

2013

Bi-Cultural Socialization and the Transition to Young Adulthood: Findings from the 2012 Parent Survey

Richard Tessler Ph.D.
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Gail Gamache Ph.D.
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Amanda Keating Moore Ph.D.
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umass.edu/sociol_reports

Recommended Citation

Tessler, Richard Ph.D.; Gamache, Gail Ph.D.; and Moore, Amanda Keating Ph.D., "Bi-Cultural Socialization and the Transition to Young Adulthood: Findings from the 2012 Parent Survey" (2013). *Sociology Department Reports and Working Papers*. 2.
Retrieved from https://scholarworks.umass.edu/sociol_reports/2

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Sociology at ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sociology Department Reports and Working Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact scholarworks@library.umass.edu.

Bi-Cultural Socialization and the Transition to Young Adulthood:
Findings from the 2012 Parent Survey

By

Richard Tessler, Gail Gamache, & Amanda Keating Moore

Department of Sociology

University of Massachusetts-Amherst

December 9, 2013

We would like to take this opportunity to say “thank you” to the families who participated in this longitudinal study, from 1996 to 2012.

Correspondence about this paper can be directed to tessler@soc.umass.edu.

Bi-Cultural Socialization and the Transition to Young Adulthood

Findings from the 2012 Parent Survey

China sent approximately 83,000 children to the U.S. between 1992 and 2012, the vast majority of whom were girls. Chinese adoptions in the U.S. peaked in 2005, with 7,906 in one year, but adoptions from China (and many other countries) have since been on the decline (Selman, 2012). The early cohorts of Chinese adoptees (those adopted in the early and mid-1990s) are now becoming young adults, and many more will in the next several years.

The experiences of children adopted from China differ not only from Chinese-American youth being raised by parents of Chinese descent, but also from first generation immigrants to the United States who experience disruptions in language and culture compounded by economic adversity. In contrast, most children adopted from China grew up in upper middle class homes and in neighborhoods that mirrored the race and class characteristics of their adoptive parents, rather than the ethnic enclaves which are more characteristic of immigrant families. Their adoptive parents (who were mainly white and of European ancestry) tended to know little about Chinese culture. Many of them had never visited China until they went there to meet their child.

Thus, children adopted from China are a very special type of Chinese-American because the composition of their households, neighborhoods, and schools tend not to reflect their own ethnicity. In addition, Chinese adoptees are a very special type of immigrant because their adoptive parents were already well established in America. While pre-adoption histories in China included much deprivation, the children's experiences once they moved to America were mainly characterized by socio-economic advantage and educational opportunity. In terms of language fluency and level of acculturation, the children adopted from China are more similar to second and third generation immigrants whose families have been in America for a long time.

However, none of this provided a guarantee that children adopted from China would be accepted as *real Americans*. Similar to Korean adoptees before them, Chinese adoptees have had to cope with the conditional acceptance of Asian Americans embodied by the dual attitude toward them as both perpetual foreigners and honorary whites (Lee, 2003; Tuan, 1999). This was an issue that was anticipated by adoptive parents, and one they sought ways to problem-solve. Bi-cultural socialization was one of these ways.

The basic idea was that by incorporating aspects of Chinese culture into daily life in America, adoptive parents could help their children to weave together their upbringing in white families, their physical appearance as Asian, and their cultural heritage (Tessler, Gamache, and Liu, 1999). The strategy required the creation of opportunities for adopted children to learn about everyday facets of their birth culture, from its holidays and customs to its music and arts, cooking and food, and spoken and written language.

As challenging as bi-cultural socialization is for immigrant families who face pressures to assimilate, the practice requires extraordinary efforts for adoptive parents because they did not themselves grow up the *Chinese way*; in effect they had to socially construct a birth culture for their children from whole cloth (Thomas and Tessler, 2007). While few parents encouraged their Chinese-born children to identify totally with their birth culture, the strategy was ambitious nonetheless because it required some degree of competence in both cultures (LaFromboise, 1993).

Bi-cultural socialization may help children adopted from China to develop an understanding of their cultural roots, but the goal of achieving bi-cultural competence was never realistic. Other goals, such as enhanced self-esteem, are more realistic yet still elusive. We learned from our last survey in 2007 that ethnic exploration in early adolescence carried both opportunity and risk. While many adopted youth experienced it as empowering, others felt anxious when national origin and race were made salient either in response to perceived Asian stereotyping by whites or as a result of social interactions with co-ethnics who know Chinese culture far better and have much more command of Chinese language (Tessler, Gamache, and Adams, 2010).

In the current paper, we re-visit the issue of bi-cultural socialization based on a follow up survey of the same families many years later. We wanted to know whether and in what ways bi-cultural socialization was still important to these adoptive parents. How did bi-cultural attitudes and practices affect relationships within the adoptive family, including with siblings? Prospects for bi-cultural socialization will be shaped not only by parent attitudes and practices but also by social context and opportunities for contact with co-ethnics (Shiao and Tuan, 2008). What barriers had they encountered trying to raise their daughters bi-culturally? What were their main sources of support? What difference, if any, did region of the country make? Growing up as one of the only Asian children at school and in the neighborhood is obviously very different than growing up in other cultural contexts (Tessler, Huang, and Jiang, 2005; Tuan and Shiao, 2012).

A related issue is how social reactions outside the home may shape adoptees' consciousness of difference (Tessler and Gamache, 2012). Children adopted from China inevitably experience at least some differentness, if only because they come from Asia and their physical appearance marks them as foreign in some people's eyes. At some point in their lives, all of the adoptees will experience first-hand what it is like to be viewed and treated as non-white in American society, including color blind responses which may also be an extension of growing up in white families.

Some have already felt outraged during adolescence over being seen as foreigners because the perception cuts them off not only from their national identity as Americans but also from their adoptive families. By early adulthood, many more will experience racial stereotyping, exclusion, and teasing similar to other minority group members. Both color blind and discriminatory responses highlight their status as non-white and become a salient feature informing their lives (Tessler, Tuan, and Shiao, 2011).

The 2012 survey was also an opportune time to examine the consequences of different family structures and characteristics, including the age gap between parents and daughters. A difference in age of some 40 to 45 years that mattered little or not at all when the girls were going off to kindergarten may be experienced very differently when they are going off to college.

A final research goal was to explore how parents are experiencing the growing independence of their daughters adopted from China (Phinney, 2006). Launching children into young adulthood may be a more complicated and prolonged process in adoptive families, where issues of autonomy and connectedness are magnified by adoption, race, and national origin. Children adopted from China did not come into their families in the usual way. Thus, it also makes sense that they will not leave in the usual way.

SAMPLE AND METHOD

The study on which this report is based has been committed to documenting the social experiences of families who adopted children from China in the early and mid-1990s. Parents volunteered to be part of a longitudinal study on bi-cultural socialization in response to advertisements about the research on the Internet, in newsletters, and by word of mouth. Although over the years some of the parents adopted more than one child from China, our focus has continued to be on the first (or only) Chinese adoptee in the family. All of the children in the study are girls.

At the time of enrollment, the average age of the parents was 43, they tended to be highly educated (e.g., 65 percent had post-graduate degrees), and well employed (e.g., 92 percent of the fathers and 53 percent of the mothers who completed questionnaires were working full time). The sample was predominantly (96 percent) white. While it is not a systematic random sample of families with children adopted from China in the 1990s, the data nonetheless provide a nationally diverse source of information tracking family experiences across several developmental stages.

The first survey was conducted in 1996 with 526 parents in 361 families when most of the children were toddlers, and the second in 2001 with 467 parents in 331 of the same families when most of the children were in primary school. More recent follow-up surveys have included only one parent per family, typically the parent who originally contacted us about the study in the mid-1990s. Thus, the third survey in 2007 produced responses from 308 parents (one per family), and that was also our strategy in the most recent survey in 2012.

Preparation for the fourth survey began by writing to all of the parents who had participated in the last round except for one who had asked not to be contacted again. Another parent declined to participate when informed that a new questionnaire was being developed. In four families, the parent who had completed the questionnaire in 2007 was not available (one had died, one was too ill to participate, two others were too busy). In each of those cases, the questionnaire was filled out by a co-parent from within the same family.

The questionnaire included structured questions about household size and composition, changes in the lives of the parents and daughters since the last survey, and current attitudes towards bi-cultural socialization including perceived barriers and supports. The questionnaire also inquired about trips to China, teenage problems and well-being, family relationships, and parents' worries about their daughter. We also included questions about how the parents and their daughters were feeling about the changes in their lives occasioned by graduating high school and (in most cases) going to college.

After considerable tracing to confirm current addresses (14 percent had moved since the previous survey), questionnaires were mailed to parents in 306 families (as noted above, two families had declined further participation). Enclosed in the mailing with the questionnaires were stamped envelopes to facilitate returns. A total of 287 parents (93 percent of the 308 parents who had participated in 2007) returned questionnaires, although in two cases there were missing data in more than one section.

Family attrition over the 16 years of the longitudinal study was only 20.50 percent. In other words, almost 80 percent participated in all four waves (1996, 2001, 2007, and 2012). While attrition has been modest overall, it has not been fully random. Of particular concern has been a tendency for families with less commitment to bi-cultural socialization to drop out of the study. For example, daughter non-response to a questionnaire designed for them in 2007 was associated with less enthusiasm about bi-cultural socialization in 2001 on the part of their parents. Non-response by daughters in 2007 was also correlated with parents' age and educational attainment; the daughters of younger and less educated parents were less likely to return questionnaires.

This was also the case in 2012, where non-responding parents tended to be those who had expressed less enthusiasm about bi-cultural socialization in 2007. Comparisons of the 287 respondents and 21 non-respondents in 2012 also indicated that the parents who chose not to participate in the current wave of the study tended to have lower income and larger and more diverse households that included children adopted from countries other than China. Non-responding parents (and co-parents) also tended to be younger than other parents.

While these differences are noteworthy, the bias caused by attrition is very modest overall. On most questions from earlier surveys, there were no significant differences between respondents and non-respondents in 2012.

RESULTS

We begin with profiles of the parents, households, and the daughters. While we make some comparisons with previous assessments, the main focus is on data from the 2012 survey.

Profile of the Parents and Households

About 84 percent of the persons who filled out a questionnaire in 2012 were mothers; 16 percent were fathers. The average age of the mothers was 59 years; the average age of the fathers was 60. Approximately 69 percent of mothers and 93 percent of fathers were currently married or living with a partner. The respondents were living in 38 states; two were living abroad in 2012.

Approximately 8 percent of the respondents reported that they had married or re-married, or found a new partner since completing the last survey; 7 percent were separated or divorced, and 2 percent (five out of 287) were widowed during the same period.

When asked about changes in the workplace, 13 percent reported that they lost their job, 9 percent had to accept a lesser job, while 13 percent received a promotion at work. More than 21 percent experienced financial difficulty. Approximately 13 percent retired. Although we did not ask explicitly, many of the responding parents also reported a high prevalence of employment-related events for spouses and partners.

Household income was slightly higher than five years ago, although the difference was not statistically significant. In 2007, 40 percent of the sample reported income of \$130,000 or more compared to 46 percent in 2012. By any measure, the large majority of these parents are enjoying a good quality of life. When asked in 2012 to rate the quality of their lives, 45 percent described their life quality as excellent, and 50 percent as good. The other 5 percent said fair. Even though it was an available response alternative, not a single parent rated their life quality as poor.

Self-ratings of physical health were similarly very positive, although 4 parents assessed their health as poor, and 8 parents became disabled in the last 5 years.

At the time of the survey, 55 percent of the girls were living with the parent who completed the questionnaire. Most of the others were either in college (a majority were in their freshman year), living with another parent, or on their own.

Besides the study child, 35 percent of the parents have other children adopted from China; these other children were almost always younger and still living at home. About 40 percent have other children not adopted from China, including some adopted from other countries. In 55 percent of these families, at least one of these other children was also living in the household. Most of the others were older and living on their own. Some had left home many years ago and had already established independent lives. Approximately 5 percent of the parents reported becoming grandparents since the last survey.

One discernible change in 2012 was a decline in household size (to an average of 3 persons) reflecting the exit of young adult children for college, as well as a slight rise in single parent households to about 19 percent. Another discernible change was the decline in the proportion who currently members of Families with Children from China (FCC). Just one in four (25 percent) is currently a member of FCC, compared to 59 percent in 2007, 79 percent in 2001, and 81 percent in 1996.

Profile of the Daughters

In 2012, the girls in this longitudinal study ranged in age from 16 to 24 (average = 18 years). They were almost equally divided between those who were still in high school (49 percent)

and girls who were in college or about to leave home for college (46 percent). About 4 percent were working full time, and the balance had special circumstances.

Overall, the girls are making good, positive, progress towards becoming independent young adults. Normative markers of their progress are omnipresent. More than $\frac{3}{4}$ already have a driver's license, and many of the others have a learner's permit. About 8 out of 10 have a checking account and/or a credit card. Almost all are involved online in social networking. More than 95 percent have a Facebook page, and about 38 percent have twitter accounts. Almost everyone has a cell phone. Nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ have had a summer job.

Teenage problems (reported by parents) are generally within the normal range for American girls from upper middle class families. Less than 10 percent have problems with recreational drugs, alcohol, eating disorders, the police or the law, bullying or cyber bullying. Higher percentages have problems related to mood and depression (32 percent), body image (20 percent), racial prejudice or discrimination (15 percent), dating (16 percent), and friendships (32 percent).

Problems tend to appear in clusters. Bullying and prejudice tend to go together; depressed mood tends to cluster with negative body image and eating disorders; problems with alcohol and drugs tend to go together, as do problems with dating and friendship.

While 4 out of 10 girls were said to be problem-free, problems in several areas were reported for 2 out of 10. The total number of problems was unrelated to the age of the child.

The problem checklist was followed by any open ended questions asking that parents specify in their own words "any other serious teenage issues." About 16 percent noted additional issues or further specification of problems. Most of these were related to mental health. They included post-traumatic stress disorder, suicide ideation, depression, social anxiety, and problems managing anger. In addition, there were learning disabilities affecting performance at school and interpersonal difficulties within the family affecting relations with parents and siblings. Physical health problems linked to accidents and chronic diseases were also cited, although less frequently.

Generally, parents described their daughter's physical health in very positive ways: 72 percent as excellent, 24 percent as good, 3 percent as fair, and only 1 percent as poor. In contrast, parents expressed more concern about their daughter's mental health: 13 percent viewed their daughter's mental health as poor or fair. Girls whose mental health was rated fair or poor were especially likely to have problems related to mood and depression, body image, and friendships.

Almost 2 in 3 parents (64 percent) of parents worry at least a little about their daughter's mental health. About 3 in 10 worry somewhat or a lot. Parents worry the most when their daughter is living on her own and not in college.

Family Relationships

Almost 72 percent of parents reported that, in general, they get along very well with their daughter. Twenty three percent said they get along fairly well; five percent said they get along not so well or poorly. These are very positive ratings overall, considering the stage of life in which the relationships are occurring.

There was a tendency for more negative assessments of family relationships to be made by older parents (60 years or more), those with poorer physical health and recent onset disabilities, and by those who were experiencing financial difficulties. Parents who experienced problems in their relationship to their daughter also tended to experience a lower quality of life.

It may be that parenting strain contributed to lower satisfaction with life. Alternatively, lower life quality may have been a risk factor for relationship-strain. In any event, parents of all ages and circumstances tended to complain less about relationship difficulties when their daughter was in college.

About 56 percent reported that their daughter also gets along very well with her other parent, and about 38 percent said she gets along very well with her siblings. These relationships appear to be shaped by social forces similar to those noted above. Thus, the girls in the study tended to get along better with everyone in the household when financial strain was low and quality of life was high. Going to college seemed to improve relationships with the other

parent (as it had with the parent who filled out the questionnaire) but had no effect on sibling relationships.

Parents tended to view the impact of the adoption on the family in very positive ways especially when they were getting along well with their daughter. Next in importance (in 2-parent families) in shaping views about adoption impact was the daughter's relationship to a co-parent. Parents tended to assign less importance to sibling relationships in evaluating the impact of the adoption on the family.

When there was relationship strain between parent and daughter, parents tended to worry more about her ($r = .38, p < .001$). The link between relationship strain and worry encompassed several areas of concern including the daughter's mental health, ability to make friends, grades at school, ability to take care of herself, judgment in making good decisions, and future well-being. Parents tended to worry less about their daughter in each of these areas so long as they were getting along well together.

We examined systematically for a wide variety of possible relationship-consequences of the age gap between parent and daughter. With only a few notable exceptions, the extent of the age difference made no discernible difference.

However, the exceptions were noteworthy. The greater the age gap, the more difficult parents say it is to communicate with their daughter ($r = .19, p < .01$). There was also a tendency for older parents to experience diminished influence over which aspects of American culture their daughter identifies with. Older fathers (those between 60 and 72 compared to those between 45 and 59 years of age) were the most likely to believe that they had little or no control over which aspects of American culture their daughter identifies with, $\chi^2(46) = 7.28, p = .06$.

On the other side of the ledger, larger age differences were associated with lower odds of divorce, $t(287) = 4.98, p < .05$, and higher odds of retirement, $t(287) = 16.75, p < .001$. The former may be a sign of stability in the household. The latter may indicate more time available for nurturing the parent-daughter relationship.

When respondents were asked if they found parenting more difficult as they have gotten older, 10 percent replied *Yes a lot*, 36 percent replied *Some*, and 54 percent replied *No*. Older parents were no more likely than young ones to say that they have found parenting to be more difficult as they themselves have aged.

Chinese Language Instruction

Chinese language instruction is an important part of bi-cultural socialization. In early and middle childhood it was very common for adoptees to receive some instruction, but this was less the case during the teenage years. For 57 percent of the girls in the study, classes in Chinese language were not offered as a part of the school curriculum in either middle or high school. When they were offered, it was much more likely to be in high school than in middle school. Chinese language classes were available in both middle school and high school for just 12 percent of the girls.

When Chinese language classes were offered, a majority enrolled in them. Some who were not taking classes at school studied Chinese language online, or in other venues. Our best estimate is that about 31 percent of the girls studied Chinese language in some venue during their teenage years.

Even if a girl chose not to study Chinese, just going to a school that offered Chinese language instruction tended to reinforce bi-cultural socialization by providing opportunities for contact with non-adopted Chinese youth. When Chinese language classes were offered at school, 39 percent of the girls had a lot of contact with Chinese American youth; when classes were not offered only 20 percent had a lot of contact.

In schools where Chinese language classes were offered, only 7 percent had no contact at all with Chinese American youth. By contrast, in schools that did not offer Chinese language, 21 percent had no contact. Having Chinese language be a part of the school curriculum also increased the odds of contact with adults of Chinese descent, $f(278) = 8.91, p < .001$.

Opportunities for both Chinese language instruction and contact with Chinese people were related to location. For example, approximately 66 percent of girls living in California had the chance to study Chinese language in middle school and/or high school, compared to only 40 percent of girls living elsewhere. Having classes in Chinese offered as a part of the middle

school and/or high school curriculum also increased the chances of a summer job which included contact with Chinese or Chinese-Americans, $f(209) = 5.55, p < .01$.

Bilingual education is sometimes a mixed experience. One parent described her daughter's experience this way:

My daughter attended a bilingual school for 11 years, from pre-k-8th grade, and had a mixed reaction to that experience. Starting around middle-school age, she was not too happy with school. It wasn't completely clear to me whether it was due to the bilingual/bicultural nature of the school or other factors. As she prepares to go off to college, she has talked about attending a school where she could do some international study in China, so has not turned her back on that part of her life.

Taking Chinese language classes in middle or high school does appear to have been instrumental for some girls in forming future occupational plans. Compared to girls who did not study Chinese either in middle or high school, those who took language classes were more likely to be thinking about a future career that will involve her in things related to China, $\chi^2(152) = 7.13, p < .01$. Overall, about 13 percent of the girls were said to be thinking along these lines.

Visits to China

Studying Chinese language at school in America tended to increase the odds of visiting China during the teenage years. Among those who took Chinese language classes in middle or high school, 50 percent visited China in the past 5 years compared to 17 percent who visited China even though they had not studied Chinese at school, $\chi^2(153) = 17.76, p < .001$.

Overall, 31 percent of the girls visited China at least once (7 percent made more than one trip) in the past 5 years. In about two-thirds of these visits, they were accompanied by the parent who filled out the 2012 questionnaires. Approximately one-half visited their orphanage, and about 6 percent made contact with a foster parent. Travel to China was also facilitated by higher family income ($r = .14, p < .05$) and FCC membership ($r = .19, p < .01$).

Girls were more likely to visit China if their parent was enthusiastic about exposing them to Chinese culture and people. They were relatively unlikely to go if their parent was indifferent. Daughters' attitudes were even more determining, as one would expect. Girls whose attitudes towards bi-cultural socialization were indifferent or negative were very unlikely to visit China ($r = .14, p < .05$).

There were exceptions, where a daughter agreed to visit China even though she was initially unenthusiastic. One parent wrote about her older daughter's experience in the context of a family trip to China that included a younger sibling, also adopted from China.

[My older daughter] has historically been indifferent to or distanced about connecting with her Chinese heritage/self. This is in marked contrast to her younger sister who loves being Chinese and American, who was the spark for our trip to China last month and who did want to and did visit her orphanage. Different kids, different stories.

[My oldest daughter] is quite verbal about her distaste for China, though she appreciates many things and people Chinese – many friends, food, art, and crafts. She was unhappy about “having to go to China” this summer. In her words - “It’s dirty, crowded, and smelly and there are no good beaches.” Somewhat ironically the elements she enjoyed most were visiting hutongs in Beijing, riding bikes on the city wall in Xi’an, and shopping along open street markets. She was supportive when we brought her sister to her orphanage and I believe she was impressed with and proud of her sister’s courage. When offered the opportunity to do the same, she said “that’s not for me. I really don’t care about where I come from.” She is the same young woman who wouldn’t miss spending Chinese New Year with our Chinese-American friends and at least one visit to China town. People are complex no matter how you slice it.

From the description we can see how, even within the same family, girls' reactions to China and things Chinese can be so different.

Most parents describe their daughters' trips to China as positive experiences overall. More than 80 percent say their daughters enjoyed the trip *very much*. Many parents who accompanied their daughters also found much personal meaning and satisfactions in these return trips.

But, sometimes travel to Chinese had negative overtones, even when it began with high expectations. One parent shared the following material from an essay her daughter prepared for her common application to college:

Last summer, I returned to China for the first time on an exchange program. Everywhere I went people had difficulty accepting that I am American. It took three or four repetitions of "I am an American" for taxi drivers to stop looking expectantly at me to translate for my Caucasian friends. Although I had grown accustomed to people assuming I was raised in a traditional Chinese household in America, I did not anticipate facing the same situation in China. Surely, Chinese people would see past my features to the Black Friday-crazed, Glee-obsessed, chili dog-eating American teenager I am. Instead, there I was perceived as less American than the Caucasian exchange students.

Reports about trips to China are mixed, but the positive ones are more frequent than the negative ones. Overall, parents whose daughters visited in the past five years were more likely to feel that they had achieved the bi-cultural goals for their daughter that they had planned when they first adopted, $t(283) = 8.46, p < .01$.

Bi-Cultural Attitudes and Practices

The persistence of positive attitudes towards bi-cultural socialization among parents in this study is remarkable considering how much time has passed since we first surveyed them in 1996. Most (but not all) of those who were initially enthusiastic still believe in the theory and practice of bi-cultural socialization.

Certain elements were singled out as being especially important by them in 20012. Rated *very important* were instilling pride in their Chinese heritage (73 percent), instilling pride in their Chinese appearance (68 percent), visiting China (58 percent), learning about the area of China from which they came (41 percent), becoming friends with Chinese-Americans (39 percent), and learning about Chinese-American history (31 percent). Parents viewed as *somewhat less important* learning about Chinese history, having Chinese artifacts around the home, learning to speak some Chinese, celebrating the Chinese New Year, and keeping their Chinese names. They assigned *least importance* to becoming involved with FCC (44 percent rated it as not important), even though in earlier surveys being a member was given much high priority.

Mothers tended to assign more importance to the 12 elements in bi-cultural socialization than fathers, $t(285) = 13.93, p < .001$. When asked about their overall attitude toward bi-cultural socialization, 41 percent of the mothers said they were *enthusiastic* compared to 28 percent of the fathers. Only 9 percent of the mothers described themselves as *indifferent* compared to 22 percent of fathers, $t(286) = 6.44, p < .05$.

We asked parents directly whether they think that bi-cultural socialization was a positive factor in preparing their daughter for young adulthood. In response, 9 percent said *not at all*, 27 percent said *a little*, 30 percent said *some*, and 34 percent said *a lot*. The elements most highly associated with the perceived positive impact of bi-cultural socialization were becoming friends with Chinese-Americans ($r = .39, p < .001$), celebrating the Chinese New Year ($r = .35, p < .001$), and instilling pride in their Chinese heritage ($r = .32, p < .001$).

Parents' efforts to provide bi-cultural socialization sometimes had unintended negative consequences. One parent wrote:

I think that our efforts at bi-cultural socialization in an area of the country (suburban Washington D.C.) with a large Asian population have served to re-enforce the differences in cultural norms and expectations. If anything I think that our efforts at bi-cultural socialization have made our daughter feel set apart—not really Chinese. I think she identifies more as Caucasian.

Parents' attitudes toward bi-cultural socialization are unrelated to both the age of the parent and the age of the child. Differences in attitudes are also unrelated to whether there are other children adopted from China in the household.

Barriers and Sources of Support

We asked each parent to think back to when s/he first adopted, and to consider several factors as possible barriers to bi-cultural socialization. The list included access to Chinese people, your daughter's attitude, the school system, your spouse or partner (if applicable), your daughter's siblings not adopted from China (if applicable), your extended family, and your daughter's friends. In describing the extent of the barrier, respondents could choose between *a lot*, *some*, *a little*, or *not at all*. Generally, the barriers were not seen as very significant.

There were exceptions. Access to Chinese people was felt to be a barrier to bi-cultural socialization at least to some degree by 68 percent. The school system was felt to be a barrier

to some degree by 63 percent, and daughters' attitudes were perceived as a barrier by 60 percent. Ratings for each as barriers averaged between *a little* and *some*.

Perceiving access to Chinese people as a barrier to bi-cultural socialization was greater if the family neighborhood did not include Chinese-Americans, $t(283) = 14.70, p < .001$. Among parents with Chinese-American neighbors, 42 percent said that access to Chinese people was a barrier *not at all* compared to only 21 percent without Chinese-American neighbors.

Parents in California viewed access to Chinese people as a barrier between *not at all* and *a little*, compared to parents elsewhere who viewed it as midway between *a little* and *some*.

Approximately 69 percent of respondents in California said that their neighborhood includes Chinese-Americans compared to 47 percent in other states.

Lack of availability of Chinese language instruction in middle school and high school increased the odds that parents would view the school system as a barrier to bi-cultural socialization, $t(285) = 7.54, p < .001$. It did not matter if the daughter actually enrolled in the course, only that it was available to her. Thus, inclusion of Chinese language in the curriculum appears to have had symbolic significance, influencing whether the school was perceived as a barrier or as a partner in bi-cultural socialization. The extent of their daughters' contact with Chinese people at school also shaped parents' attitudes. The more the contact especially with Chinese-American youth, the less likely it was that parents would view the school as a barrier to bi-cultural socialization ($r = -.17, p < .01$).

The perception of daughters' attitudes as a barrier to bi-cultural socialization was associated with parental beliefs that their daughter is currently influenced by negative aspects of American popular culture ($r = .28, p < .001$). Girls whom parents perceived as resistant to bi-cultural socialization were also more likely to self-identify as American rather than as Chinese or Chinese-American, $f(275) = 12.64, p < .001$. In general, household characteristics were unrelated to daughters' resistance to bi-cultural socialization. Such resistance was as likely to occur in single parent as in two parent households, and as likely to occur in households where the daughter was an only child as in those where there were siblings also adopted from China. Perceived resistance to bi-cultural socialization was also unrelated to parent age, gender, and marital status including separations and divorces in the past five years.

The same factors that were barriers to bi-cultural socialization for some families were experienced as *sources of support* by others. Thus, access to Chinese people was cited as a source of *a lot* of support by about one-quarter of the parents, and as a source of *some* support by one-third. When the daughter's attitude toward bi-cultural socialization was positive, it was similarly experienced as a source of support. Approximately 38 percent perceived the school system as providing at least some support for bi-cultural socialization.

The most important sources of support for bi-cultural socialization were spouses and partners (56 percent in two-parent families said they received *a lot* of support from their spouse or partner), and FCC or other adoption support group (36 percent said they received *a lot* of support there). The perceived supportiveness of FCC probably describes experiences from many years ago when families were more actively involved. By 2012, membership in FCC had declined greatly.

We asked each parent: "How many of *your adult friends* are of Chinese ethnicity?" The distribution of responses was: none (28 percent), 1 or 2 (36 percent), 3 or 4 (20 percent), and 5 or more (16 percent). As expected, the more adult friends of Chinese ethnicity the parent had, the more support for bi-cultural socialization they tended to receive from Chinese people ($r = .39, p < .001$). Parents with many Chinese friends tended to receive more support from other sources as well. Thus, having more Chinese friends was associated with more support for bi-cultural socialization from daughters ($r = .18, p < .01$), school systems ($r = .24, p < .001$), spouses and partners ($r = .19, p < .01$), other children not adopted from China ($r = .25, p < .001$), extended family ($r = .18, p < .01$), daughter's friends ($r = .24, p < .001$), and FCC or other adoption support group ($r = .17, p < .01$).

Approximately 14 percent of the parents had moved during the past five years. Moving was associated with less access to Chinese people as a source of support for bi-cultural socialization ($r = .14, p < .05$). Residential moves did not disrupt other ongoing sources of support for bi-cultural socialization such as that received from spouse or partner.

Regional Differences

We sorted the families into four regional groups: northeast, southeast, west coast, and other (mid-west, southwest, and north-centrally located states). As expected, residence was related to many aspects of bi-cultural socialization.

Contact with Chinese-American youth who were not adopted was greatest on the west coast and least in the southeast, $f(275) = 8.02, p < .001$. Amount of contact on the west coast averaged between *some* and *a lot*, compared to *some* in the northeast and mid-west, and between *none* and *some* in the southeast. Only 34 percent of family neighborhoods in the middle of the country included Chinese-Americans compared to 63 percent on the west coast, $chi2(284) = 11.40, p < .01$.

Similar regional differences were observed for the number of adult friends of Chinese descent who were part of parents' social networks. Adoptive parents on the west coast had more Chinese friends than adoptive parents elsewhere, $chi2(286) = 24.78, p < .01$. This explains why west coast parents were least likely to cite access to Chinese people as a barrier to bi-cultural socialization, $f(286) = 5.40, p < .01$, and most likely to identify them as a source of support, $f(286) = 3.17, p < .05$. West coast residents also received more support for bi-cultural socialization from the school system, $f(282) = 4.39, p < .01$, but the regional differences are not dramatic. Ratings of support from schools on the west coast averaged between *some and a little*, compared to *a little* in other regions. Children on the west coast were the most likely to have taken Chinese language classes in middle or high school when they were available (70 percent), but girls in the southeast were a close second (64 percent studied Chinese when classes were available at school).

There was also regional variation in visiting China: west coast (40 percent visited), northeast (35 percent visited), southeast (32 percent visited), and in the mid-west, south west, and north central states (17 percent visited), $chi2(287) = 10.06, p < .05$.

Girls in the southeast were said to have the least interest in Chinese culture, $f(287) = 3.40, p < .05$. Girls there were more likely to self-identify as American, rather than as Chinese or Chinese-American, compared to girls in other regions of the country, $chi2(275) = 15.45, p < .05$. (The girls on the west coast were the ones most likely to identify as Chinese-Americans).

Parents in the southeast were also less likely than parents in other regions to say that bi-cultural socialization had been a positive factor preparing their daughter for young adulthood, $f(285) = 2.89, p < .05$.

Consciousness of Difference

In order to measure consciousness of difference, we asked each parent: “How comfortable does your daughter feel about the things that make her different from other Americans in each of the following areas?” The areas were: her race, her place of birth, her adoption, and her appearance. The response alternatives were: very comfortable, somewhat comfortable, somewhat uncomfortable, and very uncomfortable.

Most of the ratings were between very and somewhat comfortable. The most comfort was reported around adoption, where 69 percent were reported to be very comfortable. However, more than 10 percent were rated as either somewhat or very *uncomfortable* in three out of the four areas. Even in respect to adoption, there were 7 girls in the sample who were said to be very uncomfortable. Comfort with race is strongly related to the daughter’s current attitude toward bi-cultural socialization ($r = .28, p < .001$). Only 3 percent of girls who were very comfortable with race had negative attitudes towards bi-cultural socialization. By contrast, 63 percent who were very uncomfortable with race had negative attitudes.

Consciousness of difference shapes (and is shaped by) contact with people of Chinese descent. Feeling comfortable with adoption was associated with more contact with other girls adopted from China, not counting siblings ($r = .12, p < .05$). Similarly, comfort with race was associated with more contact with Chinese-American youth ($r = .15, p < .05$). Comfort with place of birth was associated with visiting China in the past five years ($r = .12, p = .05$). Comfort with appearance was associated with more contact with adults of Chinese descent ($r = .14, p < .05$). Thus, associations between consciousness of difference and contact with people of Chinese descent tend to vary according to the nature of the difference and the type of social relationship involved.

Consciousness of difference is also shaped by experiences at school. Where school was a barrier to bi-cultural socialization, girls tended to be less comfortable with differences related to race ($r = .17, p < .01$), adoption ($r = .17, p < .01$), and appearance ($r = .17, p < .01$).

Conversely, when schools supported bi-cultural socialization, the girls tended to be more comfortable with themselves in each of these areas.

Comfort with differences was strongly correlated with relationships within the adoptive family. Parents who perceived their daughter to be comfortable around race, as well as other sources of difference, tended to get along better with her. Communication tended to be more positive, and the parent was more likely to feel respected in the relationship.

Comfort with adoption was the most important factor in these parent-daughter relationships, but the relationships also benefited from comfort with differences related to race, place of birth, and appearance. Comfort with differences was also associated with better sibling relationships.

Thus, comfort with differences appears to be a positive factor influencing a broad range of relationships within the adoptive family. However, it is difficult to sort out whether comfort around differences is a cause or a consequence of better relationships. More comfort with difference may enhance social interactions within the adoptive family, but better relationships may also reinforce comfort with differences.

Regardless, believing that one's daughter is comfortable in her consciousness of difference was associated with worrying less about her mental health ($r = .46, p < .001$), ability to make friends ($r = .37, p < .001$), and future well-being ($r = .44, p < .001$).

Consciousness of difference also extends to parents themselves. While more than 90 percent of parents said they feel very comfortable around the things related to adopting from China that make their family different from other American families, those who felt otherwise tended to have daughters who were similarly uncomfortable.

Parental discomfort with differences was associated with perceived daughter discomfort especially around place of birth ($r = .16, p < .01$) and adoption ($r = .16, p < .01$). Those parents who acknowledged at least some discomfort were also more likely to find parenting more difficult as they got older ($r = .20, p < .001$).

Transitions to Young Adulthood

Girls who are comfortable with their differentness tend to be experiencing smoother transitions to young adulthood. Parents were more likely to describe their daughter as very well prepared to going out into the world if she was also comfortable with the things that make her different from her peers.

Overall, 45 percent were said to be very well prepared to go out into the world, 47 percent were rated somewhat well prepared, and 8 percent were rated not well prepared. Of the four areas of difference, comfort with adoption was most strongly associated parent perceptions of preparedness, $f(279) = 15.63, p < .001$.

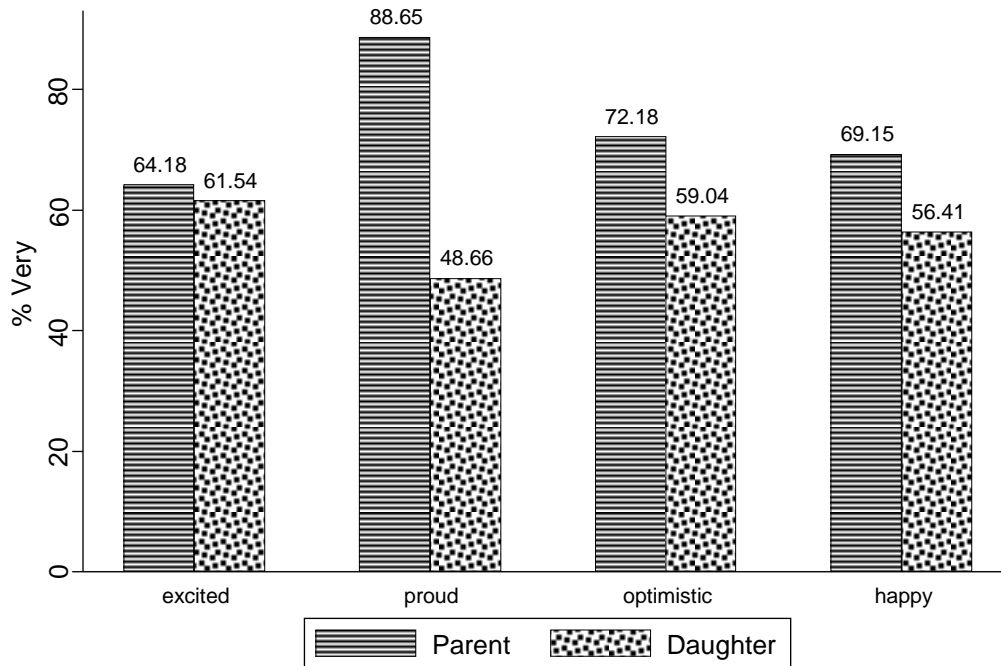
We asked systematically about how both parents and daughters were feeling about her going out into the world. The checklist included some positive feelings (excited, proud, optimistic, happy), some negative ones (anxious, scared/fearful, sad, stressed), and some in between (ambivalent, confused, indifferent). While positive feelings were most prevalent, negative feelings are experienced intensely by some. Twenty one percent of the girls were described as *very stressed* and 15 percent *very anxious* about the transition to young adulthood.

Parents tend to have more positive feelings (as well as fewer negative ones) about the transition when they feel they have good communication with their daughter, when they believe that she is comfortable with things that make her different from her peers (e.g., race, adoption), and when she has gone to college. Daughters were said to be under more stress when their parents had recently divorced or separated ($r = .13; p < .05$), and when the family was facing financial difficulties ($r = .13, p < .05$).

The following bar graph compares ratings of positive feelings that parents and daughters are having in response to the transition to young adulthood. It is important to note that parents were the raters of both their daughters' feelings as well as their own, and if asked directly the girls might describe their feelings differently. Nonetheless, the comparisons reveal some interesting differences.

Both parents and daughters tend to be *very excited* but parents are much more likely to feel *very proud*, and somewhat more likely to rate themselves as *very optimistic* and *very happy*. Overall, it appears that parents are more upbeat than daughters about her passage to young adulthood.

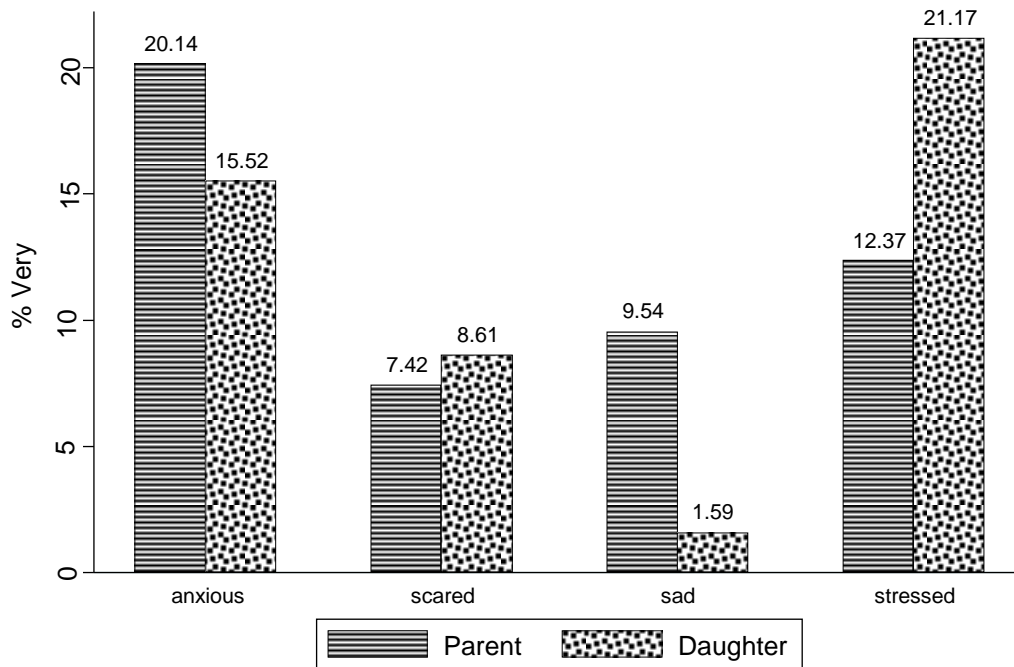
Positive Feelings about Daughter Becoming a Young Adult



The next bar graph compares parents and daughters in terms of negative feelings. Overall, negative feelings are experienced at much lower frequencies. Still, there are some notable differences.

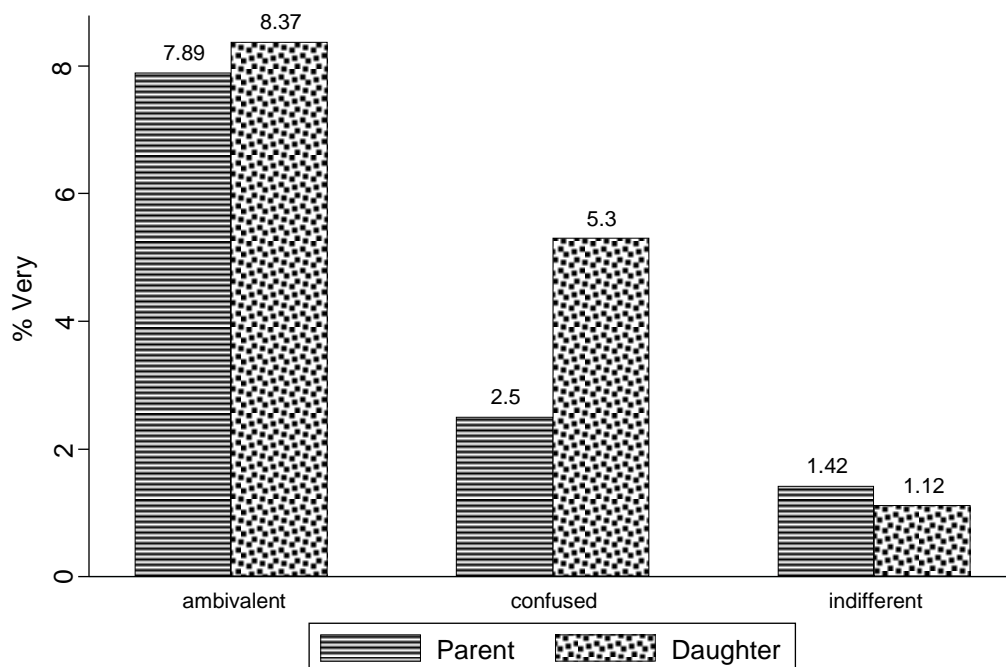
Parents are somewhat likely to be *very anxious* about the transition, and they are much more likely to be *very sad*. On the other hand, proportionately more of the daughters are *very stressed*.

Negative Feelings about Daughter Becoming a Young Adult



The checklist of feelings also included some that could not be described as simply positive or negative. The next bar graph compares parents and daughters in terms of these other feelings.

Other Feelings about Daughter Becoming a Young Adult



Only a very small proportion of either parents or daughters experience these feelings strongly, but comparisons among those reveal some differences of note. The largest difference is in feeling confused. Parents were more likely to rate their daughters than themselves as *very confused*.

In sum, the transition to young adulthood is something both parents and their daughters have strong feelings about. It is a passage that tends to elicit both positive and negative feelings, and about which very few are indifferent.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

We begin this section with an enumeration of the major findings from the 2012 survey.

Again, it is important to remember that all of these data were provided by parents.

Main Findings

- Major disruptions including separation and divorce, and death of a co-parent, have occurred in some households since the last survey. However, the majority of households have been very stable in terms of composition. In most, the major recent event has been a daughter going to college.
- The girls in the study are making good progress towards independence and self-sufficiency. Teenage problems as reported by parents are generally within the normal range for American girls from upper middle class families.
- When there are problems, they tend to appear in clusters. One cluster is defined by bullying and prejudice. Another consists of depressed mood, negative body image and eating disorders. In addition, problems with alcohol and drugs tend to go together, as do problems with dating and friendship.
- Most parents describe their relationships with their daughters in very positive terms. However, somewhat more relationship-strain was reported by older parents (60 years or more), parent's with poorer physical health and disabilities, and by those who are experiencing financial problems.
- More than half of the girls in the study did not have the opportunity to take classes in Chinese during middle school and/or high school. Much depended on place of residence and demography. Those who did study Chinese were more likely to be thinking about a future career that will involve them with China.

- More than 30 percent of the girls visited China in the past 5 years. Among these, just over one-half visited their orphanage. For most of the girls, these were very positive experiences.
- Most parents believe that it is very important to instill pride in Chinese heritage and Asian appearance, and many also feel it is important that their daughter visit China. Most also view making friends with Chinese-Americans and learning about Chinese-American history as at least somewhat important.
- Parents tended to view as less important learning about Chinese history, having Chinese artifacts around the home, learning to speak Chinese, celebrating the Chinese New Year, and keeping Chinese names.
- The main barriers to bi-cultural socialization were lack of access to Chinese people, limited support from schools, and disinterest or negativity on the part of their daughter.
- How parents think their daughters would answer if someone asked “what are you?” (as Americans sometimes ask about ethnicity) varies by region. Girls from the southeast were thought to be more likely to respond “I’m American”, while girls on the west coast were thought to be more likely to say “I’m Chinese-American”.
- Regardless of region, most parents believe that their daughter is at least somewhat (if not very) comfortable with her race, place of birth, adoption, and Asian appearance. A strong and positive consciousness of difference is associated with better relationships at home, as well as with more contact with Chinese-American youth and support for bi-cultural socialization at school.
- Most of the girls are said to be excited, proud, optimistic, and happy about becoming young adults. There is also indication that some are feeling anxious, confused, scared/fearful, indifferent, sad, stressed, and ambivalent, but with much lower frequency.
- Parents have similarly positive feelings, and most are very upbeat and optimistic about their daughter’s transition to young adulthood. Those with daughters in college tended to have the most positive feelings.
- Parents’ feelings about young adult launchings are shaped by three interrelated factors: how well they get along with their daughter, how comfortable she is in her

consciousness of difference (especially with her race), and how her formal education is going.

Implications

What have we learned about bi-cultural socialization from this longitudinal study? What can be said about it at this stage in the family life cycle? Did bi-cultural socialization work? Did it achieve its objectives?

Becoming bi-culturally competent was never a fully attainable goal for these children. Without daily language exposure, and without parents who had themselves been raised *the Chinese way*, bi-cultural competence was well beyond their reach. Few of the girls in the study have acquired the language skills or knowledge of cultural nuances sufficient for them to be fully comfortable in cross-cultural situations.

In China, they tend to experience even more consciousness of difference than in America. Even girls who studied Chinese language at school will still stand out as different in China, and many will be asked *Ni wei shen me bu hui shuo han yu* (Why can't you speak Chinese?). That they are not culturally Chinese will also be apparent in their non-verbal behaviors. Many of the Chinese people they encounter will know nothing about China's foreign adoption program, and will have difficulty understanding their unique backgrounds as children adopted internationally.

Most parents in this study recognized the limits of what they could accomplish bi-culturally years ago. The fact that they persisted with bi-cultural socialization suggests that there were other reinforcements.

In hindsight, it appears the major benefits were psychological. By celebrating their children's birth culture, parents communicated to their daughters that they were loved because they were themselves, and that they could be comfortable in their differentness both at home and in the society.

In these ways, bi-cultural socialization contributed to making adoption stories and personal biographies more coherent. Emphasizing points of difference related to adoption also

facilitated positive relationships within the adoptive family, as David Kirk had predicted it would many years before (Kirk, 1964).

Now in their late teens and early 20s, the vast majority are happy and well adjusted, and making excellent progress in their education and towards achieving independent lives. Their personal stories are as rich, unique, and engaging as are the girls themselves. Their achievements are their own, but they also reflect the considerable love and support from their families. Sometimes this gets articulated directly.

One of the parents wrote:

Just yesterday she sent me this text: "I know this is random, but I was just thinking I don't think I tell you guys enough how much I love you! I am so grateful for the love and dedication you have to making my future a bright one. I appreciate everything you have done for me and I couldn't ask for a better family." (the "you guys" in this message was to me and her aunt).

In their readiness to meet their children halfway around the world, Americans who adopted children from China in the 1990s took some important steps in demonstrating that humanitarianism extends beyond nationality, and that family extends beyond race. Their efforts to make Chinese culture visible for their children in daily life also contributed to making Chinese culture more accessible to other Americans.

Many relatives, neighbors, and friends of the family had their first personal relationships with people of Chinese descent through their associations with the children in these adoptive families. In addition, the travels of American adoptive parents (and later some of their children) to China made Americans more visible in China, especially in small to middle sized cities where most adoptions occurred.

Although no one can be certain about what lies ahead, families with children adopted from China symbolize an important meeting of West and East, one that could not have been imagined prior to the 1990s. Americans who adopted from China opened an important chapter of the new century uniting tens of thousands of children and families, and providing living examples of what it means to embrace diversity within the most fundamental social unit in any society – the family. Their stories are intensely personal, but in their efforts to

build goodwill internationally every story also has a global face. It will be very interesting to see where they go from here.

In One Word

For the adoptive parents, these young adult launchings conclude a major chapter in their lives as well as in their daughters' lives. We asked parents, if they could sum up their experience in adopting from China in one word, what would that word be?

The results are shown as a word cloud in the form of a hand. More frequently reported words are displayed in larger fonts. The results speak for themselves. Superlatives like *fantastic*, *wonderful*, *blessing*, *awesome*, and *great* are among the most prevalent.

See enclosure for Word Cloud

REFERENCES

- Kirk, H.D. (1964). *Shared Fate: A Theory of Adoption and Mental Health*. London: Free Press of Glencoe.
- LaFromboise, T., Coleman, H. L., & Gerton, J. (1993). Psychological impact of biculturalism: Evidence and theory. *Psychological Bulletin*, *114*, 395–412.
- Lee, R. M. (2003). Transracial adoption paradox: History, research, and counseling implications of cultural socialization. *The Counseling Psychologist*, *31*, 711–744.
- Phinney, J. S. (2006). Ethnic identity exploration in emerging adulthood. Pgs 117-134 in J. J. Arnett & J. L. Tanner (Eds.), *Emerging Adults in America: Coming of Age in the 21st Century*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Selman, P. (2012) *The Rise and Fall of Intercountry Adoption in the 21st Century*, Pgs. 7-28 in J. Gibbons and K. Rotabi (eds.) *Intercountry Adoption: Policies, Practices, and Outcomes*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company.
- Shiao, J. L., & Tuan, M. (2008). Korean adoptees and the social context of ethnic exploration. *American Journal of Sociology*, *113*, 1023–1066.
- Tessler, R., Gamache, G., & Liu, L. (1999). *West Meets East: Americans adopt Chinese Children*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.
- Tessler, R., Gamache, G., & Adams, G. (2009). Bi-cultural socialization and ethnic identity in daughters adopted from China. *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless*, *18*, 131–166.
- Tessler, R., Huang, B.H., & Jiang, H. (2005). The racial attitudes of Chinese adoptees in America: Comparisons with children being raised in China. *International Journal of Child & Family Welfare*, September (2-3): 127-135.
- Tessler, R., Tuan, M., & Shiao, J. L. (2011). The many faces of international adoption. *Contexts*, *10*(4), 34–39.
- Thomas, K., & Tessler, R. (2007). Bicultural socialization among adoptive families: Where there is a will, there is a way. *Journal of Family Issues*, *28*, 1189–1219.
- Tuan, M. (1998). *Forever Foreigners or Honorary Whites? The Asian Ethnic Experience Today*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Tuan, M., & Shiao, J. L. (2011). *Choosing Ethnicity, Negotiating Race: Korean Adoptees in America*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.