Embodying Chinese Culture

TRANSNATIONAL ADOPTION IN NORTH AMERICA

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Isabelle, who is six, makes a list of all the children she knows and begins to identify those among them who are, as she is, adopted. Naming three other Asian children in her New York City first grade class, she pauses, then shakes her head: "No, but they look adopted." Isabelle's mother asks, "What does an adopted person look like?" Isabelle replies, "Chinese."[1]

In the 1990s, families in the United States began to adopt children from other regions of the world in unprecedented numbers. Although adoption across national borders had its beginnings in the 1950s, in the aftermath of World War II and the Korean conflict, it remained for decades a relatively unnoticed phenomenon. "The quiet migration" is how a demographer writing in 1984 described the movement of children for adoption across national borders (Weil 1984). That description now needs to be revised. Over the past ten years, transnational adoption has become both visible and vocal. How has this shift occurred? And how might the contemporary practice of transnational adoption provoke new ways of imagining race, kinship, and culture in North America?

Visible and Vocal: Adoption from China

In 1994, when I traveled to China with my husband to adopt our daughter, I had no inkling that we were on the cusp of what would become an enormous wave of Chinese adoptions. Neither did I sense the tremendous changes in adoption practices that were under way, the heightened attention to all aspects of adoption that would become so defining of this moment, or the ways in which my lived experience would touch so intimately on contested anthropological terrain. Soon after returning to New York, however, I realized that our very personal act of creating a family through adoption was simultaneously, if unwittingly, part of a larger, collective project. In that project "culture" figured both prominently and, for me, a bit uneasily. This essay is the fruit of my efforts to understand parents' fascination with the imagined "birth culture" of their adopted children. I argue that this fascination may, in part, represent displaced longings for origins and absent birth mothers, and I attempt to situate such

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longings within historical and cultural shifts in adoption discourse and practices over the last ten years.

Adoptions from China to the United States soared from 115 in 1991 to 5,081 in 2000.[2] By the end of the 1990s, China had become the leading "sending" country of children to the United States and the world, and more than 30,000 adopted Chinese children, mostly girls, were growing up with their (mostly) white parents in North America. In February 2002, bookstore windows in Manhattan displayed Valentine's Day specials, among them *I Love You Like Crazy Cakes* (Lewis 2000), a children's book about a single mother adopting a baby girl from China. The mainstreaming of Chinese adoption has occurred in part through the incessant media attention that has been lavished on adopted Chinese girls over the past decade.[3] This interest shows no signs of abating, with a steady stream of articles in disparate venues. On a page entitled boldly "How America Lives," the *Ladies' Home Journal* featured "Citizen Amy," an adopted five-year-old Chinese girl in Kentucky, American flag in hand (Leader 2001).

Numbers and media attention do not in themselves suggest profound transformation or the normalization of adoption. They surely do not reveal the ardent embrace of a new transracial kinship; the *Ladies' Home Journal* knows that this is not *really* how most of America lives. Nonetheless, the phenomenal growth of adoption that crosses lines of nation and of race—and its media presence—hint that interesting changes are in motion, changes that must be situated within larger processes of rewriting kinship, identity, and culture in North America.[4] I focus here on adoption from China, because Chinese adoption and the communities that have developed around it have become remarkably visible and vocal. Families with children from many other parts of the world, however, are dealing with similar issues, particularly when race visibly marks differences between parents and children.[5]

In contrast to the isolation and confusion articulated in recent years by many young adult Korean adoptees, adopted children from China and their (mostly) white parents are visible not just to the public but (intensely so) to each other, through the formation of play groups, dance troupes, Culture Days and camps, reunions, Web sites, listservs, and publications intended for the adoptive community. (See figures 1 and 2.) Visibility is entwined with vocality. Writing about the world of disability, Rayna Rapp and Faye Ginsburg describe how publicly circulating narratives chronicling intimate experiences with disability have helped to shape "a more expansive sense of kinship across embodied difference" (2001, 534). A similar proliferation of stories characterizes the world of transnational adoption.

There has never been another cohort of transnational, transracial

adoptees that has arrived in the United States in such large numbers, in so few years, of roughly the same age and mostly the same gender. Many more Korean children have been adopted into U.S. families—one hundred thousand—but they were widely dispersed over time and space: fifty years, across urban, rural, and small-town America. Operation Babylift, in which two thousand babies were flown out of Saigon to the United States in a few days in April 1975, was a dramatic moment, but these children also were dispersed throughout the country and were not followed (until recently) by other Vietnamese adoptees. For most adoptees from Asia, stories such as those filmed in recent years by Korean adoptees were far more typical: the only Asian child growing up in a largely white small town somewhere in middle America (Adolfson 1999; Liem 2000). Adoption was not freely discussed, and racial assimilation was the goal. There must have been many parents like Nathan Adolfson's mother in Minnesota, who simply wanted her child to be, as she declares in her son's film, "a little Scandinavian" (Adolfson 1999).

Adoptive parents themselves have a distinctive demographic profile. Those who adopt from China are "older" (until 1999, China required parents to be at least thirty-five) and often share a sense of generational history and sensibility.[6] "We came of age in the sixties, we told our stories in the women's movement," one New York mother said. Especially in urban areas, where the largest numbers of children adopted from China live, such parents typically postponed childbearing, are relatively affluent and well educated, and see themselves as active citizens of the world. Many are unmarried. Although China's policies have recently changed to prohibit adoption by gay and lesbian parents and to limit single-parent adoptions, during most of the 1990s China's openness was striking, and coincided with increasing acceptance of single parenting and other nontraditional ways of making families in North America.[7] Unconventional parents easily forged connections out of networks in which they already participated, such as support groups for single women contemplating motherhood. Such parents are often conscious of their delicate and difficult roles. A mother in a discussion group mused, somewhat anxiously: "We are older, we are Jewish, we are two mommies, we are white. Just how much difference can we give them?"

The experience of adopting *in* China has also catalyzed the growth of organizations beyond the family. Whereas Korean babies typically arrived on planes, delivered by escorts to expectant parents in North American airports, families who adopt from China must travel there to meet their child, in groups as large as a dozen families arranged by adoption agencies. A family spends two weeks in China with this group, sharing momentous experiences: the emotionally charged moments of delivery of their

children, visits to the orphanage, and myriad anxieties, difficulties, joys, and surprises. These trips create powerful bonding experiences, which people subsequently seek to reproduce and reinforce through reunions and little rituals, like annual photo shoots of children lined up on someone's couch.

Ties forged in travel groups may focus on intimate connections: parents of babies who shared an orphanage crib may decide to nurture their daughters' friendship as they grow, even to return to China together when the girls are older. Sometimes the sense of kinship extends in the other direction, to a sort of bonding with "China," a China that is imagined yet somehow palpable, embodied in the child, archived in photographs and other tangible souvenirs.

Perhaps most critical in shaping the visibility and vocality of China adoption is the historical moment. The discursive celebration of multiculturalism of the 1990s is worlds apart from the earlier emphasis on assimilation. If we live now in an era of "Rainbow Kids," as one adoption magazine is called, this was not the case when transnational adoption began in the 1950s. Then, the all-American white-bread family was very much the desired norm, and green-eyed, freckled, Irish Catholic babies were supposed to be matched with green-eyed, freckled, Irish Catholic moms and dads. The "as if begotten" biological family was the goal (Modell 1994), a "clean break" with the past achieved by rewriting birth certificates with the names of adoptive parents, the identity of birth parents erased by sealing records (Carp 1998). In the 1950s, when Oregonians Harry and Bertha Holt launched adoption from South Korea as a Christian "rescue" mission for mixed-race orphans fathered by American soldiers, it seems that little thought was given to how such children would fit into a society where sameness was the unquestioned norm. The prevailing "clean break" model of domestic adoption was transposed, in intercountry adoption, into a "clean break" from biological progenitors and from the national or cultural origins of the child (Shanley 2001; Yngvesson 2000).

The civil rights movement sparked some adoptions in the late 1960s of black or biracial children by white parents. But in the early 1970s, in part because of the strong stance of the National Association of Black Social Workers against transracial adoption, race again became an explicit barrier in domestic adoption. Around this time Americans began increasingly to embrace adoption from other nations. This turn coincided with dramatic changes that were unfolding within the domestic adoption community. The silence and secrecy that had surrounded adoption were beginning to dissolve, as adoptees began to assert their rights to be told truthfully about their past, their "roots," and the parents who relinquished them. As adoption became "open"—both in the sense of specific and

legal forms of "open adoption," in which information is disclosed, records are unsealed, and birth families and adoptive families may actually know one another, and in the broader sense of openly acknowledged, the myth of the "as if" family, "constituted by shared biological heritage, by the 'mystical commonality' of mother and child" (Yngvesson 1997, 71), could no longer be easily sustained.

By the 1990s, these changes in the American social landscape intersected with growing political and economic pressures within China. The one-child policy, the Chinese state's attempt to curtail population growth, called for all couples to limit themselves to a single child. In many areas this became a "one son/two children" policy: parents were allowed to try for a second child—a son—if the firstborn was a daughter. Enforcement measures included steep fines for "over-quota" children, sterilization, and the threat of forced abortion in the event of future pregnancies.

These policies had serious consequences for gender relations. Mothers who gave birth to baby girls might be "subject to verbal and physical assault from unhappy husbands and in-laws," and their little ones suffered, too, "as peasant women discriminated against their baby daughters in order to ensure the birth and survival of a son" (Greenhalgh and Li 1995, 609–10). One form of discrimination was infant abandonment.[8] In the late 1980s, large numbers of healthy abandoned baby girls began to crowd China's state-run orphanages (Johnson 1993, 1996). Kay Johnson and Chinese researchers found that in the 1990s most couples expressed the wish to have a daughter and a son, but felt under intense pressure if they failed to produce the son. Many couples felt they had "no choice" but to abandon second or third daughters (Johnson, Banghan, and Liyao 1998, 469–510).[9]

Abandonments, which are illegal, take place in secrecy. The baby is left where parents hope he or she will be found: the steps of a police station or hospital, the side of a well-traveled road, a busy marketplace, a train station, perhaps at the entrance to a house where a family lives who might, especially if they already have one son and no daughter, decide to adopt the child.

Ironically, then, as adoption and the embrace of birth family in the United States have become increasingly open and encouraged, the circumstances of the child's abandonment are profoundly hidden, unknowable, in China. Adoptive parents often express a yearning for connection, a wish for knowledge of a narrative that cannot be complete. Sometimes the painful realities that have created both the possibility and the impossibility of these connections are acknowledged, as longing is laced with a critique of the inequities in the global political economy through which white American parents benefit from the suffering of their Chinese coun-

terparts: "People whose agony over her [the writer's daughter] I cannot begin to comprehend. People whose deep loss produced perhaps my greatest joy," writes Lindsay Davies (2000, 19). "I don't know what to say to a woman whose greatest tragedy is my good fortune," writes Emily Prager in a similar musing. "That you should have your daughter forced from your arms by a government who I then must pay to envelop her in mine is the stuff of which I have fought against my entire career. That I should end up tacitly supporting this policy is my shame, and yet, my fate. . . . Forgive me, Madam, for my part in ripping off the Women of China and in particular, of course, you" (2001, 237).

A More Expansive Sense of Kinship

Two institutions—one real, one virtual—have been critical in shaping and sustaining a sense of kinship and community beyond the family. Families with Children from China (FCC) is a name used by more than one hundred separate organizations that have developed across the United States and Canada since the mid-1990s. Inspired in part by smaller groups founded in the late 1970s by parents of children adopted from Korea, FCC's beginnings can be traced to 1992, when a few of the earliest adopters on the East Coast met in New York's Chinatown to celebrate their new adoptions. Susan Caughman, one of the founders of the organization in New York, described the impulse behind this early FCC: "We felt as if we knew an amazing secret that we had the obligation to tell the world about" (Klatzkin 1999, xiii).

The other powerful force contributing to the shaping of the adoptive Chinese community is the Internet. The Internet and adoption from China began to grow at approximately the same time. By 2002, the two largest China adoption lists had a combined membership of over thirteen thousand subscribers, and more than 350 other lists were devoted to more specialized interests, from *chinaboys* and *China Dads at Home* to born-again Christian lists. There are lists for those whose adoption dossier went to China in a particular month, and well over one hundred lists for families with children adopted from the same orphanage or region. Members of orphanage lists may come to think of all children in their child's orphanage as siblings.

The Internet may serve its greatest function outside of cities, which already have flourishing FCCs, an array of friendship circles, and countless other forms of face-to-face sociality. But for many, the lists provide valuable information, ideas, a space for debate, and a sense of community. Both FCC and the Internet dramatically expand the sense of kinship

beyond the domestic sphere: FCC through the many gatherings it sponsors, the Internet by building on-line relationships that extend throughout the country and internationally as well. In cyberspace, even more than in the face-to-face contact of FCC activities, people may come to feel as though they know each other well, an illusory intimacy perhaps, but nonetheless a space in which they are comfortable sharing concerns and intimate details about their daily lives, emotions, and their children that they would not easily reveal to ordinary (known) relatives. In response to another list member's announcement that a long-awaited child had been referred, one person wrote "Mazel Tov, Mazel Tov, Mazel Tov! . . . Although we don't know each other I have thought of you and your husband often. I am so happy for you two tonight" (Silverman 2002).

Is the child an "open cultural space," or is he or she inextricably "rooted in national soil"?

The Question of Culture

The question of culture pervades the discourse of contemporary adoption. Contradictory movements—"erasures of belonging" (Yngvessson 2000, 177) and its reinscription—permeate and complicate the everyday practices of Chinese and other forms of transnational adoption. Is the child an "open cultural space," or is he or she inextricably "rooted in national soil" (ibid., 173)?

Real Simple ("the magazine about simplifying your life") published an article in which a mother describes how her daughter, Oona, adopted from China eleven years ago, was provided with opportunities to develop

> a deep appreciation of the Chinese art and culture that are part of her native heritage. At home in the San Francisco Bay Area, we wheeled her in the stroller past the exquisite brush paintings and ceramics in San Francisco's Asian Art Museum, stopping afterward for dim sum in Chinatown. We took her to see the Chinese acrobats at the Civic Center and dutifully attended the Chinese New Year Parade (even though she hated it, because of the firecrackers). And when friends began packing their daughters off in frilly tutus and pink slippers for ballet classes after school, we opted for a more international form of movement: gymnastics. (Putnam 2002)

In spite of all this, Oona fell passionately in love with, and became incredibly good at, Irish dancing.

Like most articles on Chinese adoption, Oona's story was circulated on Internet lists and provoked a range of responses, including some criticisms of Oona's parents. Oona's enthusiasm for Irish dance, one person speculated, was a reaction to the family's overemphasis on China at the expense of a more all-embracing multicultural heritage that would have

included her adoptive parents' Irish "culture." To this Julie in Chicago responded:

> Where do we draw the line between strenuous but appropriate efforts to affirm our status as a minority family, and putting the family into a box where only ethnic activities focused on the child's/children's birth heritage(s) are deemed appropriate? . . . Is the child in the article, so filled with joy at present, being set up for future trauma by spending so much time with ringleted, red-haired, creamy-complexioned sprites, whom of course she can never physically resemble? (Higginbotham 2002)

A parent whose adopted Indian son was fond of boat racing commented: "Until I read this thread about the little girl loving Irish dancing, I never thought to ask our son, 'Gee, Son, maybe you should only excel at a sport that would somehow reflect your Indian culture.' "

"If constructions of race and culture are contingent processes that are historically open-ended," Ann Anagnost has written, "we need to consider how current adoption practices do not merely fit into what is historically given, but in themselves produce race"—and, I would add, culture—"in a new form." Anagnost suggests that adoption practices may reproduce the problem of identity and difference anew, "in a domestication of differences emptied of history," or they may be progressive, as "the experience of racism opens the possibility of pushing politics of parenting beyond the family, as the basis of a broader politics of anti-racism" (2000, 391). Both trajectories, I argue, are at play.

The challenge to the biologically formed family is particularly clear when adoption crosses racial lines, as it usually does in the case of China.[10] A recurrent theme in the adoption world is how to respond to racist, rude, ridiculous, or simply awkward questions from strangers (or sometimes from friends and relatives). These typically occur in public venues, like grocery checkout lines. "Is she yours? Is she real? Is she natural? Where did you get her? How much did she cost? Are they really sisters? In China they don't like girls, do they?" One list member reported a colleague's remark: "What a lovely baby, it's just too bad she's a communist." Responses to such comments range from calm to furious; some parents try to turn these encounters into "teaching moments," others reply with sarcasm. To a common query, "Is her father Chinese?" one mother laughs, "I don't know, I couldn't see his face."

The highly visible, racially marked challenge to the bio-family may contribute to the media's fascination with adoption from China, accounts of which provide what appears to be a less fraught space in which to deal with race than stories about transracial black-white adoption in the United States.[11] Whereas racial differences were just as striking for earlier gener-

ations of Korean adoptees, until recent years pressure for sameness seems to have suppressed or obscured them. Many adult Korean adoptees recall growing up thinking they were white like their parents: the "little Scandinavian" invoked by Nathan Adolfson's mother. A survey of adult Korean adoptees reports that as they reached adolescence their ethnic identifications shifted: "Only 28 percent of the respondents considered themselves Korean-American or Korean-European as they were growing up; by contrast, 64 percent of the respondents, as adults, viewed themselves as Korean-American or Korean-European" (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute 1999, 1). They described themselves as "Caucasian with a difference," "a white person in an Asian body," and "white middle class, but adopted from Korea." Or as "trying to be white," "not white enough," and "Caucasian, except when looking the mirror" (ibid., 18).

It is in part awareness of the Korean experience that motivates parents of Chinese children to provide *something*—pride in culture, pride in being Chinese. The sense of responsibility for doing this may begin with social workers who counsel prospective parents about the challenges of forming transracial or transnational families and about the need to acquire "cultural competence" (Vonk 2001, 246). This counseling differs strikingly from the earlier emphasis on matching, assimilation, and denial. It has a counterpart in China: as part of the adoption proceedings, parents must promise the Chinese authorities not only to provide their children with love and care but to impart respect for "Chinese culture." Global discourses reinforce these concerns: the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption (1993) affirm that "due regard shall be paid to the desirability of continuity in a child's upbringing and to the child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background" (Stephens 1995, 38; Cecere 1998).

While there certainly are families who have decided that their children are "just American" or "just New Yorkers," even parents who describe themselves strongly in these terms are aware of FCC and its commitment to culture. Among the most vivid representations of this commitment are "Culture Days." In New York, Culture Day has grown steadily since the mid-1990s, and the event now draws about two thousand people. Performances abound: drum ensembles, shadow plays, bits of Peking opera, and a vast array of dances performed by professionals as well as children. There are crafts and dragon carts and cotton candy, and raffle tickets are sold to benefit Chinese orphanages. In 2002, the Chinese Consul General attended and praised the "rich Chinese culture," against a very New York backdrop, as Kay Johnson (2002) noted, of Polish sausages and soft pretzels. Children who arrived early in the day marched under the banner of their home province in China in a "Parade of the Provinces." And

Figure 1. Preparing for a dance performance. Culture Day, New Jersey, 2002. Courtesy Kevin Bubriski

throughout the day, on a huge map of China, each child could point to her presumed place of origin and attach a sticker with her name.[12]

The desire for culture is translated into a panoply of cultural productions, representations, performances. Parents work to connect their children and their families with some relatively accessible form of Chinese culture: dance and dumplings, language lessons, Chinese babysitters and role models. Anagnost refers to these practices as "culture bites" (2000, 413), a metaphor that does not fully capture the myriad strategies families explore.

Miriam, a New York mother, expressed it this way: "It's all about blending—she's Jewish, she's Chinese, she's American, she's a New Yorker, she's from Kansas." Miriam's daughter studies Hebrew, Chinese, Suzuki violin, ballet. She attends Passover seders (mostly with other adoptive families and lots of Chinese girls) and Lunar New Year festivals. She has many names: Chinese, Hebrew, and English. Miriam is thinking ahead to her bat mitzvah and wondering whether appropriate Chinese elements could be incorporated. Although the oldest Chinese adoptees are only about ten, ideas are already beginning to circulate. One mother suggested looking at Chinese coming-of-age rituals: "For my daughter's baby naming we hybridized something from a baby boy's thirtieth-day celebration that we saw in a Zhang Yimou movie: Villagers passed the baby through a

Figure 2. A girl places herself on the map of China. Culture Day, New Jersey, 2002. Courtesy Kevin Bubriski

giant, donut-shaped, decorated steamed bun, so we had a bakery make us a giant donut shaped challah and passed her through at the end of the naming ceremony to much delight and applause." Chinese friends, she added, "said they'd never heard of the ritual, but were not surprised since China is a large country with lots of regional customs" (Eisenberg 2002).

Culture is seen in part as a way of instilling pride in adopted children, who come to learn impressive things about the glorious civilization of the place of their birth. Art and language and ancient history loom large in the imaginary that is China, and holiday celebrations abound. Far less is mentioned about Chinese politics. This overwhelmingly celebratory view of China and Chinese culture is sometimes questioned, especially by Asian American parents. Some criticize white parents for "exoticizing and mysticizing and obsessing about Chinese culture in China while ignoring the living, breathing Chinese American culture at our doorstep" (Klatzkin 2002). Others contend that providing appealing little packages of culture is in itself a form of racism and "worse than nothing," eliding more painful histories of oppression, colonialism, and Asian American immigration (Chang 2001).

In her study of China adoption Internet discussions, Ann Anagnost suggests that "celebratory representations of cultural difference, which are often detached from immigrant histories in the United States," may make it difficult for adopted children to understand their racialization and

may even serve to maintain "the separations that constitute racialized boundaries in U.S. society historically" (2000, 391). But Anagnost studied discussions on a list that included parents who were waiting for or had just received referrals. When babies turn into children, especially school-age children, a very different set of concerns emerges, and both Internet and daily life are filled with talk about race, identity, and adoptive families' ambiguous relationships to other immigrant communities. Conversations about race and racism do not always come easily. When Robin's seven-year-old daughter mentioned that a young friend asked her if she planned to work in a Chinese restaurant when she grew up, Robin said, "Do you think he asked because that's what I did when I was in college?" Robin's immediate response was to affirm her connection with her daughter; only later did we wonder together whether that might have been a moment to discuss race or stereotypes or immigrant labor. Nurturing "cultural pride" is often seen as the critical ground on which later struggles against racism may be waged. The startling, sometimes shocking, discovery of racism, whether subtle or flagrant, has transformed many parents' consciousness of race in ways they never anticipated. When children are teased for their small noses, flat faces, yellow skin, or short eyelashes, parents wonder if they can truly empathize or help. "What can I say to her?" asked one mother: "I speak with long eyelashes."

The question of relationships with Asian America remains unsettled. FCC branches often cultivate relationships with Chinese American worlds. In New York's Lunar New Year Parade, an FCC contingent marches with its own banner.[13] While social workers advocate adult role models and "meaningful relationships" in the Asian American community, it is not clear which parts of this "community" would be accessible or receptive. Speakers of Mandarin or Cantonese or Hakka? Students, workers, or second- or third-generation professionals—another category of "privileged immigrants" struggling with the nature of *their* "Chinese American" identity?[14] One white adoptive mother laughed as she described how a highly educated Chinese American friend sought her advice on books about things Chinese for his young children.

Vivia Chen, one of a small number of New York FCC mothers who is Chinese American, recounted a telephone conversation with a white adoptive mother in search of mooncakes, who insisted: "'You're Chinese, you must have an old family recipe somewhere.' I replied, 'Chinese people don't make their own mooncakes. I mean, who makes their own bagels? It's not done. Just go to Chinatown and buy some.' Silence ensued on the other end of the line. Finally, she spoke: 'Well, I'm sure real Chinese people make their own mooncakes!'" (Chen 1999, 17).

Chen upset a few of her fellow New Yorkers when she wrote: "I fear

that some parents might mistake the colorful trappings of Chinese traditions for the experience of being Chinese-American. . . . I can understand why parents are so intrigued by sword dancing, lantern making, dragon boat racing and mooncake baking. These snippets of Chinese culture are appealing, fun and just more accessible than grappling with the more difficult issue of identity and the race thing." Yet, Chen went on to say, adoptive parents "astound me with how much pride they take in their daughter's birth culture. In fact, they've inspired me to incorporate Chinese art and language into the fabric of my daughter's life" (ibid., 18).

There is, on the one hand, an inevitably disappointing search for an organic connection with things Chinese or Chinese American and, on the other hand, an unselfconscious pleasure in things imagined to be "Chinese," whether appropriated or invented. The "red thread," for example, has come to represent connections between adoptive parents and their children and among those who share loved ones or children from China. The image, said to be drawn from an old Chinese tale, evokes lovers predestined to meet, connected by an invisible red thread that will never break, or red threads that spring from a newborn's spirit and attach to all people who will be important to the child, shortening as he or she grows and bringing closer those who were meant to be together.

Ironically, in China the red thread tale appears to have a more limited and not altogether positive resonance. "An invisible red thread attaches you at birth to your future spouse," writes Amy Klatzkin. "With romantic marriage now the norm in China, it has taken on a positive glow, but I think that's recent—and it has nothing to do with adoption. Given that traditional marriages often brought misery and servitude to women, the fate signified by the red thread was not necessarily a happy one." Klatzkin adds: "It astounded me at first to see it morphed into an American feel-good, everything-is-for-the-best ideology of international adoption." In most writing about Chinese adoption, the red thread signifies the destiny that brought parents and children together. Klatzkin questions this as well: "And will our children always feel that they were destined to be with us and only us? Mine certainly doesn't. She delves deeply into the arbitrariness of her fate" (Klatzkin 2002).

While it is easy to parody the compulsion to consume—to spend lavishly on Asian dolls or to search the Web for panda pajamas—or to scorn the superficiality of a celebratory multiculturalism, many parents strive for some deeper transformation of their own identities and lives. Some parents become local advocates for adoption, revising school curricula, or critiquing media portrayals. Others work to create a sense of community extending to China, often through efforts to "give back" something, to redress imbalances in "a world in which children flow in only one direc-

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tion" (Yngvesson 2002). These efforts also represent an activation of ties to China, an affirmation of the child's origins.

Giving back may be a matter of contributing to a growing number of orphanage assistance programs, many of which have been founded by adoptive mothers in the United States who have taken the project of adoption in significant measure beyond the personal. These individuals often work full-time directing programs that provide foster care for orphanage children or school fees, warm clothing, surgeries, or "hugging grannies," retired women who come to the orphanage to offer stimulation and affection. For other adoptive families, giving back may be as simple as sending photographs, letters, and money to children's orphanages, sometimes money that children themselves have raised by selling lemonade or running campaigns in school. Orphanage directors in China often welcome these connections in emotional terms. In May 2002, the director of one orphanage sent greetings in an e-mail message to "our adopted children and adoptive parents," noting that orphanage children would celebrate Children's Day on 1 June and hoping that adopted children would "have a good time too." She added: "My staff and I care about all the children that have been adopted. We would like to know how the children are getting along in life. We would like to see your children's pictures. I would like you to tell your children that we still love and miss them" (Shenyang 2002).[15]

Longings

Although some parents prefer to adopt in a distant country in order to avoid the complexities of dealing with birth mothers, especially at the beginning of the process, many adoptive parents come to express deep sadness about lack of knowledge or possible contact with the birth family. Beyond the efforts to instill a kind of protective cultural pride, it is this sadness and desire, I suggest, that may incite tremendous interest in the child's "culture." In the absence of the mother's body, the longing for origins may be displaced onto the body of the nation and its imagined culture. The genetic lineage of the child is unknown, but the cultural heritage can be studied, celebrated, performed, and embodied. The world of adoption has come up with a term that seems to express this, a paradoxical formulation: *birth culture*.

The shift in domestic adoption, now something to be celebrated rather than shrouded in mystery and silence, to be explored lifelong rather than ignored, has surely helped to create a climate in which it is desirable to search: whether for actual birth families, or for greater knowledge about

those families, or at the very least for one's story. This shift has also helped to create a climate in which the adoption of children who look nothing like their parents, as is often the case in transnational adoption, may be accepted, even welcomed and embraced. Yet there is nothing instantaneous or simple about this welcome, and its complexity is compounded by the fact that the child has come from another country, another "culture." Furthermore, the new focus in domestic adoption, to create a narrative of the self that includes genetics and beginnings, does not translate easily to situations when virtually nothing is known of the specific circumstances of a child's abandonment or of her birth parents.

The social pendulum has swung from the virtual denial of adoption and the biological beginnings of the adopted child to an insistent ideology that *without* embrace of those beginnings there will forever be a gaping hole, a primal wound, an incomplete self. Betty Jean Lifton, a psychologist and adoptee whose books have been influential in the domestic adoption world since the late 1970s, writes of "the ghosts that haunt the dark crevices of the unconscious and trail each member of the adoptive triangle . . . wherever they go" (1994, 11). Lifton has provided the world of adoption with a compelling vision and language describing "the journey of the adopted self," "the broken narrative," and the "genealogical bewilderment" of the adoptee (ibid.). This vision and this language have helped to make the case for dissolving the secrecy that once surrounded adoption. But they have also helped to create an adoption discourse in which searching to repair the wounded self and broken narrative seems almost compulsory. Activism of adoptees and birth mothers, changes in adoption law in many states, open adoptions of various sorts, the prevalence of searches and reunions and literature describing them, social work discourse, the new genetics—all this has created a set of new cultural pressures to find the missing genetic link, what Kaja Finkler calls "the kin in the gene" (2001, 235).[16] Pressures that originated within domestic adoption now touch the world of transnational adoption as well.

The mysteries that would be part of any adoption are compounded in China by the absence of a narrative and by a political, social, and economic situation that seems to preclude the possibility of ever learning more. As we have seen, most Chinese adoptions are of a baby who was abandoned at a place where she (sometimes he) would be found and taken to safety: a Chinese family who might adopt the child or, more probably, an orphanage. Adoptive parents struggle with contradictions as they seek to imbue a child with a love of China *and* an understanding of the harsh realities that probably inform her personal history. It is not uncommon for adopted children, like eight-year-old Ying Ying Fry, who wrote a book called *Kids Like Me in China*, to have a rather sophisticated

understanding of the one-child policy and what Fry calls "the girl thing": the expectation that boys take care of their parents when they are old and pass on the family name. "Sometimes they decide they can't raise another baby girl, no matter how much they love her, because they need to try again for a boy. And then they take that new baby girl someplace safe, where she will be found quickly and taken care of and maybe get a new family—in China or some other country—who can love her and keep her forever. Maybe that's what happened to me," adds Fry. "I don't know for sure" (2001, 13–17).[17]

The secrecy that must surround this surrender of the child and the consequent absence of knowledge of, or possibility of connection with, the birth mother or birth story, may, in part, impel the proliferation and circulation of parents' personal reflections in the world of Chinese adoption. In "Navel Gazing," Lindsay Davies ponders her daughter's belly button: "Thus for Gemma, a child adopted from China, her navel is the sign on her flesh of her deep loss. It marks an actual physical connection to the woman who gave her life; with the woman whom later, no doubt, she will try to imagine, try to grasp in her mind and heart; for whom she will cry and yet never be able to know. This fleshly knot attaches her to a past she can never access and to people who will remain as elusive as shadows" (2000, 18). Davies tries to embrace these shadows and see them as people: "People who contributed the nature part to the nature/nurture equation of identity. People who are present in her in ways we can never exactly know but which constantly provoke my imagination" (ibid., 19).

Françoise Romaine-Ouellette and Hélène Belleau have pointed to the "paradoxical situation that is created for the child who is assigned exclusively adoptive kinship in a society where blood ties are seen as indissoluble bonds of love and solidarity" (2001, 27). A strategy for dealing with this paradox, they suggest, is to see biological ties as preceding or external to adoptive ties, "as just one tiny part of the particular history of the child, and not a component of the child's current identity." Though birth ties are "recognized" in documents, photographs, and "souvenirs," Ouellette and Belleau (27) describe these as a "deactivated, objectivized" archive. I contend that, on the contrary, parents seek ways of "activating" the archive and the connection. The quest for a DNA connection with sisters (to which I shall return below) is one example. The return journey is another.

Many parents have undertaken return journeys—sometimes to adopt a younger sibling, sometimes to visit orphanages and foster families, sometimes to give their child an experience of China (and of looking like the majority). "We watched as she was enfolded into feeling a sense of belonging and oneness with the kind people she was meeting," wrote one

mother of her six-year-old's trip to China. "Her self esteem grew a foot taller. Her sense of self as a person of Chinese heritage grew a mile. 'I look like everyone else. You two don't!' she would say with an impish grin" (Brown 2002). A cheerful version of the journey developed by Jane Liedtke, an entrepreneurial Beijing-based mother, is a traveling "culture camp" in which groups of families visit tourist attractions and child-friendly sites like panda reserves but most importantly create a solidarity among the campers and a sense that China is a real place: huge, complicated, filled with Chinese people. "We specialize in helping your child fall in love with China!" Liedkte's brochure (2002) proclaims.[18] Liedtke eventually hopes to convert an abandoned Beijing palace into a "cultural center" for families traveling to adopt or to revisit China—but also for returning adopted teenagers and young adults and even soon-to-be-retired parents, who would like to engage in some form of community service in China.

Travel may also take the form of a quest. Knowing that it is virtually impossible to find birth families in China, nonetheless the search for *something*—and the narration of that search—can assume nearly mythical proportions. *Wuhu Diary: On Taking My Adopted Daughter Back to Her Hometown in China* recounts Emily Prager's journey with her five-year-old daughter back to the town of Wuhu. Hoping to visit LuLu's orphanage and to find some traces, some additional information to supplement the incomplete narrative of her child's beginnings, Prager writes: "LuLu is now part of our heritages, in the kinship charts. Yet the mysteries of her genetic code . . . are lost to her, probably forever. So anything we can find, any tiny nugget that might lead us back, we will take and store. If paleontologists can build a race from just a jawbone, surely we can glimpse a mother and father from an entire town" (2001, 40).

After two months in Wuhu, mother and daughter left China without learning anything more about LuLu's birth parents or her past. Even the orphanage (which they were not allowed to visit) had been torn down and rebuilt. Prager's desire for connection to the woman who had borne her child is displaced onto a town, China, the Chinese people, the history of China. In the preadoption letter that she wrote, at the agency's request, to her daughter's imagined birth mother, she assures her: "I will also instill in her . . . a love of China, and an identity with the Chinese people. Don't worry. She will know where she comes from, that she was born of a great and ancient tradition. Perhaps some day, she would wish to go back. The history of China is, as you know, wide and long." Prager adds: "As your daughter becomes my daughter, your ancestors become my ancestors, and mine become yours. It is an interesting thing and very modern" (ibid., 238).

Part of what is "very modern" is the role of the adoption agency, which asked Prager to imagine and write a letter to the birth mother of her to-be-adopted child—even before a child is referred. When a discussion on a listserv that includes parents of older children turned to the question of grieving and whether grief is overemphasized, a social worker specializing in adoption countered that a child adopted as an infant who does not appear to grieve may later *learn* to grieve for a loss she was too young to experience, understand, or articulate. Although this grief is not "the intense, powerful, time-limited primary grief that someone experiences when someone known and remembered and cherished dies," most adoptees do "grieve the loss of birth parents, connection to ancestry, disconnect from their original culture . . . at the same time that they celebrate and claim the connections that they have to their adoptive parents" (Brown 2002).

Such emotions are expressed in a cultural and historical field that has changed considerably since the silences of the 1950s, when the possibility of grief on the part of anyone in the adoption triad (child, birth parents, or adoptive parents) or any attention to birth parents was suppressed. The contemporary discourse of American social work and much of the popular literature that has focused on search and reunion frame orphanage travels and the wish to search as a quest for knowledge, as a necessary step in what is constructed as a universal, "natural" process of grieving and healing.

A growing number of adoptive families have returned to China. Some have been allowed to visit the orphanage, to meet the child's caregivers, or to visit a foster mother outside the orphanage. One mother has established a small enterprise that provides photographs of a child's "abandonment site" and other key places in her story. Ironically, thanks to substantial financial support from parents in America, many of the older orphanages have been torn down and rebuilt. Yearning for some tangible connection to their daughters' pasts, two mothers who visited a reconstructed orphanage sought out the original building's site, from which they each managed to retrieve, and carry home to Massachusetts, a single brick. Children, too, may seek something tangible. A girl in Arizona, asked by a friend what she would like from China, replied, "Dirt—I would like some China dirt—so I know it's a really real place." She "treasured that small bag of China dirt," her mother wrote, and when she returned to China for the first time at the age of six, she and her family went to the mountainside and "dug up some rich, brown, moist and fragrant earth from Sierra Song E's beloved China" (Brown 2002).

There is in all of this a sense of multiple, layered longings. In the absence of birth parents (mothers especially), longings may emerge as a

quest for place. Parents at Culture Day help their child place her name on the map of China. In China, Prager tries to reconstruct the scene of her child's abandonment, to render the tale concrete. Staring at the bridge above the canal where she has been told LuLu was found, she muses, "Did people bring her here on a houseboat? Lu, with her love of boats and water? They could have. Did they bring her up out of the houseboat and place her right here?" (2001, 83).

In *The Lost Daughters of China*, Karin Evans also writes of her longing for fragments of a story about her daughter and wonders about the scene of abandonment and being found. Knowing only that Kelly was left in a marketplace when she was three months old, Evans conjures a scene vivid with sensuous detail:

> It was mid-winter, a season of mild weather, I'd been told, but likely to be wet and the market would have been crawling—filled with buckets of squirming local shrimp, live frogs in bamboo cages, and tiny shiny eels swimming in tubs. . . . Bok choy and long beans tied in neat bunches. Piles of oranges. And somewhere in that large, bustling place, tucked among the produce, maybe, or near the winter melons, was a baby. (2000, 83)

She continues to fantasize about the finding of the child—perhaps a farmer, reaching for a melon—and then tries to imagine "all the possible identities for her elusive mother—a farmworker, a young university girl, a daughter forced to fend for herself when floods destroyed her family's village, a poor rural woman who came to the city seeking work and found herself instead with an unexpected child? . . . Was she sixteen? Or twenty-two? Or forty?" (ibid., 85).

Unable to answer these questions, Evans turns to something palpable, to geography, to land and water. She imagines a symmetry between the child's birth mother and herself: "Just as the rivers in my daughter's homeland defined the physical landscape . . . there was an invisible human current at work. A rippling flow of people, poor and prosperous, riding to and from the city on motorbikes, bicycles, in trucks and cars. Somewhere back in the Pearl River Delta, I knew, I had a counterpart" (ibid., 86).

Belongings

Unlike most previous waves of adoption, adoption from China has further challenged the normative family by creating large numbers of single-parent families. Adoption from China is not, of course, alone in destabilizing the two-parent biological family model but takes its place among all sorts of contemporary ways of making families and babies: blended step-

families, gay and lesbian parents, parents who conceive with the help of new reproductive technologies. These new family forms challenge the strength of the symbolic blood tie, that powerful metaphor of American kinship (Schneider 1968). Is adoption inescapably bound to the effort to replicate, echo, or mirror the family formed by biological ties? Or is a more radical transformation possible, as Yngvesson (1997) suggests in her analysis of open adoption? The practices of contemporary Chinese (and other forms of transnational) adoption reveal both the pull of the genealogical model and the impulse to transcend it and create new forms of kinship beyond blood.

The search for adequate language suggests something of the effort entailed in rewriting kinship. Adoptive parents worry about ways of naming the woman who conceived and gave birth to their children. *Birth mother* is the preferred term of the moment, but discussion often turns to ways of acknowledging that both adoptive and biological mothers are "real." One listserv member commented that whatever we call them, it should not be so hard to incorporate the idea of extra mommies: after all, we have grandmothers, godmothers, and stepmothers, and lesbian families already have two mothers. Meg produced peals of laughter from a group of friends when she recounted a chance encounter with a New York City fireman: "Now be good to your mommy and daddy," the fireman urged six-year-old Hannah, who responded by announcing to all who could hear, "I don't have a daddy, I have two mommies!" (not adding that the other one is in China).

If the birth mother is impossible to find, the longing for genetic connection may be transposed onto a search for sisters. Two families—one in the United States, one in Europe—pursued efforts to determine if their daughters, fifteen months apart in age and adopted from the same orphanage, might be sisters. The girls look so much alike, wrote one mother, "that their photos could easily be mistaken for one another's. It's really astonishing. Even if they aren't siblings . . . it will be very cool to know somebody who looks that much like them." The families met, the girls' DNA was tested, and after six weeks of anxious waiting, the results were inconclusive. Both families were deeply disappointed. Social worker Jane Brown mused: "In a world where one is genetically all alone, it is a rare thing to have even a chance at making a connection." At the same time, she noted, adoptive families "have to acknowledge that our relationships are not just like those of families who share a genetic history. We can talk openly about how we are the same and how we are different—and that doesn't make our relationships any less authentic and powerful" (Brown 2002).

If adoptive parents struggle to affirm a kinship that is always in the

process of being created, the media is quick to dramatize the romance of genetic kin reunited. The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* published a story of twins discovered when a couple in Seattle sent a disposable camera to the foster home in China in which their soon to be adopted daughter had spent the first year of her life. Upon returning home with their child, they developed the film and to their astonishment saw pictures of her with another toddler who appeared to be her identical twin. In this case DNA testing verified the genetic link: "A miracle made possible only by a photograph" (Eggert 2002). Although the second child had already been referred for adoption to another family, the Seattle parents were able to stop those arrangements and adopt the twin as well. The mother said, "I'm very excited, to put it mildly. . . . Twins are supposed to have this bond" (ibid.).

Oscillations between these discourses—the search for the DNA connections and the bonds that blood relatives are "supposed to have" and the creation of a "different, authentic, and powerful" kinship—appear in other contemporary kinship forms. "Open adoption" may entail knowing about or meeting birth parents, or it may go further and incorporate birth and adoptive families on an ongoing basis (Yngvesson 1997; Pertman 2000). Adoptive parents are on the edge, as they struggle to balance assumptions driven by the dominant ideology that everyone has an "innate desire to know about their genetic histories" (Pertman 2000, 11–12), and simultaneously to legitimize the cultural construction of kinship. Kahleah Guibault, who was born in Guatemala and now lives in Quebec, wrote this when she was nine:

> There are two ways of building a family, by giving birth to a child, or by adopting a child. Some people do both! . . . Being a member of an adoptive family means having two families. One birth family, and one forever family. Both families are important in different ways. . . . Some people ask me if Mommy and Daddy are my REAL parents and if Tristan is my REAL brother. I answer, "You can't get more REAL than my family!" . . . I wish I could write to my birthmother. If I could, I would tell her: I love her, I am okay, I am happy and loved. I have a family. I hope she is happy and loved . . . I think adoption is a great way to build a family and to make people happy. To me, a family is: people who love each other, take care of each other, help and teach each other, and will always be together. (Guibault 2000, 52)

As I have suggested, there is a movement toward the palpable and the particular among families who have adopted from China. The search for the place of birth and abandonment; the telling of the story of being found; the salvaged orphanage brick that represents an individual's his-

There is a movement that goes beyond the China community to create a broader, more transcendent space.

tory; the forging of solidarity with others who have been adopted from the same town, or orphanage, or even crib, or at the same moment: all of these substitute for the unattainable "kin in the gene." At the same time, there is a movement that goes beyond the China community to create a broader, more transcendent space. One venue for such efforts is a New York ritual created by adoptive parents' groups, organizations of young adult adoptees, and birth parents. The annual "Spirit of Adoption" ceremony strives to bridge not merely gaps but chasms by representing and celebrating all members of the adoption triad, in both domestic and transnational adoption. A similar broadening is also evident in New York's Korean adoptee community. The mentorship program created by the largely Korean members of Also Known As (AKA), an organization of adult adoptees, is intended particularly to reach adopted Chinese children. AKA's own Culture Day was notable for its Korean drummers and dancers who performed along with groups of Vietnamese, Chinese, and even salsa dancers from Colombia—a mix of adopted and hyphenated Americans.

"We're all in the Adoptee Network," concludes each verse in a poem composed by seven-year-old participants in a New York playshop in 2001. A sort of junior consciousness-raising and empowerment group for adopted children, the playshop was invented by social worker Jane Brown. The poem's refrain was provided by Brown, but it is an idea that echoes through much of the discourse of contemporary Chinese adoption. "Jane helps our children see that they are part of something big," wrote Amy Klatzkin in describing Playshops "that they have a role to play in learning what this all means and passing on their knowledge and experience to the children coming after them. She helps them see themselves not as victims of a sad past but owners of brilliant lives whose futures are theirs to create" (Klatzkin 2001). And indeed, Klatzkin's daughter, Ying Ying Fry, declares in the first paragraph of her book, "There are lots of kids like me who were born in China and adopted by parents from other parts of the world. . . . Wherever we go, we often meet families like ours" (2001, 1).

The powerful image of the network, of "kids like me" or "families like ours" "wherever we go," enacted through the everyday practices of ribbon dance classes or FCC picnics, reflects how significantly the culture of adoption has changed in recent years. Parents of children adopted in earlier decades often note these changes with some awe, wishing that they had had a venue for the complicated discussions of myriad issues that are now daily staples of adoption talk on the Internet. It is not that the complexities and contradictions of adoption have become any simpler. Performing "Chinese culture" surely does not erase racism; it may reinscribe or reify difference in unintended ways. But many of these complexities

and contradictions are now exposed, voiced, and debated, at times to such a degree that some parents wonder if this is not too much. "Are we not scrutinizing every little thing to excess?" one mother wrote.

For many, however, the scrutiny, occurring in the field of a larger collectivity, yields both pain and pleasure. It is too soon to know what the growing cohort of adopted Chinese children will eventually have to say about adoption, about birth parents, about culture, race and gender, about China or the world. To date, the voices we have heard are mostly those of parents. But we do know that narrative impulse in the world of Chinese adoption is being nurtured at an early age, supported by adults with a lot to say, but also by a new and rapidly evolving culture of adoption. That culture includes an array of practices, from play groups and playshops and FCC newsletters that devote whole issues to the work of kids to the circulation of autoethnographical films and writings by older Korean adoptees. It was *First Person Plural*, the film by Korean adoptee Deann Borshay Liem, which originally inspired eight-year-old Ying Ying Fry to contemplate a film of her own. Fry's mother, a writer, persuaded her that a book would be simpler, and the idea for *Kids Like Me in China* was born. The mother of an eighteen-year-old Korean adoptee wrote on the Internet: "My daughter says she belongs to four cultures . . . Korean, American, Jewish and Adoption. In my heart I feel her best bet is in the adoption community. It's going to be very interesting to watch how these next few years play out." The interaction between the young generation of Chinese and other adopted children and their older counterparts from Korea and elsewhere will no doubt continue to play out in unanticipated ways, reminding us that adoption, like other forms of transnational kinship, is situated in a moment of increasingly *unquiet*, crisscrossing migrations.

Notes

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1. Field research for this article was primarily carried out in New York City (2001–2), supplemented by seven years of informal "participant observation" as an adoptive parent in New York and by Internet materials and listservs that represent a more broadly North American population. Some names have been changed, and identifying information has been omitted for listserv participants who requested anonymity. This article does not address differences in communities throughout the United States or Canada, nor does it deal with families who have chosen to raise their children as "just American." Nonetheless, membership in FCC and Internet participation encompass a very large percentage of adoptive families. Statements in this essay about "most" or "many" adoptive parents or children must be understood in terms of these constraints.

2. For statistics, see travel.state.gov/orphan_numbers.html.

3. In the late 1990s, one writer counted more than one thousand articles published in the popular press in a mere two years (Cecere 1998, 82). This interest is paralleled by coverage of adoption in general. See Hallmark Channel's release in 2002 of a thirteen-hour series, "Adoption" (www.hallmarkchannel.com).

4. Transnational adoption is also surging in Europe and Australia.

5. Whereas adoption from Russia parallels the Chinese case in terms of dates and numbers, issues of race and difference have not emerged with the same salience, nor have the communities that mobilized around Russian adoption become as vocal (Scroggs 2000). Most adopted Russian and Eastern European children are considered "white" in the United States (although in their birth country they may be stigmatized as Roma) and may to some extent resemble their adoptive parents. Even families with children from Latin America or India, where racial differences are often marked, have not organized as actively and visibly as their China counterparts. In the North American imaginary, China and Chinese "culture" are paradoxically deemed both exotic and accessible.

6. In 1999, the age limit was lowered to thirty years both for foreign adopters and for Chinese parents wishing to adopt in China.

7. Prior to quotas issued in 2001 that limited single-parent applications to 5 percent of each adoption agency's total, such adoptions constituted 25 to 35 percent of the total (Smith and Kelly 2002, 4). An earlier set of regulations prohibited gay and lesbian parents from adopting.

8. Other forms include sex-selective abortion. The growing use of ultrasound scans to determine gender is partly responsible for sex ratios that have become increasingly skewed since 1980. The 2000 census reported a ratio of almost 117:100 males to females (Gittings 2001). "The numbers tell a frightening story: little girls are being eliminated from Chinese society . . . on a massive scale" (Greenhalgh and Li 1995, 601).

9. Abandonment has painful consequences for parents, including punishments (fines and sterilization) if they are caught. We know little of emotional consequences, but Johnson et al. describe one birth mother who "wept silently before we even began to speak; several years after abandoning her second daughter she remained undecided as to whether she would ever proceed with another pregnancy despite the fact that she held a certificate of permission to give birth again and was under great pressure from her husband, and in-laws. She vowed that if she did decide to become pregnant, she would never again abandon one of her babies regardless of the gender" (Johnson, Huang, and Wang 1998, 480–81).

10. On the West Coast and Hawaii, there are many families with one or more Asian American parents (Wang 1999).

11. Other reasons include the American public's fascination with China, a mix of longings for some mysterious "East" and fear of its contemporary power. Orientalizing and ambivalence take gendered forms with respect to adoption from China. On the one hand, Chinese girls are represented as adorable, even exquisite; on the other, they are viewed as victims of a cruel and oppressive society that devalues women and discards its precious daughters. These representations pose dilemmas for adoptive parents, who see their children as neither "China dolls" nor "abandoned girls."

12. Adoptive parents have no way of knowing their child's birthplace; all they know is where the child was found.

13. In San Francisco, where a third of FCC children have at least one Asian American parent, FCC marches *without* a banner, merged with the whole parade as members of local schools or Chinese American groups (Klatzkin 2001).

14. At a workshop on transnational adoption at Spence Chapin Adoption Agency in New York (6 March 2002), parents responded to social worker Joy Lieberthal's talk about the importance of Asian role models by lamenting the fact that in their virtually all-white communities there were no Asian doctors or teachers; the only Asians worked in restaurants or Laundromats. Lieberthal suggested that children should see all sorts of Asians because they, too, will someday be mistaken for the delivery boy (or girl).

15. The influx of resources from abroad may have unintended, less beneficial consequences, as some officials "have grown accustomed to the benefits of international adoption and seem less than eager to promote the domestic adoption of healthy children" (Johnson 2002).

16. "When you go to the doctor you do not have a medical history and you are not a person," commented an adoptee in Finkler's study of the medicalization of family and kinship, a sentiment shared by almost every adoptee Finkler met (2001, 241).

17. For girls, the birth policy story offers a partial answer to the question: Why didn't my parents keep me? It is a somewhat comforting possibility that birth parents had no choice but to relinquish their female babies. But for parents of the 5 to 10 percent of adopted Chinese children who are boys, the standard gendered narrative is not helpful. One mother wrote: "I've had parents react to our family as though we didn't 'really' adopt from China because we adopted a boy . . . because we didn't save one of these precious little girls that had been displaced because of the one-child law. I've even had people suggest we should have turned down our referral or perhaps sued our agency for not making us more aware that boys were even a possibility. . . . We were, for the record, one of the many families each year that writes a gender-neutral application, paints the nursery pink, then gets surprised by the referral of a son. Like most of these families, we got over our shock and went ahead with the adoption and lived happily ever after (except for having to repaint the bedroom)" (Ridenour 2002). This comment raises the question of how inclusive is the adoptive "community" in a world where girls so clearly predominate.

18. The market for such trips is growing rapidly: Liedkte (2002) offered ten options, including "Yangtze River Camp Cruise" (see your daughter's hometown before it is submerged by the Three Gorges Dam, on a ship outfitted to resem-

ble a splendid palace, offering onboard tai chi, kite flying, and seminars). Other organizations that have sponsored Korean and other "heritage" tours for years have begun to add China to their repertoire.

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