Adoption Quarterly, 15:157–184, 2012

ISSN: 1092-6755 print / 1544-452X online
DOI: 10.1080/10926755.2012.698404

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

"It Was Like This, I Think": Constructing an Adoption Narrative for Chinese Adopted Children

APRIL CHATHAM-CARPENTER
University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, Iowa, USA

Using qualitative survey data from 35 adoptive parents of children from China, I explore the type of narrative parents construct about their child's "abandonment." Parents tell the story they know best—the child's adoption story—being careful to not overly burden the child with harsh abandonment realities. Most parents opt to tell a dominant narrative, portraying the child's Chinese birth parents as parents who loved their child and struggled with the decision to give up their child pressured by outside forces to do so. Any counternarrative told seems to be for the adoptive parents themselves, not for their children.

KEYWORDS Chinese adoptees, birth parents, adoption story, identity, narrative and counternarrative

> Momma, if children are a "gift from God," why did my Chinese Mom not want me?
> Momma, tell me about when I was born.
> Momma, what did my Chinese Mom look like?

Adopted children from China often ask these types of questions of their adoptive parents. Similar to other adoptive parents who do not know the "facts" about their child's "abandonment" circumstances, these adoptive parents have choices on how to tell this story. As with adoptive parents' stories to their children in general, the stories these parents tell their children when they are young are often incorporated into the child's own storytelling later

Received 6 April 2011; revised 24 September 2011; accepted 8 December 2011.
Address correspondence to April Chatham-Carpenter, University of Northern Iowa, Department of Communication Studies, Lang Hall 326, Cedar Falls, IA 50614-0139. E-mail: chatham@uni.edu

in life, helping the child make sense of the losses in their lives. In this paper, I explore how adoptive parents frame their child's adoption story within the context of reasons the child was placed for adoption or "abandoned." In addition, I explore the possibility of a dominant or canonical narrative in such stories, where certain messages are emphasized and others are deemphasized.

Adoptions from China have been ongoing since the early 1980s, due largely to China's one-child-per-family population management policy, which was strictly enforced by the Chinese government. The cultural preference for boys made girls the primary children who were adopted. The top six countries receiving children from China have been the United States, Spain, Canada, the Netherlands, Sweden, and France, with a total of 75,476 adoptions reported to these six countries between 2000 and 2007 (Selman, 2009). From 1999 to 2009, there were a total of 59,203 adoptions from China to the United States alone (United States Department of State, 2010). Numbers of adoptions have started to go down from China since 2005, due to more stringent requirements for adoptive parents and an increase in domestic adoption and affluence in China (MacLeod, 2010; Selman, 2009). The common practice of adopting girls is still the norm, but there has been an increase in the past few years of the number of boys adopted as well as the number of special needs children (Rosman, 2009).

Since China opened up their doors to international adoption in the 1990s, a child had to be "abandoned," without parents being able to be officially identified, in order to be adopted. With no legal option for birth parents to comply with the one-child policy, many babies were abandoned in public places (Johnson, 2004; Selman, 2009). Therefore, without finding the child's birth parents, adoptive parents have no official knowledge of why the dislocation from birth parents happened, other than because of China's one-child policy (Johnson, 2004; Tong, 2010b). Recently, however, allegations of child trafficking (e.g., Child Trafficking, n.d.; Demmick, 2009; Ren, n.d.; Tong, 2010a) provide alternative explanations of why some children may have been placed in orphanages for adoption.

Although there are many good pre- and post-adoption resources and services now available for adoptive parents to use to help them co-construct with their child the child's adoption story (e.g., Chang, 2008; Cogen, 2008; Dorow, 2006; Evans, 2000; Hoshmand, Gere, & Wong, 2006; Johnson, 2004; Lee, 2006; Luo & Bergquist, 2004; MacLeod & Macrae, 2006–2007; Rojewski & Rojewski, 2001; Tessler, Gamache, & Liu, 1999; Wolfs, 2008, 2010), it is unknown what adoptive parents tell their children and themselves about their children's "abandonment." Do they tell a traditional tale, using generally accepted reasons such as the one-child policy and preference for boys, or do they tell alternative stories or counternarratives (e.g., child trafficking possibilities)?

IDENTITY FORMATION: THE IMPORTANCE OF NARRATIVE

As human beings, our identity, or sense of who we are and what our place is in the world, is formed through the telling of narratives or stories (Eakin, 1999, 2008; Langellier, 1989; McAdams, 1993). It is in early parent-child conversations that "children learn the conventionalized narrative forms that eventually provide a structure for internally represented memories" (Fivush & Reese, 1992, p. 115).

In the narrative that is socially constructed between a child and his or her parents, certain aspects are foregrounded and seen as important and other aspects are backgrounded as being peripheral to the meaning of the story (Fivush & Reese, 1992). "By selecting particular events to discuss and focusing on particular aspects of those events, parents are informing children which events are of personal significance and why those events are meaningful" (Fivush & Reese, 1992, p. 116). The stories and memories become linked together to form a "more overarching, narratively organized life story" (Fivush & Reese, 1992, p. 117).

The role the parents' narrative plays in the child's life differs according to what developmental stage the child is experiencing (Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig, 1992; Brodzinsky, Singer, & Braff, 1984). In Wrobel, Kohler, Grotevant, and McRoy's (2003) Family Adoption Communication Model, they note there are two types of parent-child interactions before adolescence, in terms of adoption story construction. The parents direct the storytelling in Phase I, and they co-construct the story with the child in Phase II. During Phase II, parents attempt to answer their children's questions about their birth and heritage, and based on the information they are given, children then attempt to construct a meaningful narrative that provides them with a strong sense of self (Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig, 1992). The story construction changes hands in adolescence, when the child's own story becomes "front and center," instead of just the parents' version of the story, with the adolescent adoptee telling their own story as they wish to tell it (Wrobel et al., 2003).

One of the typical stories shared with children is a child's birth story (Jorgenson & Bochner, 2004), and for an adopted child, that story includes his or her adoption or "entrance" story (Krusiewicz & Wood, 2001). These stories help an adopted child understand his or her identity within both the child's biological and adopted family. Adoptive identity development has been defined as "how the individual constructs meaning about his/her adoption" (Grotevant, Dunbar, Kohler, & Esau, 2000, p. 381). "Adopted individuals have the additional overlay of discerning why they are not with the parents who created them and what relevance this has for their own identities" (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2009, p. 12).

Brodzinsky (1987, 1990) found that by the time an adopted child reaches middle childhood, the child begins to think more negatively about being adopted, more intensely experiencing the loss associated with their adoption.

Fantasies about birth parents increase, as well as behavioral problems, during this time. Adopted children begin to understand adoption as "family building" *and* as "family loss" (Brodzinsky, 1990, p. 13). "Adopted individuals' awareness of adoption loss and a sense of difference results in stress, and how individuals make sense of and interpret the adoption experience and how they cope with the stress will influence their adjustment" (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2009, p. 13). As parents and children continue to interact about the child's concerns, the narrative about the child's beginnings needs to get expanded with a legitimation of the child's concerns, in order for the child to healthily cope with the greater sense of loss he or she is experiencing (Brodzinsky, 1990, 2006).

Adoption-related stress continues into adolescence and adulthood, with adoptees often reporting that they desire to search out their roots and find their birth families (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2009). Baden and Wiley (2007) analyzed 13 studies of adoptees' choices to search for their birth families and found that common reasons for searching were desiring background information, wishing for a cohesive identity, wanting to meet their biological parents, desiring a biological connection based on physical appearance, wanting to assure birth parents that the adoptee is doing well, and being curious. A choice to search for birth parents (or not) then becomes part of an adoptee's identity and narrative development.

ADOPTION NARRATIVES

The adoption event itself can provide "a narrative rupture" in an adopted child's life (Dorow, 2006, p. 27). But when these adoption stories are "broken" with missing information, it provides "anxiety or lack of certitude" (Yngvesson & Mahoney, 2000, p. 78) for both adoptive parents and adopted children.

Harrigan (2010) qualitatively studied 11 mothers' international adoption narratives. (Two of them had adopted Chinese children.) The mothers' adoption stories included information about the child's prenatal development and details about the child's life and the adoptive parents' lives prior to adoption. These stories also explain the process leading up to the adoption and the events surrounding the adoption itself and early days together as a family. She concluded that mothers' adoption stories served several functions. One of the functions is to *offer positive reinforcement for the child*, constructing adoption as a positive experience. Harrigan's participants did this by (1) emphasizing the "birth parents' positive intentions for their children in placing their children for adoption" (p. 32), (2) detailing the "great lengths the [adoptive parents] went through to secure the adoption for their children" (p. 32), (3) emphasizing "the permanence of their families" (p. 32), (4) incorporating "into the story information regarding their long-lasting desire to be parents"

(p. 33), and (5) highlighting "their children's special qualities in order to positively reinforce them" (p. 33). Another function Harrigan (2010) found the narratives played was to help formulate a complete history of the child's life story, as "the adoption story provides the opportunity for participants to teach their children about their birth and the known details of their lives before their adoption" (p. 35). However, Harrigan (2010) does not make clear what information about the birth parents is provided when parents construct their narratives.

Krusiewicz and Wood (2001), in their study of 18 adoptive parents (including 7 who adopted internationally) found several components to the parents' "entrance stories" used to explain how the children and parents became a "family." One theme was the theme of "destiny," that the child was supposed to join this particular family, including either a belief in "fate" or "God's plan" causing it to happen. Another theme was the theme of "rescue," in which adoptive parents described needing to "save" their children from some sort of bad circumstances. In telling these stories, Krusiewicz and Wood found that parents struggled with two overall dialectical tensions or contradictions as they tell their adoption story: Misfortune versus fortune (feeling for the birth parent while being joyful about the gift of their child) and desire versus rejection (the child was given up out of hope for a better life for the child, rather than being rejected or unwanted). In the first, the parents explore the reality that adoption is good for the adoptive parents yet sad for the birth parents, while in the second, the adoptive parents create some sort of narrative about the intentions of the birth parents.

One possible aspect of the adoption narrative not included in previous studies of international adoption narratives is whether adoptive parents believe there is a possibility the Chinese children may some day meet their birth parents (Millbrand, 2010). When China fully opened up their doors to adoption to the West fully in the late 1990s, there were strict rules about what would happen to birth parents if they were found abandoning their children (Johnson, 2004). So, adoptive parents went to China fully expecting there would be no possibility of ever meeting the birth parents. With stories about some families "accidentally" meeting Chinese birth parents on return trips becoming more common (Chang, 2011; Liedtke, 2010; Stuy, 2007), there is a possibility that parents may start including this information in their adoption narratives, but it is unknown whether they do. Without any information given to them about the birth parents when they adopt, the searching for birth parents is a difficult endeavor.

COUNTERNARRATIVES

Many authors have written about the cultural and racial conditions which have helped spur on Chinese adoptions (e.g., Evans, 2000; Hoshmand et al.,

2006; Johnson, 2004; Lee, 2006). However, it is not clear how the parents' adoption narrative provided for the child emphasizes such conditions or whether there is a prototypical or canonical adoption story (a kind of "grand" or "master" narrative) that is somehow "laundered" when told to the child. A canonical story would be in contrast to possible counternarratives or alternative adoption stories which could be told (Giroux, Lankshear, McLaren, & Peters, 1996). For example, in their adoption narratives, do the parents choose to not be overly critical of Chinese policies, as they are afraid this will cause the child to ultimately reject his or her Chinese culture? Grice (2005) notes in her review of popular adult and children's books about adoption from China:

> The narratives avoid overt criticism of Chinese government and Chinese sociocultural prejudices and instead the authors focus on positive elements of Chinese culture rather than on politics. Clearly, these authors are in something of a double bind, since the logic that led to the one-child policy … has also engendered the transracial adoption phenomenon, thereby enabling childless women such as these to become parents. (p. 143)

King (2009) studied the narratives found in law review journals about international adoption. Some of the narratives King found reveal a dominant adoption narrative and implicate the need for a possible birth parent counternarrative (Giroux et al., 1996) to attack "embedded preconceptions that marginalize others or conceal their humanity" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 42), in this case, the Chinese birth parents. One of the dominant narratives King (2009) found was the "The Rescue Narrative," which portrays children as desperate and in need of being rescued from their dire circumstances, demonizing the sending countries in comparison to the West and not considering that "industrialized countries are exploiting developing countries and stealing their national resources, i.e., their healthy children" (p. 436). Another dominant narrative King (2009) identified was the "Improved Life Chances Narrative," with an underlying assumption that upper- and middle-class parents will be better for the children than their poor birth parents. A third dominant narrative was "The Invisible Birth Parents Narrative," in which birth parents are portrayed, if at all, as "dead, sick, incapacitated, impoverished, desperate, neglectful, addicted to drugs and alcohol, or shamed into abandoning their children" (p. 441), while Western adoptive parents are described as "loving, humanitarian, wealthy, and resourceful caregivers, ready to travel to the ends of the world to save a child" (p. 442). A fourth narrative King (2009) identifies is "The Natural 'Market' for Intercountry Adoption" narrative, which states that a scarcity of adoptable children domestically encourages adoptive parents to look elsewhere to adopt. King (2009) recognizes that such a "supply and demand" market can lead to the increase

in child trafficking, even in China, one of the most reputable of the sending countries for international adoptions (cf. Child Trafficking, n.d.; Tong, 2010a). Although the discourse of law journals includes such dominant narratives of international adoptions, there has been no research with adoptive parents on whether the stories they tell their Chinese children include such dominant narratives or whether they include alternative ways of looking at adoption or counternarratives, which might instead attempt to give voice to the story of Chinese birth parents and birth conditions from the birth parents' perspective.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The overall research question is "How do parents frame their child's adoption within the 'abandonment' portion of their Chinese child's adoption story?" In addition, I attempt to explore whether a dominant narrative is used by adoptive parents when they portray the circumstances surrounding the child's "abandonment," including possible birth parents' perspectives. If adoptive parents do choose to vary from more traditional ways of telling and go toward more alternative or counternarratives, what might those things include, and how do they tell these to their children?

METHODS

Procedures

As an adoptive parent myself, I solicited participants from several online Yahoo and Facebook groups of parents who adopted children from China, as well as the Families with Children from China website. I invited participants to read the informed consent form on my website (http://www.uni.edu/chatham/adoption.html) before contacting me about my study. I received 79 responses; of those, 35 participated in the study. (There is no evidence for why the others did not respond.)

Along with demographic questions, I asked the participants to answer several open-ended questions related to this study: (1) Tell me the story/ies of your adoption/s. (2) What have you told your child/children about being adopted? How did you first approach the issue of being adopted with them? What are the stories you have told them? (3) Has your child/children ever asked you about being adopted? If so, tell me about a time when s/he/they did. (4) Has your child ever asked you questions about her birth mother or parents? If so, what types of questions has s/he asked, and how do you typically respond? Tell me about one of those times that is memorable to you. (5) What are the greatest challenges you have faced with adopting from a country where your child most likely can never meet their birth parents? How have you dealt with these challenges? (6) Anything else you'd like to share? I also asked the participants whether they had a blog, Facebook page,

or other type of writing/journal about their adoption they would be willing to share. Several parents shared the text of a "lifebook" or journal they had written for their children, which tells their child's adoption story in a more formal way.

Participants

Of the 35 participants, 33 were female and 2 were male, all from different families. Participants' average age was 45, with an age range of 33 to 61. There were 25 American, 4 European, 1 Australian, 1 Canadian (all Caucasian in race) participants, and 4 people who did not indicate their ethnicity. Thirty of the participants were married, and five participants were single.

Participants had a range of one to six adopted children from China (mode: 1 child from China). Eight of the 35 families also had biological children (range of one to three children). Current ages of adopted children from China ranged from 2.5 to 13 years, with a mean age of 6.6 (mode: age 6). Only 4 of the 51 total adopted children were male.

Analysis

I initially used Riessman's (2008) thematic narrative analysis method to identify the elements of the adoption narrative from each interviewee's answers, working with a single transcript at a time, in order to try to keep the narrative intact when analyzing it. The average length of transcript and materials provided per family was five pages (single spaced). I repeatedly read through each transcript, noting the overall structure of each story and what was included. When I finished with a transcript, I moved to the next one and coded it as well for emerging themes (e.g., how birth parents are personified by adoptive parents). When new elements appeared in the other transcripts, I went back to earlier transcripts for reanalysis.

After reading each transcript multiple times, coding the narratives provided, I noted whenever birth parents were addressed in each transcript and then cut and pasted each of these sections into one document (a total of 51 single-spaced pages) by family. Using grounded theory principles (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hawker & Kerr, 2007), I then open-coded this document for themes, noting in the left margins the themes which were emerging from the data.[1] Table 1 shows example codes which emerged from the data and were used when looking for thematic subcategories.

I typed up these themes to find patterns, using grounded theory axial coding[2] (Corbin & Strauss, 2007), and reorganized the themes into overarching categories with thematic subcategories. I found exemplars for each thematic subcategory, inputting key words into the "find" function in Word. I double-checked for additional or counterexamples by going through the transcripts one more time.

TABLE 1 Open Codes for Birth Parent Themes

1. No information
   a. Truth—don't know
   b. Possible explanations
   c. Attempt to find information and do research
   d. Gather different perspectives on what others have said or done
   e. Distinguish between what is known vs. what is believed or could have happened
2. Children's questions/comments seem to dictate storytelling for some—depends on age of child
   a. Range of child's feelings recognized by parents
   b. What to share and not to share with children depends on maturity and age of child
   c. Types of questions asked
3. Personification of birth parents
   a. Ways to celebrate birth parents
   b. What wish could tell birth mom
   c. Characteristics from birth parents
   d. Why did birth mom do what she did
   e. Birth parent searching possibility (or not)
4. Angst over adopting—counternarratives
   a. Stolen generation
   b. Child trafficking possibility
   c. Maltreatment of women
   d. Orphanage realities [institutional culture]

I then separated out the families who had biological children from the families who did not, to see whether there any differences in the narratives when parents had birth children of their own and when they did not. The differences only came in the description of why they adopted in the first place, which is not the focus of this study.

FINDINGS

As with most entrance narratives (Harrigan, 2010; Krusiewicz & Wood, 2001) for international adoptions, these parents' adoption stories included details about life before adopting the child, reasons for adopting, "paperchasing" (the adoption process), the "referral" (when the parent/s heard about their actual child), and "adoption day" (when the parent/s met the child in person in China). When reporting how they told their child's adoption story, parents demonstrated by their stories that they told the adoption story in conjunction with the abandonment story, attempting to frame the one story within the purpose and meaning of the other story. For example, one participant said:

> I told her that her Chinese parents loved her very much, but because of things that her parents could not control, they could not keep her, but they knew they wanted her to have a great home, so they prayed for their daughter to go to a person who would love her the way they did. In the meantime, because Mommy was wanting a baby and could not

> have one on her own, she asked God to help her find a way to get a baby. . . . She came to China with Nana, and we got you!

The portrayal of birth parents is integral to the abandonment story. When analyzing the data for how the adoptive parents framed the child's "abandonment" or reasons for being adopted, I found three overarching themes: (1) "We have no information or don't know what happened, but this is what we say"; (2) "We revisit and retell the story over time, as our child asks us questions"; and (3) "We experience internal discomfort about certain things we might share."

"We Have No Information or Don't Know What Happened, But This Is What We Say"

The primary way the participants in this study indicated they tell the birth parent narrative portion of the child's story is by telling the child what they do and do not know. Many times parents just have to say they do not know something: "Sometimes I feel helpless knowing that there will be questions I can't answer. We will continue to answer with honesty, telling them that we really don't know very many answers." Still, parents seem to need to provide some possible explanation and to do research to find out more information if they can. In so doing, they often compliment birth parents and try not to overly burden their adopted children with the sad parts of the children's stories by being careful how they talk about "abandonment" and framing the story as "God's plan," as explained below.

Provide Possible Explanations

Parents often used two generally accepted reasons in their descriptions to why their child's birth parents did not keep them: China's one-child policy and the preference of many in China for boy babies. Included in one parent's lifebook for their child is the following statement, illustrating the former of these two reasons:

> We know that in China there are strict rules about family size. . . . So, even though a Chinese family may want more children, sometimes they feel forced to abandon a child. We don't know if this law [one-child law] had anything to do with your birth family's decision not to raise you, but it is possible.

In terms of the second reason, the preference for boys, this is well-explained in another child's lifebook, prepared by her parents.

> You may have seen a lot of girls adopted from China and some of them are your friends. Why do so many Chinese girls get placed for adoption?

> In China, parents live with their sons until they die. If a mother and father are allowed only one or two children, it is important to have a son. The son will take of them when they are too old to work. If Chinese parents have only girl babies, they worry. In China only boys take care of parents, and when a girl marries she takes care of her husband's parents. Parents love their baby girls when they are born but what should they do? Placing baby girls for adoption is one answer.

Some parents also speculated about other reasons why a child might be abandoned or given up for adoption in China. For example, one parent included the following in a letter she wrote to her daughter's birth mother in case she would ever meet her.

> I have often wondered why you had to abandon her. I wonder if you became ill and could no longer care for her, forcing another family member to take her to that spot where she would be found. Perhaps you were a young, single mother and wanted to keep her but your parents would not let you. Maybe you hid her for 5 months and when she was discovered, you were given no choice.

However, there was a hesitancy by some to just make up information to share with their children.

> There have been very pointed questions such as, "Why didn't my mother want me?" We have also been faced with, "Why couldn't they keep me?" . . . In these situations we have been clear in not offering responses for which we have no facts. On the other hand, we have engaged the girls in their own speculation about how it could happen that someone would want them and love them very much, but realize that they could not care for them properly.

Make a Reasoned Choice to Use or Not Use the Term "Abandoned" With Children

Twelve participants in the study mentioned struggling with whether to use the term "abandoned" in the birth parent narrative told to their children. The parents themselves mentioned this term, as I did not bring it up in my interview questions. Their choice to talk about their use of the term illustrates that they were trying to face the harsh realities of their child's adoption in some way. However, they disagreed as to how much to emphasize these realities in their stories. Those opposed to the use of the term "abandoned" made statements like "I have never used that word: abandoned. I always say she came to the orphanage," and "I try to be thoughtful in my responses and stick to the truth, although, I must admit, the truth that doesn't 'hurt

too much'... For example, I don't use the word 'abandoned' but 'left to be found."'

Others found a way to talk about "abandonment" in a way the children could accept, as illustrated by the quote from one participant: "Since we live in the country, invariably there are stray animals, abandoned pets ... or farmers wanting to get rid of barn cats. ... They are proud that we've 'adopted' these animals and that they care for them." Another participant included information in their child's lifebook about abandonment but made it clear that the choice to abandon a baby is not the baby's fault.

> Some families decide they will have to abandon the baby. ... We don't know why your birth family couldn't raise you; we can only guess. But, what we do know is that it was a grown-up problem of some kind. You were a sweet, tiny baby.

One parent noted that we should not back away from the pain the child faces as a result of their being abandoned, but face it with them. Her particular child has been grieving for several months over these issues and will bring them up in various ways to her.

> When our girls discover this loss for themselves ... that loss is loaded down with something more crushing: abandonment. It's the most profound rejection there is ... that of a parent, when you are new to the world, when, body and soul, you're as naked as you'll ever be.

Don't Burden or Make Child Feel Worse, yet Recognize His or Her Sadness

When choosing whether to talk about the raw realities of "abandonment," adoptive parents do not wish to make their adopted children carry an unnecessary burden, so they report attempting to strike a balance between the happy and sad parts of their child's history. For example, one parent wrote:

> The greatest challenge is in how to communicate the less positive aspects of her story to her. The issue of birth parents makes me uncomfortable because I don't want to burden her with information that will make her feel badly. ... I don't want to romanticize her abandonment, but I also don't want to make it seem more painful than it needs to be. Even as I write this, I realize that this is not possible. Her story includes this sad aspect, and it needs to be a part of her story as much as the happier parts.

So, adoptive parents also acknowledge that this aspect of their child's life is a sad one, being willing to "sit and cry together" with their adopted child. Another parent called this "sitting with her sadness."

Focus on God's Plan

Eight parents indicated that one way they balance the sad and happy parts of the adoption narrative is by choosing to include God in their adoption talk, while juxtaposing the abandonment and adoption stories, saying things like:

> When you were born and placed, God saw you. I'm sure He listened and was sad when your birth family reached the decision they couldn't raise you in their family. . . . I also know He heard a couple in America praying for a little girl from China to be their daughter.

Sometimes they assume the Chinese parents also had faith that affected the outcome of their child's fate.

> I told her that her Chinese parents loved her very much, but because of things that her parents could not control, they could not keep her . . . so they prayed for their daughter to go to a person who would love her the way they did.

Others seem to remove the birth parent from this part of the narrative: "We told her that God planned for her to be a part of our family, and that we had prayed for a baby girl just like her for many years." One participant told about the reaction of her child to such a created narrative:

> We also integrate our faith into the story by talking about how God planned families before Earth was created, and He knew that we needed her and she needed us, so God had to work some pretty special circumstances out for us to be able to be together. . . . Talking about her story usually brings tears, so we just sit and cry together. And usually if I ask her why she's crying, she says, "because God loved me so much."

One parent, however, refused to frame the adoption circumstances as "God's plan," because of its potential for not being respectful to the child's birth parents.

> I never wanted to tell her that "God picked her for us," or that "God wanted her to be our baby." I think that is disrespectful to her birth parents. We have always told her that we were matched by someone in the Chinese government because they thought we would be a perfect match.

Although talking about "God's plan" does not necessarily mean that the adoptive parent is not considering the birth parent's perspective, this last parent was the only one who seemed to be concerned about such a narrative

when it emphasizes the adoptive parents over the birth parents, eliminating consideration of the concerns and wishes of the birth parents.

Compliment Birth Parents

However, many of the adoptive parents do choose to focus on their children's birth parents by complimenting them to their adopted children. For example, many of the families speculated positively about similarities between their child and his or her birth parents, as the following excerpt from one parent's lifebook illustrates.

> You stayed safe inside your birth mother's womb for nine months while she took care of you, until you were born. We have never met her, but she is special to us because without her, we wouldn't have you! . . . But, we don't know much about your birth parents—in fact, we don't even know their names or have pictures. I wonder if either of them like to draw or paint as much as you do? I wonder if your birth mother has the wonderful leadership qualities you do? Or, if you get your kind and loving personality from your birth father? Or how about your love of music—where did that come from? . . . Since we don't know what either of them look like exactly, we have to use our imagination. . . .You can draw a picture that starts with that beautiful black hair and lovely almond eyes!

However, as noted earlier, in their attempts to be positive about their child's birth parents, adoptive parents also have to decide how to present the realities that the child was possibly abandoned by these same parents. Adoptive parents in this study reported doing this by attributing good motives to their child's birth parents, by portraying them as loving and caring for the child while making an adoption plan. For example, one parent recounted:

> We talked about how her Chinese mommy and daddy couldn't keep her and loved her enough to make sure that she was found by someone who would help her get to a loving family. . . . that they loved her enough to let her go.

In a few cases, the birth parents (or whoever left the child to be found) included a note with the child, which helped to document the birth parents' feelings toward the child. For example, one parent wrote:

> I feel I can confidently say that her birth family cared about her and wanted good things for her, since they left her in a place where she would be quickly found and they tucked in her blanket some money and a note with her birth date and a wish that good hearted people would adopt her.

Regardless of the specific words the adoptive parents used, when they talked about birth parents to their adopted children, they all were complimentary of the child's birth parents.

"We Revisit and Retell the Story Over Time, as Our Child Asks Us Questions"

A second way parents tell the "abandonment" part of their child's story is to revisit and expand the story over time, as the children indicate a desire to talk about their birth history and help direct the conversations to birth parent issues. Several parents indicated that conversations with children are sometimes sparked by the reading of certain books or looking at adoption-related pictures. For example, one parent stated:

> It wasn't till the oldest was about to start kindergarten that I sat them both down to talk about birth parents. I told them, this was going to be a bit hard for me and I wanted to use the right words so I used a book. I am pretty sure it was *When You Were Born in China* [Dorow, 1997] . . . I remember my oldest reacted quickly, saying "You mean my birth mother abandoned me?" So I went through that we don't know why but she was not able to keep you.

Another parent said, "she sometimes asks that we read one of these books, and afterward she has lots of questions. These moments are very important for us and her to work with her loss."

Some parents indicated that their children often talk about how much they miss their Chinese mother, and this sparks discussion between parent and child. For example, one parent said:

> From a very early age, she was cognizant that she had a Chinese mommy and daddy and would regularly talk about them, ask about them, and indicate that she missed them. This was a regular pattern and was triggered by a variety of things—participating in a Chinese activity, seeing a show on television, even observing other families.

These conversations may change direction over time, with new topics being added and addressed in the conversations between parent and child, as the parent below noted.

> She was about 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ when she realized that being adopted meant that she did not come out of my tummy. At age 8, we have had a lot of conversations. One that stands out is recently when I told her that it was ok to talk about her birth parents, that it would not hurt my feelings.

One parent noted, "As each girl's intellectual and emotional sophistication increases, we share the story on a deeper level." Another parent added, "At

some point she will understand the abandonment, but I think it will take a few more years before she understands that." As the child grows and faces different developmental life stages, their need to know information about their beginnings may change. One parent predicted:

> I think, likely, the greatest challenge in this area will likely emerge when they reach adolescence and the need for identity formation is more "front and center." The most currently challenging thing is to explain and reexplain that we don't have their birth parents' names [or] photos or know anything about them, except that they must share the same lovely face as their daughter.

The questions the children ask seem to lead the parents to expand the story beyond an adoption story from the adoptive parents' perspective to include speculation about abandonment and birth parent issues, thus giving voice to the birth parent in the narrative. I found six overall themes in the questions adoptive parents reported their children asked about birth parents, illustrating this: (1) demographics of birth family, (2) early days of life, (3) characteristics of birth family, (4) birth mother's thoughts and feelings, (5) abandonment, and (6) the future.

The *demographics of birth family* questions included who their birth family is, their names, whether their birth parents are still alive and where they currently live, whether they have siblings, and whether their birth mother is married. The *early days* questions focused on what the child did before he or she was abandoned (including while in utero), when the child's actual birthday is, what life was like before being adopted, and where the child was born and lived. Questions surrounding the *characteristics of the child's birth family* related to how similar or different the child was from his or her parents in looks, personality, talents, etc. Questions about the *birth mother's thoughts and feelings* were more personal, in terms of what the birth mother might think of the child, whether she remembers him or her, and why she could not keep or did not want him or her. *Abandonment* questions related to why the child does not live with his or her birth parents, why their Chinese parents did not come back for him or her, what age their abandonment happened, who left the child at the finding spot, where the child was found, and how long the child was there before being found. Questions related to the *future* included whether the child will ever meet his or her birth parents and when traveling overseas for another adoption or a return trip, whether their adoptive parents would leave them there.

The ever-expanding adoption narrative is more inclusive of the birth parent as the child gets older, perhaps due to the maturity of the child and his or her ability to handle such painful topics. Many times it seems to be the child who causes these conversations to focus on the birth parent rather than just the adoptive parent. Regardless of who or what is emphasized in

the eventual narrative that the child constructs, adoptive parents hope their children can come to some sense of peace and closure regarding their birth parents and heritage, as seen in the quote below.

> We'll allow our kids to feel and say what they need to say about it and really pray that they can find compassion for someone who had to do something that would be very difficult for us to do. I have a friend from college who was adopted as an infant, and she has never met her birth mother—and it seems like she never will be able to and she wrote a beautiful note this year on her birthday. I have printed it and will pray that my children can come to a similar place in their journey.

"We Experience Internal Discomfort About Certain Things We Might Share"

A third way parents may tell their child's "abandonment" and adoption narrative is by acknowledging the internal dissonance they face when thinking about the China portion of their child's history, specifically in reference to taking children from their home culture/country, the possibility of child trafficking, China's human rights violations in mistreating women, and whether to attempt to search for their child's birth parents. These narratives were rare, with only a few of the families in the study even mentioning one of these issues. These seem to be more illustrative of the internal dialogue these parents have with themselves about their child's "abandonment" and adoption. Therefore, they might could be considered counternarratives from the traditional adoption narrative presented by adoptive parents of children from China, as they provide a perspective on China adoption which is not part of the mainstream birth parent narrative of these adoptive parents.

The Stolen Generation

Two participants talked about the angst they have felt as they think about whether it was ethical to take a child away from his or her country and culture. One of these participants was from Australia, where there are strong sentiments about this phenomenon. She wrote:

> Australians have been appalled at the revelations about what has become known as "the Stolen Generation." Under a government policy of assimilation . . . children who appeared to share Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal blood were taken away from their Aboriginal families and either put into institutions or assigned to white families as domestic and farm labourers. A number of people I respected called me to account on why I would be willing to adopt a child, let alone transplant one from her own culture to life in Australia. . . . I thought long and hard about it. The bottom line was that I wanted a child, but I also needed to feel good about the way

> a child would come into my life and about the sort of future she would have.

After coming to terms with these issues, this mother decided to go forward with her adoption plans for a daughter from China but did not report sharing these concerns with her adopted daughter later.

Another adoptive mother wrote, after being challenged by her adopted daughter on why she took her from her country:

> *Was it right to pull a child from her country, her culture?* My understanding was that there were hundreds of thousands of girls in China, that domestic adoption was uncommon in a country where families held an overwhelming bias and preference for blood ties. . . . Orphanages were underfunded, understaffed, and overwhelmed. It all made so much sense: me, wanting to love and raise a daughter. All those girls in China needing a home. I adopted my daughter in 2001 and these larger existential, philosophical, moral questions were instantly relegated to the furthest recesses of my mind as everyday demands overwhelmed me. . . . Eight years later we've come full circle. But now it's my daughter asking these questions. *How could I have been born to one family . . . and ended up with another, half a world away?* Knowing her as I do, loving her as I do, I hear these questions in a new light. They have new meaning, new urgency. Worse, a harder question confronts me: *Could I somehow be . . . culpable?*

This mother came to some sense of acceptance of this decision after doing more research on the need for Chinese adoptions and talking to others, finally stating, "I can't change what happened or what's currently happening in China. And I can't protect my daughter forever. I can only hold her and love her. Still, I never truly understood the extent of my vulnerability as an adoptive parent."

Child Trafficking Possibility

Along with "stolen generation" issues, three participants talked about their concerns about child trafficking in China. For example, one parent said:

> Our greatest challenge is dealing with the possibility that our daughter came to the orphanage through a trafficking ring that was uncovered several years after we adopted her. The traffickers operated for several years inclusive of the time that she was there. Some babies were purchased, some were abducted. . . . Given the numbers of babies trafficked, the timing, the fact that many families who adopted from this SWI [Social Welfare Institute] were told amazingly similar finding stories, and our daughter's anxious attachment, I suspect the odds are that she wasn't

> really left in front of the traditional Chinese medicine hospital as we were told.

Another parent told about her concerns in conjunction with her daughter expressing fears that her adoptive mom had stolen her from her birth mother in China.

> Less than a week after my daughter admitted her fears I stole her from China, a story from the *New York Times* online edition appeared April 5th. . . . The bulk of the story revolves around China's demand for sons. . . . A quote stops me cold: "A grieving father of a four-year-old boy . . . started an ad hoc group for parents of stolen children. His claim? Girls are abducted as well—and some of these girls are sold to orphanages." *They are the lucky ones,* Peng says. These girls *often end up in the United States or Europe after adoptive parents pay fees to orphanages that average $5,000*. It feels like a punch to the gut. . . . To even entertain the possibility that I could have been an unwitting accomplice, that I could have taken a child from her family, sickens me.

A third woman added: "The possibility that my child might have been made available for adoption in such circumstances is horrifying." She noted that when she adopted her child, she was not aware of any baby trading going on and commented also that "the likelihood this occurred is small."

Even though these participants indicated their concerns about child trafficking, they did not make it clear how or whether they worked through such issues with their children in terms of what they said about child trafficking itself to their children, other than reassuring them of their love for them and telling the children again that they do not know why they were given up for adoption. The mother whose daughter may have been most likely to be included in child trafficking has not told her daughter (who was 7.5 at the time of the interviews) about these possibilities. The mother whose daughter accused her of stealing her from her birth mother told her daughter that she had never met her birth mother, arriving in China a year and half later to adopt her. Later, when she and her daughter had additional, emotional conversations about this, she seemed to get at the heart of her daughter's fears: "*Do you think . . . that maybe . . . you worry about this because it's just too hard to believe you could have been born to one mother, half a world away, but now, you're here with me?*"

Maltreatment of Women

Taking children away from their birth mothers or forcing women to abort their children can be considered a human rights violation, as can be female infanticide sometimes caused by China's one-child policy (Ren, n.d.). Two participants indicated they were concerned at some level about the inhumane

or unjust treatment of women and how even the governmental policies which force women to have only one child violates human rights standards. One woman wrote:

> By adopting a child, I did not want to be unwittingly encouraging inhumane practices that were resulting in children being abandoned or taken from their birth mothers. At the political level, I did not support the way China was implementing its population control policies or its maltreatment of women.

However, neither participant said to me that they had mentioned this concern to their adopted children, so it is unknown whether they told their child this information.

Choosing to Pursue (or Not) a Birth Parent Search

As noted in the literature review, recently some adoptive parents have unexpectedly found their Chinese child's birth parents. However, very few of the parents in this study talked about attempting to make such a search. Parents talked about it being very unlikely they would ever meet the birth parents, while others indicated they were glad they would never meet them. Others, however, had strong desires to meet their child's birth parents, with some indicating they thought it was very important for their child's development for this to happen.

Statements indicating parents' beliefs that *birth parents would not be found* included, for example, "I grieve for her that she won't have the opportunity to meet them if she so desires," "they understand they will never meet their Chinese parents or siblings," and "the biggest issue thus far is dealing with her sadness over not knowing her birth mother, what she looks like, and her realization that she will probably never meet her birth mother."

Several parents indicated they were *glad they would not be able to meet their child's birth parents*, as this parent's response illustrates.

> To be honest, we chose China because we wouldn't have the risk of having one of the birth parents change their mind about the adoption or pose any long-term challenge to the adoption. ... It's this kind of nightmare that we thankfully don't have to endure.

However, a few families are actively pursuing finding their child's birth parents, for example, one participant said: "As an active 'searcher' and member of the Yahoo group ChinaBirthFamilySearch, it is my hope that, someday, information will lead to their birth families." But even with these desires, parents find it is not easy to know where to search, as another parent stated: "I don't want to wait, but I am not sure where to start in trying to find them."

Adoptive parents do seem to recognize their child's need to know more about their birth parents, especially since children are often asking about them.

> Lately she's been asking more about this aspect of the story and about her Chinese mom and dad. She said this week she would like to meet them. I told her I didn't know if we would be able to find them but that we could look and that I would very much like to meet them, too. I asked her why she wanted to meet them, and she said, because they are a part of our family, too, which pleased me.

Another parent added, "As an adoptive mom of two daughters from China, I feel strongly that doing what I can to actively search on their behalf is supporting their strong desire and right to know where they came from."

However, not all children may wish to travel down this path, as seen in what a 13-year-old daughter of one of the participants wrote, after going on a return trip back to China.

> During this trip almost none of my questions were answered. . . . I am still wondering today why my birth parents left me. Was it because of the one child policy or were they too young or did they just never want me? Do I have any siblings out there? . . . I'm sure if I wanted to try to find them my parents would be behind me 100%. But then I think, do I want to find them? Do I want to ask them this or will it just hurt me in the end? Do I really want to know the answers to all these questions?

Regardless of whether this adopted daughter chooses to search for her birth parents, it is clear this is not an easy decision, and the daughter's angst over this possibility reflects the internal discomfort the adoptive parents feel as well.

DISCUSSION

In this study, I attempted to answer the research question, "How do parents frame their child's adoption within the abandonment portion of their Chinese child's adoption story?" The adoptive parents in this study juxtaposed the child's abandonment within the adoption story, sometimes framing all of the happenings as being part of a larger plan or "God's plan" that was supposed to happen. Although not all the parents used this frame, they did attempt to balance the sad part of the child's story (i.e., abandonment) with the happy part (i.e., adoption). Parents generally emphasized what they know (the adoption story) over what they do not know (the birth parent narrative). However, they did portray Chinese birth parents in a very positive light to their adopted children, while there was an apparent lack of discussion about the harsh realities of abandonment or orphanage life.

When creating possible explanations for why their child's birth parents could not keep them, these adoptive parents seem to be engaging a dominant birth parent narrative, personifying Chinese birth parents as loving parents who were victims of something larger, outside of their control, similar to what is suggested by authors such as Johnson (2004) and Wolfs (2008), perhaps suggesting these parents have been "persuaded" by such a narrative themselves from messages they have received from books, adoption agencies, and adoption support groups. The adoptive parents in this study indicated it was not the child's fault that the birth parents made the choice(s) they did to abandon their child. The dominant birth parent narrative of these adoptive parents emphasized (1) the existence of two mothers for the child, (2) the pain the birth mother must have felt in giving up her child, (3) the pain of the child in dealing with missing his or birth mother, while being mostly happy and well-adjusted overall, and (4) the child being well taken care of and loved by both the birth parents (especially the birth mother) and the adoptive parents. This narrative deemphasizes other reasons for children being adopted, such as child trafficking, and does not talk much about the role of birth fathers in the pain of giving up children for adoption.

These adoptive parents did not portray the birth parents as being invisible or assume that the child's life would necessarily be better with the adoptive parents than with the birth parents. However, with few exceptions, the adoptive parents in this study did not question whether it was best for the child to be adopted by them and be taken from her or his country of origin (i.e., "stolen generation" critique). Many healthy girls have been taken from China through the process of international adoption, so much so that population analysts warn of the negative repercussions of this for the Chinese population as a whole in future years (One-Child Policy, 2011). The adoptive parents in this study do not indicate that they talk about this type of counternarrative to their children or about other harsh realities surrounding China's one-child policy which have been documented (e.g., children being stolen from birth parents by population officials because the parents violated the one-child policy; forced late-term abortions; female infanticide; physical punishment for breaking the one-child policy; increased female suicide rate of women in childbearing years who do not produce a male heir; cf. Chang, 2008; Demmick, 2009; One-Child Policy, 2011). Perhaps adoptive parents have chosen to ignore such possibilities in discussions with their children because they struggle with how to do it without hurting their children (e.g., van Gulden, 2008). If adoptive parents would choose to tell such a counternarrative to children, what would it look like? What would the effects be on their adopted children?

By talking about the need for adoption in China with the generally accepted reasons for abandonment (i.e., one-child policy and preference of boys), the adoptive parents' stories illustrate some aspects of King's (2009) "rescue" narrative, in which adoptive parents rescue their children from these difficult and unfair circumstances, thus making themselves out to be the

"heroes" who saved the children. However, at the same time, they are not demonizing the birth parents but portraying them as real people who suffered loss in giving up their children, so in some ways the birth parents are "heroes" too, just in a different way. Perhaps adoptive parents choose to do this in order to provide positive reinforcement for their children, constructing adoption positively for their child, similar to what Harrigan (2010) found in her research.

Similar to Harrigan (2010), I found that these stories evolve over time through interaction between parent and child. It is the child's questions that seem to lead the adoptive parent to start giving voice to the birth parents' views, unless the parent prepared some sort of lifebook for the child before the questions started coming, as some authors suggest (e.g., MacLeod & Macrae, 2006–2007). The adoption story can never be totally separated from the abandonment story. As Dorow (2006) notes, these are stories about two families, and which one is emphasized in the storytelling impacts the child's construction of reality about what happened to them (Kranstuber, 2008).

The adoptive parents in this study make some attempt to focus on both the birth parent and the adoptive parent in the narratives they create, but without more information on the birth parents' perspectives, this becomes difficult to do over time. This study was primarily focused on the construction of the adoption narrative by adoptive parents for their children, but in the parents' answers, there were also indications of how there are certain parts of the narrative they construct just for themselves and do not always share with their children. More research could be done exploring these "unspoken" counternarratives, seemingly constructed more for the parents' behalf than for the children's.

For the adoptee, the ability to construct a coherent narrative emerges more fully in adolescence (Brodzinsky et al., 1984, 1992; Habermas & Bluck, 2000), during which time the young person has expanded cognitive and emotional abilities to "understand adoption in all its social, legal, ethical, and biological complexity" (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004, p. 159). At that time, the adolescent's own story will become "front and center," with stories told by the parent being more about the parent's own identity than about the child's (Wrobel et al., 2003). This movement from the parent-directed Phase I and parent-child interaction of Phase II to the adolescent-directed process in Phase III of Wrobel et al.'s (2003) Family Adoption Communication Model may be more challenging for a Chinese adoptee, where it is very rare to locate and find one's birth family or answer the questions that are raised by doing their own research.

Limitations and Future Research

This qualitative study is an exploratory one, relying on adoptive parents (primarily adoptive mothers) who self-selected to participate in this study.

This is a limitation of this study. The author of the article is also an adoptive mother, which could have provided some lack of objectivity in looking at the findings. Therefore, the findings of the study need to be tested further with larger samples and with both adoptive fathers and mothers, using intercoder reliability to code content themes from their answers.

This study also does not tell the birth parents' own stories. There is much assumed by adoptive parents about their children's birth parents, based on general knowledge about adoptions in China. Recently, there has been some movement toward collecting birth parents' stories (e.g., Chang, 2008). More research, if possible, needs to be done on the Chinese birth parents' perspectives. Why did they not keep their child? What were their fears and concerns that led to giving up their child? What type of relationship would they like to have with their child now?

Another limitation of this study was the relatively young age of the adopted children represented by the parents' stories. The narrative shared with a young child is necessarily different than those shared with older children, with narratives likely getting less simplistic and positive as the child matures. As children get older, perhaps parents will choose to interact with them about alternative counternarratives, using strategies suggested by Wolfs (2010) and Cogen (2008). More research needs to look at the possible use of such counternarratives as the adopted children get older, as well as how these adoptees make sense of these counternarratives when constructing their own self-narrative. As these adoptees move through adolescence into adulthood, how do they, for example, make sense of news reports of child trafficking or other harsher abandonment realities (e.g., Child Trafficking, n.d.)?

In summary, consistent with Krusciewicz and Wood's (2001) findings, in this study I found that adoptive parents do struggle with how they represent their child's adoption story in light of the birth parents' perceived pain. Telling an adopted child the story of their birth and reasons for needing to be adopted is never an easy task. For these adoptive parents, the task is even more challenging because of the lack of information on the child's birth parents. This study revealed more on how these parents choose to create a coherent and collaborative narrative using the information they have and generally accepted reasons for the adoption of Chinese children, while attempting to maintain the dignity of their adopted children and their child's birth parents in the process.

Regardless of how much information adoptive parents have about their child's early life and which adoption narrative they choose to tell, it is important they be open with their child about what they know and do not know. Research has found that open communication about the adoption circumstances for the child lead generally to better outcomes for adopted children and adolescents even when there is limited information (e.g., Brodzinsky, 2006; Grotevant, Perry, & McRoy, 2005). Brodzinsky (2006) states:

> When there is a lack of verifiable knowledge about the child's birth history, adoptive parents need to encourage their child to share his or her thoughts, beliefs, fantasies, and/or feelings about the birth parents and the reasons for the adoption placement. Not only does this approach allow adoptive parents access to their child's mental and emotional life related to adoption, but it also implicitly normalizes the child's curiosity about his or her heritage and facilitates greater openness in communication, even in circumstances when there is limited information about the child's birth history. (p. 14)

The parents in this study seem to realize this as they continue to co-construct the adoption narrative with their children.

NOTES

1. No intercoder reliability was established, as this is not consistent with the type of qualitative thematic analysis used in grounded theory.

2. Axial coding is the process of taking the themes you have developed and relating them to each other. The researcher takes the individual codes done with open coding and puts them back together to find larger categories which relate to each other, in an attempt to create overarching explanations or "theories" which emerge from the data, thus making it "grounded theory."

REFERENCES

Baden, A. L., & Wiley, M. O. (2007). Counseling adopted persons in adulthood: Integrating practice and research. *The Counseling Psychologist*, *35*(6), 868–901.

Brodzinsky, D. M. (1987). Adjustment to adoption: A psychosocial perspective. *Clinical Psychology Review*, *7*(1), 25–47.

Brodzinsky, D. M. (1990). A stress and coping model of adoption adjustment. In D. M. Brodzinsky & M. D. Schechter (Eds.), *Psychology of adoption* (pp. 3–24). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Brodzinsky, D. (2006). Family structural openness and communication openness as predictors in the adjustment of adopted children. *Adoption Quarterly*, *9*(4), 1–18.

Brodzinsky, D. M., Schechter, M. D., & Henig, R. M. (1992). *Being adopted: The lifelong search for self*. New York, NY: Doubleday.

Brodzinsky, D. M., Singer, L. M., & Braff, A. M. (1984). Children's understanding of adoption. *Child Development*, *55*, 869–878.

Chang, C. (2008). *Long wait for home* [Documentary]. Retrieved from http://www.lovewithoutboundaries.org

Chang, C. (2011). *Daughters' return* and *Sophia's journey* [Documentaries]. Retrieved from http://www.lovewithoutboundaries.org

Child Trafficking: Crimes of the International Adoption Industry. (n.d.). *International Adoption Facts*. Retrieved from http://sites.google.com/site/internationaladoptionfacts/

Cogen, P. (2008). *Parenting your internationally adopted child: From your first hours together through the teen years*. Boston, MA: The Harvard Common Press.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. L. (2007). *Basics of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Hills, CA: Sage.

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2001). *Critical race theory: An introduction*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Demmick, B. (2009). Chinese babies stolen by officials for foreign adoptions. *Los Angeles Times, Sept. 20*. Retrieved from http://articles.latimes.com/2009/sep/20/world/fg-china-adopt20

Dorow, S. K. (1997). *When you were born in China*. St. Paul, MN: Yeong & Yeong Book Company.

Dorow, S. K. (2006). *Transnational adoption: A cultural economy of race, gender, and kinship*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Dunbar, N., & Grotevant, H. D. (2004). Adoption narratives: The construction of adoptive identity during adolescence. In M. W. Pratt & B. H. Fiese (Eds.), *Family stories and the life course: Across time and generations* (pp. 135–161). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Eakin, P. J. (1999). *How our lives become stories: Making selves*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Eakin, P. J. (2008). *Living autobiographically: How we create identity in narrative*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute. (2009). *Beyond culture camp: Promoting healthy identity formation in adoption*. New York, NY: Author. Retrieved from http://www.california-adoption.org/Documents/AdoptionInstitute_BeyondCultureCamp.pdf

Evans, K. (2000). *The lost daughters of China*. New York, NY: J. P. Tarcher Publishers.

Fivush, R., & Reese, E. (1992). The social construction of autobiographical memory. In M. A. Conway, D. C. Rubin, H. Spinnler, & W. A. Wagenaar (Eds.), *Theoretical perspectives on autobiographical memory* (pp. 115–132). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer.

Giroux, H. A., Lankshear, C., McLaren, P., & Peters, M. (1996). *Counter-narratives: Cultural studies and critical pedagogies in postmodern spaces*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.

Grice, H. (2005). Transracial adoption narratives. *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*, *5*(2), 124–148.

Grotevant, H. D., Dunbar, N., Kohler, J. K., & Esau, A. M. L. (2000). Adoptive identity: How contexts within and beyond the family shape developmental pathways. *Family Relations: Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Studies*, *49*, 379–387.

Grotevant, H. D., Perry, Y. V., & McRoy, R. G. (2005). Openness in adoption: Outcomes for adolescents within their adoptive kinship networks. In D. M. Brodzinsky & J. Palacios (Eds.), *Psychological issues in adoption: Research and practice* (pp. 167–186). Westport, CT: Praeger.

Habermas, T., & Bluck, S. (2000). Getting a life: The emergence of the life story in adolescence. *Psychological Bulletin*, *126*(5), 748–769.

Harrigan, M. M. (2010). Exploring the narrative process: An analysis of the adoption stories mothers tell their internationally adopted children. *Journal of Family Communication*, *10*(1), 24–39.

Hawker, S., & Kerr, C. (2007). Doing grounded theory. In E. Lyons & A. Coyle (Eds.), *Analysing qualitative data in psychology* (pp. 87–97). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.

Hoshmand, L. T., Gere, S., & Wong, Y. S. (2006). International adoption and the case of China: Implications of policy, theory, and research for psychoeducation and counseling. *Asian Journal of Counselling*, *13*(1), 5–50.

Johnson, K. A. (2004). *Wanting a daughter, needing a son: Abandonment, adoption, and orphanage care in China*. St. Paul, MN: Yeong & Yeong Book Company.

Jorgenson, J., & Bochner, A. P. (2004). Imagining families through stories and rituals. In A. Vangelisti (Ed.), *Handbook of family communication* (pp. 513–538). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

King, S. (2009). Challenging monohumanism: An argument for changing the way we think about intercountry adoption. *Michigan Journal of International Law*, *30*(2), 413–470. Retrieved from http://students.law.umich.edu/mjil/article-pdfs/v30n2-king.pdf

Kranstuber, H. A. (2008). *Let's start at the beginning: The relationship between narratives and adoptees' self-concept* [Thesis]. Oxford, OH: Miami University.

Krusiewicz, E. S., & Wood, J. T. (2001). "He was our child the moment we walked into that room": Entrance stories of adoptive parents. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *18*(6), 785–803.

Langellier, K. M. (1989). Personal narratives: Perspectives on theory and research. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, *9*, 243–276.

Lee, R. M. (2006). Overlooked Asian Americans: The diaspora of Chinese adoptees. *Asian Journal of Counselling*, *13*(1), 51–61.

Liedtke, J. (2010). Walking down the village path. In D. Jacobs, I. C. Ponte, & L. K. Wang (Eds.), *From home to homeland: What adoptive families need to know before making a return trip to China* (pp. 171–176). St. Paul, MN: Yeong & Yeong Book Company.

Luo, N., & Bergquist, K. J. S. (2004). Born in China: Birth country perspectives on international adoption. *Adoption Quarterly*, *8*(1), 21–39.

MacLeod, C. (2010). Foreign adoptions from China fall. *USA Today* 01A.

MacLeod, J., & Macrae, S. (Eds.). (2006–07). *Adoption parenting: Creating a toolbox, building connections*. Warren, NJ: EMK Press.

McAdams, D. P. (1993). *The stories we live by: Personal myths and the making of self*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Millbrand, L. (2010, May/June). China adoption: A look back. *Adoptive Families*, *43*(3), 35–38.

One-Child Policy. (2011). *Wikipedia*. Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One-child_policy

Ren, Xin. (n.d.). *Protecting women and children against trafficking in China*. Unpublished report, California State University, Sacramento. Retrieved from http://csuspress.lib.csus.edu/sinology/content/ren_xin.html

Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.

Rojewski, J. W., & Rojewski, J. L. (2001). *Intercountry adoption from China: Examining cultural heritage and other postadoption issues*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

Rosman, C. (2009). State of adoption from China. *Adoption Advocate*, *18*, 1–10. Retrieved from https://www.adoptioncouncil.org/images/stories/documents/NCFAADOPTIONADVOCATENO18.pdf

Selman, P. (2009). The rise and fall of intercountry adoption in the 21st century. *International Social Work*, *52*(5), 575–594.

Stuy, B. (2007). *Searching for birth parents—how can it be done*. Retrieved from http://research-china.blogspot.com/2007/12/searching-for-birth parents-how-can-it.html

Tessler, R., Gamache, G., & Liu, L. (1999). *West meets East: Americans adopt Chinese children*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

Tong, S. (2010a). The dark side of Chinese adoptions. *American Public Media, Marketplace Morning Report, May 5, 2010*. Retrieved from http://marketplace.publicradio.org/display/web/2010/05/05/pm-dark-side-chinese-adoptions/

Tong, S. (2010b). China's one-child policy. *American Public Media Marketplace*. Retrieved from http://marketplace.publicradio.org/projects/project_display.php?proj_identifier=2010/06/21/china-one-child-policy

United States Department of State. (2010). *Intercountry adoption: China*. Retrieved from http://adoption.state.gov/country/china.html#statistics

Van Gulden, H. (2008). *Talking with children about difficult history*. Retrieved from http://www.pactadopt.org/press/articles/diffhis.html

Wolfs, R. (2008). *Adoption conversations: What, when and how to tell*. London, UK: British Association for Adoption & Fostering.

Wolfs, R. (2010). *More adoption conversations: What, when and how to tell*. London, UK: British Association for Adoption & Fostering.

Wrobel, G. M., Kohler, J. K., Grotevant, H. D., & McRoy, R. G. (2003). The family adoption communication (FAC) model: Identifying pathways of adoption-related communication. *Adoption Quarterly*, *7*(2), 53–84.

Yngvesson, B., & Mahoney, M. (2000). "As one should, ought and wants to be": Belonging and authenticity in identity narratives. *Theory, Culture, and Society*, *17*, 77–110.