Daughters of China: An Examination of the Home, School, and Community Experiences of Adolescent and Young Adult Chinese Adoptees

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of adolescent and young adult Chinese adoptees raised in the United States. The study was based on understanding the complexity of identity, the experiences of academic life, and the quality of family, peer, and community relationships. The data were gathered from a sample of 21 adolescents and their parents. Semi-structured interviews were conducted either in person or via Skype. Participants included 10 mothers, 1 father, 9 Caucasian, 2 African American, and 1 male and 1 female teachers, coaches, advisors, or counselors, and one administrator. Participants were recruited through networking methods and snowball sampling.

Previous research conducted with Chinese adoptees had predominantly relied upon the parents’ perspectives. This study was unique because most of the children had not been old enough to speak for themselves. As a result, the voices of these young women were missing from the research. Using a multiple case study design, data were gathered from a sample of 11 cases. Each case consisted of three participants—one female Chinese adoptee between 16 and 21 years of age, one parent, and one educator who worked with the adoptee. The maximum variation sample of volunteers was recruited through networking methods and snowball sampling.

Qualitative analyses yielded nine overarching themes: good fortune and specialness, family, peer, and community relationships, academic life, and the quality of family and peer relationships.

METHODLOGY

Recruitment & Sampling

The researcher purposefully selected a sample of volunteers representing different ages, family forms, religious affiliations, and geographic locations. Participants were recruited through networking, posting announcements in adoption-related newsletters, on adoption ListServs and websites, and through snowball sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). A total of 11 cases participated in the study with the following demographics:

Participants

Adoptees
- 16-20 years old (M = 17.4), all female
- 9 Caucasian, 2 African American
- 7 married, 2 single, 1 divorced, 1 widowed
- M = 20.9 years experience in education

Educators
- 9 female
- 9 Caucasian, 2 African American
- Educators included directors of classroom teachers, coaches, advisors or counselors, and one administrator.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do adolescent and young adult Chinese adoptees perceive their experiences in different sociological contexts at home, with peers, at school, and in the community?
2. Retrospectively, how do Chinese adoptees perceive their life experiences at different stages of development during childhood, during adolescence, and at present?
3. How do parents view their family, social, and academic experiences?
4. Do education work with the adoptees view their academic progress and overall adjustment?
5. How do the perspectives of the adoptees compare to those of their parents and educators?

RESULTS

The first two research questions attempted to describe how the Chinese adoptees perceived their experiences in different contexts of their lives and over time. The third and fourth research questions informed how the parents and educators viewed the adoptee’s family, social, and academic progress. The final research question compared the perspectives of the three sources. A summary of the themes related to the research questions is presented below:

UNDERLYING THEORY

This study sought to describe the unique identity development of Chinese adopted adolescents using a combination of developmental and ecological perspectives. Erikson (1968) described identity development across the life span as progressing through five stages of psychosocial stages of development (Erikson, 1980). For internationally adopted children, it was also fitting to consider identity development within the context of the mesosystem, the context of the person’s environment throughout the lifespan. The figure below provides a visualization of the blend of the two theoretical perspectives of psychosocial stages of development and the Chinese adoptive family (Erikson’s 1968) and identity development and Urie Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems model.

METHODOLOGY

A multiple case study, qualitative research design was utilized in this study. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) define a multi-case study as involving two or more participants in order to provide a detailed examination of a particular event. The researcher desired to study the characteristics of Chinese adoptees between 16 and 21 years of age. The unit of analysis was the adoptee. Each case consisted of the adoptee and up to three family members. The voices of the adoptees were critical to answering the research questions.

DATA ANALYSES

The researcher analyzed the data from the interview transcripts and PASCI self-concept inventory by performing the following steps:
1. Reviewed and edited professionally transcribed interviews and pre-coded by hand (Sadalla, 2009).
2. Created a provisional start list of 59 codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Sadalla, 2009).
4. Performed 3rd cycle of coding using NVivo 9 both within and across cases.

The researcher organized, reviewed, and examined the code list for relevance to research questions.

Thematic emergence emerged intuitively from the existing data analyses (Bernard & Ryan, 2015; King & Horrocks, 2010).
5. Compared high and low PASCI scores to the themes.
7. Performed a confirmability audit to validate the trustworthiness of results, resulting in a 97.6% agreement (Lincoln & Guba, 1988).

RESULTS (CONT.)

The following are possible limitations to the truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality of the study, according to Guba (1981):
- sampling; limitations of self-reported data; lack of protection of experience; the use of remote interviewing technology; lack of generalizability to all Chinese adopters or other groups of adoptees; the self-reported data; the expansive scope of the topics; and possible researcher bias.

REFERENCES


