

MAKING MOTHERHOOD: EXPLORING TRANSNATIONAL ADOPTION
PRACTICES BETWEEN CANADA AND CHINA
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Motherhood: Exploring Transnational Adoption Practices between Canada and China.

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Abstract

The adoption of children across international borders has emerged as an important cultural phenomenon. It shapes the way North Americans understand families, and forms relationships between sending and receiving countries. This dissertation explores the transnational adoption of children between Canada and China with a focus on the subjective experiences of Canadian women who have adopted children from China, their dreams, motivations and lived experiences of becoming an adoptive mother. Highlighting these narratives, this dissertation serves to balance critique with advocacy, and complicates the binary opposition in both scholarly and popular culture presentations of transnational adoption as either 'good' or 'bad'. The dissertation also explores the social pressures that Canadian women endure and how gender expectations and cultural ideas of femininity depend on a woman experiencing motherhood. Through the window of transnational adoption this dissertation examines discourses about infertility, philanthropy, kinship, gender and the construction of transnational adoption as kidnap or rescue.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

To some extent [this is] the dilemma in almost every international adoption; that terrible misfortune for some can bring extraordinary joy to others (Seabrook 2011:1).

This dissertation is an ethnographic project exploring transnational adoption between Canada and China. It is not a comprehensive ethnography as such, but rather an exploration of the voices of Canadian adoptive mothers, bringing attention to their enthusiasm, struggles and experiences. There is a plethora of literature on transnational adoption discussing race, history, and adoption as a consumer activity. There has also been a great deal of scholarly attention to the social and political consequences of global connections associated with the movement of children across borders and into North American families (Anagnost 2000, 2004, Briggs 2003, 2012, Brookfield 2012, Cartwright 2002, Dorow 2002, 2004, 2006a/b, 2010, Dubinsky 2008, 2010, Eng 2003, Fonesca 2003, Howell 2006, Hubinette 2006, Johnson 2002, 2004, 2005, Kim 2003, Klein 2000, Leinaweaver 2007, Modell 1999, 2002, Solinger 2001, Strong-Boag 2006, Volkman 2003a/b). This dissertation draws from and contributes to this body of literature with a unique perspective coming from the Canadian women who participate in transnational adoption. The story of what motivates, inspires and drives these women to adopt from China is complex. It is entrenched in a myriad of factors including a colonial legacy of 'saving' children from developing countries, as well as social and cultural expectations about femininity and womanhood.

As part of this ethnographic project, I interviewed adoptive mothers who had adopted children at various moments in the adoption cycle in China. It was multi-sited research taking place in three locations: with adoptive mothers in Canada, with foreign adoptive mothers in China and focusing on North American media portrayals of adoptive mothers.

From my conversations with these women, it is clear that they are conscious that the global politics of transnational adoption are complex. It is also clear that, at least to some extent, these women think critically about the common narrative that transnational adoption is a child-saving measure. “What a lucky girl!” is a comment that everyone with an adopted daughter from China has heard from those in their communities. Adoptive parents often respond to this statement by saying: “No, we are the lucky ones” (Rauhala 2008: ix). As demonstrated both in my interviews with Canadian adoptive mothers and in adoption memoirs collected from other Canadian parents in the volume edited by Ann Rauhala, *The Lucky Ones*, adoptive parents challenge the popular cultural narrative of ‘saving’ a child from abroad. These families want, painfully, sometimes desperately, a child.

This dissertation uses the voices of Canadian mothers as a window through which to explore a variety of issues such as: transnationalism, infertility, philanthropy, media/popular culture depictions of adoption, and changing ideas about the construction

of the family. Moreover, the dissertation also highlights the complexity of the discourse on transnational adoption which straddles uncomfortably between tropes of child rescue and child kidnap (Briggs 2012, Dubinsky 2010).

For many of the women I interviewed, infertility provided the main impetus to adopt, while any humanitarian motivations were secondary. In some cases it seems that women who adopt transnationally accept that there might be corruption and controversies surrounding transnational adoption, but believe that through diligent research on various adoption programs and choosing programs which have ratified with the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Inter-country Adoption better known as The Hague Adoption Convention, they can protect their families from the darker side of adoption. Perhaps couples are willing to overlook the blemished reputation of transnational adoption through the division of transnational adoptions into two categories: 'good' and 'bad' adoptions. This dichotomy has been created by adoptive parents and professionals in order to separate themselves from certain elements of adoption which do not fit their ideology of child-saving. For many women of 'advanced maternal age', the decision to adopt transnationally is a practical one. There is a complexity of factors, desires and social pressures shaping a woman's decision to adopt a child from China. What is striking is the juxtaposition of suffering in two geographic locations: Chinese women systematically forced to relinquish their children and Canadian women struggling to bring a child into their lives and families. This dissertation focuses more intensely on Canadian women than on Chinese women, and also examines the notion of reproductive 'choices' and the public surveillance of

these choices.

The marriage between two contrasting social problems (infertility and overpopulation) in disparate geographic locations is often oversimplified in Canadian culture. Canadians adopting foreign children tend to believe that “they can provide crucial things kids in the developing world might otherwise lack: medical care, educational opportunities, a safe home” (Webley 2013:38). North American couples struggling with infertility sometimes reason that they can build their families while simultaneously providing a home to a child that might otherwise not have one. Though this narrative is not used uncritically, it is reinforced for adoptive parents by the media and in their encounters with people in their communities. This dissertation will highlight the subjective experiences of Canadian women adopting children from China and locate these voices within the context of larger global politics.

It is easy to believe the narrative of needy babies without parents because the media is flooded with images of destitute children from World Vision, Save the Children or Unicef (Briggs 2012). Photographs of destitute children have become standard tropes in journalism and visual culture since World War II to accomplish a number of development goals. Historian Laura Briggs writes that such visual culture “mobilizes ideologies of ‘rescue’ while pointing away from addressing causes” (Briggs 2003:180). The photographs make it difficult to consider that some of these babies might have been stolen or to understand the complexity of poverty leading mothers to relinquish their children. Any cases of stolen children brought to light in the media are

set aside by adoptive mothers as “exceptional” and adoption supporters “passionately insist that crooked practices are not systemic but tragic, isolated cases” (Graff 2008:2).

While the scholarly discourse surrounding transnational adoption is largely critical, cultural scripts have positioned China as an ethical place to adopt. Even critics of adoption such as E. J. Graff seem to suggest that China is less corrupt than other countries involved in relinquishing children through transnational adoption (Graff 2008). With the one-child policy cited as the primary factor behind birth mothers’ relinquishing their children in China, the narrative of abandoned children needing homes resonates strongly in the Chinese case. In addition, a great deal of the literature prior to 2010 seems to portray a surplus of girls in China without enough couples ready to adopt them. In 2004, for example, Amy Klatzkin (a licensed marriage and family therapist specializing in post-adoption therapy), wrote in the introduction to Kay Johnson’s book: *Wanting a Daughter, Needing a Son*; “unfortunately, there aren’t enough foreign adoptive parents to give homes to all the abandoned girls” (Klatzkin 2004:xvii). Such a statement coming from an adoption professional reads like a pitch to recruit more clientele.

These kinds of statements contribute to the reputation that China had, at least until recently, among adoption circles for being bureaucratic and safeguarded from corruption. As one adoptive mother noted, in reference to the process of adopting from China: “you take a number and wait in line” (Anne, Interview, May 20th 2009). A participant in the research of sociologist Sara Dorow echoed this statement, “China has gotten really easy, you submit your paperwork, you travel with a group, you go through and get your baby,

and it's all very simple" (Dorow 2002:160).

Couples select the China adoption program over other adoption programs with less flattering reputations. Guatemala for example, plagued with stories of scandal and corruption, was suspended as a source of adoptions for Canadians in 2001 due to illegal and unethical practices (www.familyhelper.net, accessed march 2012, Dubinsky 2010, Graff 2008). Despite the critiques that accompany the transfer of children from impoverished nations to wealthy nations and wealthy families, Canadian women who adopt from China are adopting from a system they have been taught to believe is acceptable or even praiseworthy. Karen Dubinsky, historian and adoption scholar astutely notes that "adoption of whatever sort, works better in miniature than it does on the big screen. In the abstract it is hideous, but individually it can sometimes- even often- make sense" (cited in Seabrook 2010). Similarly, sociologist Sara Dorow juxtaposes the different lenses through which transnational adoption may be viewed: "the joyful intimacy of the family next to the unjust history that it might recall" (Dorow 2006a:3).

Transnational adoption is under intense scrutiny by adoption critics such as Barbara Katz Rothman (herself an adoptive parent) who suggests, "adoption is a problem itself and not just a solution" (2005:17). Set against a backdrop of complex global politics, this dissertation will explore the intimate context of women's self-understanding and subjective experiences of adopting children from China. The aim here is to be critical of the flawed system of adoption across borders but also to be

empathetic to the adoptive mothers with well-meaning intentions who operate within cultural scripts depicting the rescue of ‘baby girls.’ Finally, this dissertation explores the complexities and tensions of transnational adoption for Canadian women and how it is justified and explained through their narratives.

The dissertation is divided into six chapters including an introduction and conclusion. The remainder of this chapter will outline the larger social and political context in which Canadian adoptive mothers’ personal narratives are situated. It also provides a brief history of transnational adoption. Chapter 2 explores the privacy of intimate lives and shows how this issue posed methodological constraints on my research process. Chapter 3 explores infertility and its consequences for women who want to have children. In this chapter I also examine the metaphors and milestones women refer to in describing their adoption experience and show how women and others in the adoption community connect personal narrative to the cultural script of pregnancy. In so doing, I pose the questions: What is missing from these pregnancy narratives? What parts of the adoption process do they obscure? Chapter 4 explores philanthropy as a motive for adopting Chinese children or working with Chinese orphans. This chapter introduces families without fertility problems who decide to adopt because of a desire to do good within the world and/or because of their religious beliefs. I also provide a short ethnographic account of a Christian foster home for orphaned children with disabilities in China. Chapter 5 explores the public culture of adoption including celebrity involvement in and media coverage of international adoption. I also discuss the ways in which people in public spaces “at home” in Canada

respond to families who have adopted Chinese children and link these responses to the wider media culture of adoption.

Historically transnational adoption was a “humanitarian act,” however, in contemporary times it has transformed “into a widely accepted option for childless couples” (Hillis 1998:239). While transnational adoption has many positive benefits to Canadians such as increasing reproductive options for Canadian women and expanding concepts of kinship based on blood relations, it also has a dark side. The drawbacks and criticisms of transnational adoption are subjects that those inside the adoption circuit are unwilling to talk about and The Hague Adoption Convention has been unable to control. A great deal of adoption literature is very critical of transnational adoption to the extent that it is hard for researchers to be neutral. It is not the sole intention of this dissertation to critique transnational adoption. The academic literature on transnational adoption speaks strongly in the voice of criticism; however popular literature on adoption seems to uncritically perpetuate cultural scripts that position transnational adoption as child-rescue. In this dissertation I intend to problematize this popular idea of rescue and advance a different research project. This dissertation listens to the voices of Canadian adopting women from Canada and relates their suffering in tragic juxtaposition to women in China who are circumstantially forced to relinquish their children. Infertility, I would argue, is a significant problem for Canadian women. I would like to highlight how adoptive mothers struggle to become mothers and how much they really want to add children to their families. This dissertation will discuss the tensions and complexities of transnational adoption and how it is justified in the narratives of

Canadian adoptive mothers.

Historical Context

Canadian adoption scholar Veronica Strong-Boag (2006) has written extensively about the history of adoption in Canada. She details the emotionally charged history of domestic and international adoption by Canadians, outlining some of the attitudes and feelings about adoption that have left a legacy that marks contemporary adoption. For example, she writes about conditions of war, unemployment and poverty and the white middle class compulsion to save the world, especially its children (Strong-Boag 2006). Transnational adoption began in Canada during the Second World War, when Canadian families provided sanctuary for displaced British children and World War II evacuees. For the most part these early waves of child migration did not result in legal adoptions; rather temporary care in ‘wholesome’ Canadian families. These early migrations, albeit temporary, positioned Canada and Canadian families as providing “a better life” for children of poverty than their relinquishing families and nations of origin (Brookfield 2012:191).

Historian Tarah Brookfield (2012) outlines how the energies of Canadian women during the Cold War era were directed towards the welfare of children amid conflict and global insecurity. Brookfield writes that women’s participation in Cold War efforts were maternalistic and performed through acts of care-giving. International foster parent programs were introduced through which Canadian women became “long distance mothers” to children living in sites of Cold War conflict (Brookfield 2012:6). Child

sponsorship eventually evolved into physical adoption and moving these children into North American homes.

In the United States, the evangelical effort of American couple Bertha and Henry Holt in the 1950's played a major role in bringing transnational adoption to the forefront in the USA. The couple adopted eight Korean War orphans in 1954 setting a precedent for other couples to adopt internationally (Graff 2008). In the 1960's and 1970's there were major airlifts of children from Cold War Asia into American families (Brookfield 2012).

Child immigration schemes into Canada were much slower to extend to non-British children. The Canadian federal government was wary of accepting responsibility for the world's children outside of Britain because they were "neither blood kin nor from any of the major ethnic groups existing in Canada at the time" (Brookfield 2012:193). Unofficial White Canada was unwilling to invite foreign children into Canadian nuclear families due to the fears about cultural difference until more liberal ideas began to circulate about ethnicity in the late 1960's (Brookfield 2012). Similar to the Holt family, although decades later, in Canada, Sandra Simpson was moved by the plight of war-torn orphans and adopted a Vietnamese girl named Mai Lien in 1970. Over the next three decades she personally adopted 28 children and helped other Canadian families adopt from Asia (Brookfield 2012).

The script of the past, Strong-Boag argues, plays out as a "Modern Western classic rescue story" (Strong-Boag 2006:ix). This colonial legacy still infiltrates the

contemporary understanding of transnational adoption in North America (Hubinette 2006, 2009). Social workers are positioned as “child-rescue” professionals and “a circle of care” surrounds these children including NGO workers, foster parents and adoptive parents who are united through pity and ideologies of rescue (Strong-Boag 2006, Briggs 2003).

Domestic adoption, historically, was a source of shame for both relinquishing and adopting mothers. The birth mothers were shamed for having given birth to illegitimate children and adoptive mothers were shamed for infertility because having children was a means to affirm their femininity. As a result, adoptees were closed off from extended contact with their relinquishing parents and efforts were made to erase the child’s past entirely (Strong-Boag 2006). In the 1960’s adoption law moved away from matching relinquishing and adopting parents by religious affiliation. Also, increasing ideas about pluralism and multi-culturalism, as well as a reduced shame for adopting parents lead many couples to consider adoption more broadly to include trans-racial adoption. Black and Aboriginal women were more likely to give up their children for adoption than white women or to have their custody surrendered to the courts (Strong-Boag 2006). Biracial adoptions in North America had limited success. Black and biracial children were placed in white families with some good outcomes, especially in Canada. The public discourse surrounding the adoption of First Nations children by white parents, however, was entrenched in stories of bad outcomes and of cultural genocide (Dubinsky 2010).

The term ‘Sixties scoop’ has been used to describe the mass removal of Aboriginal children into the child welfare system. These children often ended up being adopted into Euro-Canadian families. Social workers were unequipped with cultural understanding of the Aboriginal communities they worked in. As a consequence European standards of care were applied to Aboriginal families, making the parents seem unfit to care for their children. For example, Aboriginal families subsisting on game, fish and berries, did not have cupboards full of food stocked in a Euro-Canadian fashion and social workers assumed that the adults were not providing for their children. Children in Aboriginal communities were also cared for within wider kin networks that extended outside those recognized by the Euro-Canadian nuclear family. These Aboriginal children were removed from their homes without consent and placed into non-Aboriginal homes. In many of these homes their cultural heritage was denied and adoptive parents told their adoptive children they were French or Italian instead (Sinclair 2007). The Sixties scoop had devastating impacts on Aboriginal families and children as children growing up in conditions of suppressed identity tend to experience psychological distress at some point in their lives (Sinclair 2007).

The children available for domestic adoption in Canada and the USA, at the end of the twentieth century and the start of the twenty-first century however, are not the kinds of children that most adoptive parents seek; that is, children they consider to be ‘healthy.’ Both types of children (from home or abroad) usually come from circumstances of poverty, however there is a clear divide between “the worthy poor and the unworthy poor” (Ortiz & Briggs 2003:43). Discourse surrounding domestic

adoption in the US is that these children are ‘damaged goods.’ Coming from the urban poor, these children are understood to be an outcome of an undesirable childhood and parenting and cultural discourses portray them as unlikely to develop the character traits of upstanding citizens. The infants and children currently available for adoption in North America are described as ‘toxic’ in comparison to the ‘resilient’ children or the rescuable orphans from abroad (Ortiz & Briggs 2003, Dorow 2006b). Ortiz and Briggs discuss the strong cultural narratives that steer American families away from adopting children from ‘home.’ Adopting domestically, Ortiz and Briggs argue, is a good option because parents are equipped with information about the child’s past and free access to health care for these children. They find it puzzling that couples would turn internationally and spend upwards of \$20,000, negotiate visas and deal with language barriers for children that are sometimes, sick and traumatized. There is also a racial component to this construction of damaged children in domestic adoption. Ortiz and Briggs write that racial ideologies have led to “moral panics over the scarcity of white children for adoption or the medical fragility of crack babies” (Ortiz & Briggs 2003:41). Children from the rural poor of the Global South, on the other hand, are culturally constructed as “victimized by poverty that can be remedied through transformations of the state, modernization, education, technology and science” (Ortiz & Briggs 2003: 41).

With domestic adoption there is also the fear that birth mothers could have a last minute change of heart. This feeling of panic on the part of adoptive parents is assuaged when adopting from abroad, especially from China where relinquishing

children is illegal and therefore relinquishing parents cannot easily be traced. Birth parents who abandon their children in China do so at great risk. Usually children are left carefully though inconspicuously in crowded spaces or in the middle of the night at an orphanage door so that the children will be quickly found and outside of harm's way. These actions maximize both the possibilities that the child will be found and that the parents will not be discovered (Johnson 2004).

The first overseas adoptions by North Americans came after World War II in the 1940's, when dislocated German and other European war orphans were relocated into the USA and New Zealand, mostly into military families. There were also placements of Japanese war orphans but to a lesser extent (Gailey 2010, 2006, Weil 1984, Lovelock 2000, Balcom 2012). The first continuous flow of transnational adoption into North America began in the wake of the Cold War. These adoptions were motivated by anti-communist interventionist strategies and Christianity with a focus on saving vulnerable Korean children in 1953 (Briggs 2012). Korea was one of the first countries to engage in transnational adoption on a large scale in the 1950's due to the number of orphaned children sired by American soldiers and increasing numbers of displaced children (Oh 2005, Selman 2009). This wave of adoption was propelled by Christian humanitarianism and the desire to 'save' children from the outcomes of war. It was also fuelled by a movement emerging in the United States that historian Arissa Oh has labelled "Christian Americanism." Oh describes this movement as a secular religion fusing the principles of Christianity with hyper-nationalism and a focus on the family (Oh 2005:162). The zeitgeist of the Cold War period held that it was un-American to be

anything but Christian and positioned the United States as “the savior of the [free] world” (Oh 2005:167). Such ideas propelled families to save children from non-democratic, non-Christian parts of the world. In the late 1970’s countries such as Ecuador, Columbia the Philippines and India joined the transnational adoption circuit. By the 1990’s Romania became the country with the highest rate of transnational adoption but was superseded by China in the mid 1990’s following the initiation of the one-child policy that left many Chinese baby girls displaced (Selman 2009).

Transnational adoption in its early incarnation was touted as a humanitarian activity with the goal of saving children from Communism. There has been a significant shift in the nature of transnational adoption which today is also motivated by infertility. The notion of child-saving, however remains an important factor in motivating prospective parents to adopt transnationally. Instead, I argue, the decision to adopt transnationally is a complicated relationship between wanting a child and wanting to do well for the world.

Visual media portrayals of poor vulnerable children were used to prompt emotional responses from North Americans. Born through these images was a paternalistic ideology of rescue by white people of non-white children (Briggs 2003). The Children’s Fund was created in 1938 in response to the Japanese invasion of China. Families began sponsoring children abroad, a practice which later opened the doors for adopting one (or more). Korean children began to be adopted abroad in 1953 at the end of the Korean War. There were a number of orphaned children sired by American soldiers in Korea during this time period which prompted North Americans to feel it

was their responsibility to save these children (Briggs 2003, 2012).

Operation Peter Pan was a major airlift of children out of Cuba and into the United States in 1960 during the rule of Fidel Castro. There was fear among middle class Cubans that their children would be sent to Soviet labour camps or that their parental custody would be rescinded under a Communist government. As a result some Cuban parents sent their children to the USA to be adopted into American families. Despite the philanthropic motives, half a century later discussions of the airlift still resonate and the perception from Cubans is that many of these children became drug addicts and gang members and that the airlift did more harm than good (Dubinsky 2010). Operation Peter Pan is the name given to this movement of children in Cuba, however it is known in the US by the name of Operation Pedro Pan. Giving it a Spanish name connotes the idea that Cuban parents made their own decisions to relinquish their children, whereas the English name 'Peter' implies American government, English-speaking and CIA influence. It is clear that this period of history is understood differently in these two geographic locations thus highlighting the possibility that contemporary inter-country adoptions are also likely to be understood differently in sending and receiving countries (Dubinsky 2010).

Likewise adoption from Peru, Brazil and Guatemala are riddled with controversy, steering many US and Canadian families to consider adoption options outside of Latin America. Leinaweaver's discussion of Peru (2007) focuses on the local context of orphanages, which are largely used as temporary housing for children to receive medicine, food, shelter and education at times when it is too difficult for

parents to provide these things. Although the parents do not intend to abandon their children in orphanages, by the terms of international standards, these children are considered legally abandoned. Therefore, these children can be adopted abroad, often without informing the relinquishing parents. Similarly, Fonesca (2003) describes the context of Brazil where a child is never really abandoned by local principles. As she demonstrates, when parents agree to adopt their children to another family overseas, they do not grasp the finality of such an arrangement. Guatemala has a particularly shady reputation as a sending country in transnational adoption circuits. Many reports have surfaced about the violent theft of children found being processed for overseas adoption from Guatemala (Graff 2008:3)

Within this scenario of controversy and failure, adoption from China has been positioned as the ethical choice for transnational adoption. In 1979, Deng Xiaoping made population control a central concern in reforming post-Mao China and instituted the one-child policy. Because it is culturally and economically important for Chinese families to have a son, many baby girls have ended up in orphanages. In her analysis of the situation in China, anthropologist Kay Johnson clarifies a common misunderstanding about China that baby girls are unwanted. As evidenced in rural areas for example, the policy has been modified into a “one son/two children” policy. In these regions it is most often the second or third daughter that is relinquished and not the first (Johnson 2004).

Transnational adoption from China began in 1988 with 12 children adopted into the US. In 1991 the number had risen to 61 and by 1992 there were 226. These numbers rapidly increased each year with 330 in 1993 and 787 in 1994. By 1995 the number of children

adopted into the US alone was 2,130 (Johnson 2004). In 1992, the North American and European adoption of Chinese babies began to emerge as a social phenomenon. By this time, foreign adoption was permitted by the Chinese authorities, the course of adoption became smooth and predictable, and the number of Western couples adopting Chinese babies increased exponentially each year (Riley 1997, Johnson, Banghan & Liyao 1998).

Significant to the China adoption program is the policy which requires adopting couples travel to China to receive their children in large groups. These adopting parents are expected to join organized adoption tours of the country; thus there is an emphasis on building memories of their trip to China and a lifelong connection to the homeland of their children (Dorow 2006a/b, Anagnost 2000, 2004). The obligatory trip to China is part of a much larger ideological shift that promotes the celebration of the child's roots and dual identity as both Chinese and American. This makes adoption from China distinctive, as opposed to other transnational adoptions preceding the China program, which emphasized assimilation and masking of dissimilarity. Some transnational adoptees have been encouraged to have a "clean break...set free from the past" and become wholeheartedly American (Yngvesson 2004:169, Anagnost 2004, Howell 2006). The expectation that adoptive parents will make an adoption tour of China also facilitates a consumer culture in adoption tourism.

In addition, the China adoption program set a standard that couples adopting children from China must be between 35 and 50 years of age. The age requirements

were amended in 2007 to allow couples between the ages of 30 and 55 years to enter the China adoption program (Davenport 2006, www.familyhelper.net accessed March 15th, 2013).

The restrictions on and requirements for adopting from China have consistently changed over the years adding restrictions based on weight, health and marital status in 2007. One requirement that has been fairly consistent in the adoption process in China is age. Chinese officials seemed to have a preference for older parents (Johnson 2004). Early on, the Western longing for baby girls was easily paired with the abundance of orphan girls in China. Chinese adoptions are also entrenched in certain ideas about race, notably the perceived “flexibility of Asian differences” (Dorow 2006a:41). Based on the stereotypes of Asian immigrants as ‘model minorities’ (intelligent, hardworking, and respectful of authority) Chinese babies are described as ‘strange but adaptable’ or ‘admirably different but accessible’ (Dorow 2006a:41-43, Shiu 2001). Many Westerners imagine Chinese infants to have a containable difference that is “neither white nor black – interesting without being so different that they would not fit in” (Dorow 2006a:47).

Between 1992 and 2009 Canada was one of the top three countries adopting from China, behind the USA and Spain. The number of people worldwide adopting from China rapidly increased until it peaked in 2005 with 14,496 children. By 2011, however, the numbers dropped to one third of its peak level (Hilborn 2011c). This decline is typical for any international adoption cycle. In China this decline began shortly after a change in policy implemented in 2007 enforcing new eligibility rules restricting who

can apply to adopt from China, including restrictions on length of marriage, health status, income and education levels. This change in policy can be linked to concerns and the discovery of some corruption, but also to an improved child welfare system in China, growing interest in domestic adoption in China and lastly China's desire to avoid the negative image that continuing international adoption can create in the global arena (Hilborn 2011a). The situation in China, as it stands in 2012, is that only those willing to adopt older children and/or disabled children are able to adopt from China. While it used to be that those adopting disabled children were expedited through the process and received their children more quickly, now prospective adopting families must wait in long queues to receive these children. (Hilborn 2011c).

Kidnap/Rescue

In the late 1970s and 1980's the rise in abortion, birth control and greater acceptance of single motherhood in North America resulted in a shortage of children available for adoption inside Western industrialized countries, a situation that has been named "the white baby famine" (Briggs 2012:6). Goodwin points, in particular, to 1973 when the Roe versus Wade case was resolved and first trimester abortions were decriminalized in the US (Goodwin 2010). This 'shortage in children' was met with another demographic shift in women's lives including a rise in the age of marriage, and a rise in maternal age leading to what Briggs calls "a structured increase in impaired fertility" (Briggs 2012:6). Domestic adoption in North America is competitive, unpredictable, lengthy and full of less desirable children leading many couples to consider adopting overseas in a consumer fashion. Current statistics in the US show that

there are 12 applicants for every adoptable child in the USA (Briggs 2012:6). Similarly in Canada, in 2010, the Hague convention reported that Ontario public adoptions were in serious decline (Hilborn 2011c).

Highly publicized cases of celebrities adopting children from abroad such as Angelina Jolie and Madonna highlight that in our collective imagination there are two kinds of adopters: good adopters and bad adopters, “child rescuers and child stealers” (Briggs 2012:3). Good adoptions are philanthropic, magical and a product of fate, while bad adoptions are wrought with theft or the purchase of children. Both of these celebrities adopted children under similar conditions where living parents were easy to track down and yet Jolie has been construed as a hero while Madonna is widely viewed as a villain. Adoption scholar Laura Briggs deconstructs this dichotomy between good and bad adoptions showing how transnational adoption is “simultaneously, an act of love and an act of violence” (Briggs and Marre 2009:1). Women, desperate for children, adopt internationally in a complex and flawed system but they bring these children up in loving families. The end result of well-loved children seems to overshadow the shaky beginnings. Moreover, the current and widespread idea about adoption is that a home, at all costs, is *always* better than an institution (Strong-Boag 2006). Briggs writes that adoption is popularly conceived as such that “while there might be fraudulent or coercive practices in adoption, these exist only in some (bad) adoptions, preserving a space where adoption is an uncomplicated good thing” (Briggs 2012:3).

Furthermore, Briggs points out that there are very few “true orphans,” just

children of poverty (Briggs 2012). The statistics can be misleading. For example, Unicef reported an estimated 132 million orphans worldwide but only 10% of that estimate are infants without living relatives. Most are children over five years old with families in need of financial support (Graff 2008). This evidence is contrary to the narrative that millions of babies are without parents and destined for an institutionalized upbringing if they are not saved by prospective parents in Western countries. Even in China the supply of children is finite.

It is also true that adoption almost always travels in the same direction: from poor women to wealthy ones. Adoption almost never travels in the opposite direction. Historian Rickie Solinger writes, “the way the ‘adoption market’ took form after *Roe v. Wade* is a case study of how some women’s choices depend on exploiting the relative choicelessness of other women” (Solinger 2001:22). She also argues that relinquishing mothers in developing countries are “desperate” and “that desperation had created the baby supply for the new baby consumers: wealthy choice makers from the United States, Canada and Western Europe” (Solinger 2001:23). It is interesting that Solinger argues that consumer interests overshadow the child-rescue intentions of inter-country adoption. The multiple layers of critique highlights the complexity of the discourse on transnational adoption.

On the other hand, adoption activists such as Elizabeth Bartholet argue that critics of adoption slow down or stand in the way of the process of placing children into loving homes and therefore extend the amount of time these children spend in damaging

institutions. In her work, Bartholet underlines the harmful impact on children of growing up in institutions in terms of physical and emotional development (Bartholet 2010). In contrast, the work of anthropologist Barbara Yngvesson (2010) focuses on the violence inherent in adoption kinship narratives that emphasize rescue and thereby erase or obscure a child's history. Adding to this discussion, historian Karen Dubinsky argues that rescue narratives in adoption impose Western ideas of a childhood which includes an extended period of innocence. Briggs complicates this dialogue contending that "adoption may sometimes be the best outcome in a bad situation, but it is always layered with pain, coercion and lack of access to necessary resources, with relatives (usually single mothers) who are vulnerable" (Briggs 2012:4).

The tension between kidnap and rescue is a very important theme in this dissertation and is carefully negotiated in my research participant's adoption narratives. Several interview participants problematized the idea of 'rescue' in their narratives, highlighting that adoptive families are astutely aware of the ways in which transnational adoption can be evaluated negatively. There are particular scripts or ways of describing adoption used by people inside the adoption community in order to align themselves with 'good adoptions'. While adoptive families know that there are some questionable or unethical practices involved in transnational adoption, their narratives are carefully constructed in such a way to disassociate their own adoption experience from 'bad adoptions.'

Michele Goodwin, professor of law, has written extensively about the

commodification of children in adoption circuits. Goodwin argues that the less attractive nuances of transnational adoption are often ignored under the assumption that adoption is the best possible outcome for these children (Goodwin 2010). One of the uncomfortable silences in adoption narratives is the transfer of money and any discussion of the market because it is deemed an inappropriate way to talk about children. The use of market terms in conversations about adoption, Goodwin argues, would tarnish the adoption industry.

There are clearly consumer activities involved in transnational adoption but adoption professionals do their best to buffer these experiences so that they do not feel like consumer transactions (Dorow 2010). First of all, adoption is an expensive undertaking which only middle-class families can consider. According to Tessler et al. (1999) the approximate cost of international adoption in the 1990's falls between \$US16,000 – 20,000. These expenses include: having a social worker perform a home study to assess the suitability of the family for adopting internationally, forms and legal documents, adoption fees, document translators, visas, travel, accommodation, food, passports, immigration fees and a donation to the orphanage. More recently, adoption professional Dawn Davenport (2007) listed the total expense for adopting in China at \$US14,000 – 18,000 plus travel expenses (which vary depending on the location of the adopting family). In 2013, the Children's Bridge adoption agency listed the cost estimate for adopting in China as 37,000- 39,000 Canadian dollars (www.childrensbridge.com accessed: August 18th, 2013).

Beyond the cost, there is a price hierarchy for more desirable babies. Goodwin 29

explains how free market forces of supply, demand and preference influence adoption practices; otherwise all adoptions would be equal in cost (Goodwin 2010). The China program, for example, has a competitive edge because the babies are mostly young, healthy and female – all qualities which are highly valued by couples in the market for a child. There was a highly publicized case in 2010 of a Russian boy who was adopted into an American family and later sent back to Russia alone. This case exposes the commercialism embedded in adoption transactions in that a child can be returned if it does not meet expectations (Goodwin 2010). Finally, sociologist Sara Dorow points out how consumer goods are used to create kinship and identity in adopted children. These relationships can be achieved through the purchase of cultural products in racialized or gendered packaging (Dorow 2010). Red thread necklaces, Chinese food, chopsticks and ornamental Chinese dolls in recognizably Chinese clothing are among these cultural products. Adoption scholar Xiaobei Chen refers to these cultural products as “Chinese bites” (both figuratively and literally) and argues that these items “maintain a romantic essentialism about Chinese particularity” (Chen 2005:2). Instead of celebrating authentic Chinese culture, she argues that these items serve to ‘retrench Orientalist stereotypes about China’ (Chen 2005:2).

The consumer side of adoption is silenced in adoption narratives. Stories about love and about magic bringing parents and children together through fate or supernatural forces rather than consumer exchange are prevalent. Chinese adoption stories are often explained through a narrative describing a red thread pulling from the adoptive mother’s heart and connecting to her child in a faraway land. A popular adoption fairy tale

published in English, *The Red Thread*, is based on “an ancient Chinese belief that an invisible, unbreakable red thread connects all those who are destined to be together” (Lin 2007:1). In this story, a queen feels a strange pain in her heart that worsens every day. She sees doctors and scientists but nothing worked to ease the pain in her heart. Finally the queen meets a peddler, who through special lenses can see the red thread being pulled from her heart. The king and queen follow the red thread overseas into a small village in a faraway land. At the end of the red thread is a Chinese baby who did not have any parents. “This baby”, an old woman says, “belongs to you” (Lin 2007:27). The king and queen take the baby home to their castle and the queen never feels the pain in her heart again (Lin 2007). These kinds of narratives fit well and are encouraged by the process of matching children to adoptive families. While it might be a product of chance, or random matching, several research participants believe that they were matched to their child through fate. One of my participants, Claire, for example emphasized the artistic ability of her daughter adopted into a family of artists as “meant to be” (Claire, interview, December 9th 2010).

The adoption market is locked away and tightly guarded by people in the adoption community. When approached in her community with questions about the cost of her adopted children, my participant Anne reacted by saying “You don’t buy a child, that’s what I tell my kids – it’s illegal to buy children. You don’t buy children, I would never participate in something like that” (Anne, Interview, May 20th 2009). Again it seems like she is distancing herself and her family from ‘bad adoption.’ Buying children

from abroad is something that most people want no part of; however, it seems there are details which prospective parents are willing to overlook in a willful sort of ignorance because they really want a child and the tale of poor orphaned girls is so persuasive (Graff 2008).

At the turn of the twentieth century, the sentimental value of children began to outweigh the economic value. Children were culturally constructed as economically worthless and yet emotionally priceless. In the nineteenth century however, the market value of children was culturally acceptable, children were expected to help with farm chores and household tasks. Since the onset of twentieth century putting a price on a child is considered offensive and children should be considered only as an emotional or affective asset to a family rather than an economic one (Zelizer 2010). The reality that transnational adoption costs money cannot be ignored. There are social workers and officials that need to be compensated for their work, and international travel is expensive. In transnational adoption there are both emotional and economic investments and since the transfer of money in adoption is an uncomfortable topic of conversation in adoption circles, emotional investments tend to overshadow the financial ones in everyday conversation. Likewise, adoptive parents engage in “rituals of decommodification” to transform a commodity into a “sentimental possession appropriate to a realm of affect that must be kept separate from the impersonal contract of market exchange” (Anagnost 2004:159). Buying children on the other hand is akin to child theft and has nothing to do with the ‘good’ kinds of adoptions, that are bureaucratic and Hague sanctioned. In *Time* magazine, one adoptive parent stated that

“the drawn-out process made her confident that her daughter was not part of the black market adoption trade” (Webley 2013).

When evidence of corruption forces an adoption program from a specific sending country to shut down, hopeful parents and their money are quickly shifted to the next destination. When it became more difficult and much slower to adopt from China in 2005, 2006 and 2007, families moved on to the Ethiopia adoption program and it hit its peak around this time with a short-lived cycle (Hilborn 2011d).

In 2005, the China program numbers began to drop and fewer children were adopted transnationally from China. This drop derived from “a conscious move by the government through its central authority, the China Centre Demographic of Adoption Affairs” (Selman, cited in Hilborn 2011a). Since prospective parents began to face longer waits without a guarantee of a child, many opted to adopt older children or children with special needs. The demographic of adopted children departing from China changed dramatically. The proportion of baby girls adopted dropped from 95% in 2005, to 74% in 2009. The number of children over 5 years old also increased in this time period from 1.4% to 10.9% and the most dramatic change was the number of children with special needs shifting from 9% to 49% of all children adopted from China (Hilborn 2011a).

The Hague Adoption Convention

The Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Inter-country Adoption better known as The Hague Adoption Convention, was drafted

on April 29th, 1988. The objective of this treaty is “to protect children from wrongful international removals or retentions from their lawful custodians” (Silberman 1994: 210). The treaty emphasizes the creation of a centralized governing body inside each country to oversee all incoming or outgoing transnational adoptions. Efforts must be made to place children in the care of extended families or local communities before international adoption is considered. There must also be limits on the number of adoption agencies authorized to work in the country in order to ensure tight control of the adoption process. The result of this convention, according to experts, has been a sharp decline in fraud and illicit practices (Graff 2008). However, adoption advocates, such as Elizabeth Bartholet argue that the Hague Convention has led many sending nations to curtail international adoptions as they work towards compliance. She states: “As of this point in history, the Hague has been very negative for international adoption. It’s been used as a tool to help shut it down or heavily restrict it in ways that mean instead of 5,000 kids getting a home a year, you might have 20 or 30” (cited in Webley 2013). David Smolin refutes this stance:

Poor practice standards and the harms they produce, prominently including child laundering, are the greatest danger to the future of intercountry adoption. Thus, so-called adoption “advocates” who minimize the significance of such child laundering scandals are themselves inadvertently facilitating the long-term decline of intercountry adoption. Such minimization of child laundering scandals undermines necessary efforts to reform intercountry adoption and to raise practice standards (Smolin 2010:45).

In 2005, China officially joined the Hague Convention. China was the 67th state to join this global convention. An enormous number of international adoptions were processed prior to 2005 under Hague- like conditions, so it would come as a surprise to

many Canadians that China ratified so late into the adoption cycle. Most parents adopting prior to this date assumed that China was already part of the Hague Convention (www.hcc.net, accessed March 3, 2013).

Kinship and Transnationalism

This dissertation deliberately uses the term transnational adoption rather than synonyms such as international adoption or inter-country adoption in order to highlight the connection between two disparate nations. The word ‘transnationalism’ refers specifically to individuals who are simultaneously involved in the social and political life of more than one nation-state (Basch, Schiller & Blanc 1994). A child adopted from China into a Canadian family is a unique kind of immigrant, one who becomes a transnational subject by maintaining ties in both nations. The Chinese government purposefully builds these transnational subjects through adoption tourism, homeland tours and the promise required of Canadian parents to foster a healthy interest in all things Chinese on the part of the adoptee.

Each prospective family, upon being matched with their child, is placed by the adoption agency in an adoption group with several other families with whom they will travel to China. Many of these families build close friendships and keep in contact with each other for long periods of time after returning from China. These adoption tours are carefully choreographed by the adoption facilitators so that families will make these kinds of connections to other adoptive families and visit tourist sites such as the Great

Wall of China. This practice is designed to foster an appreciation of Chinese culture and history and seeks to ensure that the adopted children remain connected to China.

Similarly homeland tours in which families take their children back to visit China are widely available and aim to ensure that adoptees' lives are "not sharply segmented between host and home societies" (Basch, Schiller & Blanc 1994:5).

These practices are deliberately cultivated by the Chinese government in order to build social capital overseas. Only wealthy, educated families meet the criteria for adopting Chinese children and these children are likely to be well educated and attain good social positions in adulthood. I found that many Chinese people believe that kinship based on blood relationships is sufficiently resilient that transnationally adopted children will someday return to China in search of their relinquishing parents. The hope is that they will return as well-educated citizens who can make a valuable contribution to society. Even if these adoptees never return to China in the permanent sense, they will always look Chinese and will remain connected to the national community in China to some extent.

It is also a desirable process for adoptive parents to build transnational families. Social theorist David Harvey identifies 'flexibility' as the cornerstone of late capitalism (Harvey 1989). In a postmodern, post-Fordist context, people, goods, and capital move and circulate. Likewise, anthropologist Aihwa Ong emphasizes the importance of flexible subjects as citizenship becomes less about loyalty to a particular nation-state and more about positioning oneself to participate in global labour markets (Ong 1999).

While Ong's research focuses on the Hong Kong elite who acquire multiple foreign passports for security in unstable political conditions, my research participants have less tangible and more imagined ideas of transnationalism. They have imagined connections to a distant nation rather than the physical documentation such as passports. But these imagined connections could be brokered into tangible economic tools if necessary later in life, perhaps by creating social networks between China and Canada that can be used for economic goals.

The significance of this research is that it speaks to contemporary ideas of motherhood which are more traditional than one might expect. Despite all the different ways to become a mother, biological connections are most often preferred and many women seek the pregnancy experience as a rite of passage to womanhood. There is a great deal of social pressure for women to be mothers as an expression of femininity and altruism. This research focuses on Canadian women while the majority of the literature focuses on Scandinavian or American adoptions. There is a solid foundation in the literature outlining the geopolitical inequalities between sending and receiving countries. This research strives to build on that literature and add complexity and nuance to the story of transnational adoption by focusing on the voices of adoptive mothers.

Chapter 2: Studying Personal Lives

Anthropologists have documented the challenges and unpredictability of ethnographic fieldwork. Close examination of these fieldwork experiences is a useful pedagogical tool (Rabinow 1977, Malinowski 1989, Wolf 1992). My research did not follow the conventional research pattern of entering a community and observing it. Instead it is a compilation of experiences lacking a clearly bounded period of entering the field and leaving it. The adoption community is very exclusive and private and I encountered a great deal of difficulty in entering the community because I lack any obvious personal connection to adoption as an adoptee, relinquishing parent or an adoptive mother. Adoption literature is dominated by those inside the adoption triad of relinquishing parent, adoptive parent and adopted child (Balcom 2011). My own research was clearly shaped by my position outside the adoption triad. In particular, my access to the adoption community was limited and guarded by a number of gatekeepers.

This chapter will explore the challenges of doing research about private lives and outline the diverse range of experiences and encounters that compose this dissertation. Transnational adoption is a particularly interesting site for research because despite the privacy inherent in family life and the cautious interaction outside the adoption community, these adoptive families are very public because the children are often visibly and racially different from their adoptive parents. The visibility of these

families inside of their communities creates spaces for public exploration and negotiation of ideas connected to gender and kinship. This chapter will also explore the tension between the private and public spheres and how these competing pressures shaped my research methodology.

Cultural studies scholar Lauren Berlant (2000) argues that private lives are intimately connected to citizenship. The family is at the center of private lives, therefore the state places restrictions on women's reproductive practices. In addition, my examination of adoption in the public sphere will show that it has come under intense social scrutiny and has sparked controversy when families are criticized for "buying babies" and "outsourcing" their pregnancies to women in less fortunate social and geographic positions (Goodwin 2010). The use of economic terminology in describing women as 'outsourcing' their pregnancies is a critique suggesting that women do not wish to be pregnant. The term 'outsourcing' erases the emotional and physical trauma associated with the experience of infertility. One editorial, for example writes "keen to be mothers and yet not willing to put their careers on hold during the childbearing months, these career-driven women have given a new twist to the concept of outsourcing" (AddPR.com 2010).

My research is multi-sited and includes two geographic locations; Canada and China. I interviewed twenty-six women who had adopted or were in the process of adopting children from China about their subjective experiences of adoptive motherhood. The first phase of my research took place in various cities throughout

Ontario and Quebec. I met with thirteen women in Toronto and smaller towns and suburbs in the Greater Toronto Area, as well as Guelph, Ottawa and Montreal. The second phase of this research took place in Beijing, China where I interviewed women throughout the city who were both expatriates and adoptive mothers to Chinese children. I visited two different institutions on a weekly basis and spent time caring for orphaned children. I also travelled to Shanghai to interview several adoptive mothers. I have included two charts (table 1 and 2) at the end of this chapter to outline the participants chronologically in terms of what year they adopted and what the rules and regulations were for potential adopters to qualify for adopting a child from China in each year. It is worth noting the chronology of adoption requirements because some of the interviewees, especially those who adopted before 2007, would not meet the qualifications to adopt at a later date due to the length of their marriages, or health status.

Speaking reflexively, it is important to acknowledge that my situated positioning as a researcher had a major influence on the type of research I was able to conduct. Due to my age, gender, nationality and funding options, I had greatest access to Canadian women. I am acutely aware that the narratives of these adoptive mothers effectively silence and erase those of both relinquishing mothers and adoptive children. To carry out ethnographic research that would have put the voices of relinquishing mothers in China to the forefront would have required a set of tools and skills that I do not possess. Nonetheless, I recognize that it is a tragic irony that the joy of being able to experience motherhood is brought into the lives of Canadian women at the expense of the suffering

of women in China who have systematically been denied the opportunity to raise the children to whom they gave birth.

Phase I – Canada

The McMaster Research Ethics Board (MREB) suggested that I enlist participants through a recruitment poster that could be sent out to adoption email listservs so that people interested in participating could contact me directly. I found this to be a very ineffective strategy and only had a few responses from these postings. I had to be much more creative in trying to reach people in the adoption community and intensively relied on introductions from my peers. From these initial contacts, I employed the snowball sampling technique asking adoptive mothers to introduce me to other adoptive families. As a result, I met several women who were in the same adoption group, meaning that they travelled to China together and adopted at the same time. Personal introductions and snowball sampling were very effective techniques in conducting this research and I found that adoptive mothers were quite willing to speak to me when approached in this way.

The privacy of the adoption community is protected by gate-keepers including social workers, adoption professionals and website moderators. My first attempts to enter the adoption community were met with resistance. I attended workshops and events in the Greater Toronto Area hosted by the FCC (Families with Children from China) and the ACO (Adoption Council of Ontario). In order to join these communities, I paid membership fees and added myself to their electronic mailing lists. Members are

required to indicate whether they are parents or adoption professionals, and while I did not fit into either category explicitly, I was listed as an adoption professional in the membership rosters. Even though I was welcome to attend events as an adoption professional, when I explained explicitly that I was doing research, this open invitation became more restrictive. Following the recommendations of the McMaster University Research Ethics Board (MREB), I emailed event coordinators for each event to inform them of my status as a researcher. Event organizers hesitated to allow me to attend and only granted me permission with a great amount of persistence. For 'information events' on specific topics related to adoption attended by many adoption professionals, organizers were not overly concerned about my attendance. For a workshop on "Building Bonds of Attachment," for example, the organizer responded: "we would love to have you attend the Training day with Dan Hughes next Wednesday. We would however, prefer that you not approach attendees with questions for your research" (Adoption Professional B, email communication November 7, 2008). In the case of 'how-to' events at which attendees were overwhelmingly prospective parents, I was strongly discouraged from attending.

The email responses were much more tentative stating, for example, "it is a very sensitive topic and often the groups are unpredictable. I am unable to check with them to make sure that it is okay with them to have someone observing" (Adoption professional C, email communication October 30th, 2008). This adoption worker and I exchanged several emails and she suggested that we meet privately at her office so that she could give me a private 'how-to adopt' session. I insisted that I wanted to attend the

actual seminar and explained the merits of participant observation and she was determined that we meet and discuss my research in more detail before she would allow me to attend. In the end, our meeting time was scheduled on the same day as the seminar and she sent me an email stating that I could attend based on the information I had sent her. At this event, I introduced myself to the prospective parents and no persons expressed any objections or concerns about my presence.

Despite the difficulties of gaining permission to attend events, I was able to attend a conference, an adoption resource exchange, a Chinese cooking class organized by the FCC (Families with Children from China), a film screening of adoption-related films and a 'how-to-adopt' workshop. Although I initially encountered resistance, especially from gatekeepers, to my efforts to meet interview participants, I found they were extremely forthcoming and open about their adoption experiences. They often invited me into their homes where I met their children, looked at their photographs and adoption documents, and watched home videos of what are termed by the adoptive parents as "gotcha moments" when a couple first receives their child. Adopting children is such an important experience in these women's lives that sharing the experience was an important affirmation for them. However, they explained that they feel cautious and protective of their stories because of the personal intrusions and public scrutiny they face in their everyday lives as adoptive parents of Chinese children.

Transnational adoption from China has changed drastically since its onset in the 1990's and the experiences of adoptive mothers have changed accordingly. The

remainder of this chapter provides a profile of my research participants. I present these profiles in chronological order according to the year of their adoptions in order to highlight the changes in adoption practices and to outline the demographic of the adoptive mothers in this research. Between 1993 and 2000, adoption from China was fairly unrestricted and adoption agencies accepted most families into the China program, as long as these families or singles had the resources to afford the expenses associated with adopting from abroad (Family Helper 2013). Adoption hit its peak in these ten years. In 2003, 11,230 Chinese children were adopted abroad (Selman 2009). Several of the women whom I interviewed adopted during this period.

Most of my participants fit a particular profile which is white, middle-class and educated. The age distribution of these women at the time of adoption ranges between 30 and 52 years of age (see chart on pages 67-68). While predominant research on transnational adoption portrays it as a white middle class phenomenon, Canadian adoption scholar Chantal Collard's research in Quebec highlights that many immigrant families adopt family members from their countries of origin. She writes that transnational family adoption accounted for between 5.2 percent and 7.2 percent of all inter-country adoptions in Quebec between 1990 and 2004 (Collard 2009).

I met Violet through my social network. Violet, her husband and her teenaged adopted daughter live in Montreal. Violet was 60 years old at the time of our interview and had adopted her daughter fifteen years previously at the age of 45 in 1994. Violet is a primary school teacher and she hosts Chinese language classes in her home for the

Chinese children in her community including her daughter. After our interview, Violet, her husband and daughter invited me to have dinner with them. They took me to a family restaurant, where we continued to talk about their adoption experiences as a family. It was these kinds of experiences that stood out in stark contrast to the privacy of this community imposed by various gatekeepers such as adoption professionals and chat forum moderators. I experienced warm hospitality from Violet and other adoptive parents whom I met and a willingness to share their families and personal lives with me.

I also met Anne through personal connections. Anne was 47 years old at the time of our interview in 2009, she and her husband had adopted three girls from China in 1996, 1999 and 2002. Since Anne had adopted three times at different points in the adoption cycle, she had a comprehensive sense of how adoption was changing over time. Anne works part-time and stays home with her three adopted children. Anne and her husband and three girls from China live in modest accommodations in Ottawa. She explained to me that her humble living arrangements were due to the expense of adopting from China. Anne was extremely involved in the adoption community in Ottawa and worked as a volunteer on the agency newsletter and organizing cultural events. As the volunteer editor of the agency newsletter in Ottawa, Anne had seen my recruitment poster before it went into print and yet did not respond to my call for participants until I reached her through a personal friend. Many women, it seems, are more inclined to participate when connected to the researcher through personal contacts than through an impersonal letter. Given the personal nature of my research focus, consequently, social connections were

essential to my research process.

Melissa and I met in 2010 after I returned from China. I found that my time in China changed the interview dynamics profoundly because by this point I had gained so much knowledge and experience about adoption from China. Melissa had just as many questions for me as I had for her. We met in a coffee house in Ottawa and spent several hours engrossed in conversation. She was 56 at the time of our interview and working as an artist. She had adopted in 1997. Melissa is a unique and talkative woman who took her daughter to a fortune teller in order to piece together fragments of information about her past and generate a narrative about her relinquishing parents.

In 2000 adoption in China started to change slowly beginning with new restrictions limiting the number of families eligible to adopt through the China program. At this time a quota system was introduced whereby five percent of yearly adoptions were allotted for single women. In 2003 and 2004 the China adoption program slowed temporarily due to SARS and measles outbreaks in China. Files were not processed during these periods. A few women mentioned this episode in their interviews, including Kate who adopted her daughter in August of 2003 and reported that it took longer than was predicted due to a SARS slowdown.

I met Kate formally through a recruitment poster; she contacted me by email and said that she was interested in participating in my research. As a person with experience conducting social research herself, Kate was more inclined to actively participate. Kate responded to my notice in the Children's Bridge newsletter and we met in her home in

Ottawa. Kate was 45 years old at the time of our interview and 39 when she adopted in 2003. She was working on her Master's degree in education and working at a research funding agency as an administrative assistant. As part of her Master's program she wrote an auto-ethnography of her experiences as an adoptive mother in her community. The paper, which she sent to me, describes the reaction of people in her community to her bi-racial family and outlines how these comments affected her well-being and the well-being of her daughter. The encounters she wrote about in her paper mirrored many of the experiences other women shared with me and her paper provided an ideal starting point for our interview in which I was able to ask her to expand on such topics.

Kate and her partner were not married when they began to research international adoption. They married immediately when they found out that the rules favoured married couples since only five percent of adoptions were allotted for single women in 2001 when she began the adoption process. Since 2007, the regulations in place would have disqualified Kate and her husband from adopting until they had been married several years.

The other women in my research sample who adopted during these years are Michelle, Grace and Tracy. I came into contact with each of these women through the adoption network via email listserv and newsletter. I met with Michelle at a Starbuck's in Guelph Ontario. Michelle responded to my recruitment poster circulated on the Children's Bridge listserv. She was 43 years old at the time of our interview and had adopted two children from China in 2001 and 2004, both girls.

Grace also responded to my posting circulated through the Children's Bridge adoption agency. I met Grace in a McDonald's restaurant in Oshawa. It was a somewhat unconventional setting for an interview, mostly because it is crowded and does not offer much in terms of privacy; however Grace chose that location so that her daughter could use the play area while we chatted. Grace was 43 years old at the time of the interview and working as a health inspector. When she adopted her daughter in 2002, Grace had been 36 years old. While each woman I met was distinctive and each woman had unique experiences, Grace was particularly distinctive and unlike the other women I met for a few reasons. First of all, I found it interesting that she was willing to talk candidly about her adoption experience directly in front of her daughter. In some instances her young daughter joined our conversation adding insight to how she experiences adoption in her daily life. While all of the women I met said that they try to be open with their adoptive children about the issue of their adoptions, most were hesitant to talk about particular issues such as abandonment or costs in front of their children stating that they were too young to understand. This was especially true for the women with young children.

In addition, Grace and her husband are both ethnically Chinese. Her nationality is Vietnamese and her husband is Hong Kongese and she described her family as a "trans- national family rather than a trans-racial family" (Grace, interview, March 16th, 2009). Grace insisted that her daughter was Canadian rather than Chinese and gave her what she considers a Canadian name and feeds her what she considered to be Canadian food and deemphasized the need to incorporate Chinese culture into her daughter's life. She expressed the desire for her child to grow up as any Canadian child would: "We are

Chinese, we don't need to try to do Chinese things because we are Chinese" (Grace, interview, March 16th 2009).

Tracy is an adoptive mother I met for an interview in a Starbuck's in Whitby, Ontario. Tracy is not only an adoptive mother but also an adoption professional. She published an article about her adoption experience in an adoption newsletter. She printed her email address in the newsletter offering advice and support to potential parents. I took this opportunity to email her and let her know about my research and she agreed to participate in an interview. Tracy was 44 years old at the time of our interview in 2009 and she had adopted two girls from China in 2001 and 2004. It was her personal experiences with adoption that guided her career path. She began working as a social worker and adoption practitioner after adopting her daughters.

A large proportion of my research participants adopted in 2005, 2006 and 2007. This was right near the peak of the China adoption boom and just before the most restrictive policy changes were applied. It is worth noting that those who adopted children in 2007 had been processed for adoption almost two years prior to the date of actually receiving their children and therefore were not scrutinized under the same set of regulations that came into play in 2007. I met two women whom I eventually interviewed at a Chinese cooking class in Toronto organized by FCC (Families with Children from China). We learned to make dumplings, savory pancakes and some other basic Chinese dishes one afternoon in April 2009. Most of the parents in the class seemed to know each other or at least to recognize each other. In an effort to include me, one mother, Jane, asked me

about my children and I told her about my research. She responded very enthusiastically and offered not only to be interviewed but to introduce me to her friends in her adoption group. I met Jane for an interview in a café in Toronto; she was one of the youngest of all my research participants. At age 36 she was just a few years my senior. She adopted in 2007 at the age of 34. Jane is trained as an occupational therapist, though at the time of our interview, she was taking time away from her career to stay at home with her new (adopted) daughter. I found Jane to be especially open about her experiences dealing with infertility and adoption including a first adoption attempt which was not completed due to the child's sudden and urgent health issues. Jane and her husband had travelled alone to China several weeks after the other families in their group yet she remained closely connected with her adoption group becoming very close friends with several women such as Heather and Mary, whom I also interviewed.

The lives of the adoptive mothers I interviewed are entangled in very intimate ways and in each of their stories there were numerous connections and parallels. For example, when Jane learned that her prospective son could not be adopted, she was unsure whether she would ever have the chance to adopt another child from China. Her mother had made a quilt in anticipation of this child. When Jane discovered her adoption would not go through, she gave the quilt to Heather for her daughter. When I visited Heather in her home she showed me that quilt, proudly displayed on the wall outside her daughter's bedroom.

Heather also lives in Toronto. She is a French language teacher, and was 48 years old at the time of our interview. She had adopted her daughter in 2007 at the age of 46. Heather was one of the most enthusiastic participants in my research, she showed me her photo albums, home videos and took me to her daughter's bedroom to show me all of the adoption literature she had acquired as well as the trinkets she had brought back from China. I spent nearly an entire day at her home. Heather's husband is a professional writer and at one point he published a piece about his family and their adoption experiences in a Canadian parenting magazine. I had read this piece prior to our interview without knowing or anticipating that I would meet that particular family.

Jane's other friend, Mary, was 43 years old at the time of our interview and working in the film industry. She adopted in 2007 at the age of 41. We met in a diner in Toronto for breakfast and had our interview over bacon and eggs. Mary has scoliosis and had to have a letter from her doctor stating that this medical condition would not interfere with her capacity to be a mother. Although her scoliosis did not prevent her from adopting a Chinese child at this time, it did slow down the process and she was unable to travel with her adoption group to China. Mary started the adoption process in 2005, and had already been matched with her child before the regulation changes implemented in 2007. Had she waited and started the process later, she would not have qualified to adopt from China due to her status as a person living with chronic disease. While slated to travel together in the same adoption group, neither Jane, Heather, nor Mary actually travelled to China together. Nevertheless, these women remain extremely close friends and celebrate their children and each adoption milestone together.

Cynthia was also at the cooking class, though I did not meet her at that event. I met her husband Greg. While talking with Jane about my research, Greg expressed interest in participating. While he was disappointed to learn that I was only interviewing women he took my name card for his wife and later encouraged her to contact me. Cynthia was decidedly more reserved than the other women I met, however she warmed up over the course of our interview. Cynthia was 42 years old when we met in 2009, however she was 39 when she adopted in 2006.

I met and interviewed Liz who responded to my recruitment poster in the *Children's Bridge* Adoption Agency newsletter. I met Liz in her home in Burlington, Ontario. She was 41 years old at the time of our interview and working for the federal government. In 2006, when she was 39, Liz had adopted a special needs boy through a program for children with special needs called "China Waiting Children: Green Stream process" (http://www.childrensbridge.com/pages/china_wc.html accessed: August 18th, 2013).

Finally, I met Rachel and her husband in 2011 through my social network in Hamilton. We were introduced one evening when I was at their place of business. We spoke for some time in the store and discussed their adoption experiences in great detail and later we exchanged emails to arrange an interview. It was remarkable because we discussed deeply personal details of their experiences with infertility and adoption right there at their place of business with all of their employees and customers able to hear us. It seems therefore that despite the extreme exclusivity of the adoption community guarded by professional gatekeepers that people were actually quite ready and willing to

talk about their experiences and in some cases found it cathartic.

During these peak years between 2003 and 2007, 35,000-45,000 children were adopted from China annually (Smolin 2011). Orphanages during this time period were offered great financial incentives to place children for adoption on the international market. Professor of Law, David Smolin has written extensively and followed inter-country adoption closely for the last two decades. His research suggests that this peak in transnational adoption was “driven by orphanages entering the illicit market for healthy baby girls” (Smolin 2011:62). He claims that until 2005 China’s inter-country adoption system was believed to be free of abusive practices such as child laundering and trafficking. A few highly publicized instances in Hunan province of child trafficking in 2005 changed this public image very rapidly. Two women were arrested at the Hengyang county rail station with several babies. As the case developed it was revealed that the Hengyang Social Welfare Institute had been purchasing babies from intermediaries since 2002. While the Chinese government tried to portray this as an anomalous situation, accumulating evidence pointed to a systemic problem with inter-country adoption in China (Smolin 2011, Smolin 2005). By 2007, the Chinese administration began to tighten its borders. New regulations were imposed in order to limit the number of eligible parents and eventually brought the whole adoption program to a halt. In 2012, adoption programs stopped accepting new applications into the China program because the waitlist for a child (without any special needs) began to exceed 5 years (www.childrensbridge.com Accessed: July 17th, 2012). The estimating waiting time for a special needs child listed on the Children’s Bridge website prompts visitors

to contact the office for a current estimate (www.childrensbridge.com accessed: August 18th, 2013).

Phase II – China

The second stage of my research was located in China. Most of my research took place in Beijing, but I also travelled to Shanghai to complete three interviews. I spent a total of ten months in China beginning in September 2009 and ending in July of 2010. I completed ten interviews with expatriate women living in China who had adopted Chinese children. I made contact with these women through voluntary work, involvement in the expatriate community, advertisements on an online listserv, personal contacts, the Canadian embassy and local adoption agencies. A number of these women had both biological children and adopted children; as a result, this phase of the research included a much greater range of experiences because most of the women I interviewed in Canada were first-time parents. Many of the participants in this phase of my research were quite different from those described in the first section of this chapter, not only because of their geographic location. Many of these women were not childless women driven to adopt from China by infertility. The two groups of participants are united, however, in their philanthropic motives and their dedication to the ideal of providing a ‘better life’ for their adopted children.

In September 2009, I received a Chinese Government Scholarship (CGS) to study Mandarin language at Beijing Foreign Studies University for two semesters. I studied

Mandarin while conducting my research concurrently. I did a great deal of travelling in Beijing and Shanghai during the course of my research and basic language skills were absolutely essential. I lived in a student dormitory in the west part of town, which was predominately a Chinese district. Most foreigners in Beijing live on the east side of town or in Shunyi (the wealthy suburbs near the airport), therefore, I spent a fair amount of time on public transportation. Originally my research plan in China was to shadow groups of families as they went through the adoption process doing things such as receiving their children, sightseeing, having medical exams and processing their immigration papers. I contacted numerous agencies across Canada requesting assistance in connecting with adoptive families during the process of receiving their child in China. However, the contact persons for these agencies either did not respond, rejected my request outright or rejected me after speaking with others within their agency. One response stated clearly:

We have had this request before from reporters and grad students who were interested in documenting the adoption process. This is a very private time for our families and their children and to date we have not had a family who felt comfortable sharing this process. We can, however, approach families who will be traveling in the next 6 months and if they are interested we can pass along your contact information to them (Adoption Professional A, email communication February 6th, 2010).

While several women did agree to meet me for an interview without having previously met me, the trip to China to meet their child for the first time is such an intensely private and emotional family moment that it was unlikely that people would agree to allow me to join them on their adoption journey. My experience in shadowing adoptive families was not that promising because I did not have any

opportunity to meet prospective parents and earn their trust. I might have spent time in specific locations on the adoption circuit such as the silk market, the Beijing Zoo, the adoption hotels, the airport and the medical centre where adoptive children get their check-ups and immunizations. However, this strategy was not fruitful because I could not predict when adoption groups would arrive in these locations and agencies were unable to disclose this information. Moreover, I had to be very strategic in how I spent my time due to the high demands of my language training and volunteer commitments. I thought that individuals who had the chance to meet me might be open to having me join them on their adoption journey. I had a lot to offer these families given my improving linguistic competency in Mandarin. I was able to meet some of these families while working at a Beijing orphanage and the orphanage officials approached these families on my behalf. Yet these families still turned down my request to join them on their adoption journey stating that it was a private family matter that they preferred not to share with anyone.

In China, children in orphanages must return to the city where they were abandoned in order to process their adoptions. The orphanage routinely sends a caretaker from the orphanage with the child on these journeys. I asked the orphanage facilitators whether this was a role I could perform since I knew the children and had basic language capabilities. However the orphanage staff felt that the caretaker needed to be fluent in Chinese in order to ensure that there were no problems in the adoption process.

At this point it seemed that I had exhausted all avenues for research in China with

adoptive parents; however I made an effort to adapt and find new ways to conduct my research in China. I learned through an American expatriate classmate that there were many expatriate families in China who had adopted Chinese children. I decided instead to start seeking out and interviewing foreign families living in China who had adopted Chinese children. It turned out to be a fruitful exercise because I gathered a wide range of unique experiences and found a lot of women who had adopted for reasons other than infertility. The participants I met in China added a wider perspective to my research, however they were similar to those I interviewed in Canada in their desire to help children whom they perceived to be less fortunate than Western children.

One of the initial contacts I made in Beijing was Stephanie, a 46 year old American woman and a single adoptive mother. While having coffee at *The Bookworm*, a well-known meeting place for foreigners, I ran into a friend from my university and we had a conversation about my research. An American man overhearing our conversation offered to put me in touch with Stephanie. I met Stephanie at her home in the Diplomat's Compound for our interview. Stephanie had been living and working in Beijing for several years and decided to adopt on her own because she really wanted children and had not had any romantic relationships work out for the long-term. She adopted in 1999 from China and was in the process of adopting her second child from Kazakhstan when we met in 2010. She is no longer eligible for the China program because she is not married and the regulations have become much more stringent. Stephanie was one of my initial contacts in Beijing and she was very helpful in connecting me to other adoptive mothers in Beijing. Stephanie offered to post something on the page of her

yahoo web group on my behalf since I could not get access to this page because it was restricted to adoptive parents only. I met several women from this posting that made its way into an exclusive network through this fortuitous connection.

I also met several adoptive mothers while doing voluntary work in Beijing's orphanages. I was given the contact information for Angela when I expressed interest to a volunteer I met in the community. Angela is the volunteer coordinator and actively involved in the daily proceedings of a local state-run orphanage in Beijing's suburbs. Angela is a Chinese American woman married to a white American man. She was 63 when we met in 2010 and was a medical professional. Angela had retired from formal employment and moved back to China with her husband. Angela volunteers a great deal of her time to the orphanage. With her medical training Angela was able to perform surgery on some of the children in the orphanage. For example, she was able to operate on children with conditions such as an anorectal anomaly, surgically creating an anal opening in children who were born without one. Because of her medical expertise and her Chinese heritage, Angela and her husband adopted a child who had a very serious skin condition. Angela also has a biological son who is much older than the child she is currently caring for. Angela and I got to know each other quite well before I had the chance to do a formal interview and she possessed a great deal of knowledge and expertise on all things related to orphans in China. I learned a great deal about the situation in China from Angela. She is also an example of an expatriate who was able to adopt a child in China without following the official protocol. This was possible in part because she is a Chinese woman but also because she had so much experience working

in the orphanage system in Beijing. Also her child's adoption was in 1999, which was in the beginning stages before the adoption process became more rigidly administered in China.

I met Patricia at the "Light of Hope Foster Home," a privately owned and American run English language school and orphanage in the remote suburbs of Beijing. Patricia and her husband have three biological children and adopted two daughters from China in the late 1990's. Patricia and her entire family moved to China in order to serve God in a Chinese orphanage. Her children were all home-schooled and they worked in the orphanage as a family and had committed to living there for two years. I had the chance to get to know Patricia quite well and keep in contact with her family even after leaving China. Instead of sitting down with a tape-recorder for a formal interview, I had lunch with Patricia every week during the children's nap-time and asked her a series of questions and took notes from our conversations over the course of our work together. Patricia lived far from me and had an extremely busy schedule, so this process of getting to know her was convenient for her and made sense for my research purposes.

I was introduced to Claire by a friend I made at university who is in the same faith community in Beijing. I met Claire at a Starbuck's in the business district of Beijing. She is a Canadian woman who married a British man and has three biological children and one adopted daughter. The couple has lived in China for more than ten years. Claire and her husband adopted a 4 year old girl in 2007. Claire was 44 years old when we met and 41 at the time of her daughter's adoption. She worked as an interior designer and her husband is an architect. She and her husband started a very successful

architecture firm in Beijing, as well as a kindergarten. The vision for this school, as she described it was “for Chinese children to attend and children with physical disabilities or learning needs would also be able to attend” (Claire, interview, December 9th 2009). She provided an extended narrative about her desire to adopt that included her faith and several chance experiences. At one point in her marriage, she was living in Africa while her husband was in China. She told me that it was at a point in time before the Internet was accessible, and that she and her husband exchanged letters. One of the letters she received from China had a stamp with the face of a Chinese child pictured on it. She included the stamp in her letter back to her husband stating, “One day, I hope we have one of these.” His response to her letter stated simply, “Me too” (Claire, interview, December 9th 2009).

After she moved to China, she and her husband started visiting orphanages in China in the hope of finding a child to whom they felt a particular connection. Although he knew that many of the infants in Chinese orphanages get adopted, Claire’s husband wondered what happens to the older children. One day Claire received a phone call from a small orphanage on the outskirts of Beijing asking whether a particular child with physical disabilities could attend her school. Claire visited this child in her home at an orphanage and the girl was asked to recite Tang dynasty poetry and sing her ABC’s in English to impress Claire. Claire agreed to allow the young girl to attend her school (and said she would have done so even without the interview process) but wondered how this child would manage to get to her school every day when she lived so far away from the city. Claire inquired whether the child could live with her during

the school week and return home to the orphanage on the weekends. On her car ride home from the orphanage she called her husband and said, “I found the child we are going to adopt” (Claire, Interview December 9th 2009). She explained to me that she had wanted to adopt an infant and had continued breast-feeding her youngest child until three years of age so that she would be able to breast-feed her adopted daughter. However Claire felt a particular connection to this child and thought that adopting her would address her husband’s concerns about the older children who were less likely to get adopted. Claire and her husband learned later that adopting this child would not be easy owing to the way formal adoption procedures work in China. Families are not allowed to pick a particular child to adopt; instead they must apply for adoption and be matched with a child not of their own choosing. Claire and her husband were well respected and longtime residents of Beijing and enlisted the help of their extensive network of friends and colleagues in China as well as the British government to make it possible to adopt this particular child.

The remainder of my participants adopted between 2004 and 2006 during the peak of adoption from China. I met Kimberly through a contact I made from volunteering at the “Pray for China” orphanage. Like Patricia, Kimberly and her family had moved to China from the USA in order to serve God. Her husband was taking full-time Chinese language classes while Kimberly took care of their daughter. They intended to work at the orphanage once a live-in position opened up. The orphanage only had the capacity to house a few foreign families, therefore Kimberly and her husband volunteered intermittently at the orphanage while they waited for a family to move on from the live-

in position. Kimberley is 40 years old and a Christian. She was 34 years old when she adopted in 2004. We met for the first time in a coffee shop where I conducted the interview. It is worth noting that Kimberly talked about her faith a great deal in our interview and graciously offered to meet and answer any faith-related questions I had while living in Beijing. She gave me a copy of the Bible in two languages; English and Chinese.

Susan is also a volunteer at the orphanage where Angela works. Susan is 50 years old and an American living in Beijing with her husband. After volunteering together for several weeks we met in the lobby of her apartment building in Shunyi and had a formal interview. It is worth noting that the lifestyle in Shunyi is much different from that of people who live in the city centre like many of my other participants. Shunyi expatriates are usually people who work for major companies in China and have some kind of arrangement whereby everything is paid for including accommodation, school fees, and drivers. At Susan's apartment building, for instance there were tennis courts, pools and a restaurant. It was a distinctly Western style of living compared to the city centre apartments and homes.

In order to meet other adoptive mothers in China, I made contact with a local adoption agency that facilitates adoption of Chinese orphans into expatriate families. I had hoped that this agency might be able to include me in adoption workshops and events or post a recruitment poster in their newsletter. The agency personnel responded with a comprehensive list of all three of the families who had adopted in China through

that agency. Apparently, the frequency of adoptions by expatriate families was too infrequent to merit a newsletter or adoption-related events. With some hesitation, I contacted these families by email to gauge their interest in participating; all three families agreed to take part in my study. All of these women resided in Shanghai. I travelled to Shanghai and spent a total of three days completing interviews with Julie, Barbara and Rebecca. Julie is British, 36 years old and married to an American man. She and her husband have two biological sons but she wanted, desperately, to have a daughter. Since Chinese orphanages have a plethora of baby girls, and Julie preferred not to have another pregnancy, she came to the conclusion that adopting in China was a perfect match. She and her husband both work for the same American company in Shanghai and met while he was living in England. She remarked, jokingly, that she was a souvenir from his first expatriate assignment in Britain while his Chinese daughter is a souvenir from his second assignment in China (Julie, interview, April 14th 2010).

Barbara was 49 years old when we met in 2010. She adopted her daughter in 2005 at the age of 45. She is married to a man ten years her junior. They are both Americans from Michigan and were posted in Shanghai and working for an American car company. Barbara and her husband started the adoption procedure in the USA and moved to Shanghai midway through the process. When Barbara got the referral for her daughter she and her husband were already living in China so they did not have the typical experience of traveling to China with a group. Instead, Barbara hired a translator herself so that she could pick up her daughter ahead of the adoption group. It was interesting to meet Barbara because she and her husband had decided to take a posting in China in

order to expedite the adoption process and to give their daughter a better understanding of her history and cultural roots. However, this family lived anything but a typical Chinese lifestyle. Barbara and her husband had never taken the subway or any public transportation in China and had drivers to take them anywhere they needed to go. Her daughter had a Filipino nanny because, Barbara explained, Filipina nannies are like a “brand name product” and they provide a quality of care she perceived to be far better than that provided by local Chinese nannies. Finally I would argue that this family did not really experience China as most residents do because Barbara took extra care to ensure that her daughter never drank Chinese milk. Even while at school, her daughter drank only imported milk because of something Barbara had read in the American media about a “milk scare” in China (Barbara, Interview April 14th 2010).

Rebecca lived outside the city centre in what appeared to be Shanghai’s wealthy suburbs. Rebecca was 48 years old at the time of our interview. She had adopted in 2005 at the age of 43. She is a Portuguese Canadian who also holds an American passport and she is married to an American-born Chinese man. She and her husband have one biological son and desperately wished to give him a sibling so that he would not be an only child. Rebecca had experienced three miscarriages after giving birth to her son and decided: “not to try anymore. It was too emotionally stressful, so we thought okay, well let’s try adoption” (Rebecca, interview, April 15th 2010).

One of my participants put me in contact with Pamela, a Swedish woman who had adopted twin girls from Taiwan. The process of adopting from Taiwan differs from mainland China because Taiwan does not have a one-child policy. However I have

included Pamela's experiences in my study for several reasons. I found that the process of making the decision to adopt and the experience of having daughters that look Chinese was the same for Pamela as for the other women I met. In addition, Pamela was included in my study because from the perspective of political authorities in the People Republic of China, Taiwan is officially a part of China. Pamela had a unique and interesting family and I thought her experiences could be a meaningful contribution to the kind of story I am about to tell about transnational adoption in China. Pamela and her husband are extremely wealthy. In fact so they are so wealthy that they had imported ponies from Sweden, so that her daughters could learn to ride them. Pamela told me that Chinese ponies were "not very nice" and that she wanted ponies from Sweden. Her husband started a highly successful company in Beijing that has since incorporated European investors. Pamela was 42 years old when we met in 2010 and had been living in China since 1993. She had a blended family including, a son from her previous marriage to a Chinese man, a daughter with her current husband and twin girls they had adopted from Taiwan in 2006.

I met Lori through a Chinese woman in my social circle in Beijing who used to work at the Canadian embassy. This Chinese woman offered to put me in touch with some of her former co-workers whom she thought might allow me to be present at the embassy when Canadian families were there to process their adoption papers. Not too surprisingly, this request was denied due to confidentiality; however I was put into contact with Lori who is a Canadian mother with an adopted child working at the embassy. I met Lori at the embassy on her lunch hour and went out to an Indian food

buffet for an interview over lunch. Lori was 33 years old when we met and both she and her husband are diplomats. They have two beautiful daughters, one of whom is biological and the other adopted from China. Lori and her husband went through the adoption process like any other Canadian family while living in Ottawa, and looked for a posting in China once they had completed the adoption. Lori is fluent in French and Chinese and told me that she had always wanted to adopt children since she was very young and planned to adopt more in the future as well as have more of her own biological children as part of her love of children and her vision of doing well for the children of the world.

Finally, I met Janine from the yahoo group posting. Janine is the final participant that I will describe here because she was the most recent to adopt. In fact, when we met she was in the process of waiting for a Chinese daughter. I do not know whether she has received that child given the slowdown and eventual halt of the Chinese adoption program. When I met Janine in 2010, she was a 31 year-old woman from Vancouver and was the youngest participant in my research sample. I was also 31 years old when we met and since I am also from British Columbia, we immediately had a great deal in common. We sat on the rooftop patio of her hutong¹ apartment and had a conversation like old friends. Janine's husband is British and they met while living and working in China. She came to China much like I did, as a language student, and stayed in China when she got a job at an English newspaper to edit the classified advertisements. Janine and her husband started their own company in Beijing designing and selling t-shirts. Her husband had been first married to a Chinese woman and had one child from that

marriage. Janine and her husband had full custody of this young girl as well as two girls of their own. Janine was in the process of waiting for her adopted child with no indication of when this child would actually arrive in their lives nor any details about the age or gender of this child.

Although Janine was perfectly capable of having another biological child she explained that her motivation to adopt was a way to complete her family whereby she would have two blonde children and two Chinese children. While she emphasized that she did not want to adopt “for the sake of someone else” she did see adoption as a way to balance her family that would be especially helpful for her oldest daughter who often attracted a great deal of attention in public places because she looked Chinese while the two other children did not (Janine, interview, April 6th, 2010).

While there seemed to be relatively few obstructions in getting access to the expatriate adoption community in China, I did encounter some instances where the community was protected by gatekeepers. For example, I met an interesting expatriate

¹ A hutong is a traditional courtyard residence in the small alleyways in Beijing, China. Hutongs are usually attached to other hutongs, so neighbours usually share some outdoor courtyard space

couple through my social network. We had a conversation about my research and discovered that they were intending to adopt as a couple at some point in the future. Afareen is Iranian and her husband, Scott, is American and they lived in the south of China. Afareen was very involved in a woman's network in her city and she was helping to organize an information seminar on adoption for expatriates in China. While it was not possible for me to travel to the south of China on such short notice given my volunteer commitments in Beijing, Afareen offered to set up her computer so that I could attend the information session via Skype. However, when Afareen contacted her speaker, one of the few social workers who facilitates expatriate adoptions in China, she said that this plan was impossible. The social worker felt that because she was working for the Chinese government on such a sensitive matter, it was too risky to speak to anyone "on the record" (Adoption professional D, 2010). Since she was one of few social workers in China working on expatriate adoptions, she thought an interview might have had the potential to jeopardize expatriate adoptions entirely if she lost her job: "too much is at stake" (Adoption Professional D, 2010). While this development was disappointing, it gave insight to the privacy barriers in China in comparison to Canada. While in Canada I had full access to adoption professionals, I had trouble reaching adoptive parents. In China, it seems the opposite was true. I was offered lists of adoptive parents with contact information, however I was unable to meet and speak with any adoption professionals. I still have contact with Afareen and her husband and could easily pursue research on Chinese adoptions in the south of China at a later date.

Ethical Considerations

In order to protect the identity of research participants who have shared very personal details of their lives I have used pseudonyms throughout this dissertation. To the best of my abilities, I have used age appropriate names by searching most popular girl's names in each woman's year of birth (<http://www.thenewparentsguide.com> Accessed July 19th 2013). I did not use pseudonyms to name the adoption agencies and organizations listed in this research for a number of reasons. First of all, there are so few agencies in Ontario it would be easy to locate their names with a Google search or via an adoption directory. Second, I used these agencies in order to reach adoptive parents and enter the adoption community rather than to write about or critique the agencies themselves. I do not write about the agencies other than to describe my methodology; therefore being named in my dissertation poses little risk to these agencies. I do, however, use pseudonyms for Chinese orphanages rather than name specific orphanages in China because I write about them in great detail and with a critical eye. I also made an effort to use culturally appropriate pseudonyms for my Chinese Canadian, Québécois, British and Swedish participants.

Each participant, even those whom I did not interview formally, received a copy of my letter of information and I have retained a signed copy for my records.

Table 1- Adoption chronology

Year	Adoption requirements ²ⁱ
1993-2000	<p>November 13th 1993, international adoption from China opened. Adoption was open to single women. Applicants need to be between the ages of 35-50 and childless.</p> <p>*1999 the legal age for adopting was lowered to 30 and families with children were permitted to applyⁱⁱ</p>
2001	<p>Adoption for single women reduced to 5% of all applications each year.</p>
2002	<p>Restrictions for single mothers were lifted for singles wishing to adopt older children or those with special needs. Special needs applications were expedited. A new set of requirements were applied to all single applicants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- must not be over 50 years old. -- must have received a higher education or a vocational one, with "a stable job, a comparatively good financial income, and a capability of educating adopted children." -- Must not be homosexual. One member of a gay couple may not apply as a single applicant. Adoption agencies should check carefully and be sure not to submit applications from homosexuals.

^{2 2} Information on this chart was found at <http://www.familyhelper.net/news/china.html> accessed March 15th 2013.

2003	SARS was a serious global problem. In order to curb the spread of SARS, China imposed a 6 week suspension of file processing in May 15, 2003. It also stopped issuing referrals (child matching documents) and notifications authorizing travel to China. Although the China adoption program came to a temporary halt, it still continued to accept applications resulting in a backlog when adoption was reinstated June 24, 2003.
2004	A measles outbreak in Hunan province resulted in another temporary halt in adoption from China.
2005	2005 was the peak of adoption from China sending 14,496 children to 17 countries. Alleged baby-selling in Hunan province led to another slow-down in processing adoptions in China.
2006	<p>On Jan. 1, 2006 China ratified the Hague Convention on Protection of Children.</p> <p>In reaction to the baby selling scandals in 2005, Foreign parents are matched with children by CCAA and are barred from dealing directly with orphanages.</p>
2007	<p>2007 saw the biggest changes to adoption policy to date.</p> <p>“Adoption is limited to married couples, made up of a man and a woman, who fit the following criteria:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. They must have been married at least two years. If either person has previously divorced, the couple must have been married at least five years. No more than two divorces are allowed. 2. Both partners must be between the ages of 30 and 50. Those couples who apply to adopt a special needs child must be between the ages of 30 and 55. 3. Both partners must be physically and mentally fit, with none of the following conditions: AIDS; Mental disability; Infectious disease that is actively contagious;

	<p>d. Blind in either eye;</p> <p>e. Hearing loss in both ears or loss of language function (those adopting children with hearing or language function loss are exempted from this requirement);</p> <p>f. Non-function or dysfunction of limbs or trunk caused by impairment, incomplete limbs, paralysis or deformation; Severe facial deformation;</p> <p>h. Severe diseases that require long-term treatment and that may affect life expectancy, including malignant tumors, lupus, nephrosis, epilepsy, etc; Major organ transplant within ten years; Schizophrenia;</p> <p>k. Severe mental disorders requiring medication for more than two years, including depression, mania, or anxiety neurosis; Body Mass index of 40 or more.</p> <p>4. At least one member of the couple must have stable employment. The total value of family assets must be at least \$80,000. The family's annual income equals at least \$10,000 for each family member in the household (including the child to be adopted). Annual income excludes welfare, pensions, unemployment insurance, government subsidies and the like.</p> <p>5. Both prospective parents must be high school graduates or have vocational training equivalent to a high school education.</p> <p>6. The family must have fewer than five children, and the youngest is at least one year old.</p> <p>7. Neither partner may have a significant criminal record, with no evidence of:</p> <p>a. Domestic violence, sexual abuse, abandonment or abuse of children;</p> <p>b. Use of narcotics or any potentially addictive medication prescribed for mental illness;</p> <p>c. Alcohol abuse, unless the individual can show she/he has been sober for at least ten years.</p> <p>8. The prospective parents must demonstrate the ability to provide a warm family environment capable of meeting the needs of an orphaned child and providing for her/his development, and an understanding of the special</p>
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	<p>risks (including potential diseases, developmental delays, and post-placement maladjustment) that could come with inter-country adoption.</p> <p>9. The couple must provide an adoption application letter that makes clear the applicants' willingness to allow post-placement follow-ups and provide post-placement reports as required.</p> <p>Note: where a specific age or time span is cited, it will be computed from the time that the CCAA officially logs the adoption application documents” (Family Helper 2013).</p>
Post 2007	<p>Adoption from China declined each year since its peak in 2005. By 2009 adoption declined to 1/3 of the amount of its peak.</p> <p>In 2012, the China adoption program stopped accepting new applications into the China program because the waitlist for a child began to exceed 5 years (www.childrensbridge.com accessed July 17th 2012).</p>

Table 2- Participant Chart

Phase 1- Ontario, Canada

Participant	Year of Adoption(s)	Age at (1 st) Adoption
Violet	1994	45
Anne	1996, 1999, 2002	34
Melissa	1997	44
Kate	2003	39

Michelle	2001, 2004	35
Grace	2002	36
Tracy	2001, 2004	36
Jane	2007	34
Heather	2007	48
Mary	2007	41
Cynthia	2006	39
Liz	2006	39
Rachel	2007, 2010	43

Phase 2- China

Participant	Year of adoption	Age	Nationality
Stephanie	1999	35	American
Angela	1999	52	American
Patricia	2002,2004,2012	37	American
Claire	2007	41	Canadian
Kimberly	2004	34	American
Susan	2005	45	American
Julie	2006	30	British
Barbara	2005	45	American
Rebecca	2005	43	Canadian
Pamela	2006	36	Swedish

Lori	2007	31	Canadian
Janine	Waiting in 2010	31	Canadian

Chapter 3. Adoption, Infertility & Metaphors of Maternity

I wanted, all my life, to have children and I discovered in my 30's that I couldn't. I had a surgery [to increase my chances of] getting pregnant. After that I decided I couldn't spend my life without children. It was too cruel to be a teacher with a lot of children around and not having my own (Violet 2009).

Not all women want to have children. In the 1970's, a child-free movement emerged in reaction to the pro-natalism of the baby boom era and it became a more acceptable choice in North America for couples to choose not to have children (May 1995). Historically women who never married or never had children and were stigmatized with labels such as "old maids" or "spinsters" (Rosenthal 2002). During the baby boom era following World War II, pro-natalism was at its height and parenthood was perceived as almost compulsory. Parenthood had finely tuned significance during this time period; Hollywood mothers were praised and glamorized while fatherhood became a sign of virility and good citizenship. This Cold war rhetoric and emphasis on parenthood as the route to "the good life" marked childless women as subversive, socially maladjusted and, unpatriotic (May 1995: 138). While voluntary childlessness was virtually absent in the 1960's, the national birthrate in both Canada and the United States dropped significantly by the 1970's in the post baby boom era. There was a strong reaction to the extreme pro-natalism of the baby boom era and a strong environmental and feminist ethos emerged as well as a tolerance for families outside the model of the mainstream nuclear family.

Childlessness emerged as a legitimate lifestyle, however it remained on the margins (May 1995). The birthrate has dropped significantly since the baby boom era and a

broader range of choices outside the nuclear family have emerged including singleness and childlessness (May 1995).

Childlessness, however, is not always voluntary. A trend towards postponing parenthood is increasing in North America, especially among families with professional women (Schmidt et al. 2012). A clinical research study conducted in Western Canada found that women “normalized childbearing among women over 35 years and did not perceive the phenomenon as out of sync for their generation” (Benzies et al. 2006:631). Since infertility has emerged in recent times in unique ways among a specific demographic of professional women, however, medical anthropologist Gay Becker argues that one very important aspect has not changed at all, that is the cultural phenomena that makes infertility so agonizing for many men and especially women (Becker 2000). In my research it appears that cultural metaphors are used by infertile mothers of adopted children in order to make the condition of infertility seem less pathological. Pregnancy is a significant life event for many women and those who cannot carry a pregnancy to term may feel they have missed out on that experience. In her research with infertility patients in IVF clinics, Becker found that “stopping the effort to conceive forces women to scrutinize their gender identity with respect to womanhood, motherhood, family and a range of related issues” (Becker 2000:2). Pregnancy metaphors are used by my research participants to explain the experience of infertility and to anchor their experiences of motherhood in biological terms.

Advanced reproductive age is linked to prolonged time taken to conceive, higher

chances of miscarriage, premature births and birth anomalies. In contrast to what cultural scripts have led North American women to believe, assisted reproductive technologies cannot compensate for age-dependent loss of fertility because the success rates of these technologies also decrease with age (Mills et al. 2011). Ten percent of women aged 20- 28 years old are infertile in the United States, a number which increases to 25% for women over 30 years of age (Schmidt et al. 2012). In Canada, the average age at childbearing is increasing. In 1983, 14% of first time mothers were 30 years or older. In 2003, 48% of Canadian mothers were 30 years and older when they gave birth for the first time (Benzies et al. 2006). These statistics highlight the growing trend of women delaying child-rearing well into the later years of their reproductive cycle. As a consequence, infertility has emerged in the media and our collective consciousness as a social problem in North America especially for older, career-oriented women who delay marriage and child birth until they are well into their thirties and forties (Nicolson 1997, Benzies et al. 2006, Schmidt et al. 2012, Mills et al. 2011). Since 1976, the number of women in their forties without children has nearly doubled in North America (Livingston & Cohn 2010; Shoot 2011). The cover of the *New York* magazine (December 6, 2010) brought attention to this quandary, calling it a “fertility crisis” and linking it to the birth control pill which leads many women to control their fertility for extended periods of time during their ‘best’ reproductive years (Grigoriadis 2010, May 2011).

If it is socially acceptable to remain childless, the question arises of why there is a lingering or heightening obsession with infertility. Infertility has emerged in the current

milieu in a very unique way within a specific demographic of women. It has garnered significant media attention and it is construed as a significant social problem. While women have the choice to remain childless, many women desire to have children but are unable to conceive. This chapter explores the experience of infertility and sense of loss among women who desire to have children, and looks at infertility as a motivating factor leading couples toward international adoption. This chapter also examines the metaphors used by infertile mothers that liken the adoption experience to a pregnancy in terms of milestones, conception and the transition into motherhood.

Professor of Psychology and social commentator, Jean Twenge attempts to debunk the moral panic surrounding delayed parenthood stating that statistics are misleading (Twenge 2013). First of all, Twenge argues, widely cited statistics claiming that only one in three women over the age of thirty-five will get pregnant after a year of trying to conceive are calculated based on French birth records from 1670- 1830. Twenge also points to a number of methodological problems in fertility studies such as relying on human memory to accurately state that the couple have been trying to conceive for a year. The length of marriage also influences the amount of sexual activity and therefore a longer relationship could be a factor in declining fertility (Twenge 2013).

Furthmore, Twenge reports that miscarriage statistics are also misleading because they are collected from IVF clinics, in which women are disproportionately at risk for miscarriage due to other fertility complications that may have nothing to do with

age. While fertility declines with age it is not as significant as the media has lead us to believe. Twenge argues that the risks of delaying childbirth need to be balanced with the risks of not delaying childbirth because every year that a woman postpones having children leads to a ten percent increase in her earnings (Twenge 2013). This perspective complicates the adoption plotline, so frequently expressed, that career women who have delayed parenthood are more likely to experience infertility and turn to transnational adoption to build their families. Perhaps women with other health issues including endometriosis and infertility of their male partners are also over represented in adoption circles. This commentary suggests that advanced maternal age is not a considerable problem for all Canadian women rather a measure to urge women to conform to gender ideals.

The science of infertility and its connection to advanced maternal age is still in its infancy with much remaining unknown. However, several variables suggest that conceiving a child becomes more difficult with age. Research points out that pregnancy outcomes over the age of 35 are less desirable with increased risk of cesarean section, genetic abnormalities and stillbirth (Bayrampour and Heaman 2010, Mills & Lavender 2010). Most of these adverse outcomes, however, are related to age-related illnesses such as elevated blood pressure and diabetes (Mills & Lavender 2010). If women are able to stay healthy in their 30's and 40's, the pregnancy outcomes are more likely to be positive. Guilt-inducing media coverage in the popular media might be exaggerating the dangers of 'waiting too long' as a mechanism of social control. Thought Catalog, a digital literary and journalistic magazine posted a piece in 2013 entitled: *Get married*

first, then focus on your career (Trunk 2013). Writer Penelope Trunk argues that women can find more happiness by being married than by having a good career. The author, intent on reinforcing heterosexual norms, states outright: “in fact, you have your whole life to get a career. This is not true about having a baby” (Trunk 2013:1).

This piece and others like it reflect a defensiveness about the choices that some woman have made regarding their reproductive lives, but also critiques the choices of others. In my research, I encountered several women over the age of 35 who had experienced trouble conceiving and turned to transnational adoption in order to add children to their families. There are, however, an extensive number of variables relating to infertility to consider besides age. Another important piece adding to the ongoing social dialogue on infertility and advanced maternal age is that infertility is not exclusively a Western issue brought on by delayed parenting. Anthropologist Marcia Inhorn points out how infertility is a problem of global proportions affecting eight to twelve percent of couples worldwide. Infertility is a major concern in Sub-Saharan Africa which is referred to idiomatically as the “infertility belt” (Inhorn 2003:1837). The commonality between infertility in Sub-Saharan Africa and in North America is that it is largely considered a woman’s issue even though “male infertility accounts for at least half of all cases worldwide and is often the most difficult form of infertility to treat” (Inhorn 2003:1837).

In my interviews with Canadian women who adopted from China, infertility and pregnancy loss emerged as dominant themes. I began each interview by asking these

women to tell me about their adoption experiences. Most women began their narratives “from the beginning” and related their experiences about trying to get pregnant and having problematic pregnancies leading to miscarriage or ectopic pregnancies³. It is well documented that those struggling to conceive experience hardship and may suffer from depression (Becker 2000, Franklin 1997, Petropanagos 2010, Mills et al. 2011, Schmidt et al. 2012, Benzies et al. 2006, Layne 1996). Sociologist Heather Jacobson suggests that: “grief over infertility is seen as a necessary part of forming a non-biological family” (Jacobson 2008:27). Similarly, in Gay Becker’s research in IVF clinics found that “the majority of women were unable to seriously consider nonmedical options, such as adoption or childless living until they had exhausted the medical possibilities” (Becker 2000:120). She also describes IVF as “a last ditch effort to conceive into which couples invest great emotional energy [because] IVF offered their last hope for a biological child” (Becker 2000:120). Anthropologist Sarah Franklin (1997) also did research with IVF clients in England with similar findings. The women in Franklin’s research felt that fertility and procreation were natural parts of a woman’s life-course. IVF is a risky medical procedure with a plethora of unpleasant side effects and a very small chance of success. Yet the women were willing to go forward with IVF and endure the potential risks and failures for the chance to have biological children

³ An ectopic pregnancy occurs when a pregnancy starts outside the uterus, often in one of the fallopian tubes. The fetus cannot survive under these circumstances and therefore the pregnancy is not viable (MedlinePlus <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000895.htm>, consulted February 11, 2012).

(Franklin 1997). The research of Becker (2000) and Franklin (1997) deal with a specific demographic of infertile women that differs slightly from my own since not all of my research participants pursued IVF treatments. Nonetheless, it astutely highlights both the pain associated with infertility and the strong cultural preference for biological children. Becker points to the cultural attachments in replicating one's genetic make-up and the ideology of the continuity of lineage (Becker 2000). Likewise, Franklin argues that for many, there is a powerful urge to perpetuate their genes through a new generation (Franklin 1997).

The grief experience, however, is not universal. My research participants experienced this pain in many different ways. Barbara, for example lost her child from the risks associated with prenatal testing, recommended for all women over the age of 35. She had Chorionic Villus Sampling (CVS) to test for genetic abnormalities and the procedure lead to an accidental termination of that pregnancy. Barbara was unable to conceive again and was left with feelings of guilt and anger over a test that was not absolutely necessary (Barbara, Interview, April 14th 2010). Anne had experienced three miscarriages (Anne, Interview, May 20th, 2009). Another research participant, Rachel, who underwent treatment for infertility, had nightmares about killing her husband induced by the fertility drugs, and felt that these fertility treatments put a great deal of strain on her marriage (Rachel, interview, April 3rd 2011).

Reproduction, in the biological sense, is a rite of passage into womanhood that many women feel they have missed out on when they are unable to conceive a child or carry a pregnancy to term. This feeling of loss leads to grief and seems to be especially salient for women who have delayed attempts at conception because of career or educational pursuits (Twenge 2013).

Anthropologist Judith Modell has conducted salient research on domestic adoption in the United States (2002). She writes that adoption processes were established with particular efforts to model biological kinship as much as possible. The goal of US laws was to make no distinction between biological and adoptive children and adoption was culturally made to resemble genealogical relationships. This goal was achieved through matching children and parents by “intimate traits” such as appearance, intelligence and temperament in order to replicate signs of biological kinship (Modell 2002:7). Modell writes that it was widely believed in adoption circles that resemblance between the child and adoptive parent would legitimize the ties of kinship, give the impression of “absolute bond” and ensure that the relationship would be more enduring (Modell 2002:6). Given that biological connections, however tenuous or fictitious, are emphasized in order to legitimate the bonds between adoptive parent and child, it makes sense that biological metaphors are used in transnational adoption scenarios.

In most instances, it is more difficult when adopting children from overseas to match children and parents by appearance or “intimate traits” because they are bi-racial

families. In my research on transnational adoption, women used pregnancy metaphors in order to anchor their adoption experiences in biological processes. Perhaps in describing the adoption process in terms of biological processes people believe the relationship will be more legitimate and enduring. What these pregnancy narratives obscure is just as important as what they highlight. It is possible that the use of pregnancy metaphors is simply an attempt to describe the adoption process in a way that others will understand using common cultural metaphors. What these metaphors highlight, however, is the cultural preference for biologically related kin, leaving adoption as a back-up plan when all other options for creating blood related kinship have been exhausted.

Illness metaphors are a common trope within medical anthropology (Kleinman 1988, Eisenberg 1977, Young 1982, Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Garro 2000, Martin 1994). Physician Arthur Kleinman (1988) used his experiences in his clinical practice to write about the process of creating meaning in periods of illness. Illness metaphors are always culturally shaped, Kleinman writes:

Illness narratives edify us about how life problems are created, controlled, made meaningful. They also tell us about the way cultural values and social relations shape how we perceive and monitor our bodies, label and categorize bodily symptoms, interpret complaints in the particular context of our life situation; we express our distress through bodily idioms that are both peculiar to distinctive cultural worlds and constrained by our shared human condition (Kleinman 1988:xiii).

Infertility fits into discussions about illness because it is a disruptive life event and like illness, infertility is framed within a specific cultural setting through culturally meaningful metaphors (Garro 2000). Like infertility, pregnancy in North American

culture has been highly medicalized (Davis- Floyd 2003, MacDonald 2013). For example, in her research on midwifery in Canada, anthropologist Margaret MacDonald writes that many women seek a critical alternative to biomedical or ‘technocratic’ models of pregnancy and childbirth. In contrast, natural birth is understood to “promote women as knowing, capable, and strong, their bodies perfectly designed to carry a fetus to give birth successfully without the high-tech surveillance and interventions of physicians in a hospital setting” (Macdonald 2013:367).

The metaphors we use to explain and understand illness are not absolute or fixed. Rather, they shift to meet the cultural, political and economic conditions of the time period in which they are used. Medical anthropologist Emily Martin provides a powerful example of how we understand the immune system through cultural metaphors. In the early 20th century, she writes, the body was imagined as a fortress, with a healthy body protected behind castle walls. In the late 20th century, however, the cultural understanding of the body hinges on the immune system and we imagine the body at war with foreign invaders (Martin 1994).

For the purposes of this dissertation, I include early pregnancy loss in my discussion about infertility. Pregnancy loss in the first trimester of a pregnancy is much different than a late term miscarriage because it does not involve giving birth. While there is a plethora of literature treating infertility and pregnancy loss separately and distinctly, my participants conflate the two conditions because the subjective experience of loss is similar. My research focuses on a very specific kind of infertility that is

connected directly to age and the loss of fecundity with age (Mills et al. 2011). While pregnancy loss is medically defined as a fetus that miscarries, is never born or dies during or shortly after birth, infertility is defined more broadly as the inability to conceive a child after one year of unprotected sex (DeLuca & Leslie 1996, Mills et al. 2011). The distinction between infertility and early pregnancy loss collapses because 45% of miscarriages are not detected or happen in women who were unaware that they were pregnant (DeLuca & Leslie 1996). Therefore, I have chosen to expand the definition of infertility to include all physiological conditions that prevent women from bearing children, including but not limited to: endometriosis, pelvic inflammatory disease, Chlamydia, hormonal disorders, genetic anomalies, ovulation problems, pregnancy loss, and most importantly in my research, advanced maternal age (Vissing 2002).

Most of the women whom I encountered in my fieldwork had reached an advanced maternal age, defined in the medical literature as a maternal age of 35 years old and greater at the time of delivery (Bayrampour and Heaman 2010). My participants who fit into this category expressed their feeling that society construes their infertility as illegitimate because it is connected to their choices. They feel that others judge them as 'selfish' or criticize them for putting their professional lives before their families. These women sense that they are perceived as bad mothers who *should* be self-less and *should* have prioritized family before career. They believe that they were judged and penalized for stepping outside traditional gender expectations.

Many of the women I spoke to had been unsuccessful in their pursuit of a

Canadian child or discouraged from pursuing the domestic adoption route entirely. They felt that young families “who were truly infertile” (Anne, interview May 20th 2009, Barbara, interview, April 14th 2010) were always preferred by relinquishing mothers over older couples. A truly infertile couple in adoption circles refers to a couple in which the woman is unable to have biological children due to medical conditions *rather* than age. Liz emphasized this point about her age as a limiting factor in the domestic adoption process:

A friend of mine has done two domestic adoptions privately. She had a similar history of pregnancies and stuff like I had. So we chatted with them and decided that really wasn't the route for us because we were older and that put us in a little bit of a difficult spot for that. And they said it was really like applying for a job, you've got to put your resumé out there, and you've got to go to interviews. Younger parents were more likely to be chosen. And so we started looking into the international adoption scene and it was more of a guarantee for our age bracket and our situation (Liz, Interview, February 8th 2009).

Adoption candidates such as those in my research sample perceive themselves to be less attractive candidates in Canadian adoption circles, due to their ages and the social stigma associated with delaying marriage and childbirth well into their thirties and forties. In contrast these older families are preferred in parts of the international adoption circuit, especially China which has set a minimum age requirement at 30 years of age (childrensbridge.com accessed July 1, 2011). This age limit emphasizes the preference for older parents so long as they are younger than 50 years old (or 55 years old after 2007) and have qualifications such as advanced education or higher income. The age requirement in China also highlights how this demographic of older, infertile professional women often come to the decision to adopt overseas because of their ages.

While academics, medical professionals and journalists debate the cause, social meaning and repercussions of this ‘fertility crisis’ (Grigoriadis 2010; Cecil 1996, Layne 1996, 1999, 2003, 2004; ICON Health Publications 2004), many couples have turned to international adoption to add children to their childless families. International adoption has become an attractive alternative on the “menu of reproductive options,” which also includes in vitro fertilization, donor eggs, surrogacy, and domestic adoption (Vissing 2002:92). While infertility is not the only reason that couples choose to adopt, it is rapidly becoming a popular option for couples who cannot bear children ‘of their own.’ However the narrative describing infertile couples who adopt after they have exhausted all other reproductive options highlights the preference for biological children and adoption as the second-best option for creating a family (Modell 2002).

As noted, a substantial number of my interview participants cited infertility and/or problematic pregnancies as the primary factor leading up to their decision to adopt. They described a range of difficult and emotional experiences on their journeys to receive their children from China, including but not limited to: miscarriage, expensive fertility treatments, ectopic pregnancies and ‘failed adoptions⁴.’ All of the participants I interviewed in the province of Ontario, Canada had dealt with infertility in some shape or form and this experience had provided the impetus for considering adoption. A few women whom I interviewed in China, such as Stephanie, Barbara, Rebecca, Susan and Patricia, also cited infertility as a primary factor in their decision to adopt. In my research sample, infertility most often affected women who had never been mothers. I did, however, encounter some adoptive mothers in China, like Patricia₉₀

Janine and Pamela, who already had children before deciding to adopt. Patricia had three biological children in her twenties, and yet faced serious fertility problems in her early thirties. Patricia and her husband decided they wanted more children than her biology would permit and adopted two young girls from China to expand their family. Since I met this family in 2009, they have adopted one more Chinese daughter into their family.

Pamela had biological children with a previous husband before adopting her twins in China. She said the pregnancy experience was too awful and it was a medical risk for her to bear more children. Janine has two biological daughters and a step-daughter who is half Chinese. She and her husband thought they could best complete their family with an adopted daughter from China because it would bridge the difference between their daughter who is half Chinese and their two blonde daughters.

In order to explore the grief and loss some women attach to the inability to have children, I will discuss what Linda Layne has called “a loss of innocence” (Layne 1996:132). She describes this loss of innocence as the moment in which one realizes that the assumption that being a woman means that one can bear children is flawed. For many women, the inability to conceive also leads to a loss of faith in medicine.

⁴ A ‘failed adoption’ was a term used by several research participants to describe couples who were matched with a child they were unable to bring home due to that child’s complicated health issues. While some couples moved on and adopted another child from China, I heard stories about couples who never seemed to recover from the experience and gave up on the idea of having children completely. Their sense of loss was compounded by this expectation of a ‘guarantee of a child’ and previous experiences with infertility.

Jane, one of my participants, had a lot to say on this issue. She began her interview as follows:

I was legitimately shocked that I didn't get pregnant right away. My mom had four children and everyone around me never seemed to have any problems. I was blown away. We tried for about a year without any help because I just thought, this is ridiculous, I know I can do this. I am young, healthy, I don't have any signs or symptoms, and I've never had any problems (Jane 2009).

Having trouble conceiving a child, according to Linda Layne (1996), shatters the notion of medical progress. Because there are so many available treatments for infertility, it is surprising for these women that they are still unable to become pregnant or carry a pregnancy to term. Infertility also disrupts profoundly held beliefs about the nature of womanhood. Interview participants Jane, Liz and Rachel expressed frustration with fertility treatments, which Jane described as an "immature science" (Jane, Interview, May 5th, 2009). Liz said that doctors did not diagnose her with a specific medical condition and therefore "just lumped us in [under the general category of infertility]" (Liz, Interview, February 8th, 2009). Jane had also lost faith in medicine stating that:

No matter if you have endometriosis or whatever else everybody gets the same course of treatment. We'll try this and if that doesn't work we'll try that, regardless of what they think your medical condition is... I am still enough of an evidence-based person to say I'm not interested in participating in treatments that are still unproven... it just isn't rewarding (Jane, Interview, May 5th 2009).

In addition, hormonally-induced depression and the strain on social relationships were also negative experiences listed in interviews along with financial concerns related to these fertility treatments. Other participants like Rachael described the misery of her

hormonal treatments that caused her to have vivid nightmares about killing her husband.

She explained that when she stopped that course of medication, that her “husband got his wife back” (Rachel, interview, April 3rd 2011). Barbara described similar unpleasant experiences:

I mean, the whole infertility thing, um, really takes its toll on your marriage and your intimacy and you know, I really was just glad to be past that stage because it's nasty. It's no fun. It's frustrating. It's expensive. You know, you're spending all this money and you don't have a guarantee at the end, and you know nobody really has that kind of money to spend on that (Barbara, Interview April 14th 2010).

More generally, many women facing fertility trouble suffer from the anguish of losing their “imaginary identities as mothers” and are subject to the same levels of depression as people living with life threatening conditions such as cancer, heart disease, and HIV/AIDS (Vissing 2002:88). Biological explanations such the ‘maternal instinct’ or ‘biological clock’ which induce women to want children mask the social expectations of femininity, thus emphasizing a scientific explanation rather than a sociological one. The forces pushing women to want children extend well beyond ‘natural’ urges and are intimately connected to gender expectations and cultural ideas of femininity (Berlant 1997).

Many women never experience any emotional or physiological urges for children, which in part discounts the validity of such biological explanations. Some psychological theories posit that the urge to have children has more to do with one's relationship to one's own mother than it does to one's hormones. Women with nurturing mothers are more likely to want to take on a nurturing role with their own

children (Vissing 2002).

Some women remain voluntarily childless because they enjoy the freedom and lifestyle without the financial pressures of children. Many would rather pursue their lives outside the family, or feel that living without children is better for the planet (May 1995). Women living without children are seen in some circles as symbols of empowered women who are not tied to domestic tasks. The childless women as the feminist ideal undermines the experiences associated with the loss of an idealized image of one's future self as a mother. It is decidedly complicated for women who desire both a career and a family. It is important to acknowledge that women who are voluntarily childless are less likely or even unlikely to feel this grief associated with childlessness when compared with women, such as those I spoke to, who remain childless due to circumstances beyond their control. In addition, 'child-free' women are more likely to feel in control of their bodies and lives than 'child-less' women who face infertility problems (Vissing 2002).

Childlessness is an important part of a woman's identity whether it is voluntary or not, because having and nurturing children is an important part of socially prescribed gender roles (Vissing 2002, Rosenthal 2002, Jeffreys 1985, Nicholson 1997). A woman without any children often grapples with her femininity and feels like 'less of a woman' relative to women who are mothers. In fact, "many women believe they can only achieve adult, feminine status through becoming mothers" and feel that they are denied social and cultural privileges only available to women with children (Nicholson 1997:383).

Sociologist Yvonne Vissing (2002) argues that young girls are socialized to believe they will be mothers someday and participate in play where they act as mothers to dolls or siblings. A mother for example, will save her daughter's toys as she outgrows them in anticipation that one day she can give them to her daughter's children.

This theme emerged numerous times in my interviews. Several women revealed that "they always wanted children" (Violet, interview, August 2nd 2009; Anne, Interview, May 20th 2009), "couldn't imagine our life without children" (Anne, Interview, May 20th 2009), "just assumed *my whole life* that I'd have children" (Barbara, Interview, April 14th 2010) or "just knew that I *had* to be a mom" (Melissa, Interview, August 23rd 2010). These women were waiting for the right set of circumstances to arise which came to them much later in their lives.

The imagined ideal version of oneself as a mother is very common outside the context of my research on adoptive mothers. Infertility blogs, for example; *Infertile Myrtle* (<http://meganswishingwell.blogspot.ca> Accessed August 15th, 2013) *A little Pregnant* (<http://www.alittlepregnant.com/alittlepregnant> Accessed August 15th, 2013) and *Infertility sucks!* (<http://infertilitysux.blogspot.ca> Accessed August 15th, 2013) are just a few examples of the ominous presence of infertility in popular media. In society at large, many women experience a great deal of anxiety about when it is the right time to have children, especially if they or their partners are pursuing higher education or demanding careers during their 'best' reproductive years.

For some women it is not a conscious decision to delay child-rearing but a series of events that happen or do not happen at the right time. These circumstances are difficult to control, such as finding the right partner. In her early 30's, Melissa decided to try to have children on her own because she thought those circumstances (meeting a husband and starting a family) might never materialize. She started to "realize that if I left it and didn't take charge of this, I wasn't going to be a mom" (Melissa, Interview, August 23rd 2010). She converted a floor of her house into a suite so that she could rent it out and finance her pursuit to be a single mother, and she made other preparations such as making an appointment to visit a fertility clinic, and preparing a room for her future child.

Melissa eventually did find a significant other with whom she wished to start a family. She reflected ironically that "just when the gyprock dust was basically done, the place was finished, there was still dust in the air, and I met my future husband" (Melissa 2010, Interview, August 23rd 2010). Unfortunately things did not work out for her in their attempts to conceive a child, and even though she pursued medical treatments, it was "too late" (Melissa 2010, Interview, August 23rd, 2010).

The grief that many women experience is connected not only to infertility, but also to choosing alternative routes to forming a family. My research participant, Stephanie, did not exactly face infertility; rather she did not have a long-term partner when she felt she was ready to become a mother. Stephanie has lived in China for most of her adult life and like many Western women living in Beijing she finds that the dating scene in the city is not very promising. Stephanie said that she did have some serious

relationships over the years, but nothing that worked out in the long-term. She pursued the adoption route directly, on her own and without the anguish that other women described about pursuing fertility treatments; nonetheless she still grieved the lost opportunity to have a biological family (Stephanie, Interview, March 18th 2010). Again these losses are intimately connected to this notion of the adopted child as ‘second best.’ When women like Stephanie use pregnancy metaphors in their narratives about the adoption experience, these metaphors help to overcome the differences between adopted and biological kin.

As grown women without children, infertile women are often construed in the media and by people they meet as “selfish” for prioritizing other things before family. In some cases, these women made the same negative judgment about themselves. For example, Barbara expressed her belief that “not having children is a selfish existence” (Barbara, Interview, April 14th 2010). Women who have adopted from China often feel that they are heavily critiqued for their personal choices and the grief that accompanies infertility is delegitimized because outsiders assume it could have been avoided. In addition, these childless women tend to be associated with the public domain, deriving their status and identity from their careers rather than their families. This situation disrupts traditional gender roles that decree that ‘a woman’s place is inside the home’ or in the private sphere (Vissing 2002; Shoot 2011; Livingston & Cohn 2010).

For most of the women I interviewed, however, the decision not to have biological children was not a conscious one. Rather, they view their situation as

resulting from a set of circumstances or criteria for having children which did not emerge early enough in their reproductive cycles. As Barbara puts it, echoing the sentiments of many other women I talked to, she “kept putting the decision to have children off longer and longer until it was too late... you think you have lots of time but you don’t” (Barbara, Interview, April 14th 2010).

Women who cannot carry a pregnancy to term and lose a child during pregnancy are often construed as “failed achievers” especially in the field of reproductive science. This characterization is surprising since they are often such high achievers in other facets of their lives (Layne 2003:150). Most of the women I interviewed were older parents. The reason these women were older when they were ready to become mothers was often because they had achieved so much in their professional lives. They have lived up to the ideals of their generation that a woman can achieve success in their professional life but nonetheless believe that being a mother is an important part of their identity as a successful, fulfilled woman. In turn, these women experience grief about losing their reproductive capacities in a society that makes it difficult for women to pursue their careers while having young children. Those who do become mothers while pursuing their career goals find that the workplace does not accommodate new mothers and opportunities for advancement are limited because they have small children (Evans and Grant 2008). These anxieties about pursuing career and family simultaneously have emerged as themes in popular media thus highlighting how serious and widespread this concern and tension is among middle-aged, high-achieving Canadian women today. Two edited volumes; *Mama PhD: Women Write about Motherhood and Academic Life*

(Evans and Grant 2008), and *Between Interruptions: 30[Canadian] Women Tell the Truth about Motherhood* (Howard 2007), compile stories of successful career women who struggle with the tension of balancing career with family. The two roles are not always compatible because some careers do not afford the flexibility in the workplace that is needed for mothers. Women in heterosexual and dual income families usually carry a heavier burden of housework and childcare responsibilities than the male partners.

While infertility and advanced maternal age are most often issues for upper and middle class women, 'teen pregnancy' is a somewhat parallel social problem for mostly working class women (Ward 1995). Writing about the situation in the mid 1990's Ward argues that teenage mothers, in contrast to child-less career women, are perceived of as under-achievers with few career-aspirations and teenage pregnancy is strongly associated with women from lower socioeconomic classes. In fact, one study found that teens in middle/upper classes exhibited the same kind of sexual activity as lower class teens, except that middle class teens were more likely to have abortions due to higher career aspirations (Ward 1995).

In a Foucauldian sense, women's bodies and reproductive choices are under intense public scrutiny and surveillance where social expectations dictate when women 'should' have children. It seems women are simultaneously scrutinized for having children 'too early' and 'too late', and in the same vein for achieving too much or too little in their career. Societal expectations for women indicate that though they should

have career-related ambitions, but these ambitions should not be so intense that they stand in the way of their reproductive capacities. Drawing from Foucault's notion of biopower, Lock (1998:233) explains the intersection of "disciplined" bodies, and "subjugated knowledges" where women make reproductive choices in the context of much larger mechanisms of social control and social scrutiny. Anne Balsamo, a scholar in cultural studies, elaborates on the theme of surveillance or "public pregnancies" (1995:80). She writes that women have become a "biological spectacle" and their wombs operate as a metonym, not only for the family, but also for the state (1995:80). Anthropologist Jen Pylypa writes about the expectations of motherhood and how they have intensified in a modern middle class setting in Canada. Such expectations include great investments of time and money into the child's development. As a single mother of a transnationally adopted child, she finds the public surveillance and expectations of mothering are amplified because she and other single adoptive mothers are expected to provide appropriate male role models and nurture the child's cultural heritage. In this environment of "intensive mothering" she writes that "scrutiny as to whether one 'measures up' as a mother" is intensified for single transnationally adopted mothers from the public and from social workers (Pylypa 2011:2).

While these beliefs about womanhood and the connection between a woman's identity and bearing children are profoundly rooted, there are other factors leading them to adopt children. Their reasons for adopting also included their husbands' desires for a family, the desire to do well for the world, and sometimes a family history of adoption.

Several women I spoke to expressed the view that adoption felt ‘natural’ to them because they came from families in which a parent or sibling was adopted or had adopted children. For those who came from families with adopted members, adoption was a comparatively easy choice. Liz, whose husband’s sister was adopted, found that his family was immediately supportive and accepting of their decision to adopt. Jane confessed that in a way she felt relieved to have problems conceiving because she had always imagined herself adopting a child overseas. She explained that when she was young, she had tried to convince her friends and family that she herself was adopted. She had a friend who was adopted. “I just so wanted to be adopted, I didn’t even know what it meant, I was just so intrigued by the notion” (Jane, Interview, May 5th 2009). This is a common childhood trope in children’s literature expressing the desire of children wanting to express independence from their parents, however for Jane, these feelings connected to her adult life in significant ways. During her Master’s degree, Jane had a classmate who was in the process of adopting a child from China: “I remember feeling nothing but jealousy... I thought aww- I am just so jealous, that is so cool!” Finally, as an adult thinking about having children, Jane encountered a woman in her neighbourhood with two adopted children, one from China and the other from Ethiopia: “I just think, oh my god that’s me - that’s what I’m supposed to do. I see her all the time; she goes for walks on the same route. I think the universe is trying to tell me something” (Jane, Interview, May 5th 2009).

Women, like Jane and Liz, in some ways experienced less grief than other infertile women because they imagined themselves as adopted mothers as easily as

biological mothers. Relative to the others I encountered in my research, it took Jane and Liz much less time and anguish to come to the decision to adopt given their past experiences and the feeling that adoption was a ‘natural’ choice for their family. Other women I interviewed expressed the view that adoption was an option only considered after all other avenues were exhausted from their list of acceptable reproductive choices for their families. The adoption as ‘second-best’ theme becomes even louder – yet unspoken – in their narratives. These women first pursued extensive and costly fertility treatments such as in vitro-fertilization (IVF), and registered to adopt only after multiple attempts at conceiving were unsuccessful. The policies of adoption through Canadian agencies prohibit couples who are pursuing fertility treatments to register for adoption, even if the wait-list for a child is several years. From the agencies’ perspective, it must be clear that these potential parents have chosen adoption and are no longer striving for a biological child. Expressing some regret in hindsight that she did not move on to adoption after unsuccessful fertility treatments more quickly, Anne said: “I wish I’d done it years ago, we might have ended up with five kids! But I know very well that you have to get to that point yourself. We weren’t ready to stop trying [for a biological child]. You have to get to that point where you are ready to be open [to adoption]” (Anne Interview, May 20th 2009).

Most of the women I spoke with stated simply that they could not imagine their lives without children. These ideas about motherhood and having children do, however, fit very particular patterns. For example, most of the women I interviewed had never been mothers and wanted to adopt infants or children as young as possible. These

women's desires for particular patterns of motherhood coincided with the adoption experience gained in China. Chinese orphans in the 1990's and early 2000's were usually adopted at nine or ten months (an age that is increasing over time) and the parents are unknown, whereas Canadian orphans in the public adoption system are often older children.

For women who have never been mothers, adopting an older child would mean 'missing out' on caring for an infant who depends on the mother completely for survival. Anne is one of the women who stated that she "really wanted a young child or infant" (Anne, Interview, May 20th 2009). On her adoption application she wrote that she wanted a girl between 0-8 months and explained to me that she "just wanted that experience (with an infant) if possible" (Anne, Interview, May 20th 2009). Claire, mother of three biological children who adopted a 4 year-old girl in China, told me that she could "absolutely understand why women who have never been mothers want to adopt children as infants and as young as possible" (Claire, Interview, December 9th 2009). She justified this feeling by comparing her experience of having biological children to that of adopting a preschooler in the following way:

I thought I would come to the child we would adopt with exactly the same feeling (as my biological children) but I didn't. That was very shocking and emotional to me. I thought I knew myself and thought I would have exactly the same feelings for this child. I had to grow--there was always love for this child but it was not the same kind of maternal love that you feel when you hold your own baby for the first time. I had to really assess how this -- what the difference is - the conclusion that I've come to is that because she was not a baby who needed me. I didn't breast feed or hold the bottle to her mouth -- I didn't have that initial sustenance that is required as a new born baby - there wasn't that bonding that happens in the early days in the child's

life. The bonding had to happen in a different way at a different time. She came to us when she was 4, she could feed herself. So there have been years of growing with each other in a way I didn't expect. Because of that I've had to work harder at strengthening that bond. It's required more effort than if she came to us as a newborn baby, it would have happened more naturally. My conclusion is that because she was an older child it took longer and more effort. I can absolutely understand why women who have never been mothers want to adopt children as infants and as young as possible (Claire, Interview, December 9th 2010).

Several of the women in my study group choose not to seek fertility treatments at all or stop after a very short time, stating that they felt like 'animals' or 'numbers' and that the process of fertility treatments is too impersonal (Jane, Interview, May 5th 2009, Barbara, Interview, April 14th 2010). IVF is costly and emotionally and physically demanding and yet the likelihood it will lead to a pregnancy is small. Importantly, though not often mentioned, there are significant health risks associated with IVF including increased risk of prematurity, delivery by caesarean section, multiple births, and major birth abnormalities (Vissing 2002, Hanmer 1997, Schmidt et al 2012). One research participant, Jane, told me that she decided that she was finished with fertility treatments shortly after she had started: "I was done -- it was ruining my marriage -- it was making me feel crazy, it made me feel less than as a person" (Jane, Interview, May 5th 2009). When I asked her to elaborate on these initial comments, she told me:

It's awful! They do something called cycle monitoring - where you go every morning and you get blood work done and do internal ultrasounds every morning before work - I remember feeling like a pig - I'm disgusting you know? Being probed and I had tracks from giving blood every morning. So it's not a fun thing to

go through and I think it's so -because by the time women get to this stage - it's not like giving blood - by the time you get there you are so sad and so broken-hearted and so cheated by the world that it's that much more emotionally painful as well (Jane, Interview, May 5th 2009).

In the end, Jane and her husband came to the conclusion that they wanted a child, and that having a child was important to them rather than having a biological child.

Despite this sentiment that 'having a child is enough', it seems that many women still feel that they have missed out on something that other women experience. Women who become mothers without the experience of pregnancy, such as those who participated in my research, often attempt to anchor their adoption experience in conventional experiences that include a period of pregnancy. Metaphors of pregnancy were continually used by my participants, so much that they seemed like scripts. References to pregnancy were so common that I could almost anticipate them in the interviews. Kate put this very succinctly in relating her adoption story to me: "It's as big and as exciting as if you've got a big belly and in a couple of days you will have a baby. It's the same thing really just that you got on a plane and travelled for 20 hours instead of 20 hours of labour, you know?" (Kate, Interview, May 19th 2009).

Each family, once successfully matched with their child, receives a photo of that child which is known as the referral photo. The referral photo in the adoption experience is likened to an ultrasound photo, and becomes a particularly powerful metaphor for these adoptive parents. Like the ultrasound, the referral photo is carried around in the soon-to- be parents' wallets or taped to the refrigerator. It is the first evidence of the

child and for many women it carries the same significance as an ultrasound photo. Heather said: “we fell in love right at that moment and I carried her picture with me everywhere” (Heather, Interview, August 24th 2009). Barbara echoed Heather’s sentiments of an expectant mother: “once you get the pictures it’s like, God, you know, you just want it to be that day already” (Barbara, Interview, April 14th 2010).

The social and cultural significance of the ultrasound photo, known more colloquially as ‘baby’s first photo’, has been thoroughly examined in anthropological literature (Mitchell and Georges 1998, Adams 1994). Mitchell and Georges (1998) describe the process of quickening in pregnant women as the moment when a woman first experiences the movement of the fetus and begins to conceptualize the fetus as her child. With the introduction of routine ultrasounds this experience has been transformed into a technological fact. Fetal images display these movements on the screen and women are now expected to bond with their children at much earlier stages of the pregnancy, long before they actually feel any fetal movement (Mitchell and Georges 1998). Analogously, referral photos sent to adoptive parents when they are matched to their child take on much the same social role. The women I spoke to described these photos as an important benchmark in their adoption experiences, marking the moment when they can see the child’s face and imagine this little person in their lives. Many of my participants described receiving the referral photo as the moment when they started to bond with their child: “I guess you sort of attach to a particular child through the photos that they send you” (Cynthia, Interview, July 21st 2009).

In her research on visual iconography in adoption, Lisa Cartwright (2003)

observed that the referral photo was likened to prenatal screening such as amniocentesis or chorionic villus sampling. Photographs of waiting children were used as marketing tools for adoption agencies trying to recruit adoptive parents. Beyond the use of these images as family photographs, akin to what Mitchell and Georges (1998) call 'baby's first photo', Cartwright found these images served another purpose for potential adopters. The referral photograph was used by prospective adoptive parents to screen for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and to provide an informal medical assessment of the waiting children.

Without much information about these children, whose histories had been erased through anonymous abandonment, the photograph is used to estimate the general health of each child available for adoption. The "official" information provided about each child is considered to be unreliable because medical and personal histories of these children are not always known or well translated. In some instances, Cartwright argues, the "visuals tend to dominate over text, providing more information, sometimes by default" (Cartwright 2003:89).

Metaphorical pregnancy photographs have become a popular practice in the adoption process. Photos of couples with a beach ball to symbolize their expected adopted child are used by some couples in place of pregnancy photos, see for example: <http://www.jejune.net/bits/2010/04/introducing-the-metaphorical-adoption-maternity-portrait-series/>. Pregnancy metaphors were also used by research participants to describe other experiences in their paths to motherhood. For Jane who had a "failed adoption," receiving the referral photo of a boy she would never bring home was highly detrimental

to her well-being. After being matched with her child, she took his documents and medical documentation to her pediatrician. It turned out that this child was “too sick to be adopted.” This turn of phrase refers to her desire for a healthy child, but there was also the possibility this child would not meet the minimum health standards for immigration into Canada. Given that the recommendation to reject this referral came from their physician Jane and her husband felt it was out of their hands. She likened the experience to a late-term miscarriage: “I had no other link to make to lose a child that I never held, was never in my hands but was in our lives in such a significant way, you know?” (Jane, Interview, May 5th 2009). Jane emphasized the role of the referral photo in creating a scenario where she felt she had lost a child: “Here we had this picture, this *photo*, then we had a massive shower and we named him” (Jane, Interview, May 5th 2009).

Much later during our interview we talked about the scandal involving Madonna who adopted a child from Malawi who was later revealed not to be an orphan. Jane came back to the miscarriage metaphor while expressing sympathy for Madonna. She said: “whether you hold that child or have a photograph, you fall in love with that child. It’s just the same as having the ultrasound photo and then losing the child” (Jane, Interview, May 5th 2009). According to Layne (2003) the role of fetal ultrasounds in creating closer connections between a mother and her child deeply affects mothers who then lose the child already constructed as real. She identifies the use of the technology so early in pregnancy as problematic because mothers become emotionally invested in their child. Perhaps, Layne writes, “it would be better psychologically not to determine

their pregnancies so early, not to start the construction of fetal personhood until a later date, when the chances of ending up with a take-home baby are significantly greater” (2003:101).

For Jane, it seems the metaphor of the ultrasound photo was a way of legitimatizing her grief over losing a child by using the language of miscarriage to describe it. Similarly, an informant I met in Kingston told me of her struggles to conceive due to her husband’s infertility. She had several miscarriages and was unable to carry his child to term. As a couple they had decided to adopt from Korea. She thought this was “a sure thing” since she was matched with a particular child and was just waiting for the final paperwork to go through. This informant and her husband split up at this critical moment in the adoption process rendering her ineligible to adopt this child as a single woman. She described it as a metaphorical miscarriage, and the worst of all her miscarriages because she already imagined that child in her life and was moments away from formally adopting her. She ended up having a child conceived with donor sperm.

What is striking about these stories is that the children that metaphorically miscarry in these women’s narratives, did not *actually* miscarry. These children were actually born to mothers who were forced by circumstances to relinquish their babies. In the Canadian women’s narratives of metaphorical miscarriage, the voices of the children themselves, not to mention their relinquishing mothers, are erased. It is as if those children had died prior to birth, when in fact, they were born, and are likely still living.

For others, constructing their adoption experiences as metaphorical pregnancies resonates in different ways. A number of my research participants have experienced multiple miscarriages. Liz (2009) was pregnant four times and had lost all four fetuses. Anne (2009) told me she had miscarried three times before coming to the decision to adopt. For these women who had lost several pregnancies, it is easy to imagine how the referral photo was easily equated to the ultrasound photos they had received in the process of pregnancies that had been interrupted several times. The referral photo allowed these women, in a sense, to pick up where they had left off in their pregnancies, but with the guarantee of actually receiving a child in the end.

Some adoptive mothers tailor their adoption experience to mimic pregnancy as closely as possible. For example, when given the option to choose the sex of the child they must choose between three options; boy, girl or, boy or girl. Several women selected the third option stating that, “Mother Nature does not dictate whether you get a boy or a girl, so we won’t dictate either. So we chose boy *or* girl” (Liz, interview, February 8th 2009). Similarly Pamela said “it’s almost like giving birth--you can’t choose” (Pamela, Interview, June 14th 2010).

When adoption from China first became popular, the process was very rapid. For the women whom I spoke to who adopted in the 1990s, the waiting process mirrored a pregnancy because it took exactly nine or ten months to get their child. This matching

timeline made the connection between the referral photo as a substitute for an ultrasound photo and the experience of adoption as a metaphorical pregnancy seem 'natural'. More recent adopters have to wait up to five years in order to finally get their child, which can make the pregnancy metaphors more complicated.

While discussing her concerns about the discrepancies in the length of parental leave between adoptive mothers (seven months of parental leave) and mothers who give birth (a full year of maternity leave), Kate described the adoption process as a parallel experience to child birth:

There's a new person in your life and you have to completely adjust-- and the trip that you have to take to get a child in your life --who is to say whose trip was harder? Why should anybody be judged based on how hard their trip was? You now have a child in your life and you should have a year of maternity leave -- I think. So it's not only the physical aspect of having a baby, there's a lot of mental preparation and a lot of anguish and wondering if you'll ever have a child -- and that is for every woman (Kate, Interview, May 19th 2009).

Another prevalent pregnancy metaphor used widely in the adoption community is the idea of growing a child in one's heart rather than in one's uterus. The notion "Conception in the Heart" is also employed by mothers who have children through surrogacy (Ragone 1994). According to this metaphor, a child is still conceived and grown within the woman's' body (in her heart), thus validating her as a mother just like any other. This was by far the most common and most powerful metaphor that I encountered throughout my research. It was ubiquitous among adoptive mothers in interviews, at adoption events and in adoption memoirs (Canfield, Hansen & Thieman 2008, Kitze 2003, Lewis 2000, Lewis 2007).

One particularly poignant instance from my fieldwork in Canada occurred in a short conversation I had with one of the adopted children Joy. Grace (Joy's mother) and I had our interview in McDonald's so that Joy could play in the indoor playground while we chatted, but she was curious and inquisitive about our conversation. Joy interjected with the declaration into our conversation: "I didn't come from mummy's tummy." Grace answered, "You came from mommy's heart." Joy again replied, "Daddy said to me, adopting is heart and tummy is nothing." Grace explained to me that Joy felt special compared to other children because she was adopted. Clearly this metaphor is utilized in this child's everyday life in order to create a feeling of distinction or exceptionality and to create meaningful kinship ties beyond biology.

This process of anchoring adoption experiences in pregnancy was employed frequently by my research participants in order to accomplish a number of important tasks such as building kinship ties, naturalizing the adoption process as an option for building a family, and explaining grief in terms of socially accepted and understood experiences.

Another compelling explanation for the frequent use of pregnancy metaphors is the desire to meet social expectations of femininity, which cultural studies scholar Lauren Berlant (1997) argues is grounded in sexuality and fertility. In her analysis of abortion, Berlant links the notion of reproductive surveillance to a detailed discussion of the "intimate public sphere" where private matters of sexuality and reproduction become public issues and subject to national debate. She contends that heterosexuality is central to North American ideas of citizenship and a married couple with children is

the ultimate expression of this ideal citizen.

Berlant writes that citizenship is “only for members of families” (1997:3). She argues that personal sexual activity and reproductive choices, once reserved for private life, have become symbols of what “America” stands for and therefore serve to outline how its citizens *should* behave. Reproduction, therefore “links women’s private activity to national history and the future” (1997:100). Women are expected to surrender their reproductive agency to the “compelling interests of higher powers” (1997:99). Many women who adopt children, such as those who participated in my research, use the quintessential experiences of pregnancy to describe their adoption process in metaphorical terms. These pregnancy metaphors make the adoption process as close as possible to biological processes and signify a deeply rooted preference for biological kin marking adoption as second-best (Modell 2002).

These metaphors of biological maternity were common not only in my interviews, but were also used at adoption events and seminars by speakers, organizers and parents alike. Metaphors of pregnancy also make a plethora of appearances in North American culture, not just from adoptive mothers. These pregnancy adoption narratives are reinforced in the popular literature on adoption. For example, in children’s literature, Carrie Kitze’s (2003) book, *I Don’t Have Your Eyes*, describes a child who looks different than her mother; her eyes look different, her skin tone is different, and yet they share the same heart. Again, in this instance conception occurs in the heart rather than the uterus.

Adoption memoirs are also littered with gestational metaphors. For example, *Chicken Soup for the Adopted Soul* (Canfield, Hansen & Thieman 2008) is a collection of heart-felt stories from adoptive parents that express sentiments such as: “though never connected by an umbilical cord, in the space of a heartbeat, mutual cords of love joined this child and me” (Williams 2008:22). “The love we felt for her was instantaneous, just like parents seeing their newborn baby. The difference was our baby weighed twenty-five pounds and could walk” (Williams 2008:23). One man writes about the experience of shopping with his clearly not pregnant wife for baby things. The cashier asking if they were expecting a baby and he recounted “my tall slim wife said ‘yes, two of them, tomorrow!’”(Gorden 2008:26). And finally in a passage titled “Delivery Room” Sarah Jo Smith writes:

Six years later, in the middle of a long-awaited night in May, sleepless and alone, once again I found myself in the midst of the final delivery process. This time, instead of a noisy hospital room, I spent hours before the delivery of our twins in restless agitation, pacing the rooms of our darkened home... (Smith 2008:30).

Parents who have both adopted and biological children also described their adoption process using pregnancy metaphors. While telling me about some of the difficulties her daughter had in understanding her history Claire said, “one of the things that really helped her to understand is that she had biological parents and she had us and so she has two sets of parents. I told her when she was little that she didn’t grow in my tummy but she grew in my heart” (Claire, Interview, December 9th 2009).

Pregnancy metaphors are so prevalent in making sense of the adoptive

experience that they come up in the everyday language of Canadians who observe adoption in their community but have no personal connection to it. For example, one of my informants (who has not adopted any children) described a scene at the Toronto International Airport where she witnessed a group arriving from China with their newly adopted children. She compared the airport full of family members waiting in anticipation for their new niece/nephew/grandchild/cousin to arrive from China and the excitement that ensued to: “a bunch of women giving birth at the same time and showing off their new baby for the first time to family members in the waiting room” (Janet, personal communication, July 5th 2010). Finally, adoption as a metaphorical pregnancy is used in adoption circles industry to normalize the process into mainstream culture. Anchoring the process of adoption in familiar biological processes such as pregnancy makes sense as a means to draw more couples to explore it as a reproductive option. In the step-by-step guide to international adoption, *The Complete Book of International Adoption*, for example, the author, and adoption professional, Dawn Davenport (2006) uses pregnancy imagery throughout. The chapter written to guide prospective adopters through the paperwork is titled: “Our version of labour.” In this chapter Davenport compares the difficult process of preparing the appropriate documents needed to adopt a child to labour. She describes that adoption paperwork is arduous, and like labour, “is not for the faint hearted” and “requires a strong constitution” (Davenport 2006:131). Since adoption referrals can be slow, even once all the paperwork is submitted, this book also devotes a chapter to suggesting ways for prospective parents to survive “the wait” in which she calls the “pregnancy without the

stretch marks” (Davenport 2006:155).

Although there are many reasons for women to describe the adoption process in such a way that it mirrors pregnancy, perhaps the most compelling explanation is linked to the feelings of loss that arise from infertility and the desire to perform femininity. These women explained their transition into motherhood highlighting its parallels to pregnancy to avoid the social stigma associated with delayed motherhood and to justify or compensate for the sense of loss that so often accompanies infertility. Loss is connected to the idle potential of their reproductive abilities and their unrealized hopes and dreams of becoming biological parents.

In spite of all the new ways to build kinship, it seems that biology still remains a privileged way of understanding the family. This conclusion closely aligns with the work of Marilyn Strathern (1992) and Judith Modell (2002) who both argue that there is still a strong cultural preference for biologically related kin. This preference explains why these adoptive mothers in their attempts to create meaningful kinship ties, relate their experiences as closely as possible to the biological process of pregnancy. Based on this assumption of a preference for biological kin, Thompson’s (2001) ethnography of infertility clinics found that there is some flexibility in terms of biological relationships in which specific forms of biology are strategically emphasized while others are downplayed in order to solidify the tenuous or strained relationships created in laboratory settings. In these clinics, biological connections are broken down into two parts, the sharing of genes and the sharing of bodily substances, which are selectively accentuated based on “procreative intent” (2001:178). Thompson explains how kinship,

in this context, becomes an achieved status; instead of “being a particular and fixed kind of kin” we must instead “do kinship” and carefully choreograph a set of relations in particular ways (2001:176).

In Signe Howell’s work on adoption and kinship in Norway, she writes that Euro- American understanding of kinship is predicated on biological connections and that such biocentrism means that ‘fictive kinship’ is always based on a biological model. As such, genetic kinship serves as a model for understanding other non-biological kinship relations. She explains that transnational adoption is often characterized as analogous to pregnancy and childbirth in order for the kinship relationships between mother and adoptive child to be culturally understood and legitimized (Howell 2009).

Interestingly, feminist scholar Margaret Homans (2011) conducted research on Korean adoptees returning to their homeland of Korea. In reading their memoirs of returning to Korea to reunite with their birthmothers, she found that Korean adoptees also use pregnancy metaphors in order to reestablish their kinship ties. In Korea, blood relationships are considered permanent, even after several years of physical and geographic separation “the ties of blood are considered inviolable. Children who have lived twenty or thirty years as members of US families are greeted upon their return as if no break has occurred” (Homans 2011:190). In North American discourse, in contrast, these blood ties are downplayed and replaced with birth metaphors, reassigning these children new kinship “as if begotten” (Modell 2004). Korean adoptees attempt to

rekindle the physical connection to their birth mothers through touch. As adults interacting with their birth mothers, these adoptees liken their interaction to a kind of re-birth. For example, one adoptee writes that after being pushed onto a bus with her birth mother: “the bus ride is like a journey down the birth canal” (Homans 2011:192).

Another Korean adoptee described her interaction with her birth mother in the following way: “when [her birth mother] gives her daughter a bath, ‘the water is warm as birth water’ [her birth mother] squats in laboring position and ‘washes me hard and quickly, with so much ardour it hurts, and I become a child again’” (Homans 2011:192). The metaphors, it seems, are salient in creating kinship for adoptees who have grown up in adoptive families where blood ties were metaphorical. While relationships with adoptive parents resembled blood relationships the same kinds of metaphors are used to solidify the bond with rediscovered birth mothers.

My research also highlights how in using pregnancy metaphors to describe their adoption experiences, adoptive mothers effectively erase the actual physical experiences of pregnancy and maternity of the relinquishing mothers in China. The narrative centres on adoptive mothers so much that the other stories – those of birth mothers and displaced children – are hidden. Finally my research also points out how motherhood retains a continued significance in women’s identity in contemporary Canada. While many women actively decide not to have children, for those who struggle with infertility, becoming a mother is central to feelings about being a woman. The inability to conceive or give birth to biological children results in a perceived loss of femininity

by these women and therefore they model other modes of creating a family, such as adoption, as closely as possible along the lines of biological kinship.

Chapter 4. Intimate Philanthropy

“I can’t save all the children in the world- but I can save one” (Lori, Interview, June 25th 2010).

Not all women who adopt from China have experience with infertility. Several of the women that I interviewed (mostly those whom I met in China) have not experienced any fertility problems. Some of the women I interviewed had biological children already, yet these families actively sought out adoption. These women stated that their reasons for adopting children were compassionate rather than practical. For some women, such as Janine, a Canadian woman I met in Beijing, having another biological child would have been much easier than adopting a child in China. Janine is in her early 30s and has two biological children and one step-daughter. She is still young enough to have more biological children. Adoption for her, and many other women like her, was an active choice rather than a last resort to be considered only after exhausting all other reproductive options that would have resulted in a biologically-related child. While most of the women who discussed philanthropic and compassionate rationales in their adoption narratives were women who already had biological children, my interview participants who dealt with infertility also infused philanthropic ideas into their narratives. These two motivations for adoption, infertility and benevolence, are not mutually exclusive and are complicated in their interactions with each other. This chapter explores several themes related to this sense of doing well for the world and ‘saving children.’ It begins by outlining the different kinds of philanthropic sentiments expressed by my interviewees. It also critically examines the notion of ‘saving children’ and considers the tension between kidnap and rescue in adoption narratives (Briggs 2012). Because religious faith was such

a prominent theme in my research participants' narratives and so closely linked to these adoptive parents' compassionate motivations for adopting, this chapter then focuses on faith-based adoption practices. I also explore the sometimes carefully hidden goals of faith-based organizations and individuals that become involved with Chinese orphans and orphanages. This chapter concludes with an ethnographic description of an orphanage operated by a Christian organization which I am calling 'Light of Hope Foster Home'. Most orphanages in China are state-run, however the institutions included in this dissertation are predominantly private or internationally run, and therefore are not representative.

The Light of Hope foster home is a pseudonym I have chosen for several reasons. First, I found a similar turn of phrase in the orphanage's literature. I also choose this pseudonym because it is easily recognizable by Christians as a Christian name for the organization but it is not explicitly Christian and would not be easily identified as such by people with little experience of Christianity. Finally, the name also translates nicely into Chinese as Xi Wang Zhi Guang.

There is no single word that adequately describes my research participants' motivations for adopting. The term 'altruism' comes to mind, yet it fails to capture the complexities involved in the decision making process. For those who adopt for reasons unrelated to infertility, the choice to adopt can be difficult to describe. Jacobson explains that "adoption as 'rescue' reeks of colonialism, glosses over parental desire and places too much pressure on adoptees to be grateful for having been 'saved'" (Jacobson 2008:31). Altruism suggests that there is no expectation of personal gain or reciprocity. Some of the

women I interviewed, however, articulated in their narratives, quite poignantly, that their desire to help children is intertwined with their own desire to build a unique family. My interview with Janine is one such example. She described her decision to adopt in the following way:

We [my husband and I] often talk about whether this is something we feel we are doing to help a child, to help a little girl and give her a better chance. It's really something that is difficult to get a grip on because actually we do a lot of work for charity. Five percent of our business profit goes to a children's charity and that helps more children than just one child. So when you weigh up the numbers-- if you raise one child and put her through school in China and just the basic costs of raising a child-- actually we could help a lot of children for that price-- so that's when my husband and I are sitting up thinking, "well is this really selfish? What are we actually doing?" Because we are not infertile-- we could have another child right away-- I don't have an age problem right now with having another child. We have every possible option available to us to have another child and that's the one that we chose. So in a way it is a bit selfish, we do want another child to call our own. And we feel very happy about it-- it feels right for us (Janine, Interview, April 6th 2010).

While Janine does feel that her choice to adopt is a positive one, for the sake of her future daughter, she spoke critically of the 'saving' narrative, stating that she did not want her future daughter "to grow up thinking that she owes us something. [We] wanted a child." Humanitarianism is employed cautiously in many of these women's narratives, making it difficult to narrate choice in their adoption stories. Compassion narratives are self-serving to some extent because these families want children and want multicultural families. They have added love, joy and status in their lives because of the children whom they have adopted

Cultural studies scholar Andrew Cooper (2008) has employed the term 'diplomacy' to refer to the humanitarian efforts undertaken by celebrities. He refers to a point where "philanthropy ends and diplomacy starts" based on the large scale of activity

and political involvement (Cooper 2008:12). ‘Diplomacy’ according to Cooper’s definition, like altruism, does not adequately capture my participants’ motivations because it refers to involvement in international policy making, rather than the personal effort to ‘save’ a child. For lack of a better expression, I have decided instead to use the term philanthropy but I re-frame it as ‘intimate philanthropy’ to evoke the complex fusion of personal emotions with the idea of benevolence. Transnational adoption is a weighty and personal choice that goes well beyond the simple donation of money to charity connoted in the word philanthropy. ‘Intimate philanthropy’ also incorporates the tension between kidnap and rescue inherent in the course of transnational adoption (Briggs 2012).

Transnational adoption circuits are flawed and in some cases corrupt, however families remove themselves from any potential gray areas or dishonesty associated with transnational adoption by constructing a dichotomy between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ adoptions, “child rescuers and child stealers” (Briggs 2012:3). Famous examples of good and bad adopters are Angelina Jolie and Madonna, respectively. By aligning themselves with the rescue version of adoption, adoptive parents obscure the self-serving motives of adopting a child overseas (Strong-Boag 2006). After examining the narratives of adoptive mothers in my research, it is clear that this dichotomy between good and bad adoption collapses and these women are sensitive to the dark side of adoption and tread gently across the tension between kidnap and rescue in their adoption narratives. As adoption scholar Laura Briggs points out, transnational adoption is concurrently an act of love and an act of violence (Briggs 2012). Furthermore individual transnational adoption experiences uncomfortably straddle this binary between love and symbolic violence.

Among my research participants, there are two distinct varieties of philanthropic narratives. The first is related to cosmopolitanism, and the desire to create a global community, while the second is related to religion. The first is connected to colonial fantasies of rescuing people, especially children in the global south. These attitudes are reinforced by the “visual iconography of rescue” which shows us images of children, alone, without parents, looking cute and vulnerable (Briggs 2003:179). Building upon this idea, historian Karen Dubinsky argues that “a visual culture of needy children which has provided a portal for middle class whites in the west to imagine the problems of the poor-domestic and international and to position themselves as their champion (Dubinsky 2008: 339.)” Dubinsky describes a “global cabbage patch” where well-meaning potential parents imagine themselves as rescuing a child from desperate conditions (Dubinsky 2008:339). Adoption advocates such as Elizabeth Bartholet argue that transnational adoption is consistent with feminist critiques of the normative nuclear family which fetishize blood-ties. This argument is complex because while it subverts the concept of ideal families based on biology, it also elides the global inequalities which produce adoptive families in the first place (Dubinsky 2008).

The word ‘cosmopolitan’ is derived from ‘cosmos’ which means world, and ‘polis,’ meaning city. Theoretically the term describes “a citizen of the world, member in a universal circle of belonging that involves the transcendence of the particular and blindly given ties of kinship and country” (Werbner 2008:2). Especially for expatriate women living in China, the desire to adopt children is strongly associated with building a cosmopolitan identity which includes having an international family, living overseas and

actively pushing the boundaries of what constitutes kinship. Appadurai (1991) aptly describes this cosmopolitan situation in which we envision fresh ways of understanding 'culture' as mobile and delocalized. Appadurai suggests that the world has become deterritorialized and that individual identities have become more cosmopolitan. A cosmopolitan ethnoscape, he argues, is a social context where the imagination plays an important role, as "more persons in more parts of the world consider a wider set of 'possible' lives than they ever did before" (1991:196). Appadurai's work has broad implications as he envisions a wider, global sense of the self, an anthropology of the present "where more persons throughout the world see their lives through prisms of the possible lives offered by mass media in all their forms" (1991:198). A transnational or cosmopolitan identity is an astute articulation of the prevailing *mentalité* of philanthropic culture or the emerging popular ethos of doing well throughout the world. Appadurai writes that "even the meanest and most hopeless of lives, the most brutal and dehumanizing of circumstances, the harshest of lived equalities is now open to the play of imagination" (1991:198).

Some adoption scholars argue that transnational adoption is less motivated by humanitarian intentions and more likely connected to the demand for children that is not perceived to be met domestically. Historian Rickie Solinger (2001) points out that the adoption of foreign babies increased in popularity in 1973, a time frame that coincides with *Roe v. Wade*. The moment in which women won the right to decide whether or not to carry a pregnancy to term meant that many pregnancies that might have led to adoptable babies were terminated leading to what some analysts have named "the white

baby famine” (Solinger 2001:24). There are children available for adoption in Canada and the United States, but not the children these adopters seek, children who are young, healthy, and white (Ortiz and Briggs 2003). There are also many risks in ‘losing’ a child in domestic adoptions if a relinquishing mother changes her mind or if one’s application to adopt is rejected. As a result, some adoptive parents feel the risks are too great and choose to adopt internationally for a greater sense of being guaranteed to end up with a child. Solinger argues that the consumerist intentions overwhelm any sense of transnational adoption as a child-rescue mission because the children always move in the same direction from poor countries (or families) to wealthy ones. Invoking the language of “choice” so prevalent in discussions of abortion and reproductive freedom, Solinger writes: “the way the “adoption market” took form after *Roe v. Wade* is a case study of how some women’s choices depend on exploiting the relative choicelessness of other women” (Solinger 2001:22).

My interview transcripts are filled with cosmopolitan narratives. Keywords and phrases used by my interview subjects to describe their motivations for adopting also emerge as keywords in the literature on cosmopolitanism. These phrases include such concepts as: “living together with difference,” “hospitality in strange lands,” “rootlessness,” and “living together in an international community” (Werbner 2008:2).

Claire, for example, whose partner is British, has two biological sons and a daughter adopted from China. She has been living in China for several years and she considers herself and her family to be permanent residents of China. During our interview, she captured this cosmopolitan ethos while describing one particular incident

when a taxi driver inquired about the nationality of her family. Claire described the difficulty of answering this question because she and her husband come from different nations. All of her children were born in China, but her sons do not look Chinese. She answered the taxi driver's question very proudly by saying "we are global citizens." She told me that the taxi driver, in his excitement, pulled over the car and responded "how do I become one of those?" (Claire, Interview, December 9th 2009). In building her family, Claire had the specific goals of benefiting humanity and enriching the lives and experiences of her children. Claire's sentiments were echoed by many participants in my research who lived in China, who used their family to express their worldliness and their commitment to building a global community.

Interestingly, the motto for the 2008 Beijing Olympics was "One World, One Dream" (<http://en.beijing2008.cn/> Accessed August 15th, 2013). This slogan was often mentioned in my conversations with expatriates in China. It very distinctly encompasses the notion of cosmopolitanism and was cited as encapsulating the values that were carefully considered while building a family. The cosmopolitan family is an expression or microcosm of this desire for 'one world' not divided by the nation-state. Cosmopolitanism, argues Beck "is not about a 'universal culture' of sameness, but instead about 'recognition of otherness of the other, beyond the false understanding associated with territoriality and homogenization'" (Beck 2004:143 cited in Forte 2010:7).

While being 'cosmopolitan' implies a kind of status performance or a declaration of one's worldliness, there also exists a wider cosmopolitan subjectivity exemplified in various immigrant populations that is not class specific and instead entails a kind of

“hospitality from strangers” or global citizenship (Werbner 2008:61). Historically, a cosmopolitan is one who is:

an elect member of society, familiar with the languages...able to converse about world history, philosophy, classical music, ballet, theatre and human rights. Culturally, such a cosmopolitan is an aesthetic consumer, living an elegant lifestyle a connoisseur of fine wine, a fashionable person with good table manners...” (Werbner 2010:50).

Cosmopolitanism in the context of transnational adoption also includes sentiments of charity or good will toward the world outside the boundaries of one’s home nation. Critics of transnational adoption might suggest that getting a child overseas is an example of being an “aesthetic consumer.” My research participants tended to distance themselves from the consumer side of adoption. Anne for example stated “that you don’t buy babies- - it is illegal to purchase children” (Anne, Interview, May 20th 2009). Forte argues that these kinds of ‘charitable’ cosmopolitan efforts can be “unconscious or passive” and a side effect of global interconnection rather than a mindful effort (Forte 2010:7).

In Canada, many people criticize families for adopting from abroad because they *should be* adopting children ‘at home.’ These critics believe that there are plenty of children in Canada who do not have families; however the adoptive mothers I met seem to embrace a much larger notion of community, a global rather than a national community. Adoption scholar Tobias Hubinette writes that transnational adoption is a “leftist liberal project” in which people showcase their ideology of colorblindness and make a statement about their politics through creating biracial families (2009:336). Transnational adoption is a good ideological fit for these families who see themselves as

worldly and cosmopolitan. These adoptive families can have the child they so badly desire while doing something that they feel is humanitarian. These imaginings of global families were conceived during the Cold War era where North Americans were encouraged to embrace global responsibilities and commitments and imagine a larger global community. These conceptions of global families were part of nation building projects in East Asia in attempt to save them from Communism (Klein 2000).

Specific examples of philanthropic sentiments expressed by my research participants include statements such as the epigraph to this chapter: “I can’t save all the children in the world--but I can save one” (Lori, Interview, June 25th 2010). Similarly, Barbara stated: “I felt like I had to contribute, like, I couldn’t just have a selfish life here on earth... at the end of the day your life has to have some meaning and there are so many children that you see who don’t have parents, and you know, you just wish you could do more” (Barbara, Interview, April 14th 2010). Later in our interview she reiterated this point when she said: “so I think this whole adoption thing, god, if I didn’t [give] something back to society I would really feel like my life wasn’t really of that much value” (Barbara, Interview, April 14th 2010). Anne expressed that she always had an “interest in helping children in third world countries” and when she was unable to conceive her own children, international adoption fit easily into her sensibilities and feelings about the importance of doing something good for humanity (Anne, Interview, May 20th, 2009).

Lori’s adoption narrative clearly embraced this idea of ‘saving’ a child. She described the process of taking a poorly cared-for and undernourished child and raising

her to be a beautiful healthy little girl. Lori said:

She was extremely overweight when we got her. They fed her white rice, she was malnourished and yet very wide and large. At 9 months old she couldn't sit up or hold her neck up. Normally kids are crawling at this age. So we took her for her tests and stuff-- she was anemic, very low protein, calcium deficient. She has deposits on her ribs from calcium deficiency and then she was totally fat-- and cute and chubby. But when you look inside into the blood-work extremely unhealthy, so the doctor said no more rice, no more carbohydrates, we had to put her on liquid diet. That was tough because her stomach was so expanded, so she always felt hungry and she cried a lot. She got over this initial problem and we introduced solids, it was almost a regression with the solid food she remembered these tastes. They were feeding her wagon wheels-- chocolate wagon wheels and Twinkies at 6 months old. It was incredible, anything to fill up her tummy... (Lori, Interview, June 25th 2010).

Anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod (2002) asks us to be critical of this kind of 'saving' narrative. While speaking out about Muslim women in the aftermath of September 11th, Abu-Lughod points out that Muslim women are expressions of a unique history and a product of different circumstances than those in the West. She argues that the quest to 'save' these women implies a sense of cultural superiority paired with a kind of symbolic (and/or physical) violence and wonders whether Muslim women need saving at all. Tobias Hubinette (2006) argues that transnational adoption is connected to a legacy of saving or modernization projects as well as to the disciplining of bodies in the Global South. In a similar vein, one could ask, "do Chinese children really need saving?" The population of children in orphanages in Beijing in 2010 indicates that it is mostly children with disabilities or major health concerns who are abandoned at this point in time rather than healthy baby girls. It seems that the landscape of child abandonment is rapidly changing and that fewer healthy children are available for overseas adoption. Children's Bridge, one of Ontario's major adoption agencies dealing with China has closed the

regular stream of adoption and is currently only accepting applications from those who wish to adopt children with special needs or from parents of Chinese heritage (www.childrensbridge.com, consulted January 2nd, 2012). As of June 18th, 2012 Children's Bridge is no longer accepting applications for the expedited program (for families of Chinese heritage) because the wait times are too lengthy and the sustainability unpredictable. The Waiting Children program (for children with special needs) has opened up to include children with higher non correctable medical needs and accepts 20 families into the program at one time. A call back list has been put into place for this program (www.childrensbridge.com accessed: August 18th, 2013).

Other philanthropic sentiments expressed during my interviews included a sense of environmentalism resembling the theoretical arguments posited in the zero population growth movement in the 1970's (May 1995). The basic tenets of the movement are that limiting the number of children born will reduce the human impact on the natural environment. In our interview, Barbara, for example, said that "this child is already living and needs a home, why bring another child into this world?" (Barbara, interview, April 14th, 2010). When I asked Stephanie, who is a single mother to an adopted child, whether she had considered other reproductive choices such as IVF or surrogacy she said: "it's one thing to take care of a child that is already here, that seems more natural to me than using technology to produce another life. To my mind it's better to take a child that's here and provide a home" (Stephanie, Interview, March 18th, 2010). My participant, Lori, who did not have any experience with infertility, echoed these sentiments, and said that:

We [she and her husband] liked the idea of having an international family. There are so many kids in this world and we've travelled a lot and seen so many children

in need. It just seems selfish to have your own kids when this world is over-populated already. And there are so many kids out there in need. And we're in a position where we can help- it's just-- I don't know-- a sense of global community (Lori, Interview, June 25th 2010).

Some of these philanthropic sentiments are somewhat feminist in nature. The strong social and cultural preference for sons in China is one of the reasons prompting couples to consider the China adoption program (Jacobson 2008). Some women expressed specific political concerns about gender discrimination in China. For example, my participant, Anne explains:

I wanted girls because a big part of me has always supported women-- even more so now as I try to teach my girls as much as I can about being strong and being true to yourself. I can't stand what happens to women in the world. But that's not the reason I adopted. I adopted because I wanted to have children. But I was really, really happy that I could help these girls in this situation. I feel even better about that now, I try and nurture that in my girls, respect and sisterhood. Women, even in this society, we have to stick up for each other and it's really important to me.

In a similar vein she followed up this statement later in our interview with a few tears saying:

I am not saying that their [her children] experiences in the orphanage would have been horrible, it probably would not have been a good experience especially when they get older -- but they would have managed. And they would have had what they had and that would have been life for them. I am not saying it's bad-- it's different-- very, very different --but it kills me to think that a girl doesn't have the potential-- every child deserves the right to be who they could be. I am getting emotional. Sorry (Anne, Interview, May 20th 2010).

It is clear from these statements that Anne has strong feelings about the adoption of her three daughters from China. It is also clear that she has not uncritically employed a 'saving' narrative, nor does she see herself as rescuing these children. Much like Janine, quoted earlier in this chapter, Anne places her desire for children before any sentiments of philanthropy. It is also interesting how her sentiments of solidarity toward women and

girls includes the children she has adopted but not their relinquishing mothers in China, who are once again erased from the adoption narrative. Anne and her husband could not have children biologically, and transnational adoption was a good ideological fit given her liberal beliefs about equality and multiculturalism.

Philanthropy is connected to adoption very intimately. However, it is not always the impetus for adopting and sometimes it manifests itself in unique ways. For example, for women such as Kate, the desire to benefit humanity did not inspire her decision to adopt; rather her philanthropic actions were inspired by adoption. After adopting a little girl from China, Kate became very involved in the adoption community and joined others in organizing big charity events to raise money for orphanages in China. This sort of charitable work was something new for Kate, something she had not considered until after adoption experience. Angela's situation is somewhat different. Angela was born in China, got married and educated in the U.S., and then returned to China with her husband when she was in her 60s. She had no intention of adopting another child until confronted with a unique circumstance. Upon returning to China, Angela, who has extensive medical training, donated all of her time to caring for orphans, some of whom had serious medical conditions. Health complications and disability are prominent reasons for women in China to abandon their children, especially in urban centres. The media highlights gender as the main reason that children in China are abandoned. The National Geographic documentary, *China's Lost Girls*, for example focuses on the "unwanted daughters of China" (Ling 2005). Media reports seem to overlook the numerous boys who are orphaned and children abandoned due to physical or mental impairment. My experience

in Beijing in a number of different institutions was that all of the infants and children in these orphanages had either physical disabilities or serious medical conditions.

I met Angela while volunteering in one of these institutions. Through her extensive experience working with orphans she encountered a child with a very severe skin condition, *epidermolysis bullosa*, known more colloquially as ‘butterfly skin,’ which causes the skin to develop blisters in response to even minor injuries (Pub Med Health 2010). Angela named this child Paul. Recognizing that Paul would require extensive life-long care that he was unlikely to receive in an institution, Angela decided to adopt him knowing that she had the medical expertise necessary to ensure his well-being. What makes Angela’s case unique is that she already has grown biological and adopted children and she did not seek out another adoption experience. Instead she responded to a particular child’s needs when they were presented to her.

Many of the philanthropic narratives I came across were infused with religious language. In fact there are a large number of foreign Christians in China working in orphanages. I encountered many foreign Christians in Beijing adopting and helping other Christians to adopt at home in North America. The cost of adopting and living abroad working in Chinese orphanages was off-set by donations from their congregations. Journalist Kathryn Joyce (2013) has written extensively about the evangelical movement to save orphans. She writes how congregation leaders promote all church goes to adopt children into their families. The orphan saving crusade is part of a conservative Christian social movement to get involved in poverty and social justice issues that for years belonged to liberal denominations. This movement is an extension of pro-life politics and

acts “more quietly as a window for evangelizing, as Christians get to bring the mission field home and pass on the gospel to a new population of children, effectively saving them twice” (Joyce 2013:xii).

As a non-religious volunteer at several of these institutions, I was subject to a great deal of proselytization. I was given a Bible by one of the other volunteers at a Christian institution which I have given the pseudonym “Pray for China” orphanage. The volunteers at this organization had a clear Christian agenda. After being given the Bible, I made no further visits to the Pray for China orphanage, even though I still had several months left in China. It was clear that I would be unable to observe at this orphanage without participating in Christianity or at least pretending to, and neither option seemed ethical. Although the children were well loved and cared for, I found the emphatic Christian messages unpalatable. I had learned enough in a few visits to the orphanage to know that the volunteers’ mission in working with orphans was explicitly to spread the word of Christ.

‘Saving children’ had a much different meaning for these volunteers than it did for my other participants such as Lori, Barbara or Stephanie who saw themselves as saving these children from their social and economic circumstances through adoption. The Pray for China orphanage volunteers, on the other hand, saw themselves as saving the souls of the children they cared for. Significantly, the children at the Pray for China orphanage are different from those in the majority of Chinese orphanages which are filled with abandoned children. The children at Pray for China have deceased parents but they are not legally eligible for adoption because they still have living relatives who are unable or

unwilling to care for them. Most of the youngsters in Chinese orphanages are abandoned therefore no living relatives cannot be traced. Knowing that the children living in the Pray for China orphanage will never be adopted into international families, the volunteers act as physical and spiritual guardians to these children. From the perspective of the volunteers, the message of Christianity can enter China through these children.

Christianity has a long history connected to adoption in China. Beginning with the Christian Children's Fund formed during the Cold War, Americans were invited to participate in the Cold War struggle for Asia through 'adoption' or financial sponsorship of Asian children. American politicians argued that "the Cold War demands the skills of a parent rather than a soldier" (Klein 2000:59). The Christian Children's Fund positioned the US as the defender of Asia with the responsibility of guiding this part of the world to modernization through Christianity and democracy. The Christian Children's Fund highlighted child sponsorship as their contribution to the ideological battle against Communism describing these "adoptees" as "tiny ambassadors for America" (Klein 2000:45).

One of my research participants in China, Kimberly, adopted for religious reasons. Kimberly stated that she had a "burden for China" (Kimberly, Interview, June 7th 2010). I followed up my conversation with Kimberly over email and asked her to elaborate and she replied:

The expression "have a burden for" is often used by Christians to express their desire to share the message of Christianity with people who have never heard it. It may also mean to have compassion and concern for the needs (physical and spiritual) of an individual or people group. This is what I meant when I talked with you (Kimberley, Email Communication August 29th 2011).

Kimberley was among the many Christian people I met in China who had adopted because “the Lord spoke” to her. She said that for her adoption was “part of God’s plan” (Kimberly 2010). It is very clear from her story that her intentions in China were to proselytize and “share the message of Christianity with those who have never heard it.” When I met Kimberly, one of the first points she wanted to establish in our conversation was whether I was a fellow Christian. I explained to her that I had not grown up in a Christian family and that she might need to explain some things to me that might seem obvious to her because I do not have a Christian background. On our very first meeting and in every subsequent conversation with her she reminded me that “He [Jesus] desires to have that kind of relationship with you too, Stacy” (Kimberly, Interview June 7th 2010; Email Communication, August 29th 2011). She asked whether I had a Bible and suggested some passages for me to read. It appears that I was also an object of her work as a Christian in China.

Kimberly, in her adoption narrative, said that she was listening to a Christian radio program in her home in the United States, and even though she already had two biological children, the idea of adopting from China entered her consciousness at that moment. She described it in the following way:

It actually started with a radio broadcast, strangely enough, where, I heard a man share his family’s experience going to China to adopt, and um, he was just talking about what they saw in the orphanage that they visited and just what they’d learned about the needs of so many babies needing homes in China and it just really tugged at my heart and I felt like the Lord was really using that in my life... We prayed about it a lot and one thing that was obviously a concern you’ve heard from lots of people is the finances were really overwhelming. The cost of an adoption is huge, and at the time, I was a stay-at-home mom, and we just didn’t have the money, at least we didn’t think, but God really provided in some really miraculous ways and it all, the funds came in so we were really blessed. Yeah it was really, it started with

the radio program, hearing about that and then just doing more research on my own and finding out what the needs were here with baby girls in particular. There's a scripture in the Bible that talks about taking care of widows and orphans and that's our responsibility, it's not a suggestion, it's what we are supposed to do and I just really felt like we've got room in our family for another child, we can definitely bring another child into our family (Kimberly, Interview, June 7th 2010).

She elaborated on this point in a follow-up email:

In answer to the "why China?" question, I can only say that I believe God brought China onto my "radar screen" so to speak. There really is no other explanation than that it came from Him. Within a short period of time, we encountered several stories about Chinese adoptions, about spiritual needs in China, and about orphans in China and I had this "burden," compassion, and concern for the Chinese people. I previously had never given much thought to China, so I have to conclude that it was from God. God is amazing. He works in incredible ways in Christians' lives. He desires to have that kind of relationship with you too, Stacy (Kimberly, Email Communication, August 29th 2011).

Kimberly repeated the same kinds of statements several times throughout the interview process. Later during our interview Kimberly continued:

I would say, probably the biggest influence on our adoption decision was God. I mean, I shared with you before about feeling like God has told us in His word that that's what we're supposed to do, to take care of widows and orphans, and that it is a mandate and I heard other Christian speakers talk about this, you know, this issue very directly and it was a conviction to me that we, we're not supposed to just give lip service to caring about orphans and maybe send a donation once in a great while and feel good about ourselves, but we should, as a Christian, we need to follow the mandate and that families should consider adoption. Not just, I think that one thing that I really learned in all of this, Stacy, is that, you know, earlier I would have said, only families that can't have children biologically adopt, that's what I would have said. You adopt only if you tried to have children biologically and it didn't work, for whatever reason, I wouldn't have even thought about families that had children biologically and then adopted but now it makes perfect sense to me because I can see how God can make a family both ways. He makes a family by biological means and by adoption, and it's perfectly right that way, and it's something that I wish more families would consider. I talked to a lot of individuals after we adopted [our daughter], a lot of individuals who said, 'oh, I'd love to adopt but I can't afford it', or, 'I'd love to adopt but, you know, there was always a reason why I can't do it.' And I just try to encourage people to not always say 'but I can't' but to think about it, pray about it, and to maybe consider that maybe I can. And that maybe you

should. We've met a lot of families, we've met families whose kids were out of the nest, you know, kids who were off at college, and they've recently started adopting a kid from China or, I think it's amazing. I think it's what we're supposed to do (Kimberly 2010).

It is not a coincidence that Kimberly and all of the other Christians I met at the orphanages in Beijing were Americans. There is a substantial history of American Christians and adoption overseas beginning with Korea in the 1950's (Oh 2005). Historian Arissa Oh describes how this involvement in transnational adoption is propelled by a sort of fusion of religion and nationality with Christian principles becoming fundamental to what it means to be a "good American" (Oh 2005:169).

Interestingly, it was not only Christians who used faith-based explanations to describe their decision to adopt. Adherents of other faiths also explained their decision to adopt a child in religious terms. For example, I met members of the Baha'i community of Beijing who were considering adoption or had already adopted. Claire, for instance, echoing some of the same sentiments of Kimberly, stated that:

First and foremost in the Baha'i writings it is very clear that we need to care for orphans. It even says the word 'orphan' and that it's our responsibility to take care of these children so that's the first reason. And secondly, I just cannot bear the thought that these children live without parents. And we have the means to help out. And more importantly we have enough love in our family to do it. It just seems very unjust that there are children that are uncared for (Claire, Interview, December 9, 2009).

Faith not only inspired adoption in China, but also motivated faith-minded people to up-root their lives and move to China in order to 'serve the Lord' and take care of Chinese orphans. While volunteering at two Christian orphanages in China, the Pray for China orphanage, and the Light of Hope Foster Home, I met several families and

individuals who were living in China for extended periods of time to care for these children. Some of these people were adoptive parents and some were not, but as far as I could tell they were all Christian.

Historically, conversion to Christianity has never been popular in China in part because Christianity has been intolerant of religious syncretism and critical of cultural practices such as ancestor worship. Buddhism appealed more to Chinese people because it tolerated religious syncretism (Fried 1987). Currently, in China the government wishes to eliminate the influence of missionaries, especially in universities. There are many faith communities in China including Christians, Buddhists and Baha'is. While religion is openly practiced by Chinese and foreign residents alike, proselytization is prohibited (Zhong 2011).

A document of the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist party of China circulated amongst Chinese Universities outlines some steps taken to ferret out Christian missionary activity. The document emphasizes a separation between religion and education and implemented a number of policies in order to “resist foreign use of religion to infiltrate institutions of higher education and prevent campus evangelism” (Zhong 2011:1). Some suggestions for resisting religious infiltration on campus included making Marxist atheism foundational in university learning.

The college years are seen by the Communist party as a critical time in one's lifetime in developing one's worldview and system of values. The document recommends that campus culture should be strengthened and campus activities should “continually expand the fields for outstanding culture and scientific spirit” (Zhong

2011:3). Internet activities should be tightly regulated and mental health education and psychological counselling should be readily available to students. During religious holidays, the Communist party suggests that universities should keep students busy with study, sports and recreational activities. Educators need to be screened and border officials should be cautious and thorough in letting foreigners enter the country and their activities should be monitored throughout the course of their stay in China. Youth league members of the Communist party must not be religious. Finally the Communist Party suggests that each university develop a system of reporting and investigating each case of suspected evangelism (Zhong 2011).

Local practice, as I observed it in and around Beijing Foreign Studies University, was that foreigners and locals are supposed to practice religion separately from each other. In order to attend any foreign church or place of worship, attendees must carry a foreign passport and foreigners are not allowed to attend local Chinese places of worship.

Christians have been a mainstay in caring for orphans in China since the Cold War era in its ideological battle against Communism (Klein 2000). In contemporary times the legacy of Christian involvement with orphans, it seems, is used as a strategy in Christian faith communities to circumvent Chinese policies that prohibit the active spreading of their faith in China. The security surrounding evangelism and consequences for it in China are severe. Therefore Christians seek more passive ways to spread the word of Christ in China, through their good deeds rather than active proselytization.

The 'Light of Hope Foster Home' is one of the orphanages I came into contact with in China. This organization was founded by an American couple and houses

abandoned children with physical disabilities and those in need of medical attention unavailable to them in state-run orphanages. As noted throughout this dissertation, the name 'Light of Hope' is a pseudonym, however the actual name of this organization is similar in character in that it sounds Christian but is not explicitly so. In fact, it was only after a few months of volunteering and talking with other volunteers that I realized that the orphanage was a Christian organization. The language used on their website and in print literature was very carefully worded so that the Christian messages were implicit. This lack of explicitness about religion is in stark contrast to the other orphanage, Pray for China, which is overtly Christian in name and practice.

The interns at Light of Hope were actively involved in Bible study in order to keep their faith strong under what they perceived to be challenging spiritual conditions. This was not an official practice of the foster home, rather fellowship was something that took place semi-independently of the organization. The organization began in 1993 as a small facility supported through the manufacture of handicrafts and expanded as revenues grew. A spiritual narrative on the organization's website describes the beginnings of the foster home, tracing a remarkable transformation from "a place of darkness and despair" into a "beacon of hope" (quoted from the Light of Hope website). According to this narrative, the plot of land which now houses the foster home was considered to be cursed by local villagers. Many teenagers had used this space to commit suicide and no one would purchase this land believing it would lead to "depression and hopelessness."

The legend about the land relates that a local man visited this space on a regular basis in order to pray until one evening he dreamed that the land would be purchased by

foreigners and transformed into a place for orphans. Without knowing this piece of history, an American couple bought the land and started an orphanage which they called a foster home. 'Foster home' is used in the title rather than orphanage in order to emphasize the high staff-to-child ratio. At some points in time the number of adult caretakers and volunteers exceeded the number of children. The term foster home also reflected the warm environment created at the institution through the use of lots of colour, toys and a well-constructed and equipped playground. This infrastructure far exceeds the minimal facilities offered in the typical state-run Chinese orphanages and the organization is linked to Christian adoption agencies in the United States. Most of the foreign adoptions from the foster home are arranged through these particular Christian agencies.

The Light of Hope foster home is funded by a number of sources including the manufacture of handicrafts, an expensive and prestigious English language school and investments from big businesses in China. There are also opportunities for overseas families to sponsor a particular child with a monthly donation and gifts of clothing and toys. The organization's staff is composed of local Chinese nannies and administrators and overseas volunteers and interns who run the preschool, teach English in the private college, and care for babies. Volunteers with special skills work as physiotherapists and speech language pathologists to help children with physical disabilities.

What is especially notable about the Light of Hope Foster Home is the implicit religious language used in its literature, both online and in print, to describe the events and daily work of this institution. For example, the website explains "we bring [the children] here not only for surgery and medical care, but for emotional and spiritual

restoration as well.” This kind of language takes on a special significance in light of the Christian orientation of the institution. The word ‘spirit’ is used in vernacular language by secular and religious communities alike to connote something in opposition to the material body. While not explicit, the Light of Hope foster home has specific religious intentions in using the word ‘spirit.’ Such words and phrases imply that the children at the foster home will be raised as Christians. As subsequent descriptions show, the children at this institution are raised as Christians and the orphanage staff, medical professionals who treat the children and community members understand the workings of the institution through the lens of their Christian faith. The remainder of this chapter explores how these children are raised as Americans with strong Christian leanings. This practice extends to the naming of the children, the preschool activities they take part in, the holidays they celebrate and how medical interventions are explained as ‘miracles.’

In Kathryn Joyce’s monograph “the Child Catchers” she writes critically about the evangelical movement to rescue orphans from abroad, arguing that in trying to rescue as many children from abroad as possible it creates incentives to establish and expand orphanages. In some cases, Joyce argues, agencies may hire ‘child finders’ “sometimes from impoverished but intact families” (Joyce 2013b:1). From my view from the Light of Hope Foster home, the Christian volunteers did engage in child finding, but from state orphanages. Once the children at light of hope were successfully adopted into American Christian families, orphanage volunteers made trips to state facilities in more rural locations in China, finding children with medical needs they felt could be met in the Beijing facility. These particular children are thrice saved, literally through medical

intervention, figuratively into a loving family and spiritually into the Christian faith.

Each child under the care of the Light of Hope Foster Home is given both an English name and a Chinese name. Logistically this practice is useful because the children are cared for by both Chinese and foreign caregivers and the dual name system minimizes confusion among the staff. There are laminated signs on the children's bedroom doors with each child's English and Chinese name, age, disability and medical routine (including medication and or therapy). Another reason for giving these children English names is that most of these children will be adopted by North American or European families and are carefully groomed for the Western lifestyle. When I inquired about this practice of giving the children English names, with some of the administrators at the foster home told me that "it eases their transition into foreign homes." This perspective is interesting because these children will often be re-named by their adoptive parents leaving their orphanage names behind. The practice of giving these children English names may be that many of the foreign volunteers at the foster home do not comfortably or fluently speak Chinese and having English names makes it easier to work with these children.

The Christian influence in the adoption process at Light of Hope extends to the agencies that facilitate adoption. There are specific Christian adoption agencies that link families to children in this orphanage. While parents are not allowed to choose a particular child to adopt, there is some flexibility in the rules when adopting through one of these Christian agencies. For example, with agencies such as: 'All God's Children International' (<http://www.allgodschildren.org/>) or 'Christian World Adoption,'

(<http://www.cwa.org/>) it is possible to find out when a particular child is up for adoption (usually after his/her medical conditions have stabilized). I met one family in China on their adoption trip who were in the process of adopting a young girl with a heart condition and a radial club hand¹ from the Light of Hope Foster Home. When they arrived at the orphanage and met their daughter for the first time they seemed to already know all of the staff and a lot about the child. It turned out that they had been communicating with people at the orphanage over Skype and following the child's progress on the foster home blog for years.

The foster home has two floors. The babies and children who had recently undergone surgery live upstairs and the older and sometimes healthier children live downstairs or with local foster families and attend pre-school at the foster home on a daily basis. Once a child moves downstairs it is only a matter of time before he/she is adopted. The preschool is run by foreign interns and follows detailed routines closely resembling what one would expect to see in a North American pre-school. The children read English books, sing classic North American pre-school songs such as: *The Wheels on the Bus* and *No More Monkeys Jumping on the Bed*. During snack time, the children enact specific rituals where they sit in their assigned seats, pass around a bottle of hand sanitizer to 'wash up' and then sit with their hands clasped and say "ready" in unison when all the children are seated and have cleaned up. Snacks, such as bananas and candy bars, are placed on their plastic plates and the children must remain seated until they have finished

¹ A radial club hand is a congenital deformity in which the child's wrist bends inward towards the thumb (www.childrenshospital.org).

eating. After eating, the children are given unstructured playtime when they can colour, play with blocks or go outside to use the play structure. I did not visit any Chinese preschools to compare them to the Light of Hope foster home preschool; however the rituals and routines at the foster home preschool were distinctly North American in character. The children also observe Christian holidays such as Christmas and take part in North American rituals that include celebrating birthdays and Thanksgiving, complete with cakes, party hats and turkey dinners.

Children who have been abandoned and institutionalized often suffer from attachment problems and therefore experience significant delays in cognitive and physical development. While an institution cannot replace a family, the nature of the Light of Hope Foster Home enables children to be in regular contact with the same caregivers allowing for some meaningful bonds to form. These kinds of attachments allow the children to progress very quickly and sometimes even catch up in areas where they had fallen behind. To monitor their progress, the children are regularly tested using the World Health Organization (WHO) standards for child development and growth. The foster home advocates that all the children need in order to meet the WHO standards is love and prayer.

According to the literature on Christian philanthropy, Christian charity is “given freely, joyously, almost spontaneously and without any sense of obligation. It is a gift of charity, or love” (Bangert 2010:67). Reciprocity is not expected in this form of giving, however, the notion of a gift from God is usually paired with some sense of obligation and recipients are expected to give to others in return:

Many people who experience themselves as blessed feel a deep need to ‘make good’ on the gifts they have received. To some extent this may be understood as the need to discharge a great debt. The debt, though not intentionally incurred, is no less significant as an experienced reality that helps to motivate the desire to contribute to the lives of others” (Bangert 2010:71).

In this vein, the Christian volunteers whom I met in China, while seemingly selfless in their contributions, were also making connections in China and spreading the word of Christ to its people. Historian Arissa Oh refers to this type of practice as “a new kind of missionary work” (Oh 2005:162). The message of Christ is spread throughout the community and to medical professionals more passively than in classic missionary activity. The foster home staff and volunteers who are Christian believe that the message is spread through experiencing miracles or extraordinary transformations of children who had been given little hope of survival. The following narrative provides an example of a ‘miracle child:’

When we brought her to the foster home at 3 months old, she was as tiny as 1 month old baby. She was in [a state orphanage] but we recognized that she needed more care. On the overnight train to Beijing, we woke up throughout the night to ensure she was still breathing. She was in such poor health we were concerned she wouldn’t make it through the night. She was diagnosed with heart disease and umbilical hernia. When she arrived at the foster home, she weighed 6.34 pounds. We needed to wait until she was healthier to treat her medical needs. Several months later when she had gained enough weight to have her heart surgery, the doctor found that the 6.5 mm hole in her heart was completely healed and we were sent home! Furthermore her umbilical hernia was improving and no longer required any surgery. Seeing her transform from a tiny malnourished baby with a small chance at life, to an adorable chubby little girl with a bright future was watching a miracle unfold before our eyes (cited from a Light of Hope Foster Home brochure).

This kind of narrative is customary rather than exceptional; and fuels the classic rescue narrative in adoption circles used to support or point to the ‘good’ adoptions (Briggs

2012). Many of the children at the foster home are severely disabled and many are presumed inoperable or to have little chance of surviving, while others have only minor disabilities such as cleft lip or palate which does not threaten their chance of survival.

This kind of miracle narrative is heard by doctors and community members who may have considered that caring for these children who have very low chances of surviving constitutes a waste of limited resources. What Nancy Scheper-Hughes calls “lifeboat ethics” in impoverished parts of the world where infant mortality is high and limited resources are pooled for children with the best chance of survival, provides some important insights into how these miracles are perceived in China. She describes the ‘lifeboat ethics’ in the following way:

Throughout much of human history-- as in a great deal of the impoverished Third World Today-- women have had to give birth and to nurture children under ecological conditions and social arrangements hostile to child survival, as well as their own well-being. Under circumstances of high childhood mortality, patterns of selective neglect and passive infanticide may be seen as active survival strategies (Scheper-Hughes 1997:86).

The miraculous and unexpected recovery of the children who are not expected to survive is attributed to the Light of Hope Foster Home’s connections to God. “You are people of God,” the local people said, in response to the stories of extraordinary recovery of these orphans.

The children at the Light of Hope foster home were well loved, cared for and receiving medical treatment that they might not have otherwise have received in Chinese state run orphanages. It is the embedded and unspoken nature of the Christian motivations that are unsettling at the Light of Hope Foster Home. There is no doubt about the extent to which these people love the children they are caring for; however this worked is fueled

by the connection to God and the possibility of spreading His message. The prudent use of language in the Foster Home literature that obscures the Christian basis of the institution is also an interesting point. Perhaps the message of the Lord is more palatable when it is discreetly framed or perhaps this discretion is simply a way to circumvent the laws in China that discourage Christian proselytizing.

Well-intentioned parents adopt from China for compassionate reasons often without any experience with infertility. At the heart of this chapter is compassion, philanthropy and the tension between child-rescue and child-kidnap. Cultural scripts position China as an ethical place to adopt children and position the “lost daughters of China” (Evans 2000) as a worthy cause for intimate philanthropy. These scripts are shaped not only by media images of poor and needy children, but also by a deep legacy of colonization and activity that portrays the global south as a sort of modernization project. Religion plays an important role in motivating North American families to engage in “child-rescue” activities in China. Instead of ‘saving’ children from social and economic conditions, many families seek to save their souls. Many of the women in my research were aware of the critiques associated with these child-saving measures and seem to distance themselves from any potential grey areas or ‘bad adoptions’. Straddling the binary between kidnap and rescue, adoptive mothers seem to justify the adoption of children from China through colonial scripts that suggest that these children’s lives will be better outside of an institution and in a ‘modern’ country. The ends seem to justify the means for these women because the adopted children are well-loved, educated and healthy in their adoptive families.

Echoing this binary between kidnap and rescue narrative suggested by Veronica Strong-Boag (2006), Kathryn Joyce (2013) writes that despite the altruistic motives of this evangelical adoption movement, it is part of a system that responds to western demand. When giving her monograph the title “the Child Catchers” she is alluding to the tension between two possible interpretations of that phrase: “A savior catching a child falling midair and bring it home to safety or the darker image of someone’s offspring being snatched away from her family and home” (Joyce 2013a:xvii). Her research complicates this tension between adoption as “an unqualified good or unqualified bad, purely rescue or purely theft” (Joyce 2013a:xvii). Her largest critique of international adoption has to do with how birthmothers are treated. Whether adoption is considered ‘good’ or ‘bad’ ‘the common denominator is that the birthmother is invisible” (Joyce 2013a:xvi). She also highlights how the demand for foreign babies to adopt is fueled not only by infertility but also the pulpit.

Chapter 5. Adoption in the Spotlight

In this chapter, I examine two very public facets of transnational adoption. First, I focus on media depictions of celebrities who have adopted children from developing countries. In the latter part of the chapter, I examine the public experience of Canadian families who have adopted children from China. I discuss the ways – both positive and negative – in which these families are viewed by others in their communities, and the impact of public perceptions on adoptive parents and adoptees. I argue that processes of surveillance and monitoring of reproductive choices, gender images and kinship ties are brought into play when adoption enters the public domain. This monitoring and surveillance is evident in public reactions to both celebrity adoptions and to adoptions of Chinese children by non-celebrity Canadian families.

Part I: Public Reaction to Celebrity Adoptions

This dissertation has drawn attention to the visual culture of needy children shaping the Western desire to ‘save’ these children through adoption. The ethos of saving children was fostered during the Cold War by UNICEF and the Christian Children’s Fund, organizations that encouraged North American families to rescue East Asian children in the ideological battle against Communism (Klein 2000, Brookfield 2012, Cartwright 2002). In contemporary times, when transnational adoption is

becoming more common and visible in North American communities, the media is an important space for contesting, and negotiating, how transnational adoption is understood in the general public. The contemporary media representations of transnational adoption that I discuss in this chapter come to our attention through the persona of the celebrity, in popular television shows or movies and in print media like newspapers and current affair magazines. The media pieces I have used for analysis in this chapter represent those which have had extremely high visibility because they are widely circulated and well known. I used Google alerts and scanned the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation website (the most important Canadian media source) on a regular basis between 2009 (the year I began conducting research on adoption) and 2013. I had many pieces sent to me or brought to my attention by friends and family who are not adoption experts. This media sample is also shaped by the fact that my research is Canadian and was mostly conducted in Ontario. Therefore, I have included local community news sources such as *The Hamilton Spectator* and *The Ottawa Citizen*.

The television programs and movies chosen for analysis are Canadian and/or those which have or may have been seen by my research participants. In her analysis of media images of adoption, Christine Ward Gailey (2006) starts her research on film from the 1950s. Since most of my research participants were not yet born in the 1950s, and have unlikely seen any of those films, I started my analysis with 1980s television programs, which are familiar to the adoptive mothers in their thirties and forties that I interviewed. Many of the movies or television programs discussed in this chapter were

mentioned directly by my research participants in our interviews, leading me to include these media items in my analysis.

The creation of 'the celebrity' has been shaped by celebrity weeklies, tabloids and gossip magazines showcasing the personal lives of actors, musicians, models or anyone who participates in media culture and has come to the interest of the general public (Turner 2004). In cultural studies, some scholars argue that celebrities offer a democratic space because following the personal lives of stars shapes them as ordinary people.

Celebrities are jointly owned by the people who consume their images and in this way the public has greater access to media representation (Turner 2004, Boorstin 2005, Marshall 1997). "The celebrity is usually nothing more than a more publicized version of us" (Boorstin 2005:89). Celebrities are a platform for discussing the interest and the fears or concerns of the general public about transnational adoption. These popular icons and their fans actively engage in "the commodification of the self," creating a democratic process in which the audience determines which icons matter, and who can stand as a reflection of their fantasies (Marshall 1997:26). Likewise, film and television play an important role in providing images for people to use for understanding social issues, such as adoption (Gailey 2006).

My research participants were active participants in media culture. Many of them talked about celebrities as if they were close personal friends. Some of my participants contributed to the media more directly through the dissemination of their

adoption stories in print media. This chapter discusses the significance of the media in transnational adoption, since the media both shapes and reflects the public culture of adoption across borders.

Transnational adoption is contested, in the mainstream media space. The significance of this media existence is that transnational adoption has emerged as a public social and cultural phenomenon in North America which stands in stark contrast to the private nature of this reproductive choice. Most of the women I spoke with said that they had chosen not to discuss their decision to adopt with anyone else other than their partners. They stated that the decision making process was entirely personal and made without the guidance of others. Feminist literature contends that the state keeps a careful watch over pregnant bodies, often referred to as “public pregnancies” (Berlant 1997:80). Cultural studies scholar Anne Balsamo (1995) argues that women have become a “biological spectacle” and their wombs operate as a metonym, not only for the family, but also for the state (1995:80). This argument could easily be extended to include all reproductive choices, not just pregnancy. Lauren Berlant’s (1997) work provides a detailed discussion of what she calls the “intimate public sphere,” where private matters of sexuality and reproduction become public issues and subject to national debate. She contends that heterosexuality is central to American ideas of citizenship as “only for members of families” (1997:3). Therefore, achieving motherhood is an essential criterion for women to secure membership in mainstream American society and it becomes their duty as citizens reproduce the next generation. Berlant also explains how personal sexual activity and reproduction, once reserved for

private life, have become symbols of what “America” stands for and therefore serves to outline how its citizens ‘should’ behave.

The emerging phenomenon of transnational adoption is being contested in North America because it stretches traditional ideas of the family. Moreover, the dramatic appearance of international adoption in celebrity culture as well as in the popular and news media signifies the movement of reproductive choices into the public sphere, as the state continues to keep watch over women’s reproductive choices. Sociologist Deborah Chambers examines the transformation of fertility into a media spectacle. She writes that “the display of the pregnant celebrity, flaunting her ‘ornamental bump’, forms a powerful visual iconography of maternal beauty” (Chambers 2009:1). Fertility becomes a gender performance, as these role models become “signifiers of woman” and solidify gender expectations that reside in motherhood (Chambers 2009:2). The glamorization of motherhood, it is argued, can limit rather than liberate women with respect to socially acceptable choices concerning motherhood (Pitt 2008:4).

The surveillance extends to these celebrities who are scrutinized for how they look, physically after giving birth. How quickly did they lose the baby weight? Are they wearing the latest fashions? The appearance of these celebrities has become associated with their maternal abilities. Britney Spears, for example, has never regained her pre-pregnancy figure, and looks disheveled with messy hair, wearing track pants in paparazzi photographs. Subsequently, Britney Spears has been cast in the media as a ‘bad mother’. A ‘good mother’ on the other hand, is a woman “who appears

to be successfully juggling motherhood, career and sexuality, as well as looking stylish and trendy *all the time*” (Pitt 2008:8). The images and reputations of celebrities can sometimes be dynamic and shift over time. Much like Angelina Jolie who was once a Hollywood “wild child” and has transformed her image to become a philanthropist, a good mother and a symbol of heteronormativity, Britney Spears is “now a paragon of poise and responsibility” according to a recent article in *The Globe and Mail* (Editorial, *Globe and Mail* July 2013). Spears has changed her appearance and actions and is depicted as a picture perfect mother in the media. For this reason, she was suggested as a potential role model for Canadian pop star Justin Bieber who has been behaving badly in a very public fashion (Editorial *Globe and Mail*, July 2013).

There is a long history of celebrity activism. In the 1960’s and 70’s several musicians and actors such as Marlon Brando and George Harrison were involved in setting up charities and organizing concerts to raise money and awareness for famine relief and refugees (West 2007). Jane Fonda was an active spokesperson during the Vietnam War. Stevie Wonder lent his voice to the battle against apartheid in South Africa in the 1980’s while Irish rocker Bob Geldof organized ‘Live Aid’ concerts to raise money for starving people in Ethiopia. More recently celebrities have been advocates and spokespersons for medical causes such as Michael J. Fox who advocates for stem cell research and Bono for AIDS research. The line between politics and entertainment is blurred. Well-known media figures are often considered by the public more trustworthy than politicians, thus lending their names to a cause engages a broader citizen participation. The authenticity of celebrity philanthropy, however, is often

questioned by the public because celebrities feel the need to keep their name in the headlines between films or the release of new albums (West 2007).

Female celebrities such as Angelina Jolie participate in philanthropy in specific ways. Jolie's activities are family-oriented and intimate, granting the public emotional access to her personal life. Angelina Jolie completely transformed her public image from a Hollywood wild child, to a humanitarian and a doting mother (Littler 2008). Media analyses of celebrity philanthropy conducted by political studies scholars, Jemina Repo and Riina Yrjola, discuss how celebrity participation in philanthropy is a highly gendered activity (Repo and Yrjola 2011). Male celebrities such as Bob Geldof and Bono engage in international politics in very masculine ways. They meet with government representatives and have become spokespersons for the relief of Third World debt. Female celebrities such as Angelina Jolie are known for their engagement with women and children in areas of crisis. Repo and Yrjola argue that "such depictions comply with beliefs of 'rational' men act and understand politics while 'emotional' women care for society" (Repo and Yrjola 2011:45).

The media also reflects the dichotomy between 'good' and 'bad' adoption through the public interpretation of celebrity participation in global affairs. Currently, the two most famous celebrity adoptions across borders have been those by Angelina Jolie and Madonna. These celebrity adoptions embody opposite representations of transnational adoption similar to the dichotomy introduced earlier in this dissertation between kidnap and rescue (Strong-Boag 2006). Repo and Yrjola explain why the two

celebrities are perceived in such a drastically different way though both women adopted children from other countries who turned out to have living parents. The rescue discourse in these instances where the children were not orphaned became “problematic, untidy and confused” (Chambers 2009:15). Interestingly Angelina Jolie’s image is depicted in the media as gentle, and she is portrayed as having a ‘big heart.’ Jolie has achieved this image through specific performances of femininity. Her philanthropic work is intertwined with her personal life and expressed through discourses of motherhood. Jolie’s wealth is not conspicuously displayed and symbols of class privilege are absent from media text and images of Jolie with her adopted children. In contrast, Madonna does not seem to embody the right kind of heterosexuality or conform to gender expectations. Madonna’s goodwill in adopting a child from Africa was questioned, with the public wondering whether the adoption was sincerely a humanitarian act or rather a “fashionable philanthropic whim” (Repo and Yrjola 2011:55). Madonna was criticized for fast-tracking the adoption process and her behavior was presented in the media as unfeminine. Popular culture consumers found that she flaunted her wealth unbecomingly.

Angelina Jolie was interviewed for a seven page piece published in Marie Claire in 2007 entitled “Angelina Jolie Unbound” which is confessional and intimate, making her adoption of children abroad stand out as authentic (Littler 2008, Connelly 2007). Some of my interview participants expressed similar positive views of Angelina Jolie. Kate, for her example, stated: I think she [Angelina Jolie] and I would be great friends, we have so much in common (Kate Interview, May 19th,2009). Later she

explained:

Well, I think Angelina Jolie is great (laughs). I love her! When I was a massage therapist we always had a subscription for *People* magazine, so I always knew everything happening with celebrities. But now I just get it when I go grocery shopping – I pick the long line up for that purpose. She [Angelina Jolie] was doing it before anyone was doing it. I think she's great! (Kate, Interview, May 19, 2009).

However, adoption of children from abroad by celebrities was criticized by many of my research participants because they felt that celebrities used their privilege to circumvent the difficulties and bureaucracy of the adoption process. Several participants expressed approval of celebrity adoptions so long as the celebrities go through the same procedures as any other family, rather than using their celebrity status to skip the queue or expedite the process. Kathryn Heigl, for example, was celebrated positively in my interviews and in the media when she adopted a little girl from Korea in 2009. Heigl grew up with an adopted sister, inspiring her to adopt her own child. Korea has a well-established adoption program and Heigl went through the process with her husband just like any other potential adopter (Chambers 2009, scholastic.com, accessed June 5, 2013).

Transnational adoption is of great interest to the public because it challenges conventional ideas about kinship and reproduction. The presence of transnational adoption in the media provides a forum for contesting conventional ideas and shaping the way transnational adoption is perceived in local communities. Since kinship is usually determined automatically at birth, and children adopted from China look different from their Western adoptive parents, it becomes necessary to 'do kinship' and

create meaningful kinship connections (Thompson 2001:176). The media is a space to untangle these connections. This process unfolds publicly through the media for celebrity and non-celebrity adoptive mothers alike.

The media and celebrity culture have become spaces to negotiate changing conceptions of the North American family that extend beyond biology. Several participants in my research have taken an active role in contributing to the public perception of transnational adoption. Heather, for example is married to a professional writer. He profiled their family in a piece written in a popular Canadian parenting magazine. Kate wrote her Master's thesis in education on transnational adoption in her community, detailing some of the public responses to her transnational family. These are good examples of the democratic nature of the media. Clearly these women have a strong interest in how transnational adoption is represented in the public. Several families outside the scope of my research participate in media culture in similar ways, writing about their kind of families in the lifestyle section of their local newspaper or in national public interest magazines. The lifestyle pieces are light and written as one person's narrative. For example, in 2009, *The Globe & Mail* published a story coinciding with Mother's Day entitled, "I Became a Mother on Mother's Day" (De Vries 2009). The article exposed one woman's struggle with infertility and the pain she felt for thirteen years on Mother's Day because she did not have a child. "But this story had a happy ending. It began with our decision finally to terminate the voodoo magic and adopt a child from China" (De Vries 2009).

Celebrity adoptions are contentious and polarizing within the adoption community in Ontario. Some of my research participants, such as Kate and Jane, have a positive view of celebrity adoptions because they bring attention to international adoptions and this kind of attention helps to broaden North American ideas about the family. In contrast, several other women I interviewed feel that celebrity adoptions trivialize the adoption experience, making it more about 'fashion' than about creating a family in new and meaningful ways.

Those who believe celebrity adoptions are a positive cultural phenomenon tend to see them as endorsements for adoption because the adoptive mothers are public figures promoting a viable reproductive option that many people may have never considered. For instance, Kate spoke highly about Sonja Smits, Canadian actress, most famous for her role in the television series, *Street Legal*. Kate talked about her involvement with the adoption community as a spokesperson at an annual fundraiser for orphanages in China.

Sonja Smits (is a) Canadian actress, she used to be on Street Legal, maybe you're too young for that. She plays a lawyer, I loved that show. She is one of the organizers for the orphanage fundraiser. Do you know this gala for the Children's Bridge Foundation? It is an offshoot of the agency, a charitable foundation that raises money for the children who stay in the orphanages and don't get adopted. And this is the second gala that we've organized – the first one we raised 80,000 dollars – last year we did it for an orphanage in Ethiopia and another orphanage in Vietnam, this year we're just doing Ethiopia. Sonia Smith is the keynote speaker... If you go to the childrensbridgefoundation.org...you can see the event set for Wednesday night at the Museum of Civilization. Last year Jack Layton came, Stephen Harper came, it was a lot of fun and a lot of celebrities and politicians helped organize it all. Former

Canadian politician, Sheila Copps was one of the masters of ceremony... (Kate, Interview, May 19th, 2009).

In a similar vein Jane seemed to think that celebrity adoptions are beneficial to the adoption community. She said:

I think it's actually great and it's made it easier for me-- there are people in the news who are doing it all the time so it's not odd that I am doing it, you know? It takes the heat off of it a little bit and makes it not so weird, it makes it trendy and hip. Which is not why we did it-- truly, sure it's easier to be part of something that is now hip as opposed to really odd and weird. I remember a family growing up-- they had 5 kids and they were all adopted from different parts of the world-- they were weird-- they didn't fit the norm-- everybody thought they were kind of odd. Where now that family today would be like the coolest family ever, right? So it's just interesting how that happened-- I mean sure it makes it easier for me but it's not why we did it (Jane, Interview, May 5th 2009).

On the other side of the spectrum, some of my research participants did not share these kinds of sentiments, instead feeling that celebrity adopters are "doing a disservice to the public" (Mary, Interview, August 18th 2009). Melissa and Mary were amongst the women I spoke with who thought celebrity adoptions were actually doing more harm than good for the adoption community. Melissa passionately said:

I think they (celebrities) have turned it into a horse and pony show to be honest- because it wasn't like that. They are missing the journey part- they've got the adoption part but they are missing the journey. And when I talk about it- I do give talks sometimes to different groups- I talk about it as a journey- so I think they are selling the public short by not understanding what a journey it is. They wouldn't influence me- I don't put that much weight on what celebrities do or don't do- quite frankly (Melissa, Interview August 23rd 2010).

In a similar tone, Mary stated that "it diminishes the process of adoption...I find all

celebrity culture to be pretty heinous” (Mary, Interview, August 18th 2009). Other interview participants took issue not with celebrities adopting but the way these adoptions are covered in the media. For instance Michelle stated that:

I think its fine- if they [celebrities] want to have a family. What I don't like is how the media- for instance Tom Cruise- he has Suri, beautiful little girl, but if they talk about his other children with Nicole- they always say his *adopted* children. They never just say his children or his older children. It's always that adopted comes out in front. Yeah it's his child but adopted child so it doesn't really count. There is this underlying message to distinguish between the two (Michelle, Interview, March 3rd 2009).

Finally, Liz spoke about celebrity mothers more generally,

Yeah you know the thing is, Hollywood women have waited longer to have children so the bad thing in the press is that you think that you have lots of time too because, well women are waiting longer, look at the women in Hollywood getting pregnant and having babies in their forties, but guess what? They're donor eggs; you really don't know what's going on in their lives to produce that baby and whose baby it really is. So the bad part of the press is, um, perpetuating this position that you can still have kids in your forties-like-no problem. Celine Dion is finally coming out and talking about how many cycles of invitro she's done. And I think someone else did too- the same thing; trying, trying, trying- ugh. So I think that the disservice there is that there isn't a bigger message going out to women that are in their 30's that 'don't be putting it off because you think you have lots of time, because you don't.' You know, after 38 your chances have dropped off the cliff. Basically, for me I always thought, I don't look my age, I'm healthy, I've got lots of time. My mom kept telling me- 'oh your clock is ticking, your clock is ticking.' I thought I had lots of time and that was really stupid on my part, really stupid because, you know- I did not (Liz, Interview, February 8th 2009).

Adoption broadly conceived has come to public attention. It has entered the media on various stages including television and movies, television commercials, mainstream news media, parenting magazines and current affairs media such as *Maclean's* and *National Geographic*. Film and television provide metaphors and images

for the public to use to discuss and understand social issues such as adoption (Gailey 2006). References to adoption in the media are plentiful and range in focus from domestic adoption, to interracial adoption and to transnational adoption. A useful framework for looking at the following film and television examples come from the research of Christine Ward Gailey (2006) on media portrayals of adoption. Gailey argues that adopted children are usually depicted in one of two ways that is “the cheerful orphan or the delinquent” (Gailey 2006: 83). She describes the orphan characters in film as either “passive and loveable,” or “active and evil” (Gailey 2006:85). This insight fits well into the theme discussed throughout this dissertation of the dichotomy between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ adoption.

Domestic adoption, for example, is a common plotline in Canadian TV dramas such as *Degrassi* (2011) and *The Best Years* (2007). These programs feature one of the key characters finding out that she is adopted because she needs an organ transplant and none of her family members are a genetic match. This media attention signifies a generational shift – whereas adoption was once hidden it is now coming out into the open and becoming celebrated rather than shameful. There seems to be an evolution in the kind of adoption stories featured on television from *Punky Brewster* (1984) and *Webster* (1983) where the central focus was on the orphaned child who is adopted domestically, to *Sex and the City* (1998) and *Friends* (1994) in which the mothers’ infertility and the decision to adopt internationally are the focus of the adoption-related storylines.

Contemporary television programs such as *90210* (2008) and *Grey’s Anatomy*

(2005) feature more complex plotlines about the challenges of bringing up children in a bi-racial family. *90210* was mentioned several times during my interviews. This program is of special interest to the adoption community because it features inter-racial adoption. In this series, one of the main characters, Dixon, is an African-American teenager who grew up in a white family. Because his skin colour does not match that of his parents, his struggles with intrusive questions from others about his family are a recurring storyline on the show.

Transnational adoption, in particular, has made a variety of appearances in popular media. The tone of the media portrayals varies from dramatic storylines, to comedy and horror films thus encapsulating the range of reactions and fears expressed by the general public to these international families. In the popular US medical drama *Grey's Anatomy* (2005), physician and focal character Meredith Grey and her husband Derek Sheppard adopt a baby girl, Zola, from Africa (the specific location is not mentioned). In other examples, emotional *Hallmark*⁶-like television commercials feature children adopted from China. Liz described these commercials in the following terms:

we noticed two commercials. One was about a young woman going into her bank to talk about her saving for her nephew's university education. The parents said they had been waiting a long time for him to show up. When she goes with the baby gift he's a toddler from an Asian country. And it's an international adoption. There is another one about they wanted to save for a trip and their RRSP's and the bank officer was like 'no, no you can do both of them'. The trip was a homeland trip for their adopted daughter (Liz, Interview, February 8th 2009).

Comedic references include *Juno* (2007), a blockbuster film featuring a teen pregnancy and her journey to give her baby up for adoption. After choosing a family for

her future child, and learning of their struggles to conceive and about their previous experiences with relinquishing mothers who changed their minds about giving their babies up for adoption, Juno suggests comically to the couple:

You should've gone to China, you know, cause I hear they give away babies like free iPods, you know they pretty much just put them in those T-shirt guns and shoot them out at sporting events (Cody 2007).

Another, less popular, film, *Then She Found Me* (2007), tells a story of a woman struggling to conceive. Throughout her many failed attempts to carry a baby to term, her family suggests adoption. Her mother at one point claims: "in China they are throwing them in trash cans" (Arlen and Levin 2007).

⁶ I use the trademark *Hallmark* to describe these commercials because *Hallmark* is known for its emotional and family-oriented, feel-good kinds of greeting cards and storybooks.

The main character did not seriously consider adoption in the film until the very end, when she is shown with a Chinese daughter. In this movie international adoption is construed as the very last choice, only decided upon when all other options are exhausted. This storyline fits the sentiment explored previously in this dissertation about adoption as a second-best option (Modell 2002). In the narratives of several of the adoptive mothers in my research sample, adoption was pursued only after all other (biological) options had been exhausted.

Orphan (2009) is a horror film showing an adoption nightmare. The little girl, Esther, is adopted from Russia into an American family. The movie centres on the fear and xenophobia associated with ‘the other,’ in this case a little girl who came from abroad. The adoptive parents know nothing about her history or where she came from. It turns out that Esther is really an adult with a genetic condition making her appearance very child-like. In actuality, she had escaped from a mental institute in Russia. Once adopted, she plots to kill the whole family and seduce the father. The movie *Orphan* (2009) is a good example of the fear about adoption explored in the work of Christine Ward Gailey, where adoptees are represented as maladjusted, sociopathic or ‘bad seeds’ (Gailey 2006). Critiquing the outrageous plotline, several of my interview participants took issue with the idea of the foreign orphan being set up as “the other” or “the evil” (Cynthia, Interview, July 21st 2009).

It’s getting all this press, it’s terrible. To think, obviously it takes millions of dollars to make a movie and it has to go through all of these stages before it gets approved and all this money gets laid out and actors cast. It’s not a cheap video put together on YouTube. So obviously there are grown-ups sitting around a table saying “Yeah this is a good idea for a movie--yeah let’s do this.” “Who can we cast as ‘the other’ or the one outside and not like us?” “Oh an orphan”-- normally the orphan-- if you think about someone like Harry Potter-- the one without the parents is usually the protagonist. Or Annie, Anne of Green Gables-- all these different characters in children’s literature. We kind of bond with and love them and they have their challenges. But they are the main character-- we love them because they are helpless but there is some sort of quality about them that we just love-- very endearing. Here these movie producers -- I haven’t seen it yet-- but all these grown-ups thinking “let’s have an orphan as ‘the other’ or ‘the evil’”... somehow all these movie producers thought this was a good idea (Cynthia, Interview, July 21st 2009).

Transnational adoption stories are also sporadically featured in mainstream news

media such as *The Globe & Mail*, *CBC News*, *Fox News*, *The New York Times*, *The Ottawa Citizen*, *The Hamilton Spectator*, *Victoria Times Colonist* and many other outlets (Devries 2009, Hemsworth 2007a/b, Page 2007, CBC news 2007, 2001.). These stories manifest in this type of media in particular ways. Usually they are featured in the lifestyle section. Transnational adoption is front page news only in cases where something goes wrong. In stark contrast to sentimental adoption stories, critiques of transnational adoption or scandals are featured in the news section of the newspaper. For example, in the spring of 2010 a woman from Tennessee sent her 7-year old adopted son on a one-way trip to Moscow with a note attached stating that: “he was violent and had severe psychological problems” (Associated Press:2010). On the note she also wrote, “After giving my best to this child, I am sorry to say that for the safety of my family, friends and myself, I no longer wish to parent this child” (Torry Hansen cited in the Associated Press 2010). This story deeply affected the adoption community in several ways. First of all, the Russian adoption programs at North American adoption agencies threatened to shut down completely. More broadly, this kind of bad press about the failures of transnational adoption put other adoption programs such as those involving China and Ethiopia under scrutiny (Hilborn 2011c). Finally, the coverage of this story highlights the North American preference for blood relationships. Because this child was exchanged for legal documents and money his adoptive mother treated him as a commodity that could be returned if she was unhappy with the product. This story undermines the adoption community’s emphasis on building kinship ties in the absence of blood relationships.

While the Russian adoption program has been a heavily examined transnational adoption programs in the news media, other countries' programs have also garnered public scrutiny. Other news stories that highlight the problems with transnational adoption include a lengthy CBC story about whether the children in Ethiopia being adopted overseas are truly orphans (Nicol 2009) and the *Hamilton Spectator's* story about stolen boys and black market babies in rural China (Jacobs 2009).

Transnational adoption stories have made an appearance in current affairs media such as *Maclean's* and *National Geographic*. In two similar pieces, the first in *Maclean's* magazine (Onstad 2008) and the second in *Canadian Living* (Witten 2008), both written by independent writers and adoptive parents based in Toronto adoptive parents write about adoption from experience. Both pieces are personal adoption stories about adopting a child from abroad.

Finally, the China adoption program was highlighted in a *National Geographic* documentary. The well-known journalist, Lisa Ling, documented the adoption process and her journey to China alongside a group of adoptive families in her film *China's Lost Daughters* (Ling 2005). This film was generally well received by the adoption community as an accurate portrayal of the process of adopting from China (amazon.com, accessed May 30, 2013).

While the media coverage of adoption is varied and may be positive or negative in tone, the prominent media presence of transnational adoption is at least partially responsible for the idea entering the consciousness of some North American women⁷.

Several women I met during my research, for example, who are still in their 20's or early 30's and who have never had any experience with infertility or any reason to believe that they will, told me that they wish to adopt children from abroad in the future. One married couple I encountered pursued adoption from Haiti and were turned down due to their ages. Both were 28 years old and therefore too young to adopt. Only when their attempts to adopt a child failed did they decide to have a biological child. This is an interesting example of a couple challenging and complicating the common trope so often reinforced in the media that adoption is 'second best' to having biological children.

Part II – Public Reactions to Non-Celebrity Adoptions

The public nature of adoption is revealed in my participants' narratives about how people in their lives and communities react to their transnational families. Just as celebrity reproduction is monitored, these adoptive mothers are under close surveillance for their reproductive choices. During my interviews the community's response to these families was discussed frequently and sometimes feverishly. Many interview participants described their encounters with strangers in public places such as grocery stores and restaurants. These encounters tended to be either outrageously positive, or intrusive and somewhat inappropriate.

⁷ Personal acquaintance with other women who have adopted abroad also plays an important role in bringing this option to the attention of potential adoptive mothers.

Positive encounters with strangers included overzealous comments such as: “You’ve done a really good thing!” (Mary, Interview, August 18th 2009), “Those are lucky girls!” (Anne, Interview, May 20th 2009), “You’re an angel! (Anne, Interview, May 20th 2009). Melissa reflected, “It’s like the baby had won the lotto, when they see us they act as though the baby had won the lottery, lucky, lucky, lucky!” (Melissa, Interview, August 23rd 2010). Stephanie recalls strangers saying, “Oh, it’s so good, you’ve got such a good heart, you’ve given this child a home and she’s so lucky” (Stephanie, Interview, March 18th 2010). Michelle gave a little more detail about these kinds of encounters, stating:

Everywhere that we went [as a family] people were thrilled that we adopted a baby from China. For example, last summer we were on our way to the beach- we were in a restaurant with the girls- [my husband] took them outside because they were acting up and I was paying the bill- someone stopped me on the way out. He said: “Are your girls adopted?” I said, “Yeah- they are from China,” and he said, “I can’t tell you what a lovely thing that you did.” We get this a lot- but we feel that we are the lucky ones- these girls are really precious, and special (Michelle, Interview, March 3rd 2009).

While these responses are seemingly positive, they can be just as frustrating as the intrusive questions or comments because many adoptive mothers feel that such positive responses misrepresent their adoption experiences which are more balanced with the desire to build their families than simply about ‘saving children.’

This kind of positive reaction to their transnationally adopted children is also seen as problematic by some mothers because they fear these children will be treated

differently from other children.

If [my daughter] was on a swing with another child and they both fell off- people would run to her first. [my daughter's] head swelled so much. We would request to others that they just treat her normal- like any other child, because it was almost the extreme with both of my daughters. People bent over backwards for them because they were adopted. It's like no- they are normal children (Michelle, Interview, March 3rd 2009).

Grace, who is of Chinese descent, does not experience these kinds of encounters with strangers; however she likes it to be known in her community that her daughter was adopted because she thinks that knowledge makes it easier for her daughter to understand and accept her adoption. Grace explained:

She says she is special. She doesn't have any bad feelings about her adoption because of the special treatment she receives. She knows she is special (Grace, Interview, March 16th 2009).

Other people in public spaces tend to respond less enthusiastically to these families and ask intrusive questions such as "Is she *really* yours?" (Jane, Interview, May 5th 2009), "What do you know about her *real family*?" (Kate, Interview, May 19th 2009) or "Are they *really* sisters?" (Liz, Interview, February 8th 2009; Anne, Interview, May 20th 2009). These kinds of questions are particularly frustrating because they undermine families' attempts to construct kinship relationships that are based on adoption rather than blood. Participants in my study tend to respond to these questions indignantly saying "She is my daughter" (Jane, Interview, May 5th 2009), "We are her real parents" (Kate, Interview, May 19th 2009), or "Of course they are sisters" (Liz, Interview,

February 8th 2009; Anne, Interview, May 20th 2009). Liz, exasperated by these types of questions, said to me: “Well they are sisters, not biological sisters, but why would anyone want to differentiate?” (Liz, Interview, February 8th 2009).

Some adoptive families encounter comments that are mean spirited and accusatory, such as “How much did you pay?” (Kate, Interview, May 19th 2009). Some of the adoptive mothers are denounced, in public, as “baby buyers” (Anne, Interview, May 20th 2009). Kate told me that one man asked her: “What’s wrong with you? Why don’t you have your own babies?” Kate reflected, “You know these are the [kinds of comments] that you feel in your heart a bit” (Kate, Interview, May 19th 2009).

Interestingly this kind of social scrutiny is not limited to strangers; in fact, some of the most insensitive comments come from people in these women’s close social networks. For example, some of my participants recalled hurtful questions from acquaintances or family members such as “You couldn’t take time out for your own pregnancy?” (Mary, Interview, August 18th 2009), or “Were you afraid of losing your figure?” (Kate, Interview, May 19th 2009).⁸ Jane described these kinds of comments as more awkward than intrusive, explaining:

⁸ Kate is a serious athlete and her appearance is very fit and slender.

It's just odd- you don't have norms for that or social context for that. And people also don't have normative things to say back to us. I remember when we were telling people that we were adopting- I call it the 24 hour call back-did I tell you this already? That whenever I would tell people they'd say: oh-okay-so-wow--and then they wouldn't say anything. And then I would get a call 24 hours later saying- I want you to know that I have been thinking about you and I am just so excited , and so happy for you. So it took people- to go away and to think about it and go, "oh, that's a good thing right?" You know they just don't know what to say in the moment. And I had a lot of people say stupid things to me. I remember when we were at a party and some woman was saying to me, "well that is really creepy" - and then later at the party she said to me: "I just want you to know that I am really happy for you." I think she was just like, "what the hell did I just say, what is wrong with me?" And she didn't know what to say. If someone says, "oh I am expecting," there is a whole list of questions you know you are allowed to ask such as: "when are you due?" "Are you going to find out what the sex is?" Blah blah blah-- There is set normative questions that you are allowed to ask, but with adoption people are like: "uhhhhh. What do I say, what do I say?" You can see through their eyes that they are thinking, "okay, don't be inappropriate, don't be inappropriate." There are just not enough norms, so I try, when I can, to help people out. I say, "Oh okay, yes it's a good thing." Or if [my daughter] is with me I say, "yes she's adopted" and I introduce it so that it drops the wall a bit and people realize, "Oh, I am allowed to ask here (Jane, Interview, May 5th 2009).

Most of the women I met with come from the Greater Toronto Area, which is ethnically diverse, and they found that if they were outside alone with their children people would often assume they had Chinese husbands. This phenomenon was especially pronounced for Cynthia because of her daughter's unique appearance.

Echoing the sentiments of many of the women I met, Cynthia explained:

If I go out with [my daughter], because she is fair, her hair color is quite fair, I think people assume my husband is Chinese. And when [my husband] goes out with her they must assume his wife is Chinese. But when we all go out together there is that

little triangular look from the mom- to the dad to the kid. You can see people try and figure it out- and sometimes they say something stupid... (Cynthia, Interview, July 21st 2009).

Anne expressed that it was not only difficult for herself, but that her daughters also had a difficult time dealing with intrusive questions and comments from their peers. She thoughtfully commented:

It effects everything- *Everything!* We have become a very public family. At the beginning it's kind of exciting because you're so proud and happy and it had been a long struggle for us to get there. So but then it becomes invasive. But you learn how to deal with that and teach the children how to deal with that. The hardest thing is for them and now they are away from me during the day and have to deal with these things on their own. What kids can say can be absolutely brutal, *brutal*. And they will say it. Kids don't have that filter and they are nasty on purpose sometimes. Its--- you can't erase the losses that my children have, I can't erase that, I think I have come to realize that it is very difficult to take a child out of their home country- any country (Anne, Interview, May 20th 2009).

Similarly, Michelle expressed concern about the impact these kinds of invasive questions have had on her daughters. Such comments and questions challenge the kinship relationships she has built with her children and undermines her as a legitimate mother. Instead, strangers' comments depict other woman in China as her daughters' *real* mothers.

When they are with me, I find, more so now because the girls are older-- that people are pretty nosey. Now if I don't know them and people ask if they are sisters, I just say yes. That's it. But then of course people say, "So you got them at the same time then?" I don't want to talk about it in front of the girls- because they are sisters as far as we're concerned; they fight like sisters, they are just not from the same area of China nor the same orphanage. But that's one question that is tough and irritating. [My daughter] will pipe up and say, "No, Mom, we are not sisters." You know what? That's what these nosey people have done to her. I spend time trying to correct this

saying, “yeah you are- yeah you are” (Michelle, Interview, March 3rd 2009).

Perhaps because of this kind of constant social scrutiny, the adoptive families I met during fieldwork are, for the most part, are closely linked and interact with each other on an ongoing basis. This tightly knit community was cited as both a reason for choosing the China program or as an unexpected benefit of that choice. Adoptive mothers consistently mentioned the adoption community during my interviews and talked about community events such as Chinese New Year parties, cottage get-togethers or random encounters and friendships built with other adoptive families.

Each morning Heather wakes up and checks a number of international adoption web forums including but not limited to *Rumorqueen* (<http://chinaadopttalk.com>).

Rachel and Jane keep adoption blogs where they post photos, videos and stories of their children. The Internet is a well-used tool for connecting families who have adopted overseas; personal information is shared freely among friends and strangers on an ongoing basis.

Those who travelled to China together in an adoption group often stay connected through email lists that enable them to communicate with each other over long periods of time. Through these lists they send each other photos of their children, ask each other parenting questions, celebrate milestones and voice concerns over the growth and development of their adopted children. These families send each other Christmas cards and get together as a group. Some families reach further and connect with a broader adoption group on web forums or at events organized by FCC (Families with Children from China). Anne explains it in the following way:

I wanted to do research in any way I could by talking to other families and books or anything. I would try and find out how to handle a lot of things. With the Internet there is a mass of information out there. I am still on- my husband says I have about 8 or 10 yahoo groups for a number of different subjects. You know, one for the orphanage, one for... its great way of getting information and making contacts and just finding out how things are going. I am good at scanning. But you see the subjects. You know the new parents are worried about what to feed the baby. There are groups for people who are just adopting and then there are groups for tween adoptees or teenage adoptees- there is a whole online community (Anne, Interview, May 20th 2009).

This community building begins at the onset of the adoption process before families receive their children. Mothers such as Anne join these web groups in order to learn about the adoption process through the personal narratives of other adoptive parents. Once the process of adopting begins and these families are slotted into adoption groups, they get together and form friendships with those in their adoption groups before and after their journey to China. Some testimonials to this type of community include:

Because of the way things happened and that the agency almost closed when we first adopted there were a bunch of parents that came together to make it work. And we still have very close relationships with these people...we get in contact once and awhile and this relationship is so strong we know the struggles that each other's kids have and we love each other's kids. Together as a group- it's really amazing- a real community (Anne, Interview, May 20th 2009).

There is one family from [a city]- very close to here. It was just by fluke that they were in our adoption group- they used the same agency in Ottawa. The girls were in the same orphanage and we see them all the time. There are some in Sarnia, Windsor and Niagara and we get together with them at least once a year. Those in Ottawa or Toronto we hardly see. The families we get together with, all except one, came from the same orphanage. The cribs were four in a group and [my daughter] and her friend's cribs were kitty-corner to each other. We see them a lot (Michelle, Interview, March 3rd 2009).

There is a community of families that you become part of -- the small groups that people travel with as well as the larger network of people. And we run into people-- we ran into someone at the Dora concert last week-- there was a guy with an Asian child and we walked by each other and gave each other a knowing smile- that you don't get just having, your own white child. You look at each other and know what you went through to get that child and you know how you feel about that child— “We have a bond here; I get you-- you don't have to say anything” (Jane, Interview, May 5th 2009).

~~—The three women I interviewed from the same~~ adoption group, Jane, Heather and Mary, are remarkably close. Their adoption stories intertwine and their lives are interconnected in intimate ways. Even though Jane ended up travelling separately from her adoption group, she remains close to the others and is included in their social activities and email communications. Heather spoke at great length about the connections and friendships that she had made throughout the adoption process. She met some neighbours at the corner gas station with an adopted daughter from China and actively pursued a friendly relationship with that family. She also described one family in her adoption group with whom she is very close. Each milestone in the adoption process, such as getting matched with a particular child, or reading on *Rumour queen* (www.chinaadopttalk.com, Accessed August 15th, 1013) that their adoption was imminent, were celebrated together over dinner or a glass of wine at each other's houses.

Another couple, whom I never met personally, but heard about from Jane, Mary and Heather, successfully adopted a very sick child in China which they decided not to take home because they feared his illness was too severe. As first-time parents they

wanted a healthy child. After deciding not to adopt the child they had been matched to, the couple was forbidden by authorities from re-applying to the China program. They could adopt from another country but that meant starting the whole process over after investing several years in the China program. The friendship between that couple and Heather and her husband was severed. It was too painful for the couple to interact with Heather and her daughter after losing the hope of having a child of their own. As discussed previously in the introduction to this dissertation, what makes these families qualified for the Chinese adoption program is precisely what makes them ineligible for other (particularly domestic) programs. According to Heather, once the option of adopting from China was closed, this family lost hope of ever adopting a child. Heather expressed a great deal of sadness over the loss of this formerly very close friendship.

While this narrative focusing on the adoptive mother's pain and the severed friendship inadvertently erases the child from the narrative, that particular child was found. Heather was no longer close friends with that couple, and yet she found the family who subsequently adopted the child they left behind in China on an adoption web forum, and facilitated communication between these two families. Heather wanted the new parents of this child to know the whole story about this child because the documents indicated only that the child had been "abandoned twice" and provided no further details (Heather, Interview, August 24th 2009). The extremely private details of adoption are accessible to people in the adoption community, even between persons who have never met. While these details flow freely between adoptive families, these are the kinds of details that are protected from the general public.

Beyond addressing practical questions about adoption, one of the main functions of the social networks among adoptive families is to foster a healthy interest in Chinese culture and to connect these adopted children with other Chinese children and other adoptees. I only attended a handful of adoption-related activities, however I have been on both the FCC and Children's Bridge email lists for several years and have received countless invitations to picnics, Chinese New Year celebrations and summer culture camps. It is easy to understand why adoptive families congregate together given the kinds of intrusive questions they get from people outside their community. Sometimes, however, the adoption community is involuntarily separated from larger groups. For example, some of my Toronto-based interview participants told me that the Chinese Cultural Centre in Toronto hosts separate events such as Chinese dance classes or language classes for adopted children and for children of immigrant families.

What is interesting about the Chinese cultural activities inside the adoption community is that they represent a very specific and somewhat diluted version of Chinese culture. Instead of attending Chinese New Year in Chinatown with other Chinese people many of these adopted children are spending Chinese New Year with other adopted children. Well known adoption scholar and adoptee, Tobias Hubinette (2004), in his study of Korean adoptees has described a 'third space' where international adoptees reside between their homeland and host country. He writes "an adopted Korean movement has existed on an international level since the 1990's and is today trying to formulate an identity beyond Western adoption ideology and Korean nationalism" (Hubinette 2004:16). Hubinette borrows this term 'third space' from

postcolonial theory to describe a social space that is outside both majority and minority cultures (Hubinette 2004 b). A Korean adoptee in Sweden, for example, is considered more Swedish than any immigrant to Sweden could ever be and yet is never as fully Swedish as a person born in Sweden (Hubinette 2011). Hubinette argues that occupying this space is rarely voluntary and seldom offers any liberating potential (Hubinette 2004b).

Similarly, adoption scholar Eleana Kim critiques cultural activities created for adoptees, in her research with Korean adoptees, stating that they provide “hegemonic versions of being ‘Korean’” (Kim 2003:59). Traditional culture rather than contemporary urban culture is emphasized in these cultural activities leading to the inadvertent alienation of these adoptees rather than the intended connection to homeland (Kim 2003). Government sanctioned cultural training activities where adoptees have the chance to visit their homeland, Kim argues, have very strict rules which adoptees in their twenties and thirties feel are infantilizing. These culture camps also mark adoptees very clearly as tourists and therefore threaten their ability to assert themselves as ‘Korean’ (Kim 2003).

My interview participant Anne articulated this liminal space between two cultures with a more positive tone stating:

I think in a sense these girls are a new sort of culture. They are in-between cultures and it's a new phenomenon in a way. They are a new society; this type of child because they are different from children born in Canada from immigrants that were born elsewhere. It's a little different. It's the same but different (Anne, Interview, May 20th 2009).

In his research on Korean adoptees living abroad, Hubinette found that Korean media images and film overwhelmingly portray how Korean adoptees were mistreated in their host cultures (Hubinette 2007). In the three Korean films he examined, Susanne Brinks' *Airirang* (1991), *Wild Animals* (1997), and *Love* (1999) the protagonists are Korean adoptees that were abused by their adoptive families (Hubinette 2007). In contrast to these tales of mistreatment of Korean adoptees, it is commonly held that Chinese adoptees are treasured and loved by their families in Western countries. Xinran is a well-known Chinese author and journalist who hosted a radio program, "Words on the Night Breeze" in China that reached out to women to share their thoughts and experiences. She wrote about some of their surprising confessions and hardships in a memoir entitled, *The Good Women of China* (Xinran 2002). In her more recent work, she interviewed Chinese women who relinquished their children and detailed their stories in another memoir, *Message From an Unknown Chinese Mother* (Xinran 2010). In this book, mothers reveal both the circumstances that lead to the abandonment of their children and how they feel about foreign mothers adopting their children. Xinran writes that these women take comfort in making these difficult choices knowing that their children are cherished by their adoptive families. From seeing Western families with their adoptive children touring around China, children in tow, most Chinese people have the impression that these children are loved and cherished by their new families. Because the history of transnational adoption in China only began in the 1990's (Howell 2006), and gained popularity in more recent years, there has not been much

opportunity for researchers to speak to these children about their experiences growing up as transnational adoptees because they are too young. Many of them are still infants.

The visual iconography of helpless children in developing countries has provided powerful images since the Cold War era that have been influential in shaping Western ideas about saving a child through international adoption (Klein 2000, Brookfield 2012, Cartwright 2002). While popular culture can be celebrated for creating a democratic space where the general public influences who and what matters (Turner 2004, Boorstin 2005, Marshall 1997), it also acts as a space to monitor the reproductive choices of North American women (Berlant 1997, Balsamo 1995). Celebrities involved in transnational adoptions who have public images aligning with gender ideals are celebrated and adored by the general public. Transnational adoption is constructed as a choice for the modern North American woman among many options for having children at an advanced maternal age. Yet, this chapter highlights how these 'choices' are closely monitored and should fit particular gender ideals (Solinger 2001). The media also highlights, reinforces, and sometimes contests some themes discussed throughout this dissertation such as the distinction between good and bad adoptions and adopters, as well as adoption as a second best choice relative to biological kinship. Monitoring and surveillance do not happen only through the media, however, The same kinds of public debates reflected in media portrayals of celebrity adoptions play out on the local scene at the level of particular families' experiences in their communities. The comments of strangers to Canadian parents with adopted Chinese

children send public messages of approval or disapproval to those parents, and construct them as either “good” or “bad” adopters. Sometimes transnational adoption is linked too closely to consumerism and people feel that families *should* adopt locally making all transnational adoptions bad. The negotiation of appropriate kinship ties and gender expectations takes place both in the media and in everyday social interactions. The media, as a democratic space both shapes and reflects public reactions to transnational adoption practices.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

In this dissertation and throughout the adoption literature, the whole premise on which transnational adoption is based is portrayed as flawed because this practice is essentially about power differences between the global north and south. It is striking how the exchange of children takes place between the richest and poorest of women on opposite sides of the world. Stripped down to their basic elements, transnational adoption circuits are a part of a system allowing couples in the West to parent the children of East Asian, Eastern European, or (increasingly) African women. These transactions are facilitated by a long legacy of colonialism leading people in both parts of the world to believe that the children in question will 'have a better life.'

Transnational adoption between Canada and China, however, is complicated by the one-child policy in China. Two disparate social problems create an unlikely marriage between two countries, with one country trying to control its population while women in the other struggle to have children at all. Canada, like the US and most receiving countries in Europe, is dealing with a situation where women are pursuing education and career first and deciding to become mothers at an advanced maternal age. For Canadian adoptive mothers, the etic understanding of the one-child policy in China shaped by the media and adoption agencies is a combination of myth and reality which makes the China adoption program seem legitimate and ethical. From the perspective of these

women, Chinese girl babies are indeed at risk, and in need of homes, owing to the one-child policy. This myth enables Canadian women to overlook or ignore evidence of corruption in the China adoption program. The majority of the adoption literature either advocates for transnational adoption, arguing that a home is always better than an institution (Bartholet 2010), or criticizes transnational adoption for its colonial legacy (Hubinette 2006, Dubinsky 2008, Briggs 2012). I hope that this dissertation complicates this binary opposition that depicts adoption as unequivocally 'good' or 'bad.'

By bringing the subjective experiences of Canadian women to the fore in this dissertation, my intention is to highlight how Canadian women also suffer from their reproductive limitations. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, Western women have been presented with a wide range of reproductive options that extend beyond biology. Simultaneously, however, women's choices about motherhood are carefully monitored both in the media and through everyday social interaction. Making the wrong choice represents a major threat to a woman's femininity. It is painful for these women to recognize that they might not be able to conceive a biological child, in part as a result of fulfilling the ideals of second and third wave feminism and pursuing their education and career. Since the end of the baby boom era, it has become increasingly common for women to remain childless, however, childless women still remain on the margins of society (May 1995). As many researchers have shown, motherhood has an important connection to womanhood and citizenship (Berlant 1997). Is there space for women who really want to become mothers but cannot conceive?

It is my hope that this dissertation will draw attention to Canadian women and adoptive mothers, whose voices are often excluded in the literature and marginalized in the official adoption narrative. Some readers might contest the fact that I refer to these women as marginalized because politically and socially these adoptive mothers are privileged and in popular literature on adoption, their voices dominate. In the academic literature, however, the narratives of women like the ones I encountered throughout my fieldwork are untold. This dissertation is an attempt to balance the strident critique of transnational adoption by juxtaposing it with the situated experience of adoptive mothers.

The position of Canadian women who willingly participate in a corrupt system is poignant and paradoxical. They enter the transnational adoption circuit with the best of intentions and a sense of desperation that permit a kind of willful ignorance. Cultural scripts and visual media portrayals of destitute children in developing countries position transnational adoption as a heroic act of love. These scripts ignore any allusion to transnational adoption as an act of violence, especially in the case of China which has until recently had a reputation for a clean, uncorrupted system.

The women who participated in my research are intelligent and well educated women. What is missing from their narratives is almost as evocative as what is actually spoken. It is a kind of silencing of the dark side of adoption. Their narratives also silence the original families of these children in China, excluding them from the adoption story. Wanting to believe that critics of transnational adoption are nay-sayers,

adoptive mothers in Canada acquiesce to what journalist E. G. Graff calls “the lie we love.” Graff concludes that the story of going to faraway lands to whisk away children “for a chance at a better life... is largely fiction” (Graff 2008:1). While our collective imaginations picture orphanages in China as being overly full with healthy baby girls waiting to be rescued, the reality is that many of these infants “are being systematically bought, coerced, and stolen away from their birth families” (Graff 2008:1).

In 2007, the restrictions for adopting from China increased to exclude single mothers and put heavier restrictions on heterosexual couples, excluding those with physical disabilities, obesity, depression or anxiety and those who have a facial deformity. Priority was given to couples who had been married at least two years and were between the ages of 30 and 50. Applicants who had been previously divorced needed to be married to their current partner for five years or more (Gordon 2007). Since this time, the China adoption program has faced a dramatic slowdown signaling that “the golden age of adoption from China is coming to an end” (FCC Toronto president Cindy Boates cited in Gordon 2007:2).

The numbers dropped reaching only one third of the peak level by 2009 (family helper.net, accessed March 15th 2013, Gordon 2007). The end of the ‘golden age’ of adoption refers not only to the decreasing number of families approved for adoption in China, but also to the decreasing number of ‘healthy baby girls’ available for adoption (Gordon 2007). Currently it is mostly older children or children with disabilities who are legitimately available for adoption from China. Those in the adoption community have

suggested that Chinese officials have relaxed the rules limiting families to one child and have been promoting domestic adoption within China (Gordon 2007). However, altruism is an industry, and there is too much money involved in transnational adoption for it to remain free of corruption over extended periods of time. It is likely that corruption has contributed to the end of the 'golden age' of adoption in China.

The bulk of my research participants adopted children at or near the peak of adoption in China in and around 2005. In 2005, 14,496 children were adopted from China into 17 different countries. Evidence of corruption in China led to a slowdown after this peak and by 2007 greater restrictions were imposed on potential adopters in terms of age, length of marriage and health status (Family Helper Accessed: March 15th, 2013). My research on transnational adoption, therefore, represents that moment in history near the peak of the Chinese adoption program, adding perspective to the ongoing scholarly re-evaluation of transnational adoption.

Through my ethnographic work with Canadian women, this research contributes a unique perspective to the academic inquiry on transnational adoption by focusing on female subjectivity, specifically on adoptive mothers. My research also contributes to the larger body of literature on reproduction, kinship and globalization studies. It is worth noting that transnational adoption has a great deal of positive implications for Canadian culture and society. For instance, having the ability to adopt gives women reproductive options to free them from cultural expectations inside and outside the home. It gives Canadian women the autonomy to pursue a career, an education *and* a family.

Transnational adoption also expands Canadian understandings of kinship and the family. The visibility of these families with parents and children who do not look as if they are biologically related makes a powerful impact on Canadian society. Stretching the collective imagination about kinship has the potential to make anyone living outside the traditional nuclear family acceptable and helps to build a society that welcomes diversity rather than ostracizing difference. There are some limits to celebrating diversity in families, however, since transnational adoption seems to reinforce heterosexual normativity. Angelina Jolie, for example, who has adopted several children transnationally, seems to have been better received by the public once she entered into a stable heteronormative relationship with Brad Pitt.

Transnational adoption also connects people and families in disparate nations in distinctive ways. This practice provides a privileged platform from which to look at both the tensions and possibilities of global connections, exposing both inequalities and interesting solutions to particular social problems such as over-population and infertility.

Several feminist scholars have pointed to pregnancy as a 'biological spectacle' with society closely monitoring women's reproductive choices. After all there is so much at stake at this stage of a woman's life. For many women, becoming a mother is a rite of passage into womanhood and a symbol of what it means to be a good citizen (Berlant 1997). In my research with Canadian women who adopted from China, I found that women who adopt children due to infertility often use pregnancy metaphors to describe the adoption process. This metaphorical reference to pregnancy as a means of

describing the adoption process was limited to infertile women, and was not used by the adoptive mothers I met who had adopted for other reasons such as being single, religious convictions or a family history of adoption. Infertile women use these metaphors in their adoption narrative to link their experiences as closely as possible to a biological pregnancy to make up for 'what was lost' in their inability to conceive (Layne 2003, Howell 2009). Ironically while highlighting 'what was lost' for these adoptive mothers, their narratives simultaneously erase the relinquishing families. It seems that despite the plethora of available ways to make a family, North Americans still have a preference for biological kinship. It is also noteworthy that despite a wider acceptance of childless families in North American culture and society, many women still feel that motherhood is central to their identity as a woman.

This dissertation explores many factors and motivations leading women to adopt children overseas. While I found that infertility was the most common circumstance leading Canadian women to adopt transnationally, some women I met adopted because they were single, because they were adopted themselves or had adopted family members, or for religious reasons. This dissertation critically investigates philanthropic motives for adoption that straddle uncomfortably on the border between between kidnap and rescue (Briggs 2012, Dubinsky 2010). While adoptive mothers seem to think critically about their choices, and struggle with some of the strident critiques, they come to terms with their adoptions as positive experiences by separating all transnational adoptions into distinct categories of 'good' and 'bad' adoptions. Through careful research into all international adoption programs, these adoptive mothers align

themselves with good adoptions and consider bad or corrupt adoption practices to be circumstantial rather than systematic. In other words, the Canadian women I encountered believe that at least for the China adoption program during the time at which they adopted, corruption was the exception rather than the rule. Colonial scripts suggest that their adopted children will have better lives outside of an institution and raised in a loving family in a 'modern' country. The ends seem to justify the means for these adoptive mothers because their children are so well loved and cared for in their adoptive families and because their future is bright in their adoptive country.

Finally, this dissertation draws attention to the media and celebrity culture surrounding transnational adoption from China. It is interesting that transnational adoption has become an intensely public issue, in contrast to the emphasis on privacy surrounding this community and protecting their private and personal reproductive choices. These families are very publicly visible and there are some conflicting ideas about how they are received in their respective communities. The media acts as a space where the public can debate and negotiate the difference between 'good' and 'bad' adoptions. Furthermore, culturally appropriate expectations of womanhood, femininity and kinship are both reinforced and negotiated by the media, and played out in the domain of everyday social interaction between adoptive parents, their children and the broader communities in which they live.

The next logical avenue of future research would turn to transnational surrogacy. Since transnational adoption has shut down in many countries, North

American families are quickly and eagerly looking for new reproductive options on the global stage. International surrogacy is a recent phenomenon that has many parallels with transnational adoption. Transnational adoption has become increasingly restrictive making it either impossible to get a child in this way or requiring that the parents wait for extended periods of time. Countries, such as China, which were once at the centre of the transnational adoption circuit, are closing their international adoption programs. As a result of these changes, childless couples, singles and LGBTQ couples are searching for new avenues to become parents. Professional international surrogacy companies have quickly responded to this demand and a plethora of companies are working out of India, matching Westerners with potential Indian surrogate mothers

(http://www.thesurrogacysource.com/international_surrogacy.htm (Accessed: August 28th 2013). International surrogacy raises some of the same issues as transnational adoption; however the ethics and social justice issues become even sharper. International surrogacy provides a unique site from which to further explore theoretical issues related to infertility, reproduction and kinship as well as ethical issues of global interconnection and exploitation.

At some point in the future, the entire phenomenon of transnational adoption which currently has such major cultural significance will simply be an interesting footnote in history. As anthropologists, we must reflect on this reality and ask the question, “What can we learn from this ethnographic moment? While other researchers have considered the inequality inherent in the movement of children from the global

South to the global North (Anagnost 2000, 2004; Howell 2006, 2009; Johnson 2004, 2005; Leinaweaver 2007), the intrinsic consumer quality of these exchanges (Dorow 2002, 2010; Goodwin 2010; Modell 1999) and analyzed concepts of race and ethnicity as these children grow up in a 'third space' between their home and host cultures (Hubinette 2006; Briggs 2003; Chen 2005; Jacobson 2008; Volkman 2003a/b; Yngvesson 2003), my research highlights the voices of Canadian women who negotiate motherhood without giving birth. Borrowing from anthropologist Marilyn Strathern (1992) who suggests that we must 'do kinship' in situations where it is not automatic, my research emphasizes the processes whereby adoptive mothers 'do' or 'make' motherhood.

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