

Exploring Race, Culture, and Identity Among Chinese Adoptees: “China Dolls,” “Bananas,”  
and “Honorary Whites”

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### **Abstract**

When exploring culture, race, and identity, Chinese adoptees in the United States often can face numerous emotions, ranging from confusion, to curiosity, to celebratory. From honoring Chinese holidays, to wearing American-style clothing, to being called a "banana", adoptees have a unique set of experiences when trying to navigate what it means to be Chinese, Chinese-American, and American. Through a series of interviews conducted with ten adult female Chinese adoptees within the U.S., this study investigates key themes related to cultural and racial identity formation. Key themes included exploring the different aspects of Chinese culture participants were exposed to, instances of racism participants faced, and discussions with their parents about various race issues both within the family and on a societal level. It was found that adoptees were exposed to a wide range of aspects related to Chinese culture, ranging from celebrating Chinese holidays, to learning Chinese language and dance, to simply eating at Chinese restaurants. It was also observed that the adoptees not only faced multiple forms of racism, especially microaggressions and stereotyping, but that having discussions surrounding racism and other race issues with their parents were mostly absent. The majority of the findings within the study were congruent with previous literature and research; however, it is strongly recommended that more research about the Chinese adoptee population should be continued in order to develop better resources for adoptees, their families, and others within the community.

*Keywords:* Adoption, Race, Culture, Identity, China, Adoptee

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**Table of Contents**

Abstract	2
Acknowledgments	3
I. Introduction	7
A. Why Chinese Adoption?	8
B. The Chinese Adoptee Identity	9
II. Transracial Adoption and China's History	10
A. Understanding Transracial Adoption	10
B. The Burden of Being Different	11
C. Exploring China's One Child Policy	12
i. The female "curse"	13
ii. Giving families a second chance	13
iii. The pressure of being female	14
iv. Abandoning out of love?	14
v. Behind closed doors and inside the dying rooms	15
vi. New beginnings	16
D. Exploring Race and Culture Through the Lens of Adoption	17
E. Understanding Racial Differences	17
i. Why race matters	19
ii. But I don't see color	21
iii. More than just the model minority	23
iv. Understanding stereotypes through the Orientalist lens	24
v. Facing family differences	26

F.	Connecting to Culture	29
i.	Why is culture important?	29
ii.	How to be Chinese versus learning about Chinese culture	30
iii.	Who are honorary whites?	31
iv.	What does it mean to be Chinese?	33
v.	Dumplings, and dragons, and pandas...oh my!	33
G.	Understanding the Current Study	37
III.	Methodology	37
A.	Participants	37
B.	Questionnaire	38
C.	Procedure	38
IV.	Results	40
A.	Coding	40
B.	Key Themes in Culture	42
C.	Key Themes in Race	45
i.	Facing racism and discrimination	45
ii.	Name calling, mocking, teasing, and taunting	46
iii.	Fetishization	47
iv.	Exclusion and isolation	48
v.	Stereotyping and microaggressions	49
vi.	Questioning	51
vii.	How participants handled racist situations	53
viii.	Approaches to racial privilege, politics, power, and racism	54

ix.	Approaches to handling racist situations	57
x.	Beyond skin deep	59
V.	Discussion	59
	A. The Importance of Culture	60
	B. Sticks and Stones Break My Bones, But Words Still Hurt Me	62
	C. Let's Talk About Race	68
	D. Learning How to Handle Racism	72
	E. Taking The Steps to Move Forward	74
VI.	References	77
VII.	Appendix	80
	A. Demographics Survey	80
	B. Interview Questions	94

## Introduction

As family structures evolve over time and become more diverse, one increasingly common family dynamic is the adoptive family. Although there are multiple forms of adoptions, transracial adoption holds a particularly unique history and family dynamic. Within the U.S., approximately 40% of international adoptions are transracial (Baden, Treweeke & Ahluwalia, 2011). Transracial adoption can be defined as “the adoption of a child of one race by a parent or parents of a different race than that of the child” (Baden et al., 2011, p. 387). Transracial adoptees are especially interesting because they must develop a multi-dimensional identity.

As adoptees who grow up in families that are of a different race, some believe that there is even a subculture for transracial adoptees since they can often share and relate to similar issues among themselves (Clemetson, 2006). It can be argued that the experiences of adoptees are strongly influenced by family environment, as well as their exposure to certain cultural traditions, practices, and language (Johnston, Swim, Saltsman, Deater-Deckard & Petril, 2007). Factors such as level of diversity in local neighborhoods and schools, and how parents expose their child to different cultures, can play an important role in identity development (Clemetson, 2006). Exposure to such experiences greatly influences the development of both racial and cultural identity, and is crucial to forming those identities. Racial identity plays a crucial role due to the racial differences within the family, and cultural identity often influences an adoptee’s sense of self as it relates to their overall well-being and adjustment. It is through the development and balance of multiple identities that transracial adoptees are able to connect themselves back to their country of origin, as well as develop a sense of belonging within their adoptive family, culture, and society.

### **Why Chinese Adoption?**

While there are transracial adoptions that occur both domestically and globally, this study specifically focuses on the transracial adoption of Chinese females. Because China has a very unique history due to the one-child policy, it is crucial to first understand the historical significance of the infamous policy and its influence in Chinese culture, family structure, and the rise in adoption of Chinese females. A general overview has been provided explaining the complexities behind the abandonment of Chinese female infants, such as the government's need to control overpopulation, gender roles within the traditional Chinese family, and the exposure of Chinese orphanages and its influence on international adoption.

The study focuses on Chinese female adoptees since there is a high number of females adopted from China within the United States, but also due to the lack of psychological research and literature that focuses on this particular population. While there is a large amount of research and resources dedicated to other Asian adoptees, such as those from Korea (Johnston et al., 2007), there are not as many studies that recognize and observe the cultural and racial identity development of specifically Chinese adoptees.

Although transracial adoptees from different countries have many similarities, Chinese female adoptees are especially unique due to the gendered history that resulted in their abandonment and adoption. China's historical relation to the United States, such as the history of Orientalism and the Chinese Exclusion Act, also has influenced current attitudes toward Chinese people, which greatly influences the lives of Chinese adoptees to this day. Currently, there are many books, blogs, documentaries, and social groups dedicated to Chinese adoptee communities, but it is equally as important to study this adoptee population in order to better understand the unique aspects that contribute to their identity development.

### **The Chinese Adoptee Identity**

This qualitative study exclusively focuses on the cultural and racial identity formation of adult Chinese female adoptees within the United States and how their life experiences influenced their current identities. In order to further understand the influence of these experiences, key themes related to culture and race were highlighted throughout the study. I will first explain the importance of culture for a transracial adoptee and how one's reconnection to their birth culture greatly influences cultural pride and awareness of their cultural identity. Because the study focuses on Chinese adoptees, I then discuss how to define "Chineseness", what it means to be Chinese, and how adoptees play a role in developing the Chinese identity. Because cultural identity is part of an adoptee's overall development, I then discuss how exposure to different aspects of Chinese culture influence one's cultural identity. I explain how adoptees are exposed to a wide range of items, ideas, mannerisms, practices, and events related to Chinese culture. Additionally, I also explore some of the literature that has criticized certain approaches regarding exposing adoptees to the culture and how it can become problematic.

In contrast to understanding the development and importance of cultural identity, the study's focus shifts to race relations within an adoptee's life. Key themes that are highlighted include discussing racial differences within the family and how to recognize and approach this issue, forms of racism that adoptees face, and how parents discuss racial privilege, politics, and power to adoptees. Although culture and cultural identity play an important role in an adoptee's life, it should be stressed that the development of racial identity must be included when acknowledging the adoptee experience as a whole. I discuss how previous literature notes some of the more problematic approaches to teaching about

race and privilege, such as the “colorblind” approach, as well as explain the deeper historical roots of the types of racism Chinese adoptees face.

### **Transracial Adoption and China’s History**

#### **Understanding Transracial Adoption**

Previous literature has emphasized the importance of racial, ethnic, and cultural socialization and its role in supporting ethnic identity well-being, as well as developing an awareness of racism and discrimination and overall cultural group consciousness (Johnston et al., 2007). One important theory to note within the current psychological literature regarding adoptees is social identity theory. Social identity theory can be described as the idea that individuals can create a positive social identity through the development of a well-adjusted, and positive, view of the self (Basow, Lilley, Bookwala & McGillicuddy-Delisi, 2008).

Transracial adoptees are often part of a minority social group. It has been suggested that if a minority social group is viewed as inferior by the dominant social group, members of the minority group can experience feelings of shame or embarrassment, which then could lead to negative self-image and social identity (Basow et al., 2008). Sometimes, in reaction to the realization of being viewed as inferior by the dominant social group, members of the minority social group may attempt to alleviate the negative feelings of shame and embarrassment by trying to assimilate into the dominant, more “positively” viewed social group as a coping mechanism (Basow et al., 2008).

One of the most prominent issues that both transracial adoptees and the families of these adoptees often face is racial difference. Previous literature has observed that the majority of transracial adoptees have adoptive parents who are white (Baden et al., 2011).

Research has also suggested that transracial adoptees who are raised in bi-racial families may face unique challenges when developing a strong ethnic identity (Basow et al., 2008). It is important to emphasize that the development of a strong ethnic identity is crucial for minorities to help establish positive self-esteem, as well as a mechanism for combatting negative stereotyping (Basow et al., 2008).

### **The Burden of Being Different**

In relation to Chinese adoption specifically, adoptees face the challenge of understanding the racial and cultural significance of being a Chinese adoptee, which provides a unique experience when developing one's racial and cultural identity. It is important to note that there is a significant difference between identifying as racially Chinese versus culturally Chinese, especially for Chinese adoptees who are usually adopted by white, American parents (Louie, 2015). In addition to this difference, which is further discussed later, Chinese adoptees often carry the burden of having their unique family dynamic questioned by outsiders. Unlike adoptees who are part of a family that is the same race, it is not uncommon for transracial adoptees, and parents, to receive invasive questions by others regarding the validity of their family (Louie, 2015).

Because outsiders immediately notice the racial difference within a transracial adoptive family, it is not uncommon for others to make assumptions or ask invasive questions regarding the adoption, such as "how much did she cost?" or "does she know her real parents?" (Louie, 2015). Not only must the adoptee understand the nature of their racial and cultural identity, but they are also forced to face feelings of embarrassment, shame, sadness, frustration, and other negative emotions as a result of having their own family structure being invalidated by society. Chinese adoptees are often aware of the racial

difference within the family, but facing such intrusive comments or questions by outsiders presents an additional challenge to finding acceptance with their own adoption.

In addition to facing intrusive comments and questions, Chinese female adoptees, must also come to terms with the historical significance of China's one-child policy. As discussed later, males were highly favored over females in China, and due to the notorious one-child policy, approximately 100,000 baby girls were abandoned each year during the peak of this policy (Meyers, 2005). Because China developed this policy, Chinese adoptees present a very unique experience including not only the racial and cultural differences they face within their family, but the historical background that changed their lives forever.

### **Exploring China's One-Child Policy**

As the population in China increased at alarming rates and famine took place, the Chinese government established one of the most well-known policies in the world: the one-child policy. It was through this policy in the late 1980s and early 1990s that China controlled the number of children in a family as an attempt to control the exponential population growth (Johnson, 2004). The newly established policy led to drastic changes in family dynamic, practice, and gender ratio (Johnson, 1998). As a result of this newly installed policy, it was estimated by the Chinese Ministry of Affairs that approximately 140,000 children were abandoned by 1991 (Johnson, 2004). However, the one-child policy did not affect everyone equally, and instead, the majority of these abandoned children were females.

In 1987, 1989, and 1990, China had a gender ratio of between 110 and 113 boys for every 100 girls, which was the most skewed sex ratio in the world (Johnson, 2004). Once the

new policy was implemented, the ratio became even more skewed, but even before and after the policy was established, China's gender politics hold a unique view towards females in society. In Chinese culture, which relies on a strongly patriarchal system, families often rely on having sons within the family because sons are the family's main source of welfare and old-age security (Johnson, 2004). Additionally, males carry on the family name and bloodline, and do not leave their family when married (Meyers, 2005). Males are also viewed as the ones who are able to provide work for their family, such as working on the farm, and take care of other family members through old age. Within Chinese culture, males are valued because they are seen as the main caretakers and welfare providers for the family, so having a male is the family's way of investing in their own future.

**The female "curse."** Because females do not pass down the family name, it is viewed as very shameful to give birth to a daughter (Meyers, 2005). Many families believe having a daughter is a "curse" and that she will soon be "lost", especially in rural areas, because when a female is married to her spouse, she becomes her spouse's property and serves the male's family (Johnson, 2004). For families with daughters, they are aware that not only are they "losing" their child, but are also forced to survive on their own since there is no one there to provide for them. Unfortunately, with famine and economic hardship on the rise, as well as the one-child policy, the abandonment of infants increased, and the majority of those infants were females (Johnson, 2004).

**Giving families a second chance.** In rural areas, such as Guangdong, Hubei, and Yunnan, the government granted families a slightly more lenient policy: the one-son-two-child policy, but wealthier areas, such as Jiangsu and Sichuan, were not granted this alternative policy (Johnson, 2004). The one-son-two-child policy allowed families to have a

second child if their first born was a female so that the family could try to have their second child be a male. However, if the first born was male, then the family was not allowed to have more children. If a family who already had two children, regardless of gender, attempted to have more children, they would be heavily fined. As a result, rural families that already had their first child as a female would often abandon the second born if the child was also female in an attempt to have a male. With poverty on the rise, especially in rural areas, families could not afford to pay the steep price of having more children, so families would resort to abandoning their baby girls, hoping to have a baby boy instead. As the government's population control policies increased, so did the number of abandoned infants (Johnson, 2004). Early in 1990, approximately 11,000 infants were abandoned, and by 1991 the Ministry of Civil Affairs estimated that approximately 140,000 infants had been orphaned (Johnson, 2004).

**The pressure of being female.** Women in China faced the burden of population control for a variety of reasons. Not only were women targeted as being responsible for birth control, but pregnant women also faced harassment and coercion from government officials to have forced abortions (Johnson, 2004). Additionally, pregnant women faced pressure from their in-laws and husbands to produce sons, who often beat, abused, blamed, and sometimes even abandoned them if they were to give birth to a female (Johnson, 2004). Sadly, the overwhelming pressure from society to produce a male created conflict regarding the mother's desire to keep her daughter (Johnson, 2004). Unfortunately, even with the more lenient one-son-two-child policy, this did not prevent families from abandoning their infants.

**Abandoning out of love?** When families faced the difficult decision to no longer keep their baby, what would happen to these abandoned girls? The most grim experiences

for some infants included infanticide or dying from neglect (Johnson, 2004). Others would have their life spared and instead would be abandoned or “hidden”, which would be in the form of informal adoption or foster care (Johnson, 2004). Families would sometimes try to “hide” their daughters in order to avoid receiving a fine for having additional children (Johnson, 2004).

For infants who were abandoned, it is crucial to note that families would often carefully plan their method of abandonment and that parents did not abandon their children simply because they did not care or love them (Van den Dries, Juffer, Ijzendoorn, Bakermans-Kranenburg & Alink, 2012). Because parents often felt they had no choice but to abandon their child, they would usually leave the infant in public spaces where they would be found immediately, such as a park (Meyers, 2005). Sometimes the parents would leave their infant on the doorstep of another couple (Van den Dries et al., 2012). This practice was not uncommon because parents would carefully watch and observe childless couples in order to ensure that they would be suitable adoptive parents for their child.

Because there were high levels of surveillance in rural neighborhoods, mothers would sometimes leave their village to stay with friends or relatives elsewhere and give birth in order to avoid getting caught and punished (Johnson, 2004). When the mother would give birth, if the infant was a boy, she would keep him and take him back to her village, but if it was a female, she would leave her behind in hopes of finding someone else to care for her (Johnson, 2004).

**Behind closed doors and inside the dying rooms.** When an abandoned infant was found, usually they would be brought to an orphanage. Due to the large gender imbalance in China, which was influenced by both the patrilineal culture and strict one-child policy,

orphanages were predominantly filled with female infants (Johnson, 2004). Boys were very rarely put up for adoption, especially since they are highly valued in Chinese culture, but males who had severe disabilities were also sometimes found in orphanages (Johnson, 2004). As the number of abandoned infants increased and filled the orphanages, resources became scarce, which led to sky-rocketing mortality rates (Johnson, 1998).

In the early 1990s, many orphanages had mortality rates of 40-50%, and these rates usually increased as the orphanages became overpopulated (Johnson, 2004). Orphanages were often under-staffed, unsanitary, and lacked proper resources to care for the infants. Some orphanages were in such poor condition that there were designated rooms to put extremely ill infants in called the “dying rooms”. In 1993, it was discovered at an orphanage in Nanning in Guangxi province that such rooms existed (Mosher, 1996). Photos captured images of severely malnourished infants on a dirty floor or mattress who were swaddled in blankets and completely immobilized or tied up to wooden toilets (Mosher, 1996). In 1995, a British film crew discovered these rooms and exposed to the world how common the dying rooms were throughout Chinese orphanages (Mosher, 1996). Unfortunately, it was noted by staff members in these orphanages that the majority, approximately 90%, of the infants who lived in these orphanages also died there (Mosher, 1996).

**New Beginnings.** After the world became shocked and horrified by the devastating conditions of these Chinese orphanages, as well as the orphanages continuing being overpopulated, China opened its gates for international adoptions in 1992 (Van den Dries et al., 2012). Establishing international adoptions became a way to obtain more funds and a source of income (Johnson, 2004). By 1998, over 6,000 adoptions had taken place and

continued to gradually increase over time, with 2005 having the highest number of Chinese adoptions occurring that year (Department of State, 2017; Van den Dries et al., 2012).

### **Exploring Race and Culture Through the Lens of Adoption**

In addition to a general overview of the history of China's one-child policy, it is also crucial to discuss the current psychological literature and research that relates to transracial adoption. Because this study specifically focuses on racial and cultural identity formation, it is important to understand the various subtopics related to race and culture within the adoptee experience. Issues such as acknowledging racial differences within the family, discussing racism, and developing attitudes towards race are discussed first. Then, I later express the importance of an adoptee's exposure to Chinese culture, what it means to be Chinese for adoptees, and the concept of being labeled the "honorary white".

### **Understanding Racial Differences**

In addition to the challenges parents face when teaching their child about a culture the parents did not grow up in or know very little about, families of transracial adoptees also face additional difficulties when discussing racial differences. According to the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, in 2005 approximately 60% of international adoptees from Asian countries were adopted into white families (Johnston et al., 2007). In the United States, Asians are more often viewed differently from whites in terms of culture as opposed to race, which is partially due to the fact that many Asians, especially East Asians, physically have white or light skin, so the disparity between Asians and whites focuses on the cultural instead of racial aspects (Louie, 2015). However, while many Asians can have physically white or light skin, they are still a different race than their white peers and family members.

For adoptees, racial differences within the family can be noticed as early as four or five years old (Baden et al., 2011). Children are able to recognize the physical differences between themselves and their parents, and are able to identify that they do not “match” their own caretakers.

While adoptees are able to recognize the racial differences within the family, previous research has suggested that approximately two-thirds of transracial adoptees do not identify with their own race and that many instead associate with being white (Baden et al. 2011). Because many adoptees grow up in White culture, it is not uncommon for them to adopt this “white identity”, which incorporates the white social group into one’s self-concept, as well as feelings of closeness with white Americans (Johnston et al., 2007). It should be clarified that the concept of “White culture” refers to “the dominant standards of behavior, norms, and ways of functioning that are based on the majority of institutions within the U.S., which historically come from white, Western traditions, and that it can often be indistinguishable from what is usually referred to as ‘American culture’” (Gulati-Partee & Potapchuk, 2014, pg. 27). It is important to note that this identity does not mean that transracial adoptees believe they are physically white, but because they feel a strong connection and familiarity with White culture, it is not uncommon to develop the idea of being “white on the inside” and that they feel more connected to White culture. One explanation for this phenomenon is the “transracial adoption paradox”, which has been described by previous literature as a transracial adoptee that is born within a racial minority group, but identifies his or herself with those who are a part of the majority culture due to their adoption into that culture (Donaldson, 2009).

For transracial adoptees, the Cultural-Racial Identity Model suggests that there are approximately 16 different identity statuses, which reflect the level to which the adoptee identifies with people from their own racial group and birth culture, as well as how much they identify with their adoptive parents' racial group and culture (Donaldson, 2009). Although Chinese adoptees can sometimes prefer to claim this "white identity", which can often be described as being a "banana" or "Twinkie", meaning the adoptee is "yellow" on the outside and "white" on the inside, Asians are still vulnerable to racism and discrimination (Lee, Lee, Hu & Oh, 2015).

Some studies support the notion that Asian adoptees with white parents do not face such discrimination due to successful assimilation into White culture (Rojewski, 2001). It should be noted that while some studies are in favor of this finding, it is crucial to understand that studies regarding racial discrimination towards Asian adoptees are scarce and underrepresented within psychological literature. Many studies about racial discrimination towards adoptees reflect findings in relation to African adoptees because they are the most racially marginalized group (Rojewski, 2001).

**Why race matters.** Earlier studies observing racial socialization within families have suggested that some white adoptive parents prefer to uphold the "colorblind" approach, but more recent findings have found that parents are becoming more aware of the importance of educating their children about cultural aspects related to their racial group and are making significant efforts to arm their children with cultural knowledge (Johnston et al., 2007). Both parents and adoptees are faced with intrusive questions from outsiders, who point out the racial differences between family members, so parents often feel responsible to find methods to help their child combat such instances (Louie, 2015). Since children are able to identify

racial differences within the family at such a young age, it is also strongly encouraged that American attitudes on race be addressed both consistently and at an early age, too (Clemetson, 2006).

It is through racial socialization that parents are able to teach their children about such attitudes about race. Racial socialization focuses on educating the child about discrimination, preparation for bias, and stereotyping that is based on their race (Johnston et al. 2007). However, it is crucial to recognize that while educating the adoptee about their culture is important, cultural knowledge is in no way equivalent to understanding one's race, especially as a non-white adoptee. Unfortunately, parents are mistaken into believing that they can arm their child with cultural knowledge in order to combat and overcome racism (Louie, 2015). It is through celebrating cultural pride and love for Chinese culture that parents believe they can help their child face discrimination, when in reality, cultural knowledge can neither overpower the effects of systemic racism nor the white privilege the parents automatically have in society.

Parents must acknowledge not only the racial differences within their family, but recognize the privilege they hold that their own children do not. Although white parents do not experience racism themselves, they must realize that their non-white children unfortunately will and that ignoring this crucial factor can do more harm than good. In order to help address this issue, multiple studies strongly encourage exposure to racial diversity. Previous literature has suggested that being part of racially diverse areas can be very beneficial for adoptees regarding healthy racial identity development. In a study conducted by Feigelman (1984), it was found that transracial adoptees who lived in racially diverse

communities felt less discomfort with their appearance than adoptees who lived in mostly white communities with very little racial diversity (Basow et al.,2008).

Developing a strong ethnic identity is also important regarding fighting discrimination in relation to health. Previous studies have noted that experiences of discrimination have been correlated with poor mental and physical health (Lee et al., 2015). In order to help negate the detrimental effects of racism and discrimination, studies have suggested that exposure to different racial and ethnic groups can be extremely beneficial for transracial adoptees because it helps them develop a non-white group identity with other minorities, as well as helps with the healthy development of their own racial identity (Basow et al., 2008).

**But I don't see color.** With most Chinese adoptees having white parents, approaching the topic of racial politics, power, and privilege can become difficult to discuss for many families. Unlike teaching about Chinese culture, parents often shy away from approaching conversations about racial issues both within the family, as well as Western attitudes towards race (Louie, 2015). Although there are adoptees who are have been adopted by non-white parents, the majority of adoptees have parents who identify as white, which creates a unique dynamic when confronting race issues.

For many parents, acknowledging racial difference is completely denied or avoided, which is often referred to as the “colorblind” approach (Rojewski, 2001). While parents often are willing to discuss Chinese culture and expose their child to it, having conversations about race are not as openly discussed. Instead, it is not uncommon for parents to explain that they simply “don't see race” or “don't see color”. When parents tell their child that they “don't see race”, or explain that they are simply “colorblind”, this excuse deflects from the

fact that their child does not have the option to live in a world where race will not affect their life. White parents are able to ignore racial disparities for themselves because society's power structures favor whites, but unfortunately, their child does not have that privilege to benefit from those structures in the same way their parents do. For white parents, race does not matter to those who are part of the racial group that society favors (Rojewski, 2001). It is through this approach that parents fail to recognize the fact that while they are white, their child is not and will inevitably face racism at some point in their life. While white parents can still experience forms of discrimination, they are not always able to fully understand the extent that their child will face racism and that these types of racism are not the same as the kind of discrimination white people face. As white parents who have never experienced racism, it can be difficult to comprehend teaching the child about instances of racism that they may face in the future due to the fact that the parents have very little insight regarding what it is like to *not* be white (Rojewski, 2001).

With white parents placing an emphasis on celebrating cultural diversity, this fails to recognize the influence of white privilege, racial politics, and power. However, no matter how much cultural pride is developed within the family, race cannot be changed and family racial differences will not disappear. For adoptees with white parents, developing the awareness and understanding of society's attitudes towards race can become extremely contradicting. Adoptees who are raised in a colorblind environment can develop a false sense of security because this approach teaches them to believe that their race is irrelevant in society, but when these adoptees face the cold reality that racism exists, the sense of security is shattered and can potentially lead to feelings of instability and insecurity with their own racial identity.

**More than just the model minority.** “You’ll do fine on the test. You’re Asian.” “I think she’s so quiet because she’s Asian.” “Your English is so good for an Asian!” While these deceptively “harmless” comments disguise themselves as “compliments”, they are forms of racism. With most people understanding the severity of blatant racism, such as calling someone a “chink”, very few comprehend the complexity and detrimental effects behind more subtle forms of racism, such as stereotyping and microaggressions. At young ages, adoptees may experience more overt forms of racism, such as peers calling the child derogatory names, kids pulling the sides of their eyes to make them more slanted, or mocking the child in fake Chinese (Rojewski, 2001).

As adoptees grow older, they are more likely to encounter other forms of racism that are more subtle, but can be equally as hurtful. One common stereotype that Asians often encounter is the “model minority” (Rojewski, 2001). The model minority stereotype glorifies Asians as being smart, hard-working, high achieving, obedient, and academically successful (Lee, 1994; Wong, Lai, Nagasawa & Ling, 1998). The model minority image has also contributed to the stereotype that Asians are also nerds because they are seen as being incredibly studious. Additionally, Asians are not only stereotyped as being high-achieving in school, but particularly gifted in science or math (Devarajan, 2018). . There is no doubt that there are smart, hard-working, obedient, science and math-loving Asians, but these people do not hold these traits simply because of their race. These stereotypes not only promotes the idea that Asians are high-achieving and studious solely due to their race, but it also exotifies Asians.

Because of these supposedly “positive” stereotypes, people discredit the hard work and effort that Asians put in regarding school and work (Devarajan, 2018). Instead, this

stereotype negates the individual, and unique, traits each Asian person has. Additionally, the model minority stereotype fails to recognize those who may struggle in areas that Asians are believed to be “naturally” good at, such as science and math (Lee, 2009). By asserting the assumption that Asians are automatically gifted only in these fields, this not only increases the risk of Asians facing rejection for jobs in other fields of study, but is very detrimental in school if an Asian student is struggling, but teachers do not recognize this due to the assumption that the Asian student will naturally do well in that class and does not need help. Additionally, the model minority stereotype develops both shallow and unrealistic expectations and pressure for Asians (Rojewski, 2001). Because peers, professors, and employers may hold the stereotyped belief that Asians naturally have these traits, Asians are faced with the pressure of maintaining perfection in the workforce and in school in order to fit society’s mold for what it means to be “Asian”.

**Understanding stereotypes through the Orientalist lens.** In addition to the model minority stereotype, Asians, especially Asian females, also face fetishization and sexualization. Unlike the model minority image, which promotes Asians as being nerdy and intelligent, Asian females are also often viewed as docile, exotic, and submissive (Louie, 2015). Chinese female adoptees are especially vulnerable to encountering this stereotype due to the fact that Chinese adoption is highly gendered and that the majority of Chinese adoptees are female. Additionally, many people believe that these adoptees are being “rescued” from a culture where it is wrong to be female (Louie, 2015). The concept of “rescuing” these adoptees stems from the Western lens and history of Orientalism. For adoptees, they are often exposed to images and ideas of Chineseness that sexualize and exotify females, which are imposed on them as being an “authentic” part of Chinese identity (Louie, 2015). From

images of scantily-clad women wearing “Chinese patterned” clothing as a Halloween costume, to being referred to as a “China doll”, to seeing movies that feature Asian women as merely sex objects, adoptees constantly face gendered and sexualized constructions of Chineseness.

At the beginning of Orientalism, Asian culture was viewed as objects of desire for the Western world to consume, display, buy, and desire (Louie, 2015). It was through Orientalism that Asian culture was glorified for its aesthetics and that it was through the form of tangible items that represented the “exotic” nature of Asian culture, which was viewed by Westerners as “mysterious” and “other” (Louie, 2015). The development of Chinese culture and Chinese people being deemed as “other”, as “foreign”, originated from historical moments that demonized the Chinese, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act, which dates back to 1882 (Louie, 2015; Tchen & Yeates, 2014). The Chinese Exclusion Act was designed to not only discriminate against Chinese immigrants, but was implemented due to the idea that the Chinese were unfit for Western culture and could not be assimilated.

In contrast to the “barbaric” image of Chinese immigrants, attitudes towards Asians changed over time and soon the exotification of Asian cultures developed from the media, which began displaying and advertising kung-fu movies, Hello Kitty, and Japanese anime (Louie, 2015). Rather than creating propaganda against Asian immigrants, aspects within Asian cultures were commodified in order to appeal to a Western audience. It was through these specific aspects of Asian cultures that made them desirable again to the Western world because they were viewed as “exotic” parts that could be commodified and consumed by Westerners. The romanticized view of Asian cultures as a whole through the Western lens

sends a rather contradictory message to adoptees because of its contrasting history of Asians originally being viewed as unwanted, uncivilized, and foreign.

Because of the racialized and hostile history towards Asians, parents of adoptees may sometimes avoid discussing the negative implications of certain stereotypes in order to protect their child from developing a fear towards a culture that society once viewed as “scary” and “foreign” (Louie, 2015). Parents often pick and choose specific aspects of Chinese culture to expose their child to in order to preserve the positive image the child has of the culture. While parents attempt to maintain this positive view of Chinese culture, it is crucial to recognize that Chinese culture is often framed in binary opposition to Western culture, and that it is through the Western lens that Chinese culture is viewed as one that is simply limited to chopsticks, panda bears, kung-fu, and dumplings (Louie, 2015).

**Facing family differences.** With adoption sometimes being a sensitive, or even stigmatized, topic, parents face anxiety when trying to legitimize their family dynamic within society. Outsiders can often invalidate a transracially adoptive family by claiming that adoptive parents are not legitimate parents, or that adoptive parents cannot raise a child that is not biologically their own (Louie, 2015). When faced with such criticism, adoptive parents can feel pressured into proving the validity of their family structure to the others by expressing pride in the similarities that they share with their adopted child. Unfortunately, expressing pride in these similarities does not dismiss the fact that their child is still racially different from their parents and the fact that their child is not white will affect their child’s life and how society treats them.

Previous literature has suggested that instances of racism and discrimination are likely to increase as the adoptee grows older, which means parents are less able to protect

their child from such negative experiences (Rojewski, 2001). To white parents, many of the racist experiences adoptees face are not deemed as racist to them (Louie, 2015). The disconnect between how parents versus the adoptee perceive racist issues can create tension within the family because while the parents may not view certain situations as racist, adoptees still suffer from the negative ramifications when going through such experiences. When adoptees explain how hearing someone say “you’re pretty for an Asian girl” or being referred to as a “China doll” are forms of microaggressions, parents do not always realize that these microaggressions are not “compliments”, but are rather harmful forms of racism to the adoptee. Parents often assert that these types of comments are meant to be positive and that the adoptee should feel grateful that they received such comments, but these are forms of microaggressions that reinforce gendered stereotypes of Chinese women. Additionally, telling adoptees that these kinds of comments are “positive” and that they should be taken graciously fails to recognize the sexual and Orientalist connotations behind these comments, as well as invalidates the negative feelings the adoptee experiences (Louie, 2015). It should be stressed that parents should acknowledge that the adoptee is vulnerable to being stereotyped and fetishized because of Orientalism and its influence on Western views towards Asian women in particular.

Many parents do not believe that their child will face racism in the future simply because they are Asian. While this seems to be a rather abstract and preposterous claim, it is not uncommon for parents to fail to recognize that Asians are also susceptible to racism because they believe that Asians do not face the same kind of racism as black adoptees (Rojewski, 2001). Although black and Asian adoptees have very different experiences regarding racial attitudes in Western society, it cannot be supported that Asians simply do not

face racism. For parents who believe that Asians do not face racial bias, many of them do not always know how to react and can often downplay the experiences adoptees face, which invalidates the legitimate emotions and discomfort adoptees face as non-white people (Rojewski, 2001).

It has also been suggested that parents should not avoid discussing race and racism because children must learn to anticipate these future experiences, as well as know how to cope and understand that the racism they face is not a personal attack on who they are as a person, but is about something bigger that operates on a societal level (Louie, 2015). Parents are often blind to their own white privilege and they must recognize that their children do not hold that same privilege, even though they are part of a white family (Steinberg & Hall, 2012). Parents can only protect their children for so long and discussing these issues openly helps the adoptee build both a strong sense of self and provides them with the necessary tools in order to combat racism in the future.

In addition to understanding the complexities behind racial differences within the family, as well as the intricate relationship with race adoptees have throughout their life, cultural identity also plays a crucial role in the adoptee experience. Although transracial adoptees often grow up in the U.S. and are usually raised with American traditions and concepts, it must be addressed that transracial adoptees also hold a unique connection to their birth culture. The next section discusses how adoptees are often re-connected with their birth culture, what it means to be a part of Chinese culture versus learning about it, and what it means to be Chinese as an adoptee.

## **Connecting to Culture**

**Why is culture important?** For transracial adoptees who have been adopted into the United States, a process known as “reculturation” occurs (Baden et al., 2011). Reculturation occurs when the adoptee desires and seeks to “reclaim” the culture from their birth country, which is known as their “birth culture”, as a way to help subdue possible feelings of disconnect that they may feel regarding the difference between their physical appearance and current cultural identity (Baden et al., 2011). Chinese adoptees are often not raised in Chinese culture as their dominant culture, but are instead raised in, and identify with, their adoptive parents’ culture, which is usually American culture, or White culture (Baden et al., 2011). As mentioned previously, White culture reflects the societal expectations, behaviors, and norms that have been established through generations of hite, Western traditions within the U.S. (Gulati-Partee & Potapchuk, 2014). However, it should be noted that while adoptees often grow up with experiences through the lens of White culture, this does not imply that adoptees solely experience this culture and that they can grow up in families that share other cultural influences. It is instead asserted that because adoptees do not grow up in Chinese culture as their dominant culture, they usually grow up with White culture as the main influence in their life since it is the dominating culture within the U.S. specifically.

It is also crucial to acknowledge the issue that the lived and actual cultural experiences of transracial adoptees are vastly different from society’s expected and stereotyped cultural experience that is reflected on adoptees (Baden et al., 2011). Due to the dissonance between their physical appearance and lived experience, which is usually through the lens of White culture, as opposed to Chinese culture, adoptees often recognize this disconnect and reflect on their “birth culture” in order to develop a sense of re-connection

(Baden et al., 2011). Because the majority of Chinese adoptees were adopted as young infants, they do not have any recollection of their birth country's culture during their brief time in China, which also adds to the sense of disconnect from their birth culture.

While these adoptees are a form of immigrant, it is necessary to recognize that adoptees experience a very unique kind of immigration process due to the fact that they not only leave a birth culture with virtually no memory of it, but are adopted into both a new family structure and dominant cultural lens. Because these adoptees are adopted at such a young age and have no memories of their birth culture, adoptees must re-learn the aspects and practices within that culture in order to gain a sense of connection (Baden et al., 2011).

**How to be Chinese versus learning about Chinese culture.** Because culture plays a crucial role, adoptees develop their cultural identity through ethnic and cultural socialization. Parents of adoptees assist with ethnic and cultural socialization by introducing and teaching the adoptee about ethnic pride, heritage, and diversity related to their birth culture (Johnston et al., 2007). Adoptees are often introduced to Chinese culture through a wide variety of reculturative activities, which are activities that promote an adoptee's ability to re-learn certain aspects related to the culture, such as studying Chinese language, attending study abroad or heritage tours in China, or interacting with people within the Chinese community (Baden et al., 2011).

When learning about Chinese culture, it is crucial to note that culture itself, as described by Rojewski (2001), is a sum total of shared ideas, concepts, and meanings that are used by a group of individuals who use these as a way to interpret society as a whole. Culture embodies both tangible and non-tangible aspects, ranging from music, food, and literature, to attitudes, prejudices, religion, social structures, and laws. It has been suggested

within previous psychological literature that the parents of adoptees educate their children about Chinese culture, but do not teach them how to be Chinese (Rojewski, 2001). It can be asserted that the concept of being Chinese refers to the adoptee actively engaging and participating in the culture itself. Instead, it is argued that parents help their children become aware of and understand the culture, as well as teach them to develop cultural pride. Developing cultural pride is a key aspect within the adoptee experience, but acknowledging the distinction between knowing about a culture versus actively being and participating within a culture must be noted.

While adoptees are taught about the culture, this does not support the notion that adoptees are incapable of becoming immersed in the culture. Instead, it is suggested that being a part of a culture relates to participating in the daily values, attitudes, rituals, and practices that have been formed over generations (Rojewski, 2001). Engaging in a culture extends beyond solely physical aspects related to it, and instead, it is the lifestyle that is embraced. Because culture itself is not concrete, one must both share and participate in the evolution of rituals, beliefs, values, and history within the culture. Adoptees usually are neither immersed, nor engaging, in Chinese culture in a daily form, which is why it has been argued that adoptees become aware of aspects related to Chinese culture rather than learning how to be Chinese.

**Who are honorary whites?** Due to the awareness of one's racial and cultural difference within the family, and society, adoptees can sometimes feel pressured to meet society's expectations for them regarding what or how a Chinese person should be in order to obtain acceptance from others. Adoptees are often bombarded with stereotyped images, ideas, and assumptions of how a Chinese person should look and behave that are projected on

to them, which can lead to feeling the need to fit into this prescribed mold (Louie, 2015). However, in contrast to trying to fit the stereotyped image of a Chinese person, adoptees can also face backlash from those within their own ethnic group due to the idea that adoptees are not considered “Chinese” enough, or that they are too “white-washed” to be considered a “real” Chinese person (Baden et al., 2011). The term “white-washed” does not necessarily express the idea that the adoptee is racially white, but asserts the concept of an adoptee associating more with white culture, such as expressing certain mannerisms, beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes that are a part of White culture, which is usually the adoptee’s dominant culture.

Adoptees not only are accustomed to White culture due to the fact that it is often their dominant culture in which they have been raised in, but to also develop a way to connect with peers who also share the same dominant culture. Adoptees are heavily influenced by their parents’ main culture, which is usually White culture, and are often more familiar and comfortable with it because this is what the adoptee has been raised with throughout their life. While many adoptees begin to re-connect with Chinese culture more, especially as the adoptee becomes older and better understands their adoption, many adoptees prefer to remain within the dominant culture. Adoptees are sometimes deemed as “honorary whites”, which is usually obtained through the status of having white parents and being raised in White culture (Baden et al., 2011). As “honorary whites”, adoptees can develop a sense of belonging and acceptance by others by being seen as and treated like their white peers. The “honorary white” status can give adoptees feelings of connection that they sometimes lack with others within their own ethnic group (Baden et al., 2011).

**What does it mean to be Chinese?** When asking about what it means to be Chinese, many adoptees do not always know how to define this concept until they are much older (Clemetson, 2006). Being Chinese can hold both racial and cultural significance to adoptees, or it can be seen as solely racial or cultural. While there is neither a clearly distinct answer, nor a simply right versus wrong answer, the Chinese identity that adoptees develop is formed through a very specific lens due to their unique family background. For many adoptees, China is not always viewed as their homeland or native culture (Louie, 2015). Although adoptees are aware of being racially Chinese, many still express feeling different from other non-adopted Chinese people (Mak, 2014). It should be noted that the Chinese identity that adoptees develop is not one that is innate, but one that evolves over time and is influenced by the upbringing of the adoptee's environment and social influences (Louie, 2015).

Identity for a Chinese adoptee is particularly unique because while Chineseness plays a key role within the identity, it cannot always be declared that an adoptee embraces solely a Chinese identity, or even a Chinese-American identity. Unlike other Chinese children who were born in the United States by Chinese immigrants, these children have a significantly different history than those of Chinese adoptees. The Chinese and Chinese-American identity hold many similarities, but it is crucial to recognize that these identities are far from static. With the influence of immigration and adoption, the development and defining of one's cultural and racial identity becomes fluid (Louie, 2015).

**Dumplings, and dragons, and pandas...oh my!** Reflecting back on the influence of culture, it has been argued that families display a very strong emphasis on developing cultural pride and education about Chinese culture for the adoptee (Dorow, 2006; Louie,

2015). Parents also strive to help their child feel proud of their culture in order to help reduce the stigma around their adoption and the potential feelings of isolation or difference.

However, parents can sometimes face the challenge of teaching their child about a culture that they never lived in themselves or know very little about, which can produce an additional layer of anxiety to parenting (Mak, 2014). In order to subdue these feelings of invalidation and inadequacy, parents promote exposure to Chinese culture to help their child develop a strong sense of their cultural identity with the self.

Because the parents of adoptees often recognize that adopting their child also can be seen as “taking” their child away from the original birth culture, parents often express the need to educate their child about their birth culture in order to help them feel connected back to their country. In a study conducted by Johnston, Swim, Saltsman, Deater-Deckard & Petril (2007), which looked at mothers and cultural socialization for their adopted Chinese children, it was found that the majority of the parents exposed their children to Chinese books, videos or movies related to China, celebrated Chinese holidays, and had their child interact with other Chinese adults and children within social settings. Other common examples of exposure to Chinese culture can include eating or learning how to make Chinese food, parents decorating the house with Chinese artifacts, such as paintings, pottery, lanterns, and furniture, dressing the child up in traditional Chinese clothing or jewelry during Chinese holidays, learning Chinese dance, travelling to China, and attending Chinese language classes (Louie, 2015). Children also learn about Chinese culture by watching movies related to China, reading books about China, visit Chinese culture centers or landmarks, and attend Chinese or Chinese-adoptee related events (Louie, 2015).

It is through signs and symbols that both the parents and the adoptee learn to understand and appreciate Chinese culture (Louie, 2015). From images of panda bears and the Great Wall of China, to dragons plastered on pottery and in paintings, to eating dumplings and noodles during Chinese holidays, it is through specific experiences and symbols related to the culture that create the image of “Chineseness” to the parents and adoptee. Parents often bring their child to certain cultural events, establish “Chinese traditions” within the family, or decorate their home with Chinese goods and artifacts as a way to honor the child’s culture, as well as help the adoptee develop a positive relationship with Chinese culture (Louie, 2015). While adoptees grow up in American culture as the dominant culture, parents continue to acknowledge the importance of their child’s birth culture by providing both materials and a space for the child to freely develop a relationship and respect for Chinese culture.

With respect to the positive, and necessary, influences of exposing the adoptee to aspects of Chinese culture, it must be stressed that the adoptee’s views of Chinese culture are still very much through a skewed and biased lens. It is through the lens of the white parents that the adoptee learns a large amount of Chinese culture. While not all of the adoptee’s experiences are presented by the parents, especially when the adoptee grows older, adoptees are exposed to very specific aspects related to Chinese culture that simply do not embody the culture as whole. Parents may display material goods, such as objects that contain Chinese writing on them, as a way to make the adoptee’s environment more “authentically” Chinese (Louie, 2015). It is through these materialistic items that many parents rely on in order to validate their child’s relation to their birth country.

Unfortunately, while these objects do somewhat represent the culture, many of them reinforce existing gender and racial stereotypes about Asians, especially Asian females, which have stemmed from the long history of Orientalism within the United States (Louie, 2015). Although many argue that these artifacts and goods are a key aspect to representing Chinese culture, it must be addressed that a culture as whole cannot be represented solely in the form of material items. A culture embodies beyond physical, tangible items and parents of adoptees, as well as adoptees themselves, should acknowledge that non-tangible aspects of a culture, such as practices, beliefs, laws, and norms cannot simply be represented in a physical, commodified manner.

Also, it should be noted that parents hold the power to pick and choose which aspects of Chinese culture they want to expose their child to, which also significantly contributes to the adoptee's skewed and biased view (Louie, 2015). By picking and choosing specific aspects of Chinese culture their child learns about, it is unfair to claim that one has truly experienced the culture itself for what it truly is because the aspects that are usually chosen by parents are ones that promote the idea that Chinese culture is stationary. By presenting the culture in a static form and neglecting the non-tangible, and equally as important, aspects related to Chinese culture, it is a disservice to adoptees because this ignores both the history and current influences that make Chinese culture what it is today (Louie, 2015). However, due to the fact that Chinese culture constantly evolves over time, it is extremely difficult for parents to be able to promote Chinese culture in a way that acknowledges such continuous changes and that it is understandable that parents rely on the more tangible, static forms of Chinese culture to teach their child.

### **Understanding the Current Study**

By having a general overview of the history of China's one-child policy, cultural influences and aspects related to cultural identity formation, and key themes related to the importance of racial identity development, this sets up a solid foundation for understanding the nature of this study. In light of the lack of psychological research that focuses directly on the experiences of Chinese adoptees themselves, this study was designed to provide a platform for Chinese adoptees to openly share their thoughts, feelings, and opinions regarding their experiences in relation to race and culture. By developing a specific set of key themes that are discussed within the interview, the study is able to highlight some of the main influences and trends that affect one's cultural and racial identity formation, as well as establish an early foundation for future research relating to Chinese adoptees.

### **Methodology**

#### **Participants**

Ten adult, Chinese, female participants in the study were recruited through social media, email, word of mouth, and adoption agencies such as Holt International and Half the Sky. All participants within the study were both adopted from China and were of Chinese descent. Participants were recruited and informed of both the purpose of the study and the process of how the interview was conducted. Participants were given an informed consent document, which was emailed and scanned back once it was completed. Each participant understood that the interview was to be recorded, but their identity remained confidential throughout the process of the study.

Because the study obtains qualitative data through a series of interviews conducted with only ten participants, it must be noted that this study is not designed to represent all adoptee experiences. It is acknowledged that the individual participants within the study each have very unique experiences of their own, and that the goal of the study is to provide a snapshot of how each of these experiences influenced the cultural and racial identity development of the participants.

### **Questionnaire**

The first portion of the interview process required the participant to complete an online survey through Survey Monkey, which asked questions regarding demographics. The demographics section is listed in Appendix A. Once the participant completed the online survey, they were then asked a series of questions in person through Skype. Interviews were approximately 1-2 hours long. The interview contained two parts: culture and race. The first set of questions related to culture and highlighted themes regarding exposure to Chinese culture, ideas of what it means to be Chinese, and feelings of connection to Chinese culture. The second section of the interview asked questions regarding race, which specifically focused on describing instances of racism, experiences related to discussing race-related issues with family members, and methods of coping with discrimination. Both sections of the interview are found in Appendix B.

### **Procedure**

First, the participants were recruited through social media, email, word of mouth, or through an adoption agency. When a date and time were scheduled to meet with the participant, they were then emailed a copy of the informed consent document that was

completed and submitted before the scheduled Skype interview time. Participants were asked to print the informed consent document, sign it, and return it by either scanning the document or taking a photo of it when completed and sending it through email. During the scheduled Skype interview, participants briefly learned about the purpose and procedure of the study. They were told that they did not need to answer any questions they did not feel comfortable answering and may give as much or as little detail as they'd like. Participants were also informed that they could drop out of the study at any time for whatever reason without penalties. Each participant received \$20 for participating in the study and was compensated after completion.

Before beginning the interview, participants completed an online demographics survey using Survey Monkey, and were also assigned a participant number in order to keep participant information confidential. After completing the online survey, the participant then began the second portion of the study by answering a series of open-ended interview questions that can be referenced in the appendix. The entire interview process took approximately 1-2 hours based on how long each participant's answers were. Participants were also made aware beforehand that they were to be recorded and that these recordings were only to be used for transcriptions and collecting data for coding purposes. The recordings were kept on a personal phone and laptop that were both password protected. The title of the file for each recording used the participant's number in order to protect their identity. Once the interview was completed, recordings were transcribed in a password-protected document using the personal laptop. The transcriptions were used to help find key themes within the responses and were coded based on each of the themes.

## Results

### Coding

Throughout the data analysis process, transcripts were read and coded based on different key themes that were observed within the study. Participant responses were highlighted and organized based on previously written criteria for each theme. The key themes looked at within the study were identifying forms of exposure to Chinese culture, instances of racism that adoptees encountered, parental attitudes regarding racial privilege, politics, power, racism and racial issues, how adoptees learned about handling racism, as well as how they faced racist situations they personally encountered. Criteria for coding examples of forms of exposure to Chinese culture included looking for participants referring to physical objects, such as food, artifacts, toys, or clothing, as well as attending events, visiting certain culture sites, travelling to China, listening to Chinese music or watching Chinese movies, or learning different skills related to Chinese culture, such as Chinese language and dance. Identifying instances of racism that participants encountered included identifying examples of name calling, teasing, mocking, sexual remarks or fetishization, stereotyping, microaggressions, physical violence, threats of physical violence, isolation or exclusion, and racial slurs. Additionally, memories of witnessing racism or discrimination towards others or overhearing racist remarks made by others were also highlighted.

When looking at parental attitudes regarding racial privilege, politics, power, racism, and race issues, examples were coded based on specific memories participants recalled discussing these issues with their parents. Transcripts were also highlighted if the participant noted other methods of learning about these topics, such as through friends, peers, teachers, or social media. Identifying examples of how adoptees learned about how to handle racism

included mentioning memories of discussions with parents, peers, teachers, or friends. Examples of learning about handling racism through other forms, such as books, social media, blogs, adoptee events, or news were also noted, as well as any other methods participants brought up themselves. When looking at how adoptees handled racist situations, it was noted whether a participant would directly confront the person or situation, as well as the type of response that was given during these instances.

Although it was not originally a key theme at the beginning of the study, because participants described and mentioned clear signs of discomfort, distress, anger, frustration, sadness, shame, and other negative feelings when recalling instances of racism, it was decided that noting the different emotions of how participants felt during these situations should be made a key theme. While it is important to understand and analyze the individual forms of racism that occurred among the participant group, it was observed that these situations had a clear impact on the emotional well-being of the participants, which is equally as important to acknowledge within the study. Criteria for determining such emotions experienced by participants included the participant explicitly stating the emotions they felt during instances of racism, such as the phrases “it made me feel \_\_\_\_\_” or “I felt \_\_\_\_\_”. It was also highlighted when participants gave statements that expressed an emotion that was associated with a specific event, such as the phrase “I was \_\_\_\_\_ (insert emotion) when \_\_\_\_\_ (insert event) happened.” Although it was not stated within the participant transcripts, it was also observed when participants showed physical signs of potential distress or negative emotion. It was noted if a participant had a change in tone and voice inflection, as well as any long pauses between speaking. Other criteria for signs of possible emotional

distress also included change in body language, such as avoiding eye contact or excessive fidgeting when discussing these instances.

Responses were highlighted if the participant response provided concrete examples that were associated with a key theme. Answers were also highlighted if a participant answered “yes” or “no” to more specific questions asked, such as “did you ever learn Chinese dance?” or “did you experience forms of physical violence?”. If a response stated that the participant was unsure about an experience occurring, then the response was not counted as a concrete example and did not qualify to meet coding criteria. Responses that contained descriptions of certain memories of events or objects that were mentioned throughout a transcript were also highlighted and assigned with the appropriate theme. If a participant provided a memory or example of an event that they observed, but did not experience directly, such as observing an Asian peer being called a racial slur, those responses were highlighted and coded as well.

### **Key Themes in Culture**

One of the first key themes that was observed throughout the study was what forms of exposure participants had to Chinese culture. As previously mentioned, exposure plays a crucial role in developing a re-connection to an adoptee’s birth culture, as well as contributes to creating a better understanding of one’s cultural identity. Participants within the study expressed a wide range of aspects of Chinese culture that they grew up with, which were categorized into three main groups: physical items, skills learned, and events attended.

The first group lists physical items that participants described, such as eating Chinese food, having Chinese goods, toys, or artifacts, books and movies related to, or about, China,

listening to Chinese music, and shopping at Asian markets. The majority of participants frequently referred to memories of eating Chinese food, whether it was dining at a Chinese restaurant, such as going for dim sum, or making Chinese food at home. Other forms of Chinese exposure most participants listed were a wide variety of goods, toys, and artifacts, which included pottery, jewelry, traditional Chinese clothing, such as the *cheongsam* or *qipao*, Chinese figurines, images of dragons or pictures of China, fans, lanterns, miniature boxes, Chinese calendars, and paintings. Although it was not mentioned as often, it was noted that almost half of the participants recalled reading certain Chinese books when they were young, such as *I Love You Like Crazy Cakes*, *Mulan*, *Chinese Cinderella*, *Chu Ju's House*, and Chinese mythology or folklore stories. A few participants recalled reading certain books as they got older and became more interested in Chinese culture and adoption, such as reading the books *Joy Luck Club* or *Lost Daughters of China*. In addition to reading books related to China, participants also described various movies they watched, ranging from Chinese documentaries, such as *Somewhere Between*, to *Mulan*, to *Big Bird in China*, and various Jackie Chan movies. Listening to Chinese music was not frequently mentioned, but some participants recalled listening to artists such as Yo-Yo Ma and the Twelve Girls Band, whereas other participants did not listen to Chinese music specifically but had listened Korean or Japanese pop and rock music instead.

While listing physical items was prevalent throughout the interviews, participants also discussed different skills they obtained. Many participants expressed how they learned Chinese language. Some participants learned the language at a young age in kindergarten and elementary school, whereas a few others learned at an older age throughout middle school and college. Learning Chinese dance presented itself as a fond memory for various

participants, as well as learning how to cook Chinese food. Foods that participants noted they knew how to make included dumplings, soups, and stir-fry. Almost half of the participants recalled learning how to use chopsticks while growing up, as well as learning Chinese paper cutting and doing school projects related to China or Chinese culture.

The last subgroup included memories of events that adoptees attended that were related to Chinese culture. This subgroup also included visiting historical sites, as well as any trips to China. Participants frequently recalled celebrating Chinese New Year. Most participants celebrated the holiday with friends and family, whereas others attended a Chinese New Year event hosted by other organizations, such as Families with Children from China (FCC). Other holidays some participants celebrated were the Moon Festival and Dragon Boat Festival. A few participants described attending Chinese culture and music festivals. These festivals sometimes had dragon dance performances, Chinese acrobats, dancers, or musical performances. In addition to holidays and festivals, many participants mentioned travelling back to China for study abroad, heritage trips, or vacation. During these trips the majority of these participants recalled visiting their orphanage or location of where they were put up for adoption, as well as visiting famous Chinese landmarks, such as the Forbidden Palace, Great Wall of China, or Temple of Heaven. Participants also mentioned attending “culture camps,” “heritage camps,” or “immersion camps” while growing up. Based on the memories described by participants, these camps were designed for Chinese adoptees to learn more about Chinese culture, interact with other Chinese people, and better understand Chinese adoption. Participants who attended these camps described memories of learning calligraphy, making dumplings, learning Chinese songs, and drawing pictures of panda bears. In addition to attending these camps, a couple adoptees mentioned

attending conventions specifically for both adoptees and families of adoptees. These events usually included meeting other families with adopted Chinese children, as well as hearing guest speakers discuss their own experiences. Approximately half of the participants also mentioned visiting certain parks, such as the Chinese Reconciliation Park, as well as local Chinatowns, along with museums that had Chinese art exhibits, such as the Shaolin Warrior exhibit. For local activities, some participants talked about joining their college's Asian Student Association as a way to connect with other Asians and learn more about Asian cultures.

### **Key Themes in Race**

The second portion of the interview with participants focused on topics related to race. Themes highlighted included: (1) discussing instances of racism or discrimination encountered by participants (2) how participants both personally handled racist situations, as well as how they felt during those moments (3) parental approaches to racial privilege, politics, power, racism, and race issues, and (4) how participants learned to handle racist situations. It is important to note that the third theme regarding parental approaches to various racial issues is based on how the participant interpreted and recalled memories of having discussions or interactions with their parents related to these topics. Each of the themes provides insight into the unique ways that the participants interpreted these interactions with others, as well as the deeper emotional connection related to such memories.

**Facing racism and discrimination.** One of the most important issues discussed with participants was their experiences with racism and discrimination. Because participants experienced a large variety of instances, forms of racism were divided into five main

categories: (I) Name calling, mocking, teasing, and taunting, (II) fetishization, (III) exclusion and isolation, (IV) stereotyping and microaggressions, and (V) questioning. The fifth category, questioning, does not provide explicit examples of racism, but instead focuses on instances when adoptees were faced with intrusive and invalidating questions related to their race, adoption, or family. Although the examples provided within this category are not considered to be racist, it was made clear by many participants that these experiences had a large impact in their life. Because these instances brought up by participants were so salient within the interviews, it was necessary to acknowledge the burden adoptees face with not only racism, but with outsiders questioning their identity.

The majority of participants expressed both physical and verbal signs of discomfort, anger, sadness, guilt, frustration, embarrassment, and many other negative emotions associated with recalling such memories of people questioning them. With many of the interviews discussing these instances of questioning by others, it felt unjust to not acknowledge the serious emotional and psychological impact these experiences had on the participants, which is crucial to shedding light on how adoptees face a unique form of invalidation within society. It was observed throughout multiple interviews that various participants expressed minor, physical signs of distress. Change in tone and voice inflection, especially when a participant expressed feelings of anger, often reflected feelings of frustration when describing a racist encounter. A few participants showed signs of discomfort through change in body language, such as avoiding eye contact or excessive fidgeting when discussing these instances.

**Name calling, mocking, teasing, and taunting.** When asked about instances of racism, more than half of the participants stated examples of being called various racial slurs

or derogatory names, or witnessing other Asian peers being called such names. Participants mentioned being called “chink,” “ching chong,” or “F.O.B.,” which is known as an abbreviation for “fresh off the boat,” and is often used as a negative connotation for being an immigrant. In addition to being called derogatory names, participants recalled their peers pulling their eyes back to make them slanted or mocked the participant in fake Chinese. It was also reported that peers would point to the participant’s eyes and ask “how can you see?” A few participants remembered that these instances occurred when they were at a young age in elementary school. Others experienced people pressing their hands together and bowing in order to supposedly “show respect”, but would do so in a mocking way. It was also mentioned by participants that people would sometimes yell “go back to where you came from.”

**Fetishization.** As mentioned previously regarding Orientalist and gendered stereotypes about Asian women, it was found within the study that multiple participants experienced numerous instances of fetishization. A couple participants expressed that others often stereotyped them as “submissive” or “exotic”. Some participants recalled receiving catcalls from strangers, being told that Asians want sex all the time, as well as receiving sexually aggressive comments related to their race. One participant explained her encounters with what she referred to as “yellow fever”. When asked to elaborate more about the term “yellow fever”, it was described as “not just an attraction to Asian women, it means an attraction and a demoralization of respect for Asian women...but it comes with a fetishization...and it comes with, um, a sense of hierarchy” (Participant 8). Unrelated to the physical disease also known as yellow fever, the term “yellow fever” is used as a way to

describe a person's specific attraction to, but also fetishization of, Asian women in particular, with the "yellow" aspect supposedly referring to the color of Asian skin.

**Exclusion and isolation.** Although it is more difficult to understand the true reason behind a person's actions, many participants expressed feeling excluded or isolated by peers and professors. A few participants felt unwelcomed by their white peers in school, especially from more socially "popular" groups throughout high school. However, participants also brought up instances of exclusion or isolation from not just peers, but from school administrators and teachers. One participant recalled experiencing unfair treatment regarding her high school's dress code. It was explained by the participant that whenever the white girls in her school violated the dress code, they never got in trouble with the school, whereas when the participant and her other non-white friends supposedly violated the code, they were punished. Another participant explained how her college professor often singled her out during class when the professor referred to China or aspects related to China, and often made negative assumptions about Chinese people while teaching lessons in class.

Beyond facing negative experiences of isolation and exclusion within school, many participants also mentioned instances of exclusion or isolation from various employers, play groups, and strangers. One participant recalled how when she was younger, she was not allowed to pretend to be Cinderella or Hannah Montana because her friends told her she was not white, so she could not be those characters. Another participant explained how she started using her traditional Chinese name on resumes instead of her non-Chinese name and noticed that she received fewer interviews and callbacks from employers who received her resumes using her Chinese name. It was also mentioned how some participants received stares from other white people and felt singled out due to being one of the few people of

color in the room or general area. In addition to these instances, multiple participants also mentioned that they not only felt excluded by white peers, but also experienced feelings of exclusion from other Chinese people. A few participants explained about instances where other Chinese people denied how the participant is Chinese, or how a participant was not considered Chinese due to the fact that the participant did not know how to speak Mandarin.

**Stereotyping and microaggressions.** Based on the experiences described by participants, instances of stereotyping and microaggressions were the most common forms of racism encountered. Almost half of the participants explained being stereotyped as “nerds” or people assuming that they were automatically good at math and science. Many participants expressed how others saw them as part of the “model minority” and that peers assumed that the participants did well in school simply due to their race. Participants explained how classmates would often ask for help on homework, bombarded them with questions, or wanted to be in the same group project as the participant because peers believed that they could get an A in the class by getting help from an Asian person.

A few participants mentioned that they were not majoring in math or science and that this often resulted in disbelief from their peers. These participants explained that because they are Asian, people assume that they are a math or science major, so when their peers learn that the participant is not a math or science major, the participant is faced with shock, disbelief, and suspicion by others. Additionally, some participants recalled having peers who did not understand why the participant was not at the top of the class. These participants explained that peers assumed that the participant would be at the top of the class due to being Asian, but also mentioned how if the participant was at the top of the class, peers would discredit their success and blame their intelligence and hard work on being Asian.

In addition to receiving academic pressure from peers, participants also explained how people often assumed that English was not the participant's first language and that people would ask why the participant does not have a Chinese accent. It was also mentioned by participants that a common comment they received from people was "wow, you speak English so well." It was also mentioned how others often assumed that a participant did not grow up in the U.S, too. One participant recalled her professor assuming that she could not read cursive due to her perceived race. Another participant explained how she was asked "how does it feel to not be American?", which was based on the person's assumption that she grew up in China. Participants expressed frustration when they were faced with negative stereotypes from others, such as being asked if the participant ate dog or assuming that the participant's feet were small because they had them bound.

Other stereotypes the participants encountered included being told that the participant was a bad driver because they are Asian or people assuming that the participant was related to all the other Asian people around them. Additionally, a couple participants also recalled instances of others not understanding why they could not speak Chinese, or people assuming that they could read or write Chinese characters. In relation to these assumptions made, many participants also mentioned how it was not uncommon for other Chinese people or other Asian people to tell the participant that they did not "look Chinese", even though the participants are all of Chinese descent. Other comments participants received included being told that others consider them to be "not very Chinese", people claiming that the participant must be mixed-race, or being called a "banana" or "twinkie" because others perceived the participant as being "white-washed". One participant explained how others described her as a "white girl in a Chinese body" (Participant 6).

In addition to comments about a participant's "Chineseness," it was also mentioned that multiple participants received certain microaggressions from others, such as being told "you're pretty for an Asian girl." A couple participants explained how they often received comments about their hair and that people asked them why they did not have "straight Asian girl hair." One participant recalled being told that she had "really big boobs for an Asian girl". A few participants mentioned other assumptions made about them, such as people assuming that they were their father's significant other when going out in public, or assuming that Asians only date people of the same race, or that Asians do not like to be touched.

**Questioning.** As previously mentioned, these instances may not be considered blatantly racist, but because these memories had a clear impact on the lives of the participants within the study, it was necessary to develop a category that acknowledges the prevalence of such situations. This category is based on instances where participants were faced with questions or comments that invalidated their racial or cultural identity, or their family dynamic. This also included instances where participants faced intrusive questions or comments regarding their adoption, too.

One common instance that was referred to by multiple participants was being asked where the participant is from. Although at first this seems like a harmless question, the majority of participants expressed frustration when people did not believe them when the participant tells the person that they grew up in the U.S. Participants explained that even after telling a person where they are from within the U.S., the person usually responded with "where are you *really* from?" and would sometimes feel annoyed when the person continued to repeatedly ask this question. Many participants also mentioned being asked where their parents are from after a person first asked where the participant is from. Although some may

not consider these series of questions rude or racist, participants often explained how it was invalidating and intrusive because people automatically assumed that neither the participant nor their parents were from the U.S., and that having to repeat their answer to others asking such questions became frustrating for the participant. In contrast, some participants mentioned being asked if they are American-born Chinese, but when the participant explains that they were born in China, they are not believed by others. A few participants expressed how they felt excluded by other Asian people when they were invalidated regarding their birth country, and that because the participant was adopted and raised by white parents, the participant was deemed as not “Asian enough” within certain Asian communities. It was mentioned how participants were sometimes asked by other Chinese people why the participant was not “more Chinese”, why they did not “act Chinese”, or why they cannot speak the Chinese language.

Another question that participants often faced was being asked why the participant’s parents are white. Because the participants are all transracial adoptees with white parents, racial differences do not go unnoticed by outsiders. However, when participants were asked such a question by others, it was expressed by the participants that this question was unnecessary and intrusive. In relation to this comment, a couple participants also noted how they have been asked who their “real” parents are or, more often, if they know who their “real” mother is. Two participants recalled witnessing their parents being asked by strangers if the participant was their “real” child. Additionally, a couple participants mentioned how others sometimes commented on their adoption by saying that the participant’s mother was not their “real” mother. Many of these memories of people asking about their “real” family

occurred at a young age, whereas as the participant got older, they did not receive such comments or questions as often.

**How participants handled racist situations.** In addition to asking about instances of racism that participants faced, they were also asked to recall both how they handled the racist situations and what emotional impact it had on them. It was crucial to not only ask about the racist situations that the participants encountered, but to also recognize the aftermath of facing racism throughout their life and how it influenced them. Racism can have a variety of effects on people, so participants were asked to discuss how they coped with such situations in order to provide a snapshot of the emotional impact racism has on adoptees. This theme was also designed to help provide insight into the fact that although people often mistake the previously mentioned forms of racism as “compliments”, “jokes”, or asking a simple question, these forms of racism still have a strong, negative emotional impact on adoptees that should be noted within the study. Although each individual has unique experiences that develop emotions that can vary, there were some overall patterns observed among the participants within the study that were important to recognize.

When looking at how participants handled racist situations, the majority of participants did not confront the person about being racist. Instead, most participants ignored the situation, walked away, deflected from the topic, or laughed it off. One participant explained how she prepared herself for potential racist situations by having clever responses ready, while a different participant would explicitly tell the person that their comment was not funny and confronted them about it depending on the situation that occurred. Other participants mentioned that they relied on friends to help defend against racist situations or would sometimes tell the person that they were not born in China. Some participants were

more willing to provide responses during these situations, such as explaining to the person that their parents are not Chinese. A few participants would give an explanation about why the participant was choosing not to study science or math, as well as suggested to the person to look up their question on Google. A few participants explained how they kept their guard up knowing that they were going to experience racism at some point in their life, whereas other participants relied on friends for comfort and tried avoiding those who made racist remarks.

In relation to how participants handled racist situations, they were also asked to describe how they felt during such instances. The majority of participants expressed feeling hurt, upset, angry, or annoyed when faced with racism. Other emotions described by participants also included shock, sadness, or discomfort. Some participants felt embarrassed or ashamed about being adopted, whereas others experienced feeling awkwardness or helplessness, especially during moments where racism occurred at work and the participant did not feel like they could fight back.

**Approaches to racial privilege, politics, power, and racism.** Because racial differences play a large role in the adoptee experience, participants were asked to recall memories of learning about racial issues from their parents, whether these issues were discussed, and what specific topics their parents talk about regarding race. Participants were also asked if there were any other ways they learned about racial issues besides from their parents. Potential answers that participants could have answered with included learning from social media or the newspaper, as well as any moments of having conversations with peers, professors, siblings, friends, or coworkers.

Participants were asked about their parents and their approach to discussing racial issues because the study not only focuses on the participant experiences with racism, but how they learned about racial issues stemming beyond just racial discrimination. As described by previous literature and research, white adoptive parents can sometimes struggle with facing the reality of racial difference within the family with their adoptive children. While not all parents have difficulty discussing such issues, asking participants about their experiences with having conversations about racial privilege, politics, and power with parents not only focuses on the adoptee's interpretation of these experiences, but also highlights the many different approaches parents take when discussing race issues. Participants were asked about their memories of discussing racial privilege, politics, and power in addition to being asked to recall memories of discussing racism with their parents because the study also wanted to observe whether or not participants learned about other racial issues besides racism, such as white privilege.

When interviewing about experiences related to race, participants were initially asked about whether their parents discussed issues of racial privilege, politics, or power. It was found that more than half of the participants did not recall their parents ever having discussions with them about these issues or the parents did not explicitly discuss these topics. One participant explained how originally her parents had a colorblind approach to teaching about race, but after the participant educated her parents more about these topics and why the colorblind approach is harmful, they became more open to discussing these issues and are able to have these discussions. A few other participants also recalled having these discussions with parents, with one participant explaining how she felt her parents were very understanding and supportive, and felt that they could talk openly when discussing race. A

few participants also mentioned having conversations about race with their parents, but it was noted that these conversations were not about racial issues relating to Asians, but related to African Americans. It was explained by one participant how her parents used the “Civil Rights movement route” and that inequality was discussed on a more general level, such as gender inequality or socioeconomic inequalities, rather than centering on racial inequality.

Multiple participants mentioned learning about racial issues through school, friends, and social media. For participants who learned about racial issues in school, it is important to note that the participants explained how school did not focus on Asian or Asian American race issues, but taught about the history of slavery and racism towards the black community. Some participants explained learning about racial issues through their own lived experiences, such as one participant learning after receiving multiple Asian jokes growing up, or hearing from other people’s experiences. One participant recalled learning about discussing race issues from attending Chinese heritage camp and that it was taught that adoptees should not talk to white people about such issues. A few participants learned about these topics from reading the newspaper or online articles, as well as watching documentaries or the news.

In addition to asking participants about recalling conversations with others regarding racial privilege, politics, and power, it was also asked that participants describe moments of discussing racism and other race issues with their parents. Responses showed rather mixed results regarding how parents approached the topic of racism. Almost half of the participants reported their parents not having discussions about racism or race issues, or recalled their parents being rather dismissive when a participant brought up instances of racism that the participant experienced. One participant explained how her parents never called her experiences forms of racism, but instead just referred to them as forms of ignorance. It was

not uncommon for some participants to mention that their parents did not take their experiences with racism seriously and preferred to take the colorblind approach or told the participant to simply ignore racist situations.

However, many participants recalled more positive interactions when discussing racism and race issues with parents. Almost half of the participants brought up how their parents would remind the participant that they loved them and that not everyone understands adoption. It was also mentioned how parents would ask the participant how they were feeling after such experiences, as well as reinforce that even though the participant is adopted, they are still their child. One participant mentioned how her parents often stood up to ignorance and racist situations, as well as openly discussed discrimination against Asians in particular and how racism is not ok. While many participants were able to recall having discussions related to racism and race issues with parents, participants also had these discussions with many other people, such as friends, significant others, peers, or therapists.

**Approaches to handling racist situations.** The final key theme observed within the study regarding race was looking at how participants learned to handle racist situations. Participants were asked to not only recall memories of discussing issues related to race and racism, but to describe how they learned to cope with racist situations. While having discussions about racial issues is important, it is equally as crucial to know how adoptees learn to cope with racism. Unfortunately, it is inevitable that transracial adoptees will face racism at some point in their life, so it is necessary to understand the different ways adoptees learn to handle these situations. It was discussed earlier how participants felt during racist situations, as well as what they personally did during those instances, but it is equally as important to know where they learned such methods. Although there is no simple answer to

handling racist situations, especially since racism comes in many different forms and each instance is unique, it is crucial that adoptees have at least a basic understanding and set of tools for coping with racism

Within the study, participants were asked about whether or not their parents discussed methods of how to handle racist situations, what those suggested methods were, and if there were any other sources they learned from. Out of the ten participants, only four recalled having discussions about handling racist situations. Of the remaining participants whose parents did not have these discussions much, only a few of the participants mentioned how they felt that their parents assumed that they would not have to teach their child about racist situations or that their parents were unaware of the fact that the participant faces racism. The four participants who did recall having discussions about handling racism explained that the suggested methods taught to them were ignoring the situation, reporting to a teacher or parent, standing up for themselves and educate others, explain to the person that the participant is an American, or walk away from the situation.

Other resources that participants mentioned included learning from friends, reading articles, Asian adoptee camp, social media groups, and adoption groups. A few participants mentioned relying on friends to defend them during racist situations or watching how others reacted and handled instances of racism. One participant explained that she learned at an Asian adoptee camp to either confront the issue, making people laugh about it, or ignoring it. Other suggested methods of handling racist situations included confronting the situation and explaining to the person why what happened was considered racist and inappropriate, as well as possibly throwing back insults depending on the situation.

### **Beyond Skin Deep**

Within the transracial adoptee experience, racial difference contributes to the complex development of racial identity. As observed within the study, race is an aspect of the transracial adoptee identity that cannot go ignored. For Chinese adoptees in particular, obtaining knowledge about race is equally as important as learning about Chinese culture simply because cultural knowledge cannot replace the racial identity and racial differences that occur within the family. It should be stressed that racial differences within the family should not only be addressed, but how an adoptee's race plays a role in society as a whole. Race issues should be acknowledged and understood on a deeper level by both parents and adoptees in order to obtain a true understanding of how racial identity development is multi-dimensional.

### **Discussion**

While each adoptee's individual experience is unique, the goal of the study was to not only promote a platform for Chinese adoptees to share their experiences, but to also provide deeper insight into how these experiences relate to cultural and racial identity development. Through in-person interviews with participants, transcripts were used to provide qualitative data that highlighted trends found throughout participant responses. Questions within the interview asked about defining Chineseness, exposure to Chinese culture, instances of racism, discussing racial privilege, politics and power, and coping with racism. Although there is some literature looking at these topics, previous research is still quite limited, especially regarding studies that are based directly on the adoptee's experiences. It should be noted that because the number of participants used within the study was extremely small, the data cannot be used to support the notion that all adoptees have the same thoughts, feelings,

and experiences as the ones mentioned within the study. Instead, the data presented is meant to help develop patterns that can be observed within the adoptee experience

### **The Importance of Culture**

As previously mentioned, an adoptee's connection to birth culture plays a crucial role in one's cultural identity development. Because culture can be experienced in multiple forms, participants within the study provided a wide range of examples of how each person was exposed to Chinese culture. Similar to previous research, participants mentioned experiences related to eating, buying, and making Chinese food, having various Chinese goods and artifacts within their house, wearing certain pieces of traditional Chinese clothing, watching Chinese movies, learning Chinese language, attending Chinese culture events, celebrating Chinese holidays, especially Chinese New Year, and visiting China.

It can be suggested by the study's data that parents are aware of the importance of exposing their children to Chinese culture. Every participant was exposed to at least one form of Chinese culture, which can support the notion that the parents recognize that their adopted children should have exposure to their birth culture in some way. Even though the adoptees usually do not grow up with Chinese culture as their dominant culture, the data suggests that parents of adoptees are both willing and encouraging their children to develop a form of cultural knowledge about their birth country. Rather than trying to erase the adoptee's connection to China, the data also suggests that parents providing the resources for the participants to learn more about Chinese culture are willing to acknowledge that even though they are not raising their child within that culture, they understand the significance of an adoptee developing a cultural connection to China.

With previous literature expressing concerns and criticisms regarding the fact that parents can sometimes heavily rely on physical items to expose their child to Chinese culture, it can be argued that while this approach is sometimes used by parents within the current study, this was not the only approach that was used. It should be recognized that the participants did not have solely physical items within their life, but had a diverse range of experiences that also helped them become accustomed to Chinese culture. While physical items were frequently listed throughout the interviews, it is important to note the frequency of events that participants also got to attend or experience, such as taking Chinese language or dance lessons, attending Chinese culture camps, travelling to China, visiting Chinese landmarks, and much more. It should be argued that these experiences that the participants had are equally as important as the physical, tangible items they had within their life because it is through these experiences that they learn about aspects of Chinese culture that cannot be represented in the form of an item. Attending such events and having the opportunity to be within other Asian communities, whether it be other adoptees or Chinese residents, can sometimes help adoptees develop a sense of belonging and familiarity with the people within the culture.

Parents can have many different ways of exposing their child to aspects of Chinese culture and it should be noted that not all families have the same opportunities or access to certain types of exposure. If a family lives in an area that lacks a large Asian population, it can be very difficult for the family to attend events related to Chinese culture if there are not many Chinese people within the area. It can also sometimes be difficult for parents to even expose their child to more authentic items within the culture, such as having difficulty finding an authentic Chinese restaurant to dine at or not having any Asian grocery stores in

the area. In response to the criticisms made within previous literature regarding parental approaches that rely on using physical items to represent Chinese culture, it must be acknowledged that not all families have the ability to have access to other resources.

While there are many different ways parents can expose their child to Chinese culture, it should also be noted whether or not parents have access to resources that can provide a variety of opportunities for their child to experience Chinese culture. It is strongly recommended that for families who do have the ability to attend events, can afford travelling to China, or have the connections to members within the Chinese community, it is important to provide those opportunities for their child and allow them to have those experiences. Additionally, for families who may not have the ability to gain access to these resources, it is highly encouraged that organizations, such as adoption agencies or culture centers, develop more opportunities for Chinese adoptees and their families to come together in more areas. It is suggested that centers such as these develop more locations for Chinese culture camps or that organizations develop better ways to reach out to adoptive families to help them connect with local Chinese communities or other Chinese adoptive families in the area. Because connection to a culture can be experienced in many different forms, it is crucial to not only recognize the benefits of having physical items and symbols to represent certain aspects of Chinese culture, but to understand the importance of including a variety of in-person experiences and opportunities that can help adoptees develop a deeper connection to their birth culture (Baden et al., 2011; Louie, 2015).

### **Sticks and Stones Break My Bones, But Words Still Hurt Me**

According to previous literature reflecting on racist situations Chinese adoptees may face, it can be asserted that each participant faced a form of racism at some point in their life.

One of the most common forms of racism participants faced was stereotyping and microaggressions. Multiple participants referred to others viewing them as “nerds” or the “model minority”, as well as feeling pressure from others to study math and science. Participants also noted how peers would often discredit their hard work in school and that people believed that participants succeeded in academics simply because of their race. It was also found that many participants experienced others assuming that they did not speak English, or that they did not grow up in the United States. Participants were often asked where they were “really from”, even after explaining that they grew up within the U.S. In contrast, participants also frequently mentioned how their Chinese identity was often denied by others, especially other Asians, and that they were often viewed as not “Chinese enough” due to the fact that they did not speak Chinese fluently or did not have the mannerisms or typical physical appearance that others believed a “real Chinese person” has. Similar to what previous research has found, it is not uncommon for adoptees to feel different from people of the same ethnic group because adoptees may feel that they are lacking certain traits that are often associated with those who are in already that ethnic group (Baden et al., 2011; Mak, 2014).

In addition to experiencing various forms of stereotyping and microaggressions, participants were able to recall multiple instances of more blatant forms of racism, ranging from having peers mock the participant in fake Chinese, to people pulling their eyes back to make “Asian eyes”, to being called a “chink”, as well as other derogatory names. It was also frequently mentioned how participants often faced intrusive questions or comments that were perceived as invalidating of the participant’s race and family. Comments or questions often referred to questioning why a participant’s family was white, whether or not the participant

knew who their “real” parents are, or being told that the participant’s mother was not their “real” mother, as well as being asked why the participant does not act “more Chinese”.

While these questions and comments are not usually deemed as racist, instances of these forms of invalidation were mentioned frequently enough and had a clear emotional impact on the participants that these memories should not be ignored. Other forms of racism that participants faced included fetishization and exclusion or isolation. While these forms were not brought up as frequently compared to the other types of racism previously mentioned, it was expressed how participants were sometimes seen as “submissive”, “exotic”, or “sexy” by others. As supported by previous research, Asian females are vulnerable to being stereotyped as “exotic” and “submissive” due to the history of Orientalism and that these stereotypes have continued to carry on to this day (Louie, 2015). Additionally, it was mentioned how some participants felt excluded or unwelcome by their peers at school, especially white peers, as well as feeling excluded by other Chinese people, too. Although there is no way to know the true reason behind why these participants were being excluded by others, research has suggested that transracial adoptees can still feel excluded by others due to the fact that these adoptees do not fit the prescribed mold of what people think a “Chinese person” is or what an “American person” is (Baden et al., 2011).

In light of the previous literature highlighting the types of racism Asians encounter, it can be argued that although the participants in the study were all exposed to Chinese culture in some way and obtained knowledge about the culture, this did not protect them from encountering racism throughout their life. Previous literature has described how having cultural knowledge and pride does not protect against racist encounters and that having such knowledge will never change the fact that the adoptee is not white. While some participants

obtained more exposure to Chinese culture than others, all participants faced forms of racism to varying degrees.

Reflecting back on how Asians are often stereotyped as the “model minority”, which was frequently brought up throughout participant responses, this harmful stereotype is still a form of racism that Chinese adoptees are vulnerable to. It is often misunderstood that being viewed as a “nerd”, or someone who automatically excels at math and science, is a “compliment”, but these stereotypes develop a plethora of problems for Chinese adoptees. As mentioned within the interviews, multiple participants explained how this stereotype led to peers discrediting a participant’s hard work and achievement in school because it was believed that the participant only succeeded because of their race. In contrast, it also produced an unnecessary amount of pressure for participants to have a perfect academic performance since their peers automatically assumed that Asians always get good grades. Additionally, the stereotype about Asians only wanting to study math and science is harmful to those who desire to pursue other fields of study, such as art or history, and that the pressure to fit this mold can bring feelings of shame or invalidation to those who are not studying those prescribed subjects.

One of the most distinctive trends observed within the study was how participants described not only being seen as the “model minority”, but also as people who were foreign. It was often mentioned how people would be surprised that a participant knew English or when the participant explained that they grew up in the U.S. Participants were sometimes met with disbelief when talking about their hometown or when they explained that their parents grew up within the U.S., too. Although Chinese adoptees are a form of immigrant within the United States, the majority of them did not grow up in China or deeply immersed

in Chinese culture. For Chinese adoptees who were raised within a white family and in the United States, it can sometimes become frustrating when adoptees are met with the assumption that they are not American and that they did not grow up in the U.S. Assumptions and comments regarding the adoptee's ability to speak English or family background can produce a sense of invalidation and "otherness" for the adoptee.

In contrast to these experiences, another finding included how participants received invalidation regarding where they grew up and their English-speaking skills, as well as experienced difficulty validating their own Chinese identity within Chinese communities. Participants also experienced people questioning the fact that the participant grew up in the U.S., as well as having others doubt that English is the participant's first language. It was explained that because some participants lack the ability to speak Chinese fluently, or do not have specific mannerisms and physical features that are associated with Chinese people, they were not seen as a "real Chinese person". Language is a very important aspect within a culture and community, and because adoptees do not always know how to speak Chinese, this can sometimes create a large disconnect with other Chinese people.

Additionally, because many Chinese adoptees do not grow up being immersed in Chinese culture, they do not always recognize or know about the mannerisms, beliefs, and norms that are within that culture (Baden et al., 2011). Because adoptees can face this disconnect with Chinese people, it should be acknowledged that the concept of "Chineseness" and whether or not an adoptee is "Chinese enough" should not be based on one's Chinese-speaking skills or familiarity with specific norms within the culture. Previous literature has explained that there is a difference between an adoptee's lived experience versus expected experience, and that this distinction should not be ignored (Baden et al.,

2011). While there are many prescribed ideas for what being Chinese is, adoptees fit a very unique mold that is much more multi-dimensional than what many outsiders perceive it to be. Chinese adoptees are part of a population that is often viewed as neither fully “American” nor fully “Chinese”, which poses as a unique challenge that adoptees face throughout their life that must be recognized.

One of the most unexpected, but important, trends throughout the study was participants being questioned by outsiders regarding their family dynamic and race. Participants faced comments or questions asking who their “real” parents were, or were told that their adoptive parents were not their “real” parents, as well as outsiders asking why their parents were white. It could be argued that the people asking these questions are genuinely curious, but phrases such as “real parents” implies that the adoptive family is not as valid or legitimate as families with biological children. It also indicates that adoptive parents are not as qualified to be deemed as parents and that having a non-biological child makes them less of a parent. Asking about the “realness” of an adoptee’s family structure produces invalidation and a sense of “other”, which can sometimes make an adoptee feel ashamed or embarrassed about their adoption.

Participants who received such comments expressed feelings of shame, hurt, embarrassment, anger, frustration, and other negative emotions. Comments and questions such as the ones described within the study can also be seen as intrusive, especially when coming from strangers. Adoptees are not required to provide such information to outsiders and have a right to keep it private if they choose to do so. While some adoptees are more open about discussing their adoption, outsiders should not assume that all adoptees are willing to explain why their parents are white or if they know their biological family. It is

understandable that outsiders may be less familiar with the adoptive family structure, but it should be stressed that adoptees are not obligated to discuss these topics with others if they choose not to and that those who do ask such questions should be mindful of how they ask them.

### **Let's Talk About Race**

With race playing an important role within the adoptee experience, it is crucial to understand not only the types of racism adoptees face, but how issues surrounding racial privilege, politics, and power are discussed within the family. Because Chinese adoptees are often adopted by white parents, such as the participants within the study, it is crucial to recognize the different approaches parents take when acknowledging race issues both within and outside of the family. As described earlier, unlike teaching about Chinese culture and exposing an adoptee to different aspects, discussing racial differences and race issues are topics that are not as openly, or easily, talked about.

Over half of the participants did not recall their parents discussing racial privilege, politics, or power and instead learned about these topics through school, friends, blogs, and social media. One interesting finding was that even though participants learned about these issues in different ways, almost half of the participants explained that these issues were taught to them regarding African Americans rather than Asian Americans, especially in school. While it is very important to learn about the African American history and the racial politics related to that population, participants who learned about issues this way explained that they learned very little about Asian American history. Additionally, one third of the participants recalled their parents using the “colorblind” approach when learning about race

issues, however, only one of those participants' parents changed their initial view away from the colorblind approach.

Although the sample population in the study is very small and not representative of all adoptee experiences, it can be suggested that there is a need for more resources when learning about racial privilege, politics, and power. While some participants did have discussions about these issues with their parents, it is also important to consider perhaps why the other participants did not have those discussions within the family. Topics related to race can be difficult to discuss, especially since there are many subtopics related to race, but previous research supports the idea that having open and honest discussions about racial issues is beneficial and necessary for healthy racial identity formation for adoptees.

There are multiple reasons why these discussions did not occur for some of the participants, but one possible explanation could be that there is a lack of resources that teach parents how to navigate these topics with their children. Even though race issues can be difficult to understand, it has been mentioned by previous research that children as young as four are able to comprehend racial differences between themselves and their parents, which means discussions surrounding race can and should start even at a young age. It is important that parents in particular have the resources to teach their children about these issues and that more information could be provided by adoption agencies, books, adoption groups, therapists who specialize in adoptive families, doctors, and online blogs or websites.

In addition to providing parents with more resources to educate their children, adoptees should be provided with more resources that also discuss these issues, especially for those who are raised in families who avoid approaching these topics. It is suggested that adoption groups, social media pages for adoptees, books, adoption magazines, documentaries

and guest speakers at adoptee events discuss these topics as a way to help educate adoptees. Additionally, schools should be teaching not just African American history, but Asian American history as well. It is recommended that schools educate about the history of America's racial attitudes towards Asians, such as the history of Orientalism or Chinese Exclusion Act, in order to help not only adoptees, but all students, understand the deeper meanings behind current stereotypes that are present to this day.

In relation to discussions about racism with parents, almost half of the participants reported not having conversations about racism with their parents or when attempting to have those conversations, their parents were dismissive about the topic. However, for participants who were able to bring the topic of racism to their parents, parental responses included comforting the adoptee and reminding them that they are loved, asking the adoptee how they felt about the situation, or standing up for the adoptee when the parent witnessed racist remarks. As mentioned within previous literature, parents can sometimes have difficulty discussing racism with their child because they do not always recognize that their child will face racism at some point in their life (Louie, 2015). It should be argued that parents hold the responsibility to initiate these discussions with their children because they are the ones who are choosing to adopt a child of another race, and because Chinese adoptees are not white, they are prone to facing a wide variety of racial issues throughout their life. Unfortunately, it is virtually inevitable that adoptees will face racism and discrimination throughout their life, which is why it should be stressed that parents educate them about the complexities behind attitudes towards race both within and outside the family in order to help prepare them for future experiences. As mentioned within previous literature, teaching a child about Chinese culture and developing cultural pride is important, but this does not protect them against

racist encounters (Louie, 2015). Instead, recognizing and having discussions about racism and other race issues can promote healthier development for an adoptee's racial identity.

Additionally, more resources could be provided to help educate parents and adoptees about various forms of racism that Asians face within the U.S., such as discussing the "model minority" stereotype or how the concept of being "white washed". Families could also be better educated about racism towards Asians by learning about the historical significance behind different stereotypes as well, such as understanding the deeper meaning behind the fetishization of Asian women. Learning about the roots of these stereotypes can help parents teach their children that when they face racism from others, it is about racial issues that are part of a larger problem within society as a whole.

It should also be stressed that when adoptees approach parents about instances of racism that they have faced, it is crucial that parents validate the experiences that the adoptee has. While it is difficult for parents, white parents in particular, to fully understand and relate to what it is like to experience racism, it is strongly recommended that parents not only listen to their child's experiences, but validate the adoptee's emotions associated with such moments. Because racial difference is an important factor within the adoptee's experience, it has been strongly recommended by previous research that these differences be acknowledged within the family (Louie, 2015). Additionally, it has been suggested that having conversations about race with the adoptee has been found to be crucial for healthy long-term adjustment and sense of identity (Rojewski, 2011). As observed within the study, participants expressed a wide range of negative emotions, such as anger, frustration, hurt, sadness, shock, embarrassment, and helplessness. Because racist situations can evoke numerous emotions, parents should empathize with their child's emotions.

Even though white parents do not know what it is like to experience racism firsthand, validating an adoptee's negative experiences and emotions from racism can help provide emotional support during these traumatizing moments. It is understandable that parents want to protect their child from racism in the world, but when their child does have the unfortunate experience of encountering racism, dismissing, denying, or avoiding discussing the issue can be potentially harmful for the parent-child relationship. In order for these discussions to occur, adoptees should be able to feel safe and that they can freely discuss their experiences and emotions to their parents without feeling invalidated.

### **Learning How to Handle Racism**

Based on the participant responses regarding how they handled racist situations, seven out of ten participants either ignored the situation, laughed it off, walked away, or deflected from the topic. A few participants explained that their responses and reactions would change depending on the situation that occurred. When asked about whether or not their parents had discussed how to handle racist situations, only four participants recalled having those discussions. These participants recalled their parents telling them ignore the situation, educate the person a little bit, or report the situation to a teacher. Out of the seven remaining participants who did not have discussions with their parents, three of them explained that these conversations did not occur because their parents did not feel that they had to teach about racism, assumed the participant would figure out how to handle racism on their own, or felt that their parents were unaware that the participant faced racism in their life.

Combatting racism can be quite difficult, but it is crucial for adoptees to develop healthy coping mechanisms and tools to assist them during racist situations. For white

parents, this can be a particularly challenging concept to teach since they do not have previous experiences of racism that they personally have faced. Although these parents have not encountered racism directly, it is still important that they recognize that their non-white child will face racism and must learn how to handle such situations. As expressed earlier, parents should hold the responsibility to have discussions about race issues, which should include having conversations that teach their child how to cope with racism.

Because encountering racism can sometimes be emotionally difficult, adoptees have to develop mechanisms that protect their well-being during these situations. Since there are different forms of racism that adoptees encounter, coping mechanisms can vary. One way to handle a racist situation would be to ignore the comment, which is a method that was frequently mentioned by participants when they encountered racism. If an adoptee receives a racist remark from a stranger, ignoring the situation is a possible solution since it does not involve direct confrontation and does not draw attention to the self. However, it should be noted that although ignoring a situation can be helpful in some instances, adoptees are still prone to suffering from the emotional impact of racism and that ignoring a situation does not mean the adoptee is immune to its negative emotional effects. As stated previously, because adoptees carry the burden of these negative emotions after encountering racism, parents must provide the emotional support to validate and empathize with their child's experience.

In addition to ignoring the situation as a coping mechanism, adoptees can also take a more confrontational approach and call the person out for their racism. While being confrontational can be intimidating, it can be a powerful way to show people that their actions are not acceptable and that racism has an impact on others. One way to confront someone is to educate them. If someone asks a question or makes a comment that is racist

towards Asians, an adoptee can choose to correct the person and explain why their comment is wrong or why asking an intrusive question is not always appropriate. It should be noted that adoptees should not feel obligated to owe explanations to others and that they do not always have to put in the emotional labor to defend their existence and family. Adoptees should have the right and autonomy to decide when they want to take the time to confront others about racism and that they should not do so if the situation directly threatens their safety. None of the participants recalled moments of experiencing physical violence or threats of violence due to their race, but adoptees should be aware of their safety first before confronting the situation.

Because there is a lack of literature that discusses methods of how to combat racism for adoptees, it would be very beneficial if there were more resources to offer solutions. Both parents and adoptees would benefit from such resources and it is strongly suggested that anti-racism workshops be taught at adoptee events, camps, and adoption agencies. By developing in-person workshops or having online resources, families can better navigate ways to help aid their child through such experiences. Additionally, therapists should become educated about the complex racial issues transracial adoptees face and could teach adoptees healthy ways to cope with the emotional impact of racism.

### **Taking the Steps to Move Forward**

While the study population was very small, it would be beneficial to develop larger, more in-depth studies that focused specifically on the emotional impact racism has on Chinese adoptees, as well as looking further into the types of racism Chinese adoptees specifically face. Studies should also further investigate why conversations surrounding race issues and coping with racism do not occur often within the family in order to help find ways

to initiate these conversations better. By providing more research surrounding this topic, adoption agencies, practitioners, and adoptee support groups are better able to help provide the resources that families might need in order to develop open conversations about race with their child.

Additionally, it is suggested that Asian American history be taught in schools or that parents take the time to educate their child about the history of Asians in America. Because it was reported that participants had little knowledge about Asian American history, it would be beneficial for adoptees to learn about this topic because it can help them understand the racial and cultural significance Asian countries, especially China, have had within the United States over time. Understanding the historical significance behind events that involved Asian Americans can help adoptees and families learn about the deeper meanings behind current stereotypes and microaggressions towards Asians.

In addition to developing more resources for parents and adoptees to learn about race issues, it is also recommended that more Chinese adoptee and Chinese culture events occur. Having access to physical aspects that are a part of Chinese culture are important, but it is also very beneficial for adoptees to have in-person experiences that involve interacting with other Asians, especially Chinese communities. It is suggested that adoptees have these opportunities to interact with other Asians as a way to help promote a stronger racial identity, as well as cultural identity. By having access to interacting within Chinese communities, adoptees can have the opportunity to learn more about the social, political, and societal norms that are also a large part of Chinese culture.

The Chinese adoptee population became more prominent since the establishment of China's one-child policy, but the aftermath of adoption holds a wide variety of issues that

must be further studied. It is crucial to develop more studies that focus specifically on the Chinese adoptee population since many of the infants who were affected by the one-child policy, especially the ones who were adopted during the nineties, are now old enough to help participate in such studies. While there are multiple books, blogs, social media pages, documentaries, and adoption groups that focus on Chinese adoptee experiences, it is crucial to develop more psychological research that looks at the unique experiences Chinese adoptees have, ranging from developing their cultural identity, to understanding race dynamics within the family, to finding ways to combat racism and its emotional impact. Developing more studies surrounding these topics not only provides a platform for adoptees to further express their thoughts, opinions, and emotions regarding their adoption experience, but also will help parents better understand the reality that adoptees live.

As family dynamics continue to change over time, the adoptive family structure becomes increasingly more common. Transracial adoptees hold a unique history and lived experience that involves the development of a multi-dimensional identity. The identities that adoptees have involve a diverse range of influences from their family, friends, school, work, and society as a whole. It is through these influences that develop the many aspects that are a part of the transracial adoptee identity. By expanding the amount of research dedicated to this unique population, adoptive family dynamics can become better understood, adoption agencies can provide better resources, and adoptees can obtain the knowledge and support in order to develop stronger, healthier identities.

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## Appendix A

### Demographics Survey

- Completed using Survey Monkey, approximately 20min.

1. Participant Number: \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is your gender?

-Cis is defined in this context as "of, relating to, or being a person whose gender identity corresponds with the sex the person had or was identified as having at birth" (Merriam Webster).

-Trans is defined in this context as "of, relating to, or being a person whose gender identity differs from the sex the person had or was identified as having at birth" (Merriam Webster).

-Nonbinary is defined in this context as "a person who identifies with or expresses a gender identity that is neither entirely male nor entirely female" (Merriam Webster).

-Agender is defined in this context as "a person who does not have a specific gender identity or recognizable gender expression" (Dictionary.com)

- a) Cis Female
- b) Cis Male
- c) Trans Male
- d) Trans Female
- e) Nonbinary
- f) Agender
- g) Choose not to answer
- h) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

3. What is your date of birth? Please write the month and year. If this is unknown, please write "unknown." If you would like to not answer, please write "choose not to answer." \_\_\_\_\_

4. What is your race/ethnicity?

- a) White
- b) Black/African American
- c) Hispanic/Latino
- d) Asian/Pacific Islander
- e) Native American
- f) Choose not to answer
- g) Unsure
- h) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

5. What region and/or city in China were you adopted from? If this is unknown, please write "unknown". If you would like to not answer, please write "choose not to answer". \_\_\_\_\_
6. When were you adopted? Please write the month and year. If this is unknown, please write "unknown". If you would like to not answer, please write "choose not to answer". \_\_\_\_\_
7. How many siblings do you have in total? Please include both step and non-step siblings and specify the number of each. Step sibling in this context is defined as "the son or daughter of one's stepparent by a former partner" (Merriam-Webster). If you would like to not answer, please write "choose not to answer".  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Please specify the total number of siblings who lived in your household while you were growing up. Please include both step and non-step siblings and specify the number of each. If you would like to not answer, please write "choose not to answer". \_\_\_\_\_
9. Sibling 1: Is the sibling biologically related to you? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA" in the "other" box.
  - a) Yes
  - b) No
  - c) Unsure
  - d) Choose not to answer
  - e) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
10. Sibling 1: Is the sibling adopted? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA" in the "other" box.
  - a) Yes
  - b) No
  - c) Unsure
  - d) Choose not to answer
  - e) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
11. Sibling 1: Is the sibling a step sibling? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA" in the "other" box.
  - a) Yes
  - b) No
  - c) Unsure
  - d) Choose not to answer

- e) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
12. If Sibling 1 is adopted, where were they adopted from? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA." If you would like to not answer, please write "choose not to answer." \_\_\_\_\_
13. At what age was Sibling 1 adopted? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA." If you would like to not answer, please write "choose not to answer." \_\_\_\_\_
14. How old is Sibling 1? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA." If you would like to not answer, please write "choose not to answer." \_\_\_\_\_
15. What is Sibling 1's gender? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA" in the "other" box.
- a) Cis Female
  - b) Cis Male
  - c) Trans Female
  - d) Trans Male
  - e) Agender
  - f) Unsure
  - g) Choose not to answer
  - h) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
16. What is Sibling 1's race/ethnicity? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA" in the "other" box.
- a) White
  - b) Hispanic/Latino
  - c) Black/African American
  - d) Native American
  - e) Asian/Pacific Islander
  - f) Unsure
  - g) Choose not to answer
  - h) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
17. Sibling 2: Is the sibling biologically related to you? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA" in the "other" box.
- a) Yes
  - b) No
  - c) Unsure

- d) Choose not to answer
- e) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

18. Sibling 2: Is the sibling adopted? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA" in the "other" box.

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Unsure
- d) Choose not to answer
- e) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

19. Sibling 2: Is the sibling a step sibling? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA" in the "other" box.

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Unsure
- d) Choose not to answer
- e) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

20. If Sibling 2 is adopted, where were they adopted from? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA." If you would like to not answer, please write "choose not to answer." \_\_\_\_\_

21. At what age was Sibling 2 adopted? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA." If you would like to not answer, please write "choose not to answer." \_\_\_\_\_

22. How old is Sibling 2? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA." If you would like to not answer, please write "choose not to answer." \_\_\_\_\_

23. What is Sibling 2's gender? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA" in the "other" box.

- a) Cis Female
- b) Cis Male
- c) Trans Female
- d) Trans Male
- e) Agender
- f) Unsure
- g) Choose not to answer
- h) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

24. What is Sibling 2's race/ethnicity? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA" in the "other" box.

- a) White
- b) Hispanic/Latino
- c) Black/African American
- d) Native American
- e) Asian/Pacific Islander
- f) Unsure
- g) Choose not to answer
- h) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

25. Sibling 3: Is the sibling biologically related to you? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA" in the "other" box.

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Unsure
- d) Choose not to answer
- e) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

26. Sibling 3: Is the sibling adopted? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA" in the "other" box.

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Unsure
- d) Choose not to answer
- e) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

27. Sibling 3: Is the sibling a step sibling? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA" in the "other" box.

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Unsure
- d) Choose not to answer
- e) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

28. If Sibling 3 is adopted, where were they adopted from? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA." If you would like to not answer, please write "choose not to answer." \_\_\_\_\_

29. At what age was Sibling 3 adopted? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA." If you would like to not answer, please write "choose not to answer." \_\_\_\_\_
30. How old is Sibling 3? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA." If you would like to not answer, please write "choose not to answer." \_\_\_\_\_
31. What is Sibling 3's gender? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA" in the "other" box.
- a) Cis Female
  - b) Cis Male
  - c) Trans Female
  - d) Trans Male
  - e) Agender
  - f) Unsure
  - g) Choose not to answer
  - h) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
32. What is Sibling 3's race/ethnicity? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA" in the "other" box.
- a) White
  - b) Hispanic/Latino
  - c) Black/African American
  - d) Native American
  - e) Asian/Pacific Islander
  - f) Unsure
  - g) Choose not to answer
  - h) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
33. Sibling 4: Is the sibling biologically related to you? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA" in the "other" box.
- a) Yes
  - b) No
  - c) Unsure
  - d) Choose not to answer
  - e) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
34. Sibling 4: Is the sibling adopted? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA" in the "other" box.

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Unsure
- d) Choose not to answer
- e) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

35. Sibling 4: Is the sibling a step sibling? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA" in the "other" box.

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Unsure
- d) Choose not to answer
- e) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

36. If Sibling 4 is adopted, where were they adopted from? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA." If you would like to not answer, please write "choose not to answer." \_\_\_\_\_

37. At what age was Sibling 4 adopted? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA." If you would like to not answer, please write "choose not to answer." \_\_\_\_\_

38. How old is Sibling 4? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA." If you would like to not answer, please write "choose not to answer." \_\_\_\_\_

39. What is Sibling 4's gender? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA" in the "other" box.

- a) Cis Female
- b) Cis Male
- c) Trans Female
- d) Trans Male
- e) Agender
- f) Unsure
- g) Choose not to answer
- h) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

40. What is Sibling 4's race/ethnicity? If you do not have any siblings, please write "not applicable" or "NA" in the "other" box.

- a) White
- b) Hispanic/Latino

- c) Black/African American
- d) Native American
- e) Asian/Pacific Islander
- f) Unsure
- g) Choose not to answer
- h) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

41. What is your primary caregiver's relation to you? Primary caregiver is defined in this context as "someone who is or was primarily responsible for the daily care of you".

- a) Mother
- b) Father
- c) Stepmother
- d) Stepfather
- e) Grandmother
- f) Grandfather
- g) Aunt
- h) Uncle
- i) Cousin
- j) Brother
- k) Sister
- l) Unsure
- m) Choose not to answer
- n) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

42. What is your primary caregiver's current age? If this is unknown, please write "unknown." If you would like to not answer, please write "choose not to answer."

\_\_\_\_\_

43. What is the occupation of your primary caregiver? If this is unknown, please write "unknown." If you would like to not answer, please write "choose not to answer."

\_\_\_\_\_

44. What is the race/ethnicity of your primary caregiver?

- a) White
- b) Hispanic/Latino
- c) Black/African American
- d) Native American
- e) Asian/Pacific Islander
- f) Unsure
- g) Choose not to answer
- h) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

45. What is the highest degree or level of education achieved by your primary caregiver? If currently enrolled, highest degree received.

- a) No schooling completed
- b) Elementary school to 8<sup>th</sup> grade
- c) Some high school, no diploma
- d) High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (ex: GED)
- e) Trade/technical/vocational training
- f) Some college credit, no diploma
- g) Associate degree
- h) Bachelor's degree
- i) Master's degree
- j) Doctorate
- k) Unsure
- l) Choose not to answer
- m) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

46. What is your secondary caregiver's relation to you? Secondary caregiver is defined in this context as "someone besides the primary caregiver who is or was also primarily responsible for the daily care of you".

- a) Mother
- b) Father
- c) Stepmother
- d) Stepfather
- e) Grandmother
- f) Grandfather
- g) Aunt
- h) Uncle
- i) Cousin
- j) Brother
- k) Sister
- l) Unsure
- m) Choose not to answer
- n) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

47. What is your secondary caregiver's current age? If this is unknown, please write "unknown." If you would like to not answer, please write "choose not to answer."

\_\_\_\_\_

48. What is the race/ethnicity of your secondary caregiver?

- a) White
- b) Hispanic/Latino
- c) Black/African American
- d) Native American
- e) Asian/Pacific Islander
- f) Unsure
- g) Choose not to answer
- h) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

49. What is the highest degree or level of education achieved by your secondary caregiver? If currently enrolled, highest degree received.

- a) No schooling completed
- b) Elementary school to 8<sup>th</sup> grade
- c) Some high school, no diploma
- d) High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (ex: GED)
- e) Trade/technical/vocational training
- f) Some college credit, no diploma
- g) Associate degree
- h) Bachelor's degree
- i) Master's degree
- j) Doctorate
- k) Unsure
- l) Choose not to answer
- m) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

50. What is the occupation of your secondary caregiver? If this is unknown, please write "unknown." If you would like to not answer, please write "choose not to answer." \_\_\_\_\_

51. Did you have any other caregivers, besides your primary and secondary caregivers, who are or were also responsible for your care?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Unsure
- d) Choose not to answer

52. What is additional caregiver 1's relation to you? If you did not have an additional caregiver, please write "not applicable" in the "other" box.

- a) Mother

- b) Father
- c) Stepmother
- d) Stepfather
- e) Grandmother
- f) Grandfather
- g) Aunt
- h) Uncle
- i) Cousin
- j) Brother
- k) Sister
- l) Unsure
- m) Choose not to answer
- n) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

53. What is additional caregiver 1's current age? If this is unknown, please write "unknown". If you would like to not answer, please write "choose not to answer". If you did not have an additional caregiver, please write "not applicable".

\_\_\_\_\_

54. What is the race/ethnicity of additional caregiver 1? If you did not have an additional caregiver, please write "not applicable" in the "other" box.

- a) White
- b) Hispanic/Latino
- c) Black/African American
- d) Native American
- e) Asian/Pacific Islander
- f) Unsure
- g) Choose not to answer
- h) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

55. What is the highest degree or level of education achieved by additional caregiver 1? If currently enrolled, highest degree received. If you did not have an additional caregiver, please write "not applicable" in the "other" box.

- a) No schooling completed
- b) Elementary school to 8<sup>th</sup> grade
- c) Some high school, no diploma
- d) High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (ex: GED)
- e) Trade/technical/vocational training
- f) Some college credit, no diploma
- g) Associate degree

- h) Bachelor's degree
- i) Master's degree
- j) Doctorate
- k) Unsure
- l) Choose not to answer
- m) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

56. What is the occupation of additional caregiver 1? If this is unknown, please write "unknown". If you would like to not answer, please write "choose not to answer". If you did not have an additional caregiver, please write "not applicable".

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57. Is/was there anyone else primarily responsible for your care besides "additional caregiver 1"?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Unsure
- d) Choose not to answer
- e) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

58. What is additional caregiver 2's relation to you? If you did not have an additional caregiver, please write "not applicable" in the "other" box.

- a) Mother
- b) Father
- c) Stepmother
- d) Stepfather
- e) Grandmother
- f) Grandfather
- g) Aunt
- h) Uncle
- i) Cousin
- j) Brother
- k) Sister
- l) Unsure
- m) Choose not to answer
- n) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

59. What is additional caregiver 2's current age? If this is unknown, please write "unknown". If you would like to not answer, please write "choose not to answer". If you did not have an additional caregiver, please write "not applicable".

---

60. What is the race/ethnicity of additional caregiver 2? If you did not have an additional caregiver, please write "not applicable" in the "other" box.

- a) White
- b) Hispanic/Latino
- c) Black/African American
- d) Native American
- e) Asian/Pacific Islander
- f) Unsure
- g) Choose not to answer
- h) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

61. What is the highest degree or level of education achieved by additional caregiver 2? If currently enrolled, highest degree received. If you did not have an additional caregiver, please write "not applicable" in the "other" box.

- a) No schooling completed
- b) Elementary school to 8<sup>th</sup> grade
- c) Some high school, no diploma
- d) High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (ex: GED)
- e) Trade/technical/vocational training
- f) Some college credit, no diploma
- g) Associate degree
- h) Bachelor's degree
- i) Master's degree
- j) Doctorate
- k) Unsure
- l) Choose not to answer
- m) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

62. What is the occupation of additional caregiver 2? If this is unknown, please write "unknown". If you would like to not answer, please write "choose not to answer". If you did not have an additional caregiver, please write "not applicable".

\_\_\_\_\_

63. Is/was there anyone else primarily responsible for your care?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Unsure
- d) Choose not to answer
- e) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

64. Thank you for participating in the demographics survey! Please fill in anything else you'd like to tell me or simply type "NA".

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## Appendix B

### Interview Questions

- Completed through Skype/phone call, approximately one to two hours.

Opening question: I see you're from \_\_\_\_ (insert their location). Is that where you mainly grew up? Tell me a bit more about your experience growing up in \_\_\_\_\_ (insert location of place(s) where participant grew up). What was it like going to school in that area?

Culture:

1. Was adoption a topic that was openly discussed with you? If so, in what ways did your family approach this topic?
2. What do you think it means to be Chinese?
3. Have you ever not felt Chinese? What are some specific memories of these moments, if any?
4. Did your parents/main caretakers expose you to aspects of Chinese culture? If they did, how so? Did you....

-Take Chinese language lessons?

-Learn Chinese dance?

-Celebrate Chinese holidays?

-Eat Chinese food or learn how to make it?

-Have Chinese artifacts/goods/toys in the home?

-Visit Asian culture museums or historic sites?

-Travel to China?

-Read books or watch movies about China?

-Listen to Chinese music?

-Watch Chinese shows?

-Are there any specific memories of encountering these aspects of Chinese culture?

-If not, did you/do you have a desire to learn about the culture? What aspects do you desire to learn about specifically?

5. Do you feel that these forms of exposure helped you form your identity and who you are today? In what ways do you feel this helped form your identity?
6. Do you feel connected to Chinese culture? In what ways do you feel connected, if at all? Are there any specific moments where you felt connected?

7. Are there any instances where you saw yourself as different from other Chinese people? When? How did these instances make you feel when you saw yourself as different?

Race:

1. Did your parents ever discuss issues of racial privilege, politics, and power? Can you recall any specific details from when those issues were discussed? Were there other ways you learned about these issues? Can you tell me who else you discussed these issues with possibly?
2. To what extent did your parents discuss racism and race issues with you while growing up? Can you tell me who else you discussed these issues with possibly? Do you recall any specific moments of these discussions?
3. Do you feel you have experienced forms of racism? What were some of those instances? Have you experienced...

-Racial slurs?

-Stereotyping?

-Mocking?

-Teasing/taunting?

-Racially-motivated physical violence?

-Threats of violence?

-Exclusion?

-Microaggressions? (Merriam-Webster Definition: a comment or action that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group (such as a racial minority)...behavior or speech that is characterized by such comments or actions (2007)) ex: "You're really pretty for a black girl."

4. If you experienced forms of racism, how did you handle the situation? How did you feel when the situation occurred?
5. Did your family discuss methods of how to handle racist situations while growing up? What were their suggested methods for handling such situations? Were there any other ways you learned about handling racist situations?