

Reflections upon Adoption

When asked about my origins and identity I have so little yet so much to say...

British Opium and Colonization 1839



Chinese Civil war 1927



WWII Japanese occupation 1937



Where if I was honest, I'd have to start far before I was born to a time rather violent and wished to be forgotten

Chinese Communist and cultural revolutions 1950s 1960s



中国人民解放军是毛泽东思想大学校



Millions dead, from starvation, martyrdom, and murders all for a cause that was meant to bring peace and harmony to peoples that had been long deprived of any dignity and independence



The Great Leap forward 1960-62



A period in retrospect, of failure, tragedy, and so much death

A progression of desperation and “hard choices that had to be made

Had to be made? They said, never blaming any policy or world event and its consequences

No fault of western colonization, imperialist genocides, power hungry leaders, scientists and scholars...

It was all the peoples fault- at least that's who had to suffer the consequences

Oh, but to all of my peers this is not a lived experience, it was ages ago

Grandpa and grandma don't even recall this

The luxury to forget does not exist here



With the implementation of the one child policy gender preference became a significant issue

The policy defined that a woman could only have one birth- but there was always a loophole. A baby (girl) could be easily erased. Tales of what people find in wells, trashcans, and rivers were reality. Abandoned baby girls could be found all around, in fields, marketplaces, and more.

Others had their children forcibly taken by neighbors and government agents and forced to pay a heavy ransom in order to have their child returned. But the ransom would grow each week, and by the time the sum could be paid, families found their children had “disappeared”, only to find years later their children had been adopted internationally, and reunion impossible

These daughters became ghosts whether they lived or died. They were no longer a part of society or reality as far as anyone was concerned.



In the 1990s China opened its orphanages up to the world, and an overwhelming amount of western agencies “saved” the a poor neglected daughters of cruel communist China

At Least that is the narrative that prevails

No narrative speaks of the pain and loss felt by parents and family when forcibly sterilized, and pressured to give up their child.

No narrative speaks of what happened after a child is adopted

No more conentray or investigation is needed, for everyone goes back to their day and happily ever after

1979-2015 is how long the policy lasted

I was born in November of 2003

(Abandoned on a park bench)

Adopted 2004

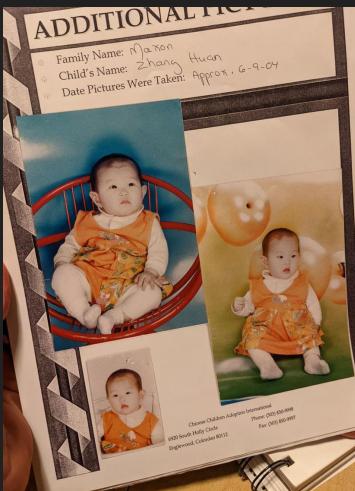
I was left on a park bench in a public park sometime at night, and a local runner picked me up and took me to an orphanage. With me was a red “napkin” that said “we love her and but can not keep her, born Nov 21 2003”

I love the term, information poverty. I'm unable to do the most basic of paperwork. No I do not know my heritage or genetic history. I certainly can't answer any questions about my biological family, and I am very used to the microaggressions from both kid and adult pestering me about my “real parents”

2 months after adoption



Adoption Paperwork



Developmental plasticity and pre and postnatal care of a child... seemingly self explanatory until something goes wrong

For all Chinese adoptees there is something that went wrong. Nerve pathways and senses never properly developed due to neglect of touch due to overcrowded orphanages and little staff.

Compulsive food hoarding tendencies due to lack off food. All before the age of 1 I had all of these issues, my parents were very surprised how small I was and how underdeveloped I was. I luckily did learn to crawl than walk in a span of the week. Apparently I had no opportunity to test if i could effectively walk or crawl before this.

I still am weird with food, I can only speed eat and tend to shove as much as I can in my mouth at once to the annoyance of my mom.

Ethnicity and Identity

Looking at my family, the main signifier for our “societal identity” was race, religion, and class

Upper middle class, Evangelical Christian, and mixed White “Chinese”

My adoptive mother immigrated from Taiwan in the 1980s She identified as Taiwanese-Chinese.

When she announced she was adopting a kid from China Her mother was deeply concerned, expressing; “don’t do that, you don’t want a communist baby”.



At the age of 10 months Comrade “Emily” was set to wreak havoc after defecting from China

Hurtful and inaccurate Stereotypes as well as Inflated senses of Nationalism prevail..

Navigating the relationship between being culturally Taiwanese, ethnically Chinese, and Nationality wise American had been complex due to political and social rivalries that have been cultivated overtime through US racialization and politicalization of bodies and media

It was no secret that I was adopted, no one tried to hide it

I didn't realise it was such a big deal till my parents one day brought up how proud of me they were for me being so confident and open about it

I was rather confused, for there was no way I could escape not telling people this very clear fact. Peers and people knew from just looking at the family, and one someone revealed it news traveled fast and became a hot topic to ask 6 year old me about

"Going home" Barbie (I was never allowed to open as a kid)



Elementary school Chinese cultural event 2013



Phrases I could always count on hearing
Where are your real parents?
Aren't you so grateful to be adopted
Your parents must be very nice to want to adopt

What was a child supposed to make of these questions, that I didn't belong? that I was a charity case?

That my adoptive "identity" and past trumped any other trait?

Adoption was part of what I learned to be markedness, a social category that was 100% accurate and easy to compare against the norm of being genetically related

As I grew older adoption being my defining social trait became less important as “race” took its spot among my peers. Most certainly not ethnicity, for my peers could care less what country I was “from” unless it could be used as a joke. “Asian” as my no.1 ascribed status Took its hold, I felt proud to be one of the few Asians yet, rather uncomfortable many decided to replace my name with “Hey Asian”.

As a middle schooler, “racism”, insensitivity, and eurocentric bias was not in me nor my family; \’s vocabulary. My Mother would always say “just smile and be nice” when I’d mention any problems such as these.

“Rather, within the context of overall cultural consensus, subgroups of respondents tend to privilege certain aspects of that knowledge over other aspects” (Dressler 2020)

Spirit Halloween “Costume” 2022



I don't blame Mama for not being confrontational, “acceptable” expression of agency was not easy to define, especially advocating for a behavior not even my peers parents were familiar with.

When one accuses their peers of being insensitive or racist, it is so easily played off as “oh sensitive Asian” and political correctness

Finding Asian solidarity and community is never easy. What is “Asian”, what is “Asian enough” and how does nationalism, especially ethnic supremacy play into this

Just because I was Asian didnt mean I was “Asian”

Sure I knew my language well enough, but apparently to the “community” of proper Asians, having a white dad, and being one of those adopted Chinese through in some difficulties to be accepted or “valid”

Adoption is trauma

Adoption can be beautiful

Adoption is complex

Adoption can be hard to understand

And adoptees are not a monolith of experience and backstory

Concept such as self ethnography, cultural learnings and mismatches, and physical mismatches from upbringing are concepts that should be talked about especially in Anthropology regarding adoptees

Adoption is taxing upon mental health and is correlated with predispositions for many “issues” yet is never mentioned nor considered unless it is to blame for all problems

Mothers side of the family 2006 (me age 3)



Adoption has a price

It's expensive and highly exclusive, the price of a child is 10k-25k on average

The capitalistic components of adoption align with political “benefits” and connections of adoption are another element rarely addressed

Adoption is the exercise of cultural and material capital upon another, not necessarily negative—but it is true

It's never social situations and stigma that can cause such as big issue or anxieties, it must be the identity of adopted that trump all including mental health validations

“For example, one such analysis revealed that average scores on the Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale, for children mostly ages 9–11 years, increased by a full SD between 1956 and the late 1980s. A change in this large means that roughly 85% of children by the late 1980s were more anxious than the average child 1956.” (Gray 2023, 2).



Labels and broad generalizations have done no one any favors. Creating a sense of “misfit” and “outsider” isolating what should be in “harmony and what are in fact intersectional factors. societal and social misfit.

Where sometimes you have to embrace not being “enough” and exist outside the perceived norm. Competition over being enough or valid enough for one’s race or ethnicity and other identities just perpetuate racist ideals and stereotypes and qualifications most of the time and should be addressed.

Well so far all this makes me seem like an ungrateful adoptee

It's much more complex than that

There is an importance of duality, where one can advocate for more awareness and of a painful history while benign grateful for those in my immediate life and situation, while being aware there are much more complex institutions and practices at work.



Bibliography

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