this piece that Chinese-Canadian adoptees experience insecurity with the detachment they have to their country of origin, the statement is present here. What I took from this is that these adoptees were more precarious with their words. In trying to articulate how they identify, I do not feel as though the adoptees interviewed for this project were always sure how to best answer the questions asked. This was a reflection on them and for me as well. I definitely could have made my interviews to be more semi-structured based, and less question/answer oriented. In looking back, I reflect on how, if I had created a space that was more “you can talk with a peer”, “you can talk with a friend”, the responses to the questions could have been different. What one will see from the interviewees’ responses, is that home is defined as a place either here in Canada or back in China. It is a location for them. If I had to create a generic definition of home as described by these adoptees, I would say it is a space where someone lives or has grown up, and with other members of their family.

According to Maisy, Maria, and Jessica, Canada is first and foremost home. For these three adoptees in particular, Ottawa has been where they have lived pretty much their whole lives. Maisy, an adoptee from Ottawa, hesitated when she spoke of where she was from. She told me, “This question is confusing. You should clarify. I am from the city of Ottawa. Me and my family have lived here pretty much my whole life.” She said that she was from Ottawa and has lived here with her family pretty much her whole life but then later said she was not sure if she was supposed to have answered the question by stating which city in China she was from. As stated before, home is a specific location for Maisy. Apart from a year living in British Columbia when her mother took a sabbatical, she said Ottawa has always been where she calls home for her.

Maria, too, found this question to be interesting given the context of this being a study. She too was not sure how to best answer this question. She shared that she is from Ottawa. Jessica is also an Ottawa based adoptee. What sets her story apart from Maisy and Maria's is that she also mentions her connection to China in her interview. She does this by first saying she grew up in Ottawa, but that she was born in China. I found this, and other interviews, quite remarkable. I had not considered the order of one's words to be too important prior to this question, but after thinking on it, whether an adoptee first shares if they feel more connected to their life in Canada or China is one way of saying if the adoptee considers one place more of a home than another.

For all three of these adoptees, while there was a bit of hesitation and confusion of what was asked in this question, because Ottawa and Canada as a whole was home to them. I reflected on this and understood what these few adoptees were saying is that they are connected to their Canadian identity and the Canadian side of living and their Canadian background more than their Chinese background. The next set of adoptees however, had the opposite reaction and responses to this question. For Olivia, Taylor, Elizabeth, Zoey and Amelia, their initial responses were to say where they were adopted from in China. They first gave the province in China from which they were born, and then some mentioned where they have grown up here in Canada.

Olivia said she is from China first and foremost, but that she has lived in Ottawa for most of her life. Unique to this particular adoptee's upbringing is that Olivia has had the opportunity to live in China. In her interview, she mentioned that as a teenager, she lived in China. Her mom took her to China to travel but also, so Olivia could experience her cultural background. With this experience and others, her mom brought Chinese food into her home which helped Olivia be proud of being Chinese. Through this experience, she said she was able to feel like she belonged

in both worlds. Olivia was adopted from Shenzhen, China but has lived in Ottawa for most of her life.

It was interesting having a discussion with Taylor, as Taylor was very descriptive. I had not wanted to pry too much with these adoptees about knowing where they were from, and certainly if they felt uncomfortable sharing that part of them, I would not press on, but it was very neat to hear from Taylor that he knew the city and province from where he was adopted in China. Taylor was adopted from China and is from the city of Lishui in Zhejiang province, but grew up in Ottawa.

While the majority of these participants were adoptees who grew up in Ottawa, there were a few that were from other cities in Ontario, too. Elizabeth was one of these adoptees. She and her family are from a smaller city in Ontario, Hamilton. Like Olivia and Taylor, though, Elizabeth first shared where she was from in China, before mentioning where she was living in Canada. She too, knew enough details to share which city she was adopted from. She was born in the city of Suzhou, just west of Shanghai in Jiangsu province, but has been living in Hamilton since she was adopted.

Zoey, a younger adoptee from Ottawa, was very particular in saying the city, province and country (China) where she was from. Zoey is from Wuhui city in the province of Anhui. She was clear in stating that “China was where I was born, but I’m from Ottawa.” Why mention Zoey’s story? I found it very interesting how some of these adoptees are told so much detail about where they come from, while others are left more in the dark. From these interviews I did not get the sense that one adoptee was surer of themselves knowing the exact city where they were adopted from than someone who was not told this information, it is just another way of seeing how an adoptee has grown up and what they grow to know and believe about themselves.

Amelia had a very different response from the other adoptees. While the other adoptees either shared they were from a place in Canada or that they were adopted from China but have lived some place in Canada all their lives, Amelia did not acknowledge the Canadian part of her life. Nor did she talk about where “home” really is. She just mentioned where she was from in China. From a region not too far from the others, Amelia is from Hubei province. She is from Wuhan city. Why list the cities and provinces? I do this in part because that is how the adoptees themselves shared their stories, but also because it is interesting to see where these adoptees are all from. Shared a little later on in this thesis, is the question of reconnecting with birth parents and siblings. It is not uncommon for Chinese adoptees to post stories about their experiences with DNA sites like Ancestry.ca or 23andMe if they want to connect with other members of their birth families. While these semi-structured interviews were not centered on reunion stories for adoptees, for those who are interested in that, one way to reconnect could be by hearing where other adoptees are from and to see if you (or someone you know) is from the same regions.

Why this question? Why ask about where home is for an adoptee? As this was one of my first experiences in conducting interviews and dealing with other adoptees in a professional and academic setting, I had wanted to open with a fairly simple question. In doing so, I also wanted to ask something that was open-ended and that would also help spiral other thoughts for participants in sharing more about themselves through the interviews. When searching for articles about adoption, some keywords that often arise in these articles are “identity”, “sense of belonging”, “culture” and “a sense of home.” I felt asking the participants how they define home, would help showcase their identity through space and place (Canada or China), demonstrate a sense of belonging to one nation or another, and then also provide a sense of home and community to readers about adoptees. That it did. Although not all of what the 15 participants

had said could be included into every section of this thesis, the overall conclusion is that about half of the group identified more with their home here in Canada and the other half connected more with the home they have or once had belonged to back in China.

What I learned from the stories shared above from adoptees on where they are from, is that one can better understand their experiences with place, space, cultural identity and how the three can be woven into each other. I can relate this section of the chapter in particular to a fascinating read by Dani I. Meier. Meier, a psychotherapist and school social worker from Michigan, wrote a piece entitled “Cultural Identity and Place in Adult Korean- American Intercountry Adoptees.” The study she did for this piece looks at the interwoven relationship of cultural identity and place for Korean adoptees (adults) who are living in Minnesota. Through semi-structured interviews, Meier used life histories as a method to find themes of discussion from adoptees and how they were revealed. These themes were of gender, place, identity and ethnicity. Most of the Korean adoptees interviewed had similar experiences and responses of denial of their Korean heritage, particularly after high school. The stories were changed when the environment of the adoptee was changed (such as places that the adoptee may have moved to or visited). Her study looked at the limitations of other works on adoptees and how they are often focused on hearing from the adoptive parents or adoptees when they are younger. That approach, to Meier, is limited as one does not properly hear about the life course of the adoptee and the journey they could be on in wanting to know more about their identity, to gain a sense of belonging and to find a sense of home (Meier, 1999). I appreciated that Meier’s piece turned to the adoptee experience and went straight to the source. I felt we both had similar experiences in hearing how adoptees have claimed a connection to a specific place. She focuses life course measures of adoptees and she too tries to follow the adoptees stories themselves, and not the

ones told by their parents or by others outside of the circle of the adoptee. It was interesting to hear how some adoptees that were interviewed in her study have connected more to their lives as a Korean after they have left home. This relates to my insecurity argument and with this similarity readers will see how adoptees have (or have not) chosen to connect more to their country of origin in the coming sections and chapter. What will be seen, is a sense of freedom the adoptee obtains once they leave home or once they leave high school and can access other resources through their travels and in their exposure to other environments that may help them navigate the relationship they have to cultural identity and place.

Song and Lee (2009) can connect to this point about the importance of exploring one's ethnic identity. For them, it is about exploring one's ethnic identity once one reaches young adulthood as opposed to when parents suggest one does through 'cultural socialization' when the child is younger. Their article, which talks about adult Korean adoptees' past and present cultural experiences explicitly discusses ethnic connection. In terms of identity development, they say a strong ethnic connection should be made individually, from the get-go, as early as possible. They say that if one has a strong connection to a certain ethnic group at a young age, that instilment will lead to a positive upbringing. The positivity will act as a blocker for discrimination or other challenges the minority may face when they become older (Song and Lee, 2009, p.20). Song and Lee (2009) say that their study on adult Korean American adoptees was to provide information to readers that would contribute to adoption literature. They too, wanted to contribute to a field that has relatively low accounts of direct perspectives from adoptees themselves. Based on their data, their conclusions lead them to consider that cultural socialization activities enforced by parents at a young age were not positively connected with ethnic identity in their research. They discuss that only when the activities arise in young adulthood (i.e., they were taken on by the

adoptees' own motivation) did they have a positive link with ethnic identity. Their arguments support Pylypa's work in that we must respond to what individual adoptees themselves regard as important, instead of concentrating on cultural activities that parents and social workers decide should be imposed on the child. This also supports my idea that others should listen to adoptee voices more to know what is important. Like my research, Song and Lees' findings were not comprehensive. Like my work, theirs was only a first look and explanation of what many adoptees feel but both do not address what all adoptees feel. The objective of their work was to have others follow in their footsteps with other studies that aim to help the world understand post-adoptive experiences, identity formation, cultural connection and the impact adoption has to adopted individuals and those who interact with them.

I wrote this particular section to show how difficult it was for adoptees to state where they are from, where they belong, and where home is for them. It shows that half of the group feel more connected to home here in Canada, while perhaps also mentioning they were born in another country, while the other half immediately felt mentioning where they are from in China was more important. In sum, all these adoptees had a way to express their doubts of who they are, which again, is the root of my argument. Not having a strong understanding or a connection to the country of origin has resulted in uncertainty in knowing how an adoptee should present themselves. In the next couple of sections of this chapter, I show what happened when I challenged participants reflect on if and how they feel as though they can identify as adopted. And if so, how being adopted has been a meaning making experience, to what extent, and in which contexts this idea has emerged.

Adopted or Not?

In this section, I had discussions with participants on if they identified as adopted or not. This question prompted more examination such as finding out when the individual may have been told they were adopted, how it was brought up in their lives and why they may choose to identify as an adopted individual or not.

Having gone through childhood, jobs, growing up with siblings, perhaps travelling back to China or living there at one point, I felt this was an appropriate question to ask as their thoughts may be more fully developed than if the discussion had been held when they were younger. Not just given the study, but having another adoptee ask them this question, I felt they would perhaps feel they could open up to me. Similarly, to the first question of how 'home' is defined, the results from this question were quite mixed. Of the 15 participants, 9 participants said they identify as someone who is adopted. The last 6 participants were equally sorted into feeling as though they were not adopted and feeling somewhere in between.

Lauren, a 22-year-old adoptee from Ottawa identifies as adopted. For her, she said it does not come up often that she is adopted, but more so in social situations with her parents as she does not look like them. For the get-to-know-you games, Lauren said she would bring it up that she was adopted, as an alternative, different and unique fact about herself that she could share with others. She told me, "I identify as someone who is adopted. My parents tried to make sure when I was young that I was loved and was supposed to be a part of the family. I guess I always knew I was adopted but it was never a bad thing."

Maisy, a 19-year-old adoptee also from Ottawa, said that being adopted is something she has always known about herself and has accepted. Adoption did not come up too often for Maisy

either. If it was brought up, it was with other adoptees at events. Maisy said that most people do not care, at least not in her friend group. In her situation, she said she would not bring it up and usually the others would not know until later or they would figure out she was adopted on their own. Maisy did mention that there are the odd people who say “You are adopted? Cool.” She mentioned that at her work as a camp counsellor she had one camper who approached her one day and questioned her about being adopted. The camper asked if she had been in foster care. When asking Maisy how she reacted to that camper, she said she shook it off. She said the camper was just not informed about adoption, but that it was fine. In this situation with a kid, she mentioned how they often just speak their minds. Interesting about this story, though, was that Maisy was never asked this by someone. No one had asked her if she had been in foster care before, but in asking her about how she responded to this camper, she said she was not offended either. She said, “Yes, I feel adopted. I have always known I was adopted. I have accepted it is a part of me. It is in the back of my mind. It has always been there. It is just a little fact about me.”

Victoria, a 22-year-old adoptee from Port Colbourne, ON had a different story of adoption to share. While she too identifies as adopted, her background story leading up to feeling this way was different than Maisy or Lauren’s. Everyone in Victoria’s family knew she was adopted, and the majority of those family members were very happy about it. Victoria grew up with her mom, her dad, and two older siblings who have since passed away. Her adoption brought lots of happiness and hope to a difficult family situation. With her friends, she was only ever bullied once in elementary school. Otherwise she would just tell people she was adopted if they asked. She said her family was good at bringing up adoption through stories. In the books read to her when she was younger, there would always be a character who was adopted. She never questioned it, but it is a memory that she has remembered as she has gotten older. Victoria

has accepted that she is adopted. When asked if she identifies as someone who is adopted, she said “I do. That is what happened.” Victoria did not elaborate. She just stated it as such.

Readers will notice that throughout this thesis, there are often moments where the interviewee leaves the conversation with “it was just that” or “it is what it is.” I wanted to leave this authentic exchange within the piece, and to have it more solely as “here is a direct quote from one participant, and direct quote from another” to again capture the precise dialogue of the adoptees and what they shared with me. It is certainly a more awkward ending or written section than someone may anticipate, but again, it shows the rawness of the interviews and how I did not feel discussions were always meant to be unpacked. As expressed previously, I never wanted to make an interviewee uncomfortable in talking about their adoption story. If they ended a moment in our interview with a “that is just what happened” statement, I would wait a minute to give them time to reflect but would also try to read their body language to know if it was alright to proceed to the next question.

Now I share with you stories from adoptees who feel somewhere in between identities; of being adopted, but also living in Canada and feeling like there are multiple sides to their identity. Lily does not remember when she was told she was adopted but her recollection makes her believe that her parents probably sat down with her and told her at some point that she was. She does not gloss over the fact that she is adopted or not, but she accepts it. She has acknowledged that there are two sides to her. She says she does not dismiss the truth in that she is adopted. She recognizes that she has birth parents out there, but she also points out that they are not the ones who adopted her. Lily shared that she did not used to be open to talking about adoption or the fact that she is Chinese-Canadian.

I used to not be that great with the fact that I am Chinese-Canadian. I went to Chinese school but I never wanted to learn any of it because you know, I am Canadian. I

did not even feel Chinese. I was Canadian. But in the last few years I have acknowledged I am from China and there are two sides to me.

To elaborate on this, Lily and I discussed how she has two sides to her in that she is Chinese, but she lives in Canada. There was a lot of hesitation in Lily's interview. Again, this demonstrates this fear or moment of uncertainty in who an adoptee is and how they identify or lack some identification to certain parts of their background. Sharing that she was not always comfortable with the fact that she is Chinese-Canadian was not an understatement. There were a significant number of pauses in between sentences for Lily as she tried to find the right words to share with me.

Kristen, like Lily, I found to also be feeling as though she is adopted and as if she is not. She too has this feeling of being in between identities. Of trying to identify as Chinese, Canadian, adopted or not adopted. Kristen, a 23-year-old adoptee from Ottawa, grew up in a different family make-up than some of the other adoptees. While many of these adoptees indicated they also had adopted siblings (some from China, some who were adopted internationally from other countries), Kristen was the only one who had a sibling who was biologically related to her adopted parents, and whose adopted parents were Chinese themselves. For her, it is more challenging to identify as adopted or not and to recall when she would have been told she was adopted. She does not believe her parents ever hid the fact that she was adopted from her, but she cannot recall having that conversation. Her best guess was that she was four or five years old when she was told. Up until that point, she did not think she knew she was adopted. And now as an adult, it is not something she regularly thinks about.

Sometimes do, sometimes do not. Do not because I grew up in Chinese culture and went to Chinese school and ate Chinese food. Do because of DNA and potential diseases.

This final portion of the section shows the adoptees who do not identify as if they are adopted. By this, I mean to say that they did not express themselves as adoptees. They are aware they are adopted, but it is not something they regularly choose to acknowledge. In this specific area, it demonstrates the underlying narrative of adoptee identity uncertainty as they try to articulate who they think they are for a particular audience. Mia, Brittney, Allison and Zoey are four of the adoptees who said they do not consider themselves as adopted. A commonality for these four adoptees is that they do not feel like they need to introduce themselves as such or that day to day it does not come up in a way that they need to recognize themselves in that light.

Mia, a 19-year-old from Ottawa has moved out from living with her parents. For her, considering herself as an adoptee presented itself more when she was with her parents. As she is living on her own, she doesn't feel like it comes up as often.

I do not consider myself as someone who is adopted. It comes up more when I am with my parents. As I am living on my own, it does not come up as much. When I was younger, through sports, I would be questioned. Now that I am mostly alone, it does not come up that much.

Brittney, one of the oldest adoptees interviewed for my project, had a different response from Mia. She does not identify or introduce herself as someone who is adopted but she recognizes that she is an adopted individual. Similar to some of the other adoptees' responses, Brittney does not recall when she would have been told she was adopted. She is often asked this question and feels like it may have been in 5th or 6th grade that she was told but cannot recall. She told me, "No, it does not cross my mind of introducing myself as that. I know that I am, but I am not actively thinking about it."

Allison is also a unique adoptee in that she was the oldest of those interviewed to be adopted. She was adopted as a toddler. When I asked her when she believed she was told she was adopted, she was more aware of the time frame than the other adoptees. She believes she has

known all along. Being adopted at three years old, she mentioned how at a toddler age, children are often more aware of their surroundings. She said, “I know I am adopted, but because it is part of my identity, I do not think about it all the time. You just know. I do not bring attention to it since it is so normal to me.”

Zoey has always known she was adopted, as her mom used to read books to her. These books were adoption books that said she was this, or she was that. When asked if Zoey identified as someone who was adopted, she said she had mixed feelings.

Yes and no. Day to day, I do not feel I am adopted. Family is family. My mom is completely Canadian. When other people see us together they will start asking questions and then I go through the whole ‘I’m adopted’ thing.

In sum, this section was meant to show how difficult it can be for adoptees to come to terms with the fact that they were adopted. For some, it was very quick and simple to address that they felt adopted for certain reasons (whether that be because they were told through books, they had gone to Chinese school with other adoptees), or to identify as not adopted for other reasons (just knowing and not drawing attention to it in their day to day lives). It was often the participants who felt somewhere between identities that really stood out. This stood out to me for personal reasons. In trying to incorporate the occasional excerpt of my own lived experiences, I can say that one of the easiest ways in which you can explain the adoptee experience is living in between identities. Physically, we Chinese-Canadian adoptees look Chinese, but culturally, many of us are being brought up in households that do not have Chinese individuals, that do not speak languages like Mandarin, and who may not regularly practice or celebrate Chinese affiliated holidays or customs. In contrast, some of us have grown up going to Mandarin classes or travelling abroad to feel closer to our cultural roots, while others have not been outside of Canada since they were adopted. As I have gotten older, and as some of these adoptees have

shared, you do get curious. If you have not been exposed to Chinese customs, traditions and ways of living, you may want to explore that side of you.

This question of identifying as adopted or not led to a rich and informative discussion with each participant. It was interesting to hear when an individual may have been told or taught about adoption and how it was brought up amongst their friends and families. Talking with adoptive parents in my community, I learned there is no specific time when a parent feels comfortable to address that their child is adopted. Some of their kids were curious at a younger age than others, so they had to address it either through conversations with the whole family, or by introducing them to characters from books who were also adopted. I conclude from this that there is no universal time to introduce a child to the fact that they adopted.

From this question and others that arose in my discussions with Chinese-Canadian adoptees, I hope to have offered a better understanding to readers about the adoptee experience and how they have been socialized and told to recognize and respond to being adopted. I have not completed myself, nor have I done any research to review how biological parents narrate stories of their past and present lives to their children, so it is not completely clear whether or not the stories expressed by these adoptees are particular to them being adopted. It would be interesting to hear how a parent tells the story of them having their child biologically and how that differs from the stories adopted parents share with their children. As I write this, I reflect on how this is not the narrative of this project. As previously stated, my focus is on the adoptee experience and not the narratives that the parents may have about or for their adopted children. While the stories of being told they are adopted have come from the parents, it is the children who are recounting them. The chapter as a whole is really showing the interest I have in better understanding the adoptee experience.

Adoption as a Meaning-Making Experience

In this final section, I uncover the stories of adoptees who have said adoption has been a meaning making experience for their identity. By this, I mean that the adoptee has perhaps felt empowered in particular instances, because of this special characteristic of them being adopted. For this part of the semi-structured interviews, I asked participants whether or not they felt proud to be adopted. Many had difficulties answering this question, as they did not feel “proud” was the best way to encapsulate their feelings. Instead, they talked about their struggles. They shared with me whether or not they felt there were challenges to being adopted. These challenges ranged from how to handle difficult conversations with members of their family, people at work, or with strangers they meet in their day to day lives. They also spoke of how being adopted has made their life better. To further explain this, would be to say that some adoptees feel proud to be adopted. They articulated that they were thankful to be matched with such a loving family and be given lots of opportunities in a new country. From the participants’ answers below, three discussed how they have handled hardships in their life from being adopted. Another two talked about being in between identities and trying to feel a sense of belonging to a culture. The last three talked about what makes them proud to be adopted. All in all, each adoptee shared how being adopted has been a meaningful process for them.

First, I share with you Allison’s story on handling hardships. In her interview, Allison said it was not so much that there were lots of difficulties or hardships for herself in being adopted. It was more difficult for her to figure out how to react to others’ interpretations of her. In our discussion, Allison said it isn’t that she is proud of being adopted, nor does she feel ashamed, it is more that she does not let it get in the way of her being who she would like to be. She said she is grateful to have been adopted, that it is ‘cool’ for her.

The difficulties are when you meet new people and somehow it gets brought up into the conversation, particularly about family. Reactions have been ‘poor you’ or ‘omg, you are adopted? I could never tell’. It is about handling the reactions when people feel bad for you, but you do not understand why.

Victoria handled hardships within her own adopted family. Victoria grew up in a family where her parents had children who were biologically related to them. Unfortunately for them, their children (Victoria’s older siblings) became quite sick and passed away.

If my parents did not have biological children that were sick, I would not have been adopted into that family. Hardships have stemmed from society in my situation. They come from people in my workplace saying I am different and asking questions that make me feel uncomfortable. It makes me question myself and being adopted.

Growing up, Victoria and her family had to deal with death in their family. For Victoria, that came at a very young age. Now as she has become older, she shared that the hardships she faces come from interactions with people in her day to day life, such as colleagues at work. Their perceptions of her and who they think she is have affected how she sees herself and her life as an adoptee.

Third is Elizabeth’s story. Elizabeth too has had to navigate handling hardships in her life. What sets her story apart from Allison’s, and from the other adoptees interviewed, was that Elizabeth was with a foster family before she was adopted. Elizabeth had the opportunity of visiting her foster family. In conversations, they told her where the authorities had found her, which was on the side of a street. While connecting with her foster family was helpful, Elizabeth still has unanswered questions. She says,

It is hard not knowing everything in the background. I was with a foster family who knew where I was found. I have visited my foster family but have unanswered questions.

In unpacking what Elizabeth had to say, I can really appreciate what she had to say in the fact that she feels like she would perhaps be more familiar with herself, if she knew more about

where she came from. She was the only adoptee in this project to have said she was with a foster family, and the only one who had connected with them. All that to say, she still has unanswered questions. Elizabeth later on in our interview said she would not like to search for her birth parents, but that she would like to know more about her history, her past and any relevant medical history that may be useful for her.

These first three adoptees shared what it was like to face hardships that were created before they were adopted, and ones that were outside of their control. For them, the opinions of others and how they view them as individuals and adoptees shaped how they felt they ought to act or how they should identify themselves.

These next two adoptees discussed with me the realities of what it is like to be adopted. They shared that they feel they have a stronger sense of belonging and are comfortable with these realities. Maria talked about the narrative of adoptees and how in truth, adoption for what it is, is an incredible act. For the adoptee, she expressed how an adoptee fills the space for someone or a group of people (a person or a family) who wanted a child. While when Maria was younger, she was taught about the nuclear family, her family was different from that norm. Not just because she was adopted, but because she was raised by a single parent: her mom. For her, being adopted has been meaningful in developing her character because she feels a strong sense of belonging.

You are wanted by a family or person who wanted a baby. Especially when I was younger, it was awkward to describe an alternative family situation other than your regular nuclear family.

Maria and I talked about how it can be hard looking different than members in your family or in your social or community networks. She said she routinely forgets that she is an immigrant in

Canada but that it is interesting in some ways to say that she is. She doesn't feel adoption inhibits her by any means, but it is something that she does notice in her day to day life.

Maisy and my conversation was more analytical and about who she is and about being adopted. She did not feel completely proud to be adopted but she also did not feel dismayed about the fact that she was adopted. She accepted that she had been adopted when she was younger and says it is just part of her identity at this point. She went on to share that she isn't proud, she does not find it difficult, but that it is just part of her life and that she is very grateful to have been adopted.

I do not know. Proud of being adopted...it is not something I am proud about and it is not something I am not proud about. It is just part of my identity. There is nothing hard or proud, I have just accepted that I am adopted.

What I make of this, and all the discussion I had with Maisy, was that she is an accepting individual. She said it is not something particularly out of the ordinary for her, rather it is a fact of who she is. She is grateful to have been adopted. She does not feel as though "proud" is the right terminology, rather, in her words, "it is just kind of normal." I also liked how Maisy helped me challenge my own thinking. She said, "It is like asking someone if they are proud to be black or white or religious or not religious, it is just part of your identity and who you are."

Both Maria and Maisy said to me that being adopted is a natural fact to who they are. They say it is an experience that makes you appreciate being wanted by someone and that helps others form a family in alternative ways. In other words, there are times where it just does not feel particularly different or unique to be adopted compared to someone who is not. Upon inferring what these adoptees have shared, it would appear as though they do not quite identify as being adopted. Or at least, they do not make that part of them take over their whole identities.

These last three participants shared how proud they are to have been adopted. They disclosed to me the joys that being adopted has brought to them and their families. These adoptees feel it is about how a family is created. They said it does not have to be biologically, but a family can be socially created. It is about how you are constantly feeling loved by someone. Being proud is not the only thing that these adoptees have shared about being adopted, but it is certainly a dominating factor. Lily shared how her family is diverse. She likes that she is not visibly the same to other members in her family.

I was not birthed from my mother but being adopted helps hopefully other people realize that you do not need to be genetically related to someone to be part of a family. I like that my family is diverse. I realize I am the visible minority in my family, but I like the fact that I am not visibly the same.

Amelia shared a lot of joy and happiness in her interview. She is proud to have been adopted into the family that she has. She says they all feel a strong, close knit connection to one another. While being a proud adoptee has definitely dominated her narrative of who she is, she shared that there have also been challenges. One challenge is that she does not feel as independent as her not-adopted peers. From our discussion, she said:

I can say I would not be where I am today if I was not in this loving family. Who knows what my life would be like. Challenges for me come from a sense of loneliness and that I do not have the sense of independence as most people do. I feel loved and always wanted but my sister is different in that she resents the fact that she was left on a doorstep.

Amelia said the sense of pride she has from being adopted is directly linked to the loving family she has been adopted into. The challenges have been factors of abandonment and independence. Amelia still lives at home and is dependent on her family. They still provide a shelter for her and because she has not moved out yet, she feels she lacks a proper sense of self and independence. Amelia's story began when she was only a few months old. She shared how she was told of being abandoned and just left on someone's doorstep. She carries this sense of loneliness with

her and how she looks for extra love. She knows she was abandoned at one point in her life and that has stuck with her.

Olivia said she too had a contrasting view of what it means to be adopted for her but like Amelia, being proud of who she is dominated the discussion. Olivia embraces the differences in her background and lived experience from her peers.

I am proud to have a different cultural background and experience. I moved back there while I was a teenager. Proud of my ethnic heritage. Proud of my mom for being the type of woman to go to China and give a better life to a child.

Olivia comes across as surer of herself and who she is, as she was exposed to the culture and heritage of her country of origin through her mom and her own choosing. That being said, Olivia does experience challenges. These come from the construction of her family. She is grateful for having a mom who has exposed her to her Chinese heritage and background by travelling back to China, but she does feel it is different (and perhaps lacking) in just having a single parent raise you.

It is a different family structure. I have a single mom. I cannot talk about having a father. It is a different way of being raised. I do not know if it is different from a single parent raising a child. Visually, I do not look like my mom. It is not a particularly challenging thing, just something you grow up with.

In this area of meaning making experiences for adoptees, I have uncovered what moments in time or what activities have helped adoptees form their identity. Through various actions of the adoptees or by others around them (their family or people in their immediate environments, such as at school or at work) these adoptees have claimed the experiences to have been meaningful for them. In this portion of the chapter, I shared instances where adoptees felt proud of being adopted, moments where they felt they were in-between identities, and moments where they faced many challenges. Recall that the stories these adoptees shared (their triumphs and hardships) may not be particularly unique to solely adoptees. While they were the target

group for this research project, I cannot comment on whether what these adoptees experienced was just because they were adopted, or because of their living situations, jobs and people they interact with. These adoptees shared if, when, and where, challenges had arisen in their lives and what has been special in their life. For many, those special moments were sparked because they were adopted. In sum, regardless of if these adoptees have expressed they are happy or uncomfortable with being adopted, they all share a commonality of feeling like adoption has been rooted in how they view themselves. To unpack this, I mean to say that regardless of if they have a positive connection with being adopted, or if they resent the fact that they were adopted, adoption has been an integral part in helping them to express who they are. Adoption has opened some to more travel experiences, like with Olivia and being able to connect with her Chinese cultural background by visiting and living in China. Or, in Amelia's case, how much love she feels with her adopted family and her adopted sister and how she does not feel like she would be where she is today without her loving family here in Canada.

Conclusion

I was pleasantly surprised by the detailed discussions I had with each and every participant. Each discussion was so personal and certainly not linear. By this, I mean to say that participants really showed me their true selves. Explained above in the methods section, this project was a first experience for me in getting to interview fellow adoptees. While there was more of a question/answer format to this project, I do feel that the conversations the adoptees and I had with one another, were very emotional and true to who they were. I truly appreciated getting to know each and every one of the adoptees and hearing what they have gone through to get to where they are today. For some, it is a developmental process of being more comfortable

with being in the shoes of someone who is adopted, while for others, they are still in between identities and are struggling to know who they are meant to be and who they would like to be. Being an adoptee myself, I feel like I am at an advantage with these discussions and this research. I view being an adoptee and researching other adoptees as a strength, as it gives me access to communities and narratives that other researchers may not easily be exposed to or be permitted to ask about. It is as the participants said: they feel like their communities are strong and that their support systems lie with other adoptees that they know or people who have shared experiences with them or who were adopted on the same adoption trip as each other. I think one of the key takeaways from this was hearing from adoptees how much easier it can be for them to talk to other adoptees. As Maria says, it's nice to have a group of friends (fellow adoptees) to talk with about what you are going through. Or as Lauren says, it is important for adoptees to stay connected to fellow adoptees and to be culturally aware. Lauren also said it is just nice to know somebody like you. I am grateful to my participants for allowing me to ask them personal questions about their lives and for giving me permission to expose their stories to others.

Much of what has already been produced on international adoption, experiences of Chinese-Canadian adoptees or the process of adoption has been produced by individuals who may not have that same lived experience. For this chapter, I tried to demonstrate the adoptee perspective. The goal was to have the adoptees' voices out front and center. While the stories that many researchers have access to have been about adoptees through another person's eyes, this chapter specifically gives space for the adoptee experience. It discussed self-identification and it aimed to show how adoptees have grown to comprehend who they are and how they can live in their racial and ethnic identities and adopted cultures. The experiences shared from these adoptees are meant to give readers a better understanding of what Chinese-Canadian adoptees go

through when growing up here in Canada. Their stories are most certainly the ones that shape their identities.

The adoptees' stories were divided into sub topics and were all looking to answer the following research questions: 1) How do Chinese-Canadian adoptees navigate the dilemma of preserving a connection to their birth culture? 2) How have Chinese-Canadian adoptees integrated their new adopted culture into their identity/sense of self? The three sub areas of this chapter were discussing: how 'home' is shaped and where it is for the adoptee, whether the adoptee feels they connect themselves to being adopted and when/why they feel this way and finally, how adoption has made for meaningful experiences for the adoptees. My intention in writing this chapter was to share with others how Chinese-Canadian adoptees are trying to form their identity. With that, one can see there is a dilemma in trying to preserve the Chinese part of their identity while also trying to grow into the Canadian side of their identity.

Chapter 3: Forming a sense of belonging in the community

Introduction

As described in the previous chapter and in the literature review, I did not come across too many academic studies or reports about Chinese-Canadian adoptees, written by adoptees or with contributions from adoptees themselves. Mainly what has been said to date about international adoption and the experiences of adoptees has been from the point of view of adoptive parents or from scholars in the field. Continuing to showcase the adoptees' point of view, this chapter shows the narrative of adoptees through their own lens. It does so by discussing how others have helped them socially construct their identity. While the previous chapter was on self-identification, this one is on social-identification. It intertwines the topics of the last chapter to see how adoptees form their identity, but in this case, we see the formation come through narratives and preconceived ideas that are out of the adoptees' control. The chapter shows what Chinese-Canadian adoptees have had to go through in the course of shaping their identities. From hearing racist slurs or inappropriate comments shouted out to them, to curiosity from outsiders about their family makeup, there are many stories to unpack of how adoptees view themselves through the lens of others. Here, I examine the adoptees from my project who have been in difficult social situations and see how they reach out for support and find their sense of community through the experiences.

Like the previous chapter, I have divided the quotes from adoptees into separate areas and also seek to answer the questions for this research project: 1) How do Chinese-Canadian adoptees navigate the dilemma of preserving a connection to their birth culture? 2) How have Chinese-Canadian adoptees integrated their new adopted culture into their identity/sense of self? The three sections of this chapter are: race and the expectations of others identifying them as

“other”; how much social identity is shaped by family settings; whether the adoptee identifies as adopted and if they do, who they choose to turn to for support during difficult periods in their life. In this chapter readers will again see how this narrative of confidence in conforming to your identities and understanding the different backgrounds you may have, can play out in an adoptee’s life. As with the previous chapter, auto-ethnography and reflexivity are intertwined throughout as I wanted to show readers how I responded and interacted with each of my participants and the stories they shared with me.

Expectation of Others Identifying Adoptees as the “Other”

Outlined in this first area of the chapter are instances when adoptees experienced racist remarks from others in their day-to-day lives. I chose stories from interviewees who talked about times at work, at school, or out in their community when they were told to be or act one way, or another based on their race. I have defined racism as when someone has prejudice for someone or is discriminating against another individual based on the belief that their race is superior. In these instances, these individuals were picked on based on what others had expected of them. In the stories coming up, readers will see how others picked on the adoptees because of how they looked, their educational and cultural experiences, and the skills they demonstrated in environments like their workplace.

First is Allison’s story. Allison shared with me stories from when she was younger and had experienced racism in her life. She said these moments were not too common but when they did occur, it was in an environment where she was at school or at work.

I remember one incident from when I was 7. A girl in an older grade asked me why my face was so flat. She maybe didn’t understand how racist that was because she was maybe 8-9. When I was eighteen years old and working at a grocery store, an elderly

a man came through my cash. I spoke too quickly and mumbled, and he said “speak English, you are in Canada” aggressively and walked away.

When I asked Allison about these routine instances and how she responded to what she was told, particularly when she was 18 years old and perhaps old enough to remember the stories, she said she would just talk to her mom about what happened. Similarly, Allison shared an incident from when she was at camp. In this particular story, when her mom came to pick her up, she shared that the counsellor had addressed her [Allison] with “oh, your grandma is here to pick you up.” Allison said she has a mom who is older and that others in public often mistake their relationship for being that Allison is her mom’s caregiver or that her mom is perhaps her grandmother. This particular instance does not necessarily correlate with race, but it is another way of showing how adoptees’ social identities are created based on the ideas of others. I too, have an older parent and have had it happen to me on numerous occasions when a teacher or swim instructor has had to try to acknowledge my mother for one reason or another, but because they aren’t aware of our relationship, they just freeze and do not know how to address us. I, like Allison, just talk to my mother about it. As I have been trying to present in this piece, I find writing about adoptees by adoptees is this lens where others who have not lived in our shoes can see what we may routinely have to go through. Doctors, adoptive parents, and scholars in the field would most likely be sharing other stories and perspectives. I myself am more likely to open up about a story related to adoption to a friend who is also adopted, than some who are not adopted. I find it is easier to confide and connect with others who are going through the same experiences as me.

Jessica experienced racism in school a bit more often than some of the other adoptees. She mentioned how stereotypes, Chinese and Canadian, were placed on her quite frequently in her academic environments.

I would get the math stereotype: “oh you are Asian, you should be good at math.” For math problems, I was always being asked for help. Canadian stereotypes were when I was volunteering for an adoption organization. People said I did not say ‘sorry’ as much as they expected. It bothered me a little bit. Stereotypes are just labels that people put on someone. Sure, we say sorry a lot, but it does not mean I am not Canadian enough if I do not say “sorry that often.”

On top of these racist or stereotypical instances Jessica, like Allison, has also been questioned about her relationship to her parents. One moment that stood out to her was when she was travelling with her parents to the United States. The border security agents at first would not let her and her mom cross together since they did not look alike. She shared that her mother had to talk to the gentlemen and explain their family make up. Again, this is an instance where an adoptee is identified as “other”, especially in the context of their family. They are isolated from others based on their appearance; based on their race. In this story, the border security agents did not believe Jessica should be crossing the border with her family, since she did not look like her parents.

Lily has experienced racism in her workplace. She works at the grocery store, Farm Boy, as a chef and sometimes handles the stir fry station.

One day this lady was trying to say I was a natural at making stir fries because I am Chinese. I was trying to explain that I have experience because I have worked here for 2 years. She lost it. I said I was adopted at 11 months and raised by white people and I do not know what you are talking about. Five years ago, if someone said something, I would just go home and cry. Now if someone says something, I say something like “That is not respectful.”

Lily has experienced racism like the other adoptees, but in her case, it was an expectation that she would be good at preparing a certain dish. Lily has developed different strategies than the other adoptees in handling tough discussions. She calls the individuals out if they have done something wrong. Lily made a point to remind me that while these adoptees have unfortunately

experienced racist and stereotypical remarks, the remarks she has received do not necessarily correlate to her being adopted. Primarily it is because of their race; they are Chinese. Again, this emphasizes the “otherness” of the adoptee in the space of race and how they are different than the norm.

Victoria’s story sheds light on how others in society have decided to point out the difference in an adoptee’s lives with theirs. Victoria said she has not ever heard anything blatantly racist targeted towards her, but that people have asked her ‘how long are you here for?’ or ‘is that shirt from China?’ In a recent encounter when she went to visit her family for her grandfather’s funeral in Port Colborne, she said a woman made an inappropriate remark.

The woman asked me where I was from. It was an inappropriate question and inappropriate situation. It was about identifying with the fact that I am different. I did not want to educate her but wanted her to understand. Saying you are adopted should be enough for most people. It is a reality that I have to go through.

Victoria pointed out in her interview that these stories and remarks not only devalue and isolate the adoptee, but they also devalue the parents. There was a time when Victoria was at a gas station with her mother and the attendant had asked them “Where is her mother?” When Victoria and her mother responded that they were a mother daughter group, the attendant had responded with: “No, you are not. She is Chinese.” Victoria had a very mature reaction to this situation and rightfully points out that saying you’re adopted should be enough for most people. Victoria and other adoptees in this project have said they do not feel they owe anyone an explanation of who they are unless they wish to disclose that information. Victoria was very understanding of this situation and shared with me that she wishes she had more tools for coping with what may be thrown her way. She does not believe individuals are trying to be malicious with their comments. I give thought to this part of our interview and I am in awe. Victoria’s comments helped me have a better understanding of my project and its purpose. Readers may read this and think this paper

will be read and perhaps meant for adoption scholars or adoptive parents, but they are wrong. It is indeed for them, but it is also for the adoptees themselves. I had wanted to write a piece where adoptees could pull from the ideas of fellow adoptees to know how to handle difficult situations and to be able to relate to similar experiences.

It was with Victoria's comment that I was reminded why this project is so important. This thesis is for everyone. Not just adoptees, not just their parents, not just for those who wish to adopt in the future or for those who have an interest in studying adoption, but for all. This study and discussion that adoptees have had about their lives is a way for others to understand who we are and how we wish to be identified. Why is this important? What do we endure if the work isn't done? Or if adoptees' voices are not brought forward? More rude comments can be made. Racist comments. Inappropriate comments in the workplace. Inappropriate comments at a funeral. Who knows? There are lots of people researching adoption (doctors, parents, policy analysts, etc.) but by creating a space where adoptees can talk about themselves and to an audience of other adoptees, we can better understand how these individuals see themselves. By addressing some common challenges adoptees may face, and hearing their stories first hand from them, I hope others can adapt and change the way they approach everyday difficult situations with adoptees.

Lauren told me that she faces difficulties in others thinking she should be "more Chinese." She said she does not get rude comments based on being adopted, but that in her social environments outside of work and school, she has been told mean remarks and that when travelling, there have been assumptions made by strangers based on their personal expectations of her.

It is more comments on being Chinese. Adoption is pretty good. With Girl Guides cookie selling, a man once told me to go back to my country. That does not happen very

often. I'm lucky living in Ottawa. Generally, people are pretty nice. I experienced racism when I went back to China, people assumed I could speak Mandarin.

Unfortunately, Lauren is not the first to be told to be "more Chinese." In fact, in one way or another, all of these adoptees have been told to conform or behave a certain way based on how the other in the situation wants them to. Being told to act or behave a certain way based on what others want, is again showcasing this narrative and disconnect many adoptees have in knowing what should be happening to them and what is happening. Leading in to this, is Zoey's story and how teachers expected her to have a Chinese last name based on her appearance. To respect Zoey's confidentiality, I am not sharing her proper last name. Instead, I have chosen a pseudonym while keeping the story she shared with me intact. Zoey's last name is Wee. Growing up, teachers would correct her and say "Li." Li is a very common Chinese last name. Zoey would spend time calling out her teachers and correcting them until she eventually gave up. It got to the point where she had to correct them so often that she just allowed them to call her whatever they thought was right.

Teachers had to correct me. Eventually I gave up and said to just call me whatever. In a store, I always have to spell my last name. If I do not, they will spell it wrong. It is really annoying.

Zoey's stories are prime examples of how adoptees are being told they are this or they are that in others' minds, based on prior assumptions these individuals may have had with people who looked like them. A story to go hand in hand with what Zoey has shared, would be of a personal time, when I had the name game placed on me. It was the first day of Spanish class. It was a second- or third-year class where I had known many of my previous classmates due to taking other Spanish classes together, but none of us had had this professor prior. I had not thought much about attendance at the time, I know I have a very Scottish last name of Stewart, but I had

not ever been questioned about it like I had in this situation. As the professor is going through the list of names “Sally Smith”, “Bob Thompson”, “Jessica Robertson”, she gets to one that stumps her. I could not recall the exact name, but for the story, I have used a similar sounding name. She said, “Guangzhu Woo?.” As she said this, she looked directly at me. I remember looking around the room and seeing that I was the only Asian in the classroom. Again, the professor pressed on “Guangzhu Woo. ARE YOU GAUNGZHU WOO?” By this point she was practically shouting at me. I think she raised her voice because she was worried I would not understand her English. Once more, from both Zoey and my stories, we see how race and expectations of others, get us to believe that is who others see us as and that racism is normalized in adoptees’ living situations.

Taylor said he has been addressed by slurs from construction workers as he has walked past work sites. He said it only happened to him once but that he remembered it. In school, he would have others come up to him making funny faces with their eyes. Taylor otherwise has not experienced many racist comments or inappropriate conversations with strangers. It is solely these incidents that have stuck with him. I say these are “isolated” incidents, but mainly, that is for the particular individual. They feel like what they have encountered does not occur in their lives every day, but in reality, it is not isolated and many adoptees (as seen by the stories shared so far) have experienced racist remarks in their lives growing up. In Taylor’s story that they remember, it was comments from construction workers. He said it was not really a slur, but kind of.

I once got kind of slurs called out to me by construction workers. That was the only time. It has kind of stuck out to me. In high school, they would make funny faces with their eyes and that just came out of nowhere.

When I had asked Taylor about the frequency of these stories and if this would happen very often, he said that it was rather unusual for others to make inappropriate remarks towards him. It is really these one-off stories that he remembers. For instance, there was a time when he was at a jewelry store with his mom and sister. The salesperson had asked the family how they were all related. Taylor's mom had responded "these are my kids." Taylor said he was not too bothered by the whole situation but was also questioning why the salesperson had asked in the first place. He did not believe they needed to know that much. Taylor, like some of the other adoptee stories previously mentioned, has only spoken of these one-off stories. Otherwise he did not say he had regular encounters where he has experienced racist remarks. As with the other adoptees, he has shared a time when he and his family were picked out of a crowd based on their visible differences. He said he was at a jewelry store one time and that he and his mom and sister were asked by a sales associate how they all knew each other. Taylor's mom spoke up to say that the two individuals with her were her children. Taylor said he did not really have an issue with the situation but also expressed that he did not feel it was the salesperson's business to know what connection he had to the two other people he had walked in with.

Brittney stressed that comments and racist remarks are all too common for her, and other adoptees she knows. She says it is a real challenge for her as she grew up Canadian, and really has no connection to Asian culture.

So, I have always had this battle between what "category" of race I fall into. I hate all of the racist jokes (about being short, wearing glasses, or being good at math, etc.). Yes, I have had people ask before how I knew my mom. And my mom would say "this is my daughter" and the person would seem confused and then say, "ah yes, I see the resemblance." In general, whenever we travel or go anywhere together, people seem confused when I say this is my mom.

This section of the chapter expresses moments when adoptees experienced racist comments from others in their lives based on how they look. The stories shared above were from adoptees who said they were victims of racist remarks at work, at school, or out in their communities and how they dealt with what was thrown their way. These were times when others were dissatisfied by what they saw in terms of the adoptees' skills (such as an adoptee who was working the stir fry station at Farm Boy) or in what they saw of the adoptees' family make up (like at the jewelry store when the attendant had to comment on Taylor's guests whom she walked into the store with). This is not to say that only adoptees experience racism. I find these stories significant to my understanding of adoption as it would appear that they experience racism oftentimes when they are with their family members. Visually speaking, they look different than their parents, so it is one way for a stranger to perhaps pick on them. In thinking about how adoptees experience a sense of insecurity the more detached they are from their country of origin, of course this is present here. Those who felt more present with themselves as a Chinese individual was due to physical traits. The adoptees said they felt less connected, or as phrased here, 'more detached', when they were not living up to the expectations of others, such as being able to speak Mandarin or making a stir-fry in a certain way. Failing to meet other expectations of them meant they were left to feel insecure of who they are. I cannot comment on how these experiences might differ from someone who were to narrate from a non-adoptee perspective (as I am adopted myself) but I would assume that the individual would not have as many remarks from strangers when they are with their families. Appearance has played a significant role in all the stories shared by these adoptees and I feel like had they looked like their parents or spoken the language others had thought they spoke, they perhaps would not be made fun of as much or as frequently. This section was meant to showcase what adoptees have to

go through on a daily basis, whether at school, work, or in social situations with their friends and family and how they (and others) handle the situations.

How much social identity is shaped by family setting

In the previous section, I discussed some key experiences of racism from some of the adoptees interviewed for this project. In many cases, they were exposed to negative interactions with strangers in the workplace or on social excursions whereby the stranger made a racist or inappropriate comment to the adoptee. The expectations from the other made for a dominant understanding of the adoptee. If the comment was that they “should speak the language”, it was an insult saying that the adoptee may have an accent and should speak more clearly. Or if the individual made a comment on the shape of their eyes, it was isolating the adoptee to show that they were different from others around them. Really what the last section had done was showcased the “other” in the adoptee. Instances where the adoptee was outed for being different were brought to the front to see how adoption and race and otherness have come together. In this section, I examine how these adoptees have identified their family structure and how having a connection to their family has shaped the understanding of their own self.

For this question, I asked adoptees how many people are in their families, who the members are, and if they are particularly close to one member. Each adoptee had a different response from the next. In school it would seem as though, many were taught about a standard nuclear family of a mom, dad and two kids, but this was not the common makeup for most of these adoptees and their families. If anything, that formation was the minority. There were some adoptees who had a mom and dad, some who had single parents, some with divorced parents, some with adopted siblings, some who had adopted siblings from another country than where

they were adopted from, and some who had siblings who were biologically related to their adoptive parents. In each scenario, the adoptee was attached to a member of their family that was different to what the last adoptee said, and for different reasons. Below are the stories from some of the adoptees interviewed about their families and who they are closest with.

To begin, Kristen shared that she is not so much connected to her adopted parents, rather she is connected to her son. Her son is biologically related to her and with that connection, she feels a special parental bond. She talked about how there is something natural about connecting with a child that was in your stomach for 9 months. In her family, Kristen has a mom, a dad and a brother. Her brother is biologically related to her parents and is married.

In my family it is my parents; mom and dad. My brother is married to his wife. I have a son and am probably closest to him. There is a parental bond. Nine months in the stomach. Also, my brother is biologically related to my parents.

Kristen's story is unique to me. Her adoption experience tells me that one can have strong connections to someone both biologically and socially. In talking with Kristen, it did not sound as though she did not have any connection with her parents or brother, but rather, she had a stronger connection with her son. I would imagine, as she shared, her brother being biologically related to her adoptive parents, that he may feel closest to them. Kristen's story reminded me how connection works. In an adopted child's situation, it is socially and emotionally created. Kristen identified a different connection because she has this biological relationship. None of the other adoptees in this project had a biological connection with a family member. It was interesting to hear that Kristen did, and how that has had such an impact on her outlook on life.

As previously stated, Olivia is an adoptee who is an only child. Her family is very small. She was adopted by a single parent, her mother, who she grew up to be quite close with. Where Olivia truly feels connected however, is culturally with other kids who are adopted. For her, her

social identity has largely been created and influenced through connections she has had with other adoptees.

Experiencing culture and being grouped with other adopted kids. They grew with me. My mom took me to China to travel and for me to experience my cultural background. It helped me sort of be proud of being Chinese. Important to connect with China and Canada. Belong to both worlds.

What I found particularly appealing in what Olivia had shared with me was how she was able to travel back to China and to experience her cultural background. Not only did Olivia travel back to China with her mother, but she lived there during her adolescence for a bit too. She said with this social, environmental experience, she was able to understand her identity a bit better. She gave insight into how she believes it is important for a Chinese-Canadian adoptee to connect with China and Canada. She argued that adoptees should belong to both worlds.

Mia, too, found she was more connected to the social side of her identity when she was outside of her parents' home. In Mia's family, there are four people. It is her, her sister (who is also adopted from China), and their mom and dad. While Mia feels close to most of her family and she feels her family is pretty close knit in general, she relates most to her dad. Mia is studying engineering and her dad is an engineer. She also has a good relationship with her sister in that they laugh together and make Asian jokes. Apart from that, she does not really have any deep conversations with her family. Now that Mia has moved out of her house for school, she finds it easier for her to connect with herself and to set her own rules. She told me, "I find it easier that I am not constantly connected with my parents. I can do my own thing. I am just myself. If anything, it has gotten easier."

Mia's experience differs here from Olivia's as she feels socially connected to her adopted self and less so to her family. While Olivia felt close to her mom and thought her connection to her adopted self was impacted based on the experiences her mom exposed her to, Mia is the

opposite. She has found that she has been able to grow more as an individual by not being surrounded by her parents all the time or living under their roof.

Jessica has been living a different life, one where adoption is very open in her family and one where she is particularly close with her parents in talking about her adoption story and birth parents. Jessica has grown up with a mom, dad, and a sister who is also adopted from China. She feels closest to her dad as he can keep secrets and she can tell him things that she can't tell her other family members or her friends. Jessica's social identity is greatly influenced by the connection she has with her family, especially when they talk about the connection she has with adoption. She said, "My parents have always been open about adoption; my mom particularly. She will talk about it and ask me questions, 'Do you want to find your birth parents? I will support you on that'."

I found Jessica's interview to be quite unique. Many articles on adoption have expressed that it is not uncommon for adoptees to go searching for their birth parents. What is often talked about, is how the adoptee wishes to find their birth parents or other family members who are biologically related to them. What is interesting in Jessica's family is that her adoptive parents (specifically her mother), are very open to her finding them. I found this unique as none of the other adoptees had shared this with me. I do not know if that is because it does not come up often in their family conversations, or if they just do not have an interest in learning more.

Lauren is an only child too and living with two parents. She feels closest to her mom based on the profession her mom has. Her mom is a nurse in the neonatal intensive care sector and based on that factor alone, is very nurturing and affectionate. I understood from my interview with Lauren that while her mother sounds like a loving and caring individual, it is also outside of her character and in her professional life that she is nurturing and supportive to others.

Just my mom, dad and me. I have been an only child my whole life. I am closer to my mom. My mom is a nurse. She works in neonatal intensive care. She has worked there for more than 30 years. She is very nurturing and is more affectionate.

Amelia is an adoptee who, like some of the others, has two parents and an adopted sibling. In her family, she felt like she was closest to her dad growing up. As she has gotten older, that has changed to her being closest with her sister. She said in her interview that it has been easier to connect with her sister as she is also adopted and that they can share similar experiences or memories with each other. I understood with Amelia's story the importance of having someone live in the home with you who is also going through the same experience as you. While Amelia was not always close with her sister, her story highlighted to me that as they have both gotten older, they both need someone who is walking in the same shoes as the other to be able to bond further and to address difficult situations that only an adoptee would understand.

There are four people. My mom, my dad, my sister and me. Dad and I were close. My sister is probably who I am closest with now. My sister is also adopted but from different provinces and two years after me.

For these last three adoptees, Elizabeth, Brittney and Lauren, their responses to who they were closest with did not have anything to do with adoption. Their responses reflected other factors. Elizabeth said she was close to her siblings as they too are adopted. She is the oldest of three girls and is someone her parents can turn to show the way for her younger siblings and for her younger sisters to be able to look up to someone. Brittney's factors had to do with where her parents lived geographically, not on the adoption itself. She is closest with her mom because that is who she was able to regularly see and grow up with. Her dad lives in England. Finally, for Lauren, Lauren was closest to her mom because of her profession (the mom's) as a nurse. Lauren said her nature as a person and as nurse was loving and caring and that made them have a strong bond to one another. I include these three stories that differ from the others to again, focus on the

theme of how for some participants, their sense of belonging and connectivity to their family was influenced by adoption issues, but not necessarily rooted in them. This was about discovering closeness to someone biologically (like Kristen being most connected to her son that she gave birth to), something they did not otherwise experience or having a parental bond because of the support they receive for their adoption journey. It is clear that not all stories had to do with closeness of adoption. There were personal connections made that were unrelated to adoption.

To wrap up this section, once more I reiterate how this part of the chapter was meant to show how individuals have been socially influenced through their families. As shared by the adoptees above, there are some who were exposed to uncomfortable expectations placed on them in their place of work and at their schools. From those negative interactions, that is what the adoptees had come to permanently understand of themselves. It was through the expectations of others that they had grown to understand themselves. Their family makeup and dynamic has shaped the adoptees' understanding of themselves.

Hearing from adoptees about how their family was made up and who they are closest with and why illuminated how families are made and how you connect to your family members. For individuals like Kristen, biology played a significant factor in who they felt closest with. Kristen said it was having physically carried a child in her that made her feel especially close to someone. Whereas for some of the other adoptees it was having a sibling who was also adopted that helped them connect to themselves. I found this particularly interesting as Kristen was the only adoptee to comment on the biological connection. The others had felt they could be close enough to a parent due to shared interests or to a sibling if they were also adopted and were growing up with the same lived experiences.

Adoptee support systems

Beyond the connection to family comes the connection to other members in society and the adoptees' general community. This section deals with how adoptees have connected with others in their communities, school or work environments. I asked adoptees what kind of support system they have or whether or not they have a close-knit community of individuals who they can turn to when things are challenging. For this question, it was partially related to who they could resonate with if they were stuck on adoption related challenges, but it was also just a question about who they trust most in their lives and who they can confide in. The question was telling in itself as some naturally felt they were more grounded and more connected to those who were adopted. Others said the mere aspect of having Asian friends has helped them grow as an individual and come into their identity; those who said this remarked that it was helpful turning to people who look like them for advice. I would not say this was a salient feature, but my remark from what the adoptees had shared with me was that they were even more comfortable talking with others who had likewise experienced racism.

As for community building, I noticed this was shaped through the neighborhoods these adoptees come from; from school settings and whether there were other Chinese or adopted kids in their classes. Community building and networking also came from the adoption agency they were adopted through. In looking at the numbers from my interviews, those who felt a strong connection to their adoption and those of the adoption community, often felt this way because they took part in cultural celebrations with other adoptees. This allowed them to embrace their Chinese culture and to grow up knowing about it. What surprised me was how difficult it was for those who grew up in smaller communities, and for people who did not have other adoptees or other visible minorities in their surrounding circles. Not having the direct connection or access to

those of a particular community made the adoptees feel isolated and ashamed about being different from others around them. All these adoptees said it was important to have people to turn to.

Kristen removed herself from the discussion when I asked her where she felt she experienced community and support, focusing instead on other adoptees. Recall, Kristen is the adoptee who was adopted by two Chinese parents and whose brother is biologically related to her parents. For her, it was not as physically obvious for strangers to pick her out as an adoptee. Instead of commenting on what it is like in her shoes experiencing community and support, she generalized based on observations she has had on other adoptees. She said, I think Chinese adoptees have more Caucasian ways. I feel like they hang out with Caucasians more. I have more Asian friends and go to Chinese churches.” I was pleasantly surprised to hear Kristen bring up religion in her interview. As a non-religious individual, I anticipated these adoptees might share experiences that I possibly could not resonate with, i.e., speaking Mandarin fluently, attending church or having different cultural values or practices. It was interesting to hear that Kristen had more friends who were Chinese and this whole community she has from her church group. In other words, she experiences community and support from others who look like her and who are growing up in similar households and who are being brought up under the same faith; people who share the same beliefs as her and her family.

Taylor feels most empowered and involved in the adoptee community when he is bonding with other adoptees from the same agency as him. He also says he is close with his family and other adoptees in general. Taylor grew up with two Caucasian parents and a sister who is also adopted from China.

I experience support and a sense of community mostly with my family and the adoption group. Adoptees in general really. I know people who are from the same agency as I, but

they are not as involved in the agency and community as I.

Taylor wanted me to share some advice to other adoptees reading this. He says it is important to get involved with an adoption group. He said he knows a lot of adoptees from the same agency as him with whom he is close and that he has chosen to be involved in the agency to help him grow as an adoptee. He also knows adoptees who are not as involved as him, but for him, his advice is to integrate yourself. Jessica feels that being close to members in her neighborhood and the organizers in her adoption agency and how they communicated frequently with the members really helped her.

Agency events have helped. My neighborhood is also close. The organizers of the adoption agency communicates frequently and put events together such as for Chinese New Year or Canada Day. Even on our own time as adoptees, we hangout without them (the organizers) helping.

Victoria shared advice for connecting to others who are adopted. For her own adoptee perspective, she says that it is not easy for a Chinese adoptee to be connected to Chinese people, as you have not been brought up the same way as them. She said you are learning about the culture almost from an outsider's perspective.

Chinese people want to teach you more about your culture. You fundamentally cannot understand the culture as you were not brought up in it. It is important to build up a community with other families that are adopted.

Victoria said in her interview that she has relied on community building with other families that are in the same situation as her, and who are also trying to navigate the dilemma of trying to learn about another culture, from others who haven't completely immersed themselves in that culture.

Mia too used this time and space to offer advice. She says to build community, one must be open to talking about their adoption story. In her day-to-day life, she has not come across

anyone who is not open about talking about their past. She shared that there are certainly some who are more expressive or more sensitive, but that is their character and not necessarily because they are adopted.

Be open to talking about it. I have not met anyone who is not especially open to talking about their adoption story. I know some who are more sensitive. It is more their character and not because they are adopted. I do not consider it as something I need to shelter. I am fine sharing and talking about it.

Something that popped out to me from Mia's interview was how she mentioned that she does not feel talking about adoption should be something the adoptee hides. She said that it is valuable to talk with others who understand what you are going through or to educate those who do not, as you will be building a connection. Mia pointed out how important it is to have connections as you get older. I can echo this as with my own adoption journey; I would say I have a stronger sense of myself with the more adoptees I have been able to connect with each year. In meeting with these strangers-turned-friends, I feel both sides can benefit in having a friend who can resonate with what you go through in being an adoptee.

It is not uncommon for adoptees to say they have stayed in touch with their travel group (sometimes called an adoption group). For those who are not familiar with what a travel/adoption group is, it is a group of families who adopted babies at the same time (year and day). For instance, my mom adopted me alongside 12 other families in January 1998. There were 13 babies (myself included) in my travel group and we have all been quite close over the years. While some are geographically close to their travel groups, my group and I have been close online and through our own means of connection. When we began high school, we created a Facebook group, so we could keep up with one another. We also used to put together annual calendars where each adoptee would get associated with a month where they could share a photo

of themselves. Through these photos, we could learn from one another of our interests and talents.

Elizabeth's own lived experience as an adoptee and finding a sense of community and belonging stems from the close relationships she has with her travel group. She was with a travel group of eight adoptees and geographically speaking, they all have lived nearby to one another. For that reason alone, it has been easy for them all to keep in touch. She said if it was feasible that year, she would also attend big agency events (often held in Ottawa, farther from where she lived) and that she would stay with friends there and then go to the events.

I stayed close with my travel group. There were eight of us and I live in the same area as them so it was easy to keep in touch. FOI reunions are often in Ottawa. If we went, I would stay with friends and then go to the events.

Similar to what Elizabeth has done with her group in staying connected, and having vacation time to see each other, my adoption group and I are in our 20s and are getting into the AirBnB scene. We have just booked our first trip where we have said "anyone who can make it to a reunion is invited." We are hoping to catch up in person in the coming months.

Maria does not connect with travel groups as much. Instead, she said connection and community is about having a general friend group where you can feel supported. She said she knows a lot of people who connect with their friends online, but for her, she thinks it is easier to have people who you can communicate with face to face, in person.

For me, I stay connected through the same friend group. For other people, I know it has been with friends online. For some, I know it is easier. I think it is also about having those friends to talk to with what you are going through.

The meaning I take from this section of the chapter is that adoptees feel comfortable with other adoptees. Adoptees experience community and support mainly with other adoptees. Some adoptees experience community and support with non-adoptees but primarily for adoption

related connections, it is with others who have a shared experience with them. In those cases, those adoptees identified the individual as someone they can trust and confide in. One adoptee said that for adoptees to feel comfortable with who they are and in order to grow, they need to have at least one person they can share everything with. Many say it is a sibling or someone else who is also adopted who holds this role. The meaning I take from this and the response of connecting more with other adoptees is that these are individuals who have shared experiences, who can say they have felt the same way before and who have lived through the same positive or negative experiences and who have perhaps experienced the same heartbreak. They say it would also help to have guiding principles or people to turn to for advice; someone they can call upon when they do not have an answer for something. Community and support are very relative and come in different shapes and forms for everyone. A commonality for all these adoptees is that they identify this with a human, someone they can have discussions with face to face.

Conclusion

Conclusions to research questions

This thesis was titled “From China to Canada: The Identity Formation of Chinese-Canadian Adoptees”, this thesis reviewed the process by which Chinese-Canadian adoptees construct and narrate their identities. In this thesis, I aimed to demonstrate the lives and connections Chinese-Canadian (and Asian adoptees as a whole) have with their cultures and identities. This goal was quite broad, but the intention was to unpack how Chinese-Canadian adoptees understood themselves and narrated their adoptee stories. The goal was used as a starting point to a broader project; one that opened others to understand how Chinese-Canadian adoptees conform to their identities. This thesis included an overview of the history of international adoption, looked at the methods used for this research project and an analysis of the discussion had with participants. The analysis focused on self-identification (how these adoptees saw themselves) and social-identification (how they were viewed by others). In doing this work, I addressed the following questions: How do Chinese-Canadian adoptees choose to identify themselves? Do they identify as Chinese, Canadian, or Chinese-Canadian? An adoptee or not an adoptee? How do they narrate their adoption stories? How do their stories impact those around them? How do their experiences shape our understanding of identity and belonging in Canada? In answering these questions, I sought to understand the reality behind what it feels like to be an adoptee, to belong, and to build community.

Going into this project, I knew that some adoptees would choose to identify more with their Canadian heritage, while others may gravitate towards their Chinese side. Some not surprisingly felt they could identify themselves as adopted, while others could not, or were not comfortable with that claim. Each story of the adoptees varied. The project opened my eyes to

how components like where an adoptee grows up, to who they go to school with, to who they regularly socialize with, to how they were brought up, truly opened my eyes to what it means to be an adoptee. It surprised me how hard some of the other adoptees have had it. Growing up in a very diverse neighborhood with many other adoptees to socialize with and to converse with if ever I had questions about my upbringing, I feel I took that privilege for granted. Some of the adoptees in this project disclosed how they had wished to have grown up in cities/towns with other adoptees or to have kept in touch more with others that were adopted at the same time as them. To answer the question about how their experiences, shape our understanding of identity and belonging for adoptees in Canada, I would say it comes down to how one looks and what they are exposed to. My argument for this thesis was that Chinese-Canadian adoptees experience a sense of greater insecurity, the more detached they are from their country of origin and the culture which they could have been brought up in. From this project, from how the adoptees articulated how they connected to their family members (such as adopted siblings) more because they were going through the same journey or that the negative comments they received in jewelry stores or on their shifts at grocery stores had to do with perceptions of others of those in the Asian community, shows that the insecurities these individuals face come from being more detached from their country of origin. Based on what was shared in these adoptee talks, I conclude that those who were able to travel back to China, or those who were able to connect with other Chinese-Canadian adoptees felt more secure with who they are.

As I have expressed throughout this thesis, this has very much been a thesis about, from, and for Chinese-Canadian adoptees. When I thought it was appropriate to the dialogue, I would contrast what was said by the adoptee with what I had perhaps experienced (or not) myself in terms of my upbringing as a Chinese-Canadian adoptee. I had never wanted to undermine or take

away space from these adoptees so as much as possible, their words and their stories were the ones to be focused on. What will be seen in this concluding piece, are the responses from participants on what they would like others who are reading this thesis to know. This was anything and everything from what the adoptee was feeling at that moment, for example “thank you for allowing me to participate in this thesis work. It has opened me up more than I had done so before” to “I encourage other adoptees to get involved in their adoption journey too” to “I want to search for my birth parents and to know more about who I am” to “I am really not interested in learning more about who I am or where I come from.”

Really what I want others to take away from this, is how racialized adoptees feel and to be able to finish reading this thesis with an understanding of how to navigate their way in the outer world and how to approach adoptees and to create a safe space for them. That being said, I want adoptees to feel comfortable in a space in articulating how they feel and what troubles they may be encountering. In hearing the stories of these adoptees, adoptees who are of all different ages, I am understanding that adoption really is not a one-time thing. It is not as though we adoptees are adopted as infants and then magically we know everything about who we are and who we want to be and that is that. This is a lifelong process for all involved and I believe the sooner adoptees and others around us realize this, the easier it will be for everyone to be more inclusive and to have research that works on bettering the lives of adoptees.

A Review of the Chapters

After the auto-ethnographic story in my introduction, I wrote about international adoption in the broader context. The literature provided was a space to contextualize the project and to challenge the public’s current understanding of international adoption and the experiences of

Chinese-Canadian adoptees. Included in this section were articles like Chen (2015)'s where she spoke of debates over the importance of bringing in birth culture to the upbringing of a Chinese-Canadian adoptee. Also discussed were adoption rights and policies by Selman (2015) and the parents' cultural socialization practices from Pylypa (2018). I reviewed perspectives about the One Child Policy (OCP) in China, about honoring the rights and best interests of adopted children, and stories from other internationally adopted children.

The remainder of the first chapter was devoted to the method and approaches used for this project. Semi-structured interviews from Chinese-Canadian adoptees were the primary means for me to collect data for this project. In between interviews and upon reflecting on what each adoptee said, I would also add personal stories when I thought it was appropriate. Again, this project was intended to spread the word to adoptees to come forward with their narratives and opinions of adoption. As much as possible, I tried to honor their stories and position myself outside of their work.

Chapter Two, "From China to Canada: Stories on Adoption" brought in the adoptee perspective. It concentrated on how adoptees connect to their racial and ethnic backgrounds. This chapter was intended for highlighting what Chinese-Canadian adoptees have to say themselves about their adoption stories. I focused on the insecurities these adoptees face and how they address and respond to the uncertainty they may feel about themselves and how they can openly express who they feel they are.

Chapter Three, "Forming a sense of belonging in the community" was a chapter about adoptee difficulties. The chapter analyzed the challenges adoptees have faced in trying to form and keep up a connection to a community. Some of the adoptees spoke about the difficulties in having no other adoptees in their hometowns to talk to. This meant that at work, school or in

their friend groups, there weren't other people who shared the same experiences as them, and who they could lean on for support. The opposite of those experiences were the adoptees who said they were frequently around other adoptees. In those situations, the adoptees shared that they were close to their adoptee travel groups (other adoptees who were adopted at the same time as them), siblings who were adopted, or adoptees who were adopted through the same agency. In sum, Chapter 3 was heavily grounded in community structure. It was about bringing in perspectives from adoptees on how adoption was introduced in their families and how they made themselves known (or not) in their social circles.

What's next for adoption work?

As international adoption has declined from its peak in the 1990s, I feel there needs to be a shift in attention given to adoptive parents, their voices and their experiences in raising adopted children. I believe in more concentration on adopted children and their voices. The vast majority of them are reaching adulthood and are coming into a period where they may be old enough/more inclined to speak for themselves of their adoption stories. This fits in with the focus I had had on privileging adoptee voices throughout this thesis. The following final paragraphs of this thesis show what is next for adoption work, advice from adoptees outside of the project and the final thoughts my own participants had and wanted me to share with readers in order to better understand adoptees narratives.

“Intercountry adoption is changing continually. It's not static. But there are more restrictions in place now” – Cathy Murphy from the Children's Bridge (Pearce, 2012).

I wish to leave readers with a sense of discovery in wanting to learn more about international adoption. This last part of my thesis looks at news articles to see where

international adoption is headed. It also includes information from my participants to see what they would like others to know about them and how they wish to see adoption work highlighted in their school and social environments.

Many of the articles that I came across in doing research on international adoption, said that there is a decline in international adoption. In this final section I examine some reasons why there is a decline. This decline is connected to the hike in fees pertaining to intercountry adoption, the restrictions given to prospective parents and now also the lack of children available for adoption.

“On average, it now takes \$35,000 to \$45,000 to complete an adoption. About a third covers Canadian costs, a third goes to fees in the child's home country and a third to travel” (Pearce, 2012). Reading about the fees associated with adoption is very informative. Many readers may not know or understand the process of adoption and how expensive it can be to adopt a child. Through reading stories and articles on adoption, others may be able to identify the determination and dedication these parents demonstrate in wanting to adopt a child.

Deborah Brennan from the Adoption Council of Canada “points to a number of factors driving the downward trend. These include hefty costs (an international adoption can cost up to \$50,000)” (Harris, 2017). Like Pearce, Brennan associates the decline of international adoption to the hike in prices, many of which parents cannot always afford to pay. She also mentions, “A growing number of countries have imposed restrictions or all-out bans on international adoptions, and many have developed stronger systems to encourage more adoptions within their own borders” (Harris, 2017). I have continued to read more on this issue, and one thing I found was that “China, today, wants to look good and strong: 'We don't need you to take care of our kids any more. We can take care of our own’” (Pearce, 2012). Since the stress has been for

people to adopt domestically, the prices have increased to prevent people adopting internationally. As Pearce's article was written in 2012, this comes before there is a drastic shift in adoption, one that changes to allow Chinese parents to have more than one child.

In this next bit, I consider the process of adoption and the longer wait times. "With how long it takes you almost need to decide when you're 23 that you want to adopt internationally, so you'll start working on it and when you're 32 you'll have a child" (Pearce, 2012). Since I was adopted, I have read that the wait times for adoption have grown. For some prospective parents, they could be waiting anywhere from a few months to a few years before they can begin the process of adoption. In the case of Chinese-Canadian adoptions, as mentioned in the previous area, there is a focus on domestic adoption. For this reason, many intercountry adoption agencies have been forced to close their doors and those that have remained open are now stuck with providing longer wait times for the parents. "This has led to a longer wait time for an adoptable child, which may discourage some Canadian prospective adoptive parents during the process" (Harris, 2017). From my research, I have noted that in some cases, the longer wait times are a result of issues that have occurred with current adoptive parents. In one situation, an adoptive mother sent her (at the time) 7-year-old son back on a plane, unaccompanied, to his birth country, Russia. "At present, the country still allows international adoptions, but there is now a mandatory six-month search for adoptive parents within Russia before a child can be adopted internationally" (Pearce, 2012). I have drawn the conclusion that it really is the country's adoption policies that determine the wait times.

Finally, to tie these issues of costs and wait times together, the big picture here is that there is a lack of children available for adoption. As Pearce writes, "Most provinces have suspended Haitian adoptions due to irregularities after the 2010 earthquake, such as adoptions

being arranged without a proper search for birth parents. Also, on the no-adoption list are Guatemala, Cambodia and Nepal, for allegations of unethical or illegal practices including payments being made to birth mothers for giving up their babies” (Pearce, 2012). Pearce expresses her idea that intercountry adoption may be coming to an end. With many countries shutting down the system of international adoption, it makes it more difficult for prospective parents. “A growing number of countries have imposed restrictions or all-out bans on international adoptions, and many have developed stronger systems to encourage more adoptions within their own borders” (Harris, 2017). All in all, the focus is not on international adoption any more. Instead, it is on domestic adoption.

For the final point of why there is a decline, and the reasoning behind it, I turn to Peter Selman’s article “The Global Decline of Intercountry Adoption: What Lies Ahead?” The article speaks to this decline and how the reduction of children being adopted is due to issues of adoptions from single women, an interest in domestic adoption, issues with same sex couple adoptions, and more (Selman, 2012).

Advice from other Chinese adoptees

To finish off the thesis, I wanted to include the final words of each of my participants and the advice and suggestions they had for myself, and others, in continuing to research and work alongside Chinese-Canadian adoptees. This was inspired through work with other adoptees. I have mentioned adoptee scholars such as St. Clair or Chung in my thesis, but outside of the academic realm, I wanted to also highlight stories from the news and from blogs I have come across.

Through my research of non-academic articles, I came across the story of Kati Pohler. Kati was born in Hangzhou, China, the same city as me. After Kati was only a few days old, her

birth father Xu brought her to a market and left her with a note that read (in Mandarin): “If God has sympathy for us and you care about us, let’s meet on the Broken Bridge on the West Lake in Hangzhou on the morning of Chinese Lunar date July 7th in 10 or 20 years” (Chang, 2017). Kati was adopted by Ruth and Ken Pohler from Michigan and was left with the note. When Kati was ten years old, the Pohlers hired a messenger and sent her to the bridge on the appointed day. The messenger found Kati’s birth parents but became reluctant to continue with these activities and disappeared, losing the connection Kati’s birth parents had with the Pohlers. The Pohlers made the decision not to tell Kati about this reunion until she expressed interest in knowing about her past. In 2017, Kati became curious and found out her adopted parents had known about her birth parents all along. After making this discovery, Kati decided to go to the bridge in China on the appointed day. She met with her birth parents and her biological sister.

Following the reunion of Kati with her birth parents, she has since gone back to China and is now working there. Her story was documented by BBC News in a documentary and is being followed by world news sites to see what she is up to now. In September 2018, Kati travelled to Huai’an, a city in Jiangsu province (about 450 km from Hangzhou) to teach English as a Second Language (ESL) for a year. Kati travelled 8 hours by bus on September 22nd to celebrate the Mid-Autumn Festival in Hangzhou with her birth family. When reunited with her older sister, Xiaochen, she discovered more about herself and the similarities and differences she shares with her sister (Tsui, 2018).

What I found with Kati’s story was deeply personal. Kati was adopted from the same city and province as I was, of Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China. I had briefly followed her story when it first came out but did not want to analyze it at the time, as it was too emotional. I felt her story contributed to my work on international adoption and identity formation in that she chose to go

back and to form a relationship with her birth family and get to know more about her Chinese culture. Her story reveals this sense of belonging and of identity formation struggle that resonates with not only my participants for this project, but myself as well. In the themes for this thesis of self-identity and social-identity, I believe both can be intertwined to Kati's story. In analyzing her journey with topics from my project, on the social identity side, I would say that Kati would strongly identify with somewhere in China (in this case specifically, the city where she was born, Hangzhou, is where she perhaps feels home is). Kati has expressed that she identifies as adopted, but that as she became older, it was important for her to interact with her birth parents and non-adopted side to her as well. That meant reconnecting with her birth family and travelling back to China. In terms of how being adopted has been a meaning-making experience for Kati, her story has shown the world and the adoption community in general how important it is for her to have a connection to her adopted culture, but also the one she left from birth, back in China.

Advice from adoptees in my project

My goal in this thesis has been to privilege the voices of adoptees. As such, here I would like to include a few final comments directly from my participants, which highlight what they believed was important as an adoptee. Maisy said that one should embrace their identity. They (other adoptees) should embrace who they are. Taylor said that everyone will be different, but that if you're interested in learning more about adoption in school, you could read about Chinese adoption or watch documentaries. He said for the hands-on experience, one could travel back to China. For those who may be struggling, he said it is so important to reach out to family, friends and fellow adoptees for support. Allison said it would help if you knew what you stood for and

what your values are. She herself doesn't connect with her Chinese side as she's integrated herself into her Canadian lifestyle well but that was after she had travelled back to China. Elizabeth encouraged others to look into their medical history; especially if you are someone who wants to know more about where you came from. Jessica said that adoption should be talked about more. She said, like anything, everyone has a different story. Brittany, Maria, Mia, Zoey and Olivia didn't have anything to add to their interviews. Lily and Kristen aren't giving up hope in connecting with their birth parents. Lily's adopted sister was able to find her birth mother and connect with her. Lily thinks it would be cool to find hers. Victoria said there should be more post-adoption services and tools made available for parents and adoptees, so they know how to handle difficult situations. Lauren said more should be made aware about the option of adoption for those who can't conceive children of their own. Amelia said it's good to be open to talking about adoption and to embrace both Chinese and Canadian cultures.

Appendix A: Recruitment Poster



Let's Talk!

Participate in a study on Chinese-Canadian adoptions!

To participate in this study, you must:

- Identify as a Chinese-Canadian adoptee
- Be between 18 and 25 years old

In this 30-60-minute interview, you will be asked what impacts the formation of your identity. Do these factors make you feel more connected to your birth culture or adopted culture? All of the information you provide will be connected with a code name (a pseudonym) so that your identity can be kept confidential.

Participants will be compensated with \$15 cash and a coffee or tea at the location of their choosing.

The ethics protocol for this study has been reviewed and cleared by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board (Clearance # 11056). If you have any ethical concerns with the study, please contact Bernadette Campbell, Chair, Carleton University Ethics Board-A (by phone at 613-520-2600 x 4080 or by e-mail at ethics@carleton.ca)

Please contact the researcher, Hanna, to participate. You can reach the researcher at hanna.stewart@carleton.ca

Appendix B: Consent Form



Research Consent Form

Name and Contact Information of Researchers:

Hanna Stewart

Masters Student in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology Carleton University

Email: hanna.stewart@carleton.ca

Supervisor and Contact Information: Alexis Shotwell (alexis.shotwell@carleton.ca)

Project Title

From China to Canada: The Identity Formation of Chinese-Canadian Adoptees

Invitation

You are invited to take part in a research project because you are a Chinese-Canadian adoptee. The information in this form is intended to help you understand what we are asking of you so that you can decide whether you agree to participate in this study. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and a decision not to participate will not be used against you in any way. As you read this form, and decide whether to participate, please ask all the questions you might have, take whatever time you need, and consult with others as you wish.

What is the purpose of the study?

This project is being conducted for a graduate thesis entitled “From China to Canada: The Identity Formation of Chinese-Canadian Adoptees” at Carleton University. The course has received ethics approval from Carleton’s Research Ethics Board. However, if the researcher chooses to use any data gathered after the thesis is completed, they will need to apply for additional ethics approval for the project. If that were the case, the researcher would return to you with an additional consent form after receiving ethics approval.

What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to take part in the study, the researcher will ask you to meet with them (Hanna Stewart) for an informal semi-structured individual interview. The researcher would request 30-60 min of your time as you help to answer the following question: “How do young Chinese-Canadian adoptees, between 18-25, connect their identities to Chinese culture?” The interview would take place at a location of the participant’s choosing, either at Carleton university, a public setting of their choosing (such as a coffee shop or library) or online. If online, the researcher would ensure that the data be kept secure and confidential through use of password encryption on their laptop. The interview will be audio taped, unless the participant does not provide consent to be recorded.

Risks and Inconveniences

The researcher anticipates this project could be a sensitive topic for participants and will work to support each participant with appropriate resources. Please let the researcher know if you are uncomfortable with any of the questions asked and know you are able to withdraw consent from this study at any time or refuse to answer any questions.

Below are some numbers and e-mails of resources you may wish to use, should you experience any emotional discomfort in this study.

Ottawa Centre for Resilience: (613) 714-0662

Distress Centre, Ottawa and Region: (613) 238-3311

Health and Counselling Services (Carleton University): (613) 520-6674

University of Ottawa Health Services: (613) 564-3950

Possible Benefits

You may not receive any direct benefit from your participation in this study. However, your participation may allow researchers to better understand how Chinese-Canadian adopted children develop, and how their identities are formed.

Compensation/Incentives

You will be compensated for your time in this study with \$15 dollars and coffee or tea provided at the setting of your choosing.

No waiver of your rights

By signing this form, you are not waiving any rights or releasing the researchers from any liability.

Withdrawing from the study

If you withdraw your consent during the course of the study, all information collected from you before your withdrawal will still be used, unless you request that it be removed from the study data.

After the study, you may request that your data be removed from the study and deleted by notice given to the Principal Investigator (named above) by August 2020.

Confidentiality

The researcher will remove all identifying information from the study data as soon as possible, by October 1st, 2019.

They will treat your personal information as confidential, although absolute privacy cannot be guaranteed. No information that discloses your identity will be released or published without your specific consent. Research records may be accessed by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board in order to ensure continuing ethics compliance.

All data will be kept confidential, unless release is required by law (e.g. for reports of child abuse, harm to self or others).

The results of this study may be published or presented at an academic conference or meeting, but the data will be presented so that it will not be possible to identify any participants unless you give your express consent. The data would not be presented unless the participant has provided additional consent.

Data Retention

After the study is completed, your de-identified data may be retained for future research use. Photographs, videos and/or audio recordings that may be used in this study will be securely stored on a password protected computer. The data would not be retained unless the participant has provided additional consent.

New information during the study

In the event that any changes could affect your decision to continue participating in this study, you will be promptly informed.

Statement of consent – print and sign name

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. Yes No

I agree to be audio recorded. Yes No

(Note: Recordings are optional for participation)

I agree to be contacted for follow up research

Yes

No

Signature of participant

Date

Research team member who interacted with the subject

I have explained the study to the participant and answered any and all of their questions. The participant appeared to understand and agree. I provided a copy of the consent form to the participant for their reference.

Signature of researcher

Date

Appendix C: Semi-structured interview questions

1. What is your name? How old are you? What city are you from/where did you grow up?
2. How many people are in your family? Who are they? Are you particularly close to one member more than another?
3. Do you think of yourself as someone who is adopted? If so, what makes you feel this way? If not, why?
4. When did you find out you were adopted?
5. What makes you proud to be adopted? What is hard about being adopted?
6. What did your parents do to embrace your Chinese background? Are you interested in your Chinese background? Did you find the things your parents did important or useful, or not really? Do you wish your parents had done anything differently?
7. Did the topic of adoption come up often with either friends or family?
8. Growing up, did you know a lot of people who were adopted? Were you close with any of them? Is it important to you to know other adoptees, or not really? If yes: Why?
9. Have you had to deal with any racism or stereotypes to do with being Chinese or being adopted?
10. Were you or your parents ever asked any inappropriate questions or comments?
11. How do Chinese-Canadian adoptees experience community and support? Where, if relatable, have you received this support?
12. How does being a Chinese-Canadian adoptee affect your everyday life?
13. Do you have anything else to add to this interview?

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