

Home and belonging among female Chinese adoptees in the Netherlands





Universiteit Utrecht

Home and Belonging among Female Chinese Adoptees in the Netherlands

How do female Chinese adoptees in the Netherlands negotiate and construct belonging and the understanding of home?

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Maps

Map of the Netherlands

Figure 1: Map of the Netherlands¹



¹ Source: <https://www.internationalstudents.nl/maps-of-the-netherlands/>

Map of China

Figure 2: Map of China²



² Source: <http://www.map-of-china.co.uk/political-map-of-china.htm>

Acknowledgements

From the 5th of February 2018 until the 15th of April 2018 I have conducted qualitative research in the Netherlands among female Chinese adoptees who are sixteen years and older. I am thankful that the University of Utrecht gives us –me and other anthropology students– the opportunity to set up and design our own research during the bachelor anthropology. As a female Chinese adoptee, I have struggled with my ambiguous identity and what exactly is home, and I am grateful that I have been able to do research to this topic among other female Chinese adoptees within the Netherlands.

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Introduction

I am interested by how female Chinese adoptees in the Netherlands negotiate and construct belonging and the understanding of home because as a female Chinese adoptee I have struggled with the questions to whom I belong, and what exactly home is.

Although I had a normal and carefree youth, I always felt different. I felt different in terms of physical appearance, because I grew up in Bussum, which is a very white village and all the children in the neighborhood and at primary- and high school were mainly white. Therefore, I had the feeling that I did not fit in in terms of physical appearance. I felt different and was not very satisfied with my physical appearance, I felt ugly.

I also felt different because of my family situation. I was aware that ‘normal’ families share genes with each other, and within my family this was not the case because my sister and I were adopted from China. I did not share genes with my sister and I did not share genes with my adoptive parents. Because of this I felt that I did not *really* belong to this family; I had the feeling that I *really* belonged to my biological family in China. The longing to China and my biological parents became my fetish. In my mind, I genuinely thought that if I were there, all my struggles and hardships in life would magically disappear.

I also struggled with my ambiguous identity. In the eyes of others, I am ethnically Chinese and when people hear my [Dutch] name, the following scenario often occurs:

People who I just met said things like: *‘I had expected a different name’*. To which I immediately replied with: *‘I am adopted, that is why I have a Dutch name.’* Followed by an *‘Aaaah’* and then the following questions came up: *‘Do you know your biological parents?’* [no] *‘Do you want to search for you biological parents?’* [maybe] *‘Is your sister your real sister?’* [no, we are not biological sisters].

In a really short amount of time I had to negotiate with completely strangers to which ethnic group and family I belong to or not belong to. Through these questions, I became insecure about who I really was. In other words, I did not know if I was Dutch, Chinese or Dutch-Chinese or somewhere in between.

In the summer of 2017 my ‘dream’ came true and I went together with my adoptive parents to Kunming (Yunnan, China) to search for my biological parents. I have tried to search for my biological family through the media –local television channel, Kunming TV and Yunnan TV, and through the local newspaper, Kunming Daily.



Figure 3: Karlijn is being interviewed by Kunming TV and Yunnan TV.

During my preparation for my trip to China, I went searching online for Chinese adoptees who did find their biological parents or who were also interested in their roots and searching for their biological parents in China. Thus, I got to know these Chinese adoptees, mainly through Facebook, and also through a workshop called: *China Roots Zoeken* (China Roots Searching). For the first time, I had the feeling that I did not feel different. Although I have a sister who is also adopted from China, I did not find acknowledgement in my feelings towards my biological parents and China, because she was not interested at all in her biological parents and China.

Although I did not find my biological parents, it brought me something else. Which I wrote down:

Be(longing)

Since I was a little child,

I always longed to home.

But what is home?

I always thought that China was my home.

I always thought that I belong to China.

So, I suffered from longing to China.

China became my fetish and obsession.

I became obsessed with longing to China.

After all those years of longing to China,
I have visited my ‘motherland’, my home.
However, after I came back from China,
I did not long for China anymore, as much I did in the past.
I was not familiar with the Chinese culture,
I could not speak the Chinese language,
Because of that, I did not feel at home.

What I actually try to illustrate within this short narrative is the following: although I thought that I did belong to China, I did not feel like coming ‘home’ at all when I visited China in the summer of 2017. I could not speak Chinese, and was not familiar with Chinese norms and values, because of this I felt alienated from the Chinese people. Moreover, when I came back to Holland, I felt more at home in the Netherlands than I have ever felt before.

Thus, through my own struggle with my ambiguous identity and the knowledge that other international adoptees may also experience this, the societal goal of this research is to unite a collection of experiences, performances, behaviors, expressions of identity and constructions of identity from female Chinese adoptees in the Netherlands. I hope that other (female) (Chinese) adoptees who are also wondering to whom they belong to feel empowered by reading the findings of this research. In other words, I hope that my findings can help other adoptees in their struggle with their ambiguous identity, feelings of belonging and the understanding of home.

Scientific Relevance

This research is conducted from an anthropological perspective. Adoption has been studied historically from an anthropological approach to kinship, however in the past little attention has been paid to the diverse ways people think about, react to and represent the meaning of adoption (Terrel 1994, 157).

Since the mid-to-late 1800s, anthropologists have been interested in the study of kinship (Peletz 1995, 343). Adoption and kinship are connected to each other because, through adoption, people create families which are not merely based on biological ties. Adoption is not a homogeneous phenomenon and occurs in several ways (Hoopes 1990, 147). In other words,

birthparents (biological parents), adoptive parents and adoptees in the global West³ should know that people elsewhere in the world may look at adoption in a variety of ways that do not resemble Western assumptions and biases about this form of kinship. They need to know that what adoption means and what it signifies for participants is malleable, contingent, pragmatic: a social construction, not a natural fact or a universal given (Terrel 1994, 156).

Note, that this research proposal will examine adoption through a Western cultural lens. In the global West, the hegemonic stance towards adoption is: adoption is a second-best way of becoming a family (Schaffer and Lindstrom 1989, 15 in Terrel 1994, 156). The psychological and social ties binding an adoptive family together are looked on by the majority in the global West as weaker than natural ties of blood. Therefore, adoption is seen as difficult and risky. The risk is held to be especially great when a child does not look like or share the background of its adoptive parents. This is according to the majority preeminently true for transracial and international adoptions. They believe that the child is removed from its 'real' family and from 'his/her ethnic roots' and 'cultural heritage' (Terrel 1994, 155).

Nowadays anthropologists such as Schneider, do not simply study adoption to gain knowledge about the genealogical ties between family members (Terrel 1994, 160). Schneider studies adoption to discover the meanings and implications of aspects of culture and social order that remains problematic for both anthropologists and the public. In other words, when a child does not look like his/her parents, due to transracial and international adoption. Questions about belonging to a family arise. For example: *'What does it mean to belong to a family?'* Also, the majority of the international adoptees grows up in a nation where he/she does not look like the majority of the nation. Questions about belonging to a group or a nation arise. For example: *'What does it mean to belong to a group or a nation?'* (Terrel 1994, 160) Although international adoptees are legally belonging to the nation-state and the family where they have been adopted into, the above questions still arise. In other words, international adoption raises questions about who belongs to whom. Thus, by examining how female Chinese adoptees in the Netherlands negotiate and construct belonging and the understanding of home the anthropological knowledge about the meanings and implications of aspects of culture and social order in relation to adoption will be expanded.

Furthermore, international adoption is also discussed in public debates and other academic fields. The main motivation to stop international adoption according the board of

³ The West and the South are not two entities, they are interconnected, because they exist in the same holistic context of globalized power relations (Dámico-Samuels 1991, 83). Therefore, the term 'global West' and 'global South' will be used to show that the relation between the West and the South are interconnected.

child protection of the Netherlands is: *'A child has to stay in an environment where it knows the culture, the social environment'*. Not only a public debate in the Netherlands has emerged, also academic debates about adoption occurs. Several academics, such as Smolin, hold a negative stance towards international adoption. Smolin states: *'The global West disrupts children from their national, racial and cultural identity, because Western adoptive parents impose a new set of cultural values from the outside to their adoptive child(ren)'* (Smolin 2006 in Martin 2006, 178-179). Both arguments prescribe to whom the adoptee 'really' should belong to, namely the country, family and culture of birth. Also, it approaches culture, the nation and the family as something fixed. The boundary they make is between the culture, the biological family and the country of birth of the adoptee (where the adoptee *really belongs*) and the culture, the adoptive family and the country in which the adoptee will be adopted into. I argue that the international adoption debates are too 'simplistic', because cultural, national and family boundaries are fluid, malleable, contingent, pragmatic: a social construction. I believe that it is very important to incorporate the views of international adoptees within the international adoption debates, because the debates are about 'them'. By examining how female Chinese adoptees negotiate and construct belonging and the understanding of home in the Netherlands this research wants to contribute to the debates about international adoption by revealing their experiences with cultural, national and family boundaries within the Netherlands and thus give international adoptees a voice within this debate.

In the field

The main question –*How do female Chinese adoptees in the Netherlands negotiate and construct belonging and the understanding of home?*– reveals the research population of this research: female Chinese adoptees who live in the Netherlands. First, this specific research population is chosen, female Chinese adoptees, instead of 'adoptees who live in the Netherlands' (including both female and male Chinese adoptees), due to the knowledge gained from gender studies about intersectionality.

Intersectionality is introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 (Crenshaw 1989, 139), which is the most significant theoretical contribution of women's studies (McCall 2005, 1771; Shields 2008, 301). It is a way of looking at the world that takes as a principled stance that is not enough merely to take gender as the main analytical tool of a particular phenomenon, but that gender as an important social and symbolic axis of difference is simultaneously operative with others like, race, class, sexuality and religion (Wekker 2016, 21). These grammars of difference co-construct each other (Wekker 2016, 22).

Thus, the approach of intersectionality, renders visible the multiple positionings and power relations within which they are embedded. Rather than listing categories and identity options, the approach takes into account the intersecting structures of power and hierarchy (Toivanen 2014, 29). The hegemonic structures of power and hierarchy regarding identity has its genesis in the European colonial era. The cultural archive foregrounds the centrality of imperialism to Western culture. The cultural archive has influenced historical cultural configurations and current dominant and cherished self-representations and culture. Thus also, the dominant discourse regarding race, gender and sexuality. On the top of the hierarchy: white and masculinity and at the bottom: black and feminine and these ideas about race and gender are still deeply embedded into today's society (Wekker 2016, 22-23).

Second, due to the one-child policy⁴ in China, a lot more girls than boys were abandonment and eventually ended up in the Netherlands due to international adoption, this also eased the choice for female adoptees instead of male adoptees.

Furthermore, I have narrowed my research population by only delving into the lives of participants who are sixteen years and older. The age of the participants is important for the following reasons. The first reason, researchers should always inform the potential participants about the research (explain why the research will be conducted, how you will gather the data and tell the participants who the sponsor of your research project will be). It is important that potential participants understand the research before the participants join the research (DeWalt and DeWalt 2010, 215). I believe that participants who are sixteen years and older will understand my research. The second reason, it is not only important that the potential participants understand the research. It is also important that they can freely choose whether to participate in the research project or not (DeWalt and DeWalt 2010, 215). I believe that participants who are sixteen years and older will be old enough to decide for themselves if they want to join my research project.

Moreover, I am highly aware that I am part of my own research population. Critics will say: *How can you achieve doing objective and value-free research if you are part of your own research population?* First, I argue that research does not have to be completely value free, however the personal and moral values of the researcher has to be made explicit. For example: why did the researcher choose this topic? or why did the researcher choose for a certain data collection? By being explicit about my motivation to conduct this research and my data collection and eventually reflect on this, other researchers and I can determine how my own

⁴ See 'Context' for further explanation about the one-child policy in China and the reason why Chinese parents mainly abandoned girls instead of boys.

motivation and data collection have influenced this research. Second, according to DeWalt and DeWalt, objectivity is not possible in the study of human behavior (DeWalt and DeWalt 2010, 96). I argue that all scientific research has to be as objective as possible. Before I entered the field I took the course: qualitative research methods and applications, within this course anthropology students learn how to conduct anthropological research. I have learned that jot notes, expanded fieldnotes, and transcriptions of semi-structured interviews are not results of the research, this is all raw-data that has to be interpreted by the researcher. I am aware that my own experiences ‘color’ how I perceive the world and how I understand and experience certain phenomena in life, thus also how I interpret data. I will strive to achieve to interpret this data as objective as possible, by using Nvivo to analyze the data in three steps, namely: open-coding, axial coding and selective coding. Furthermore, during the process of data collection besides making jot notes and expanded field notes, I kept a dairy in which I wrote down my own personal experiences and I will reflect on this in the reflection.

In order to collect data, I have conducted fieldwork in the Netherlands from the 5th of February 2018 until the 15th of April 2018. To collect the data, I have made use of the methods of participatory observation, small talk, informal interviews (conversations) and semi-structured interviews. I have recruited participants from my own network of female Chinese adoptees⁵, and by placing a Facebook post in a closed Facebook group which is called ‘*Adoptie uit China*’ (Adoption from China). The moderator of the group only allows Dutch adoptive parents and Chinese adoptees from the Netherlands in this group. Note that both the female Chinese adoptees from my own network and the members of the *Adoptie uit China* closed Facebook group, are interested in adoption and in China.

Right at the start of the research I have conducted interviews among female Chinese adoptees who are sixteen years and older, in some cases the adoptive parent(s), sibling(s) were also present. During the fieldwork I have conducted twenty-one semi-structured interviews, which were all recorded and transcribed. To get a more holistic view of the lived experiences of belonging and the understanding of home I also used the research method: participant observation. I have participated during fieldwork in different activities where Chinese adoptees came together. The first event has been the premiere of a self-made documentary of a female Chinese adoptee about her ambiguous identity and her stance towards China, the Netherlands, her adoptive family and her biological family. The second event was a private meeting of female Chinese adoptees at one of the girl’s home. I know these girls through a WhatsApp group called:

⁵ I got to know these girls during the preparations for my search to my biological parents in China (through a workshop called: China Roots Zoeken and Facebook).

'China Girls Meet Up'. This WhatsApp group emerged from a closed Facebook page called: *'Geadopteerde uit China: Meet & Share'* (Adoptees from China: Meet and Share). The group WhatsApp has at the moment 35 members and all the members are interested in adoption and their roots. The group organizes meetings to meet each other and to get to know each other. They talk about every aspect of life (e.g. school, work, family, friends, adoption etc.). The atmosphere among the girls is very good and because of that, everyone is very willing to talk about adoption and their personal feelings. The third event was a lecture about the consequences of finding the biological parents in China, the lecture was organized by the foundation: Meiling⁶.

Not only have I participated in group events for (female) Chinese adoptees, I also have participated and observed in their daily life to get a more holistic view of what their daily life looks like. I have participated in many activities such as, lunching with the adoptees and their family, having dinner with the adoptees and their family, shopping with the adoptees, joining Chinese lessons, celebrating Chinese New Year and cooking with adoptees.



Figure 4: Participant is making Sui Kau (dumpling filled with shrimp)

⁶ Dutch license holder for international adoptions (source: www.meiling.nl)

Structure of the thesis

In the upcoming chapter the theoretical framework of this research will be discussed. The theoretical framework will examine the emergences of international adoption to the current state of affairs regarding international adoption, international adoption debates and the concept of belonging. Chapter two, the context will elaborate on the one-child policy, because due to the one-child policy in China a lot of babies have been abandoned who eventually through international adoption ended up in the Netherlands. The context also will elaborate on the Dutch self-image to illustrate the Dutch climate towards 'race' and 'racism' within the Netherlands and how the Dutch society perceives South-East Asian women in particular. This is important, because the negotiation and the construction of belonging among female Chinese adoptees is formed within the Dutch context.

Chapter three, four, five and six will present the empirical data. Chapter three, will elaborate on how the construction of belonging within the adoptive family takes place regarding the adoptive family, biological family and China. Chapter four will examine how ethnic boundary rules work in practice within the Netherlands among female Chinese adoptees and how they deal with these boundaries in their daily lives. Chapter five will examine how female Chinese adoptees are confronted with hegemonic ideas about the family and how they deal with these confrontations. Chapter six, will elaborate on the friendships between Chinese adoptees and friendships between female Chinese adoptees and non-adopted Asians. Together these empirical chapters will give an insight in how female Chinese adoptees within the Netherlands negotiate and construct belonging and the understanding of home, which will be recapitulated in the conclusion. After the conclusion, an academic summary of this research and a reflection in which I will reflect on my own role as a researcher will be present.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

Introduction

To examine the negotiation of belonging and the understanding of home among female Chinese adoptees in the Netherlands the theoretical framework will provide sufficient background information about international adoption and other key concepts which are important for this research.

The first paragraph will elaborate on the emergence of international adoption and the current state of affairs regarding international adoption. The second paragraph will elaborate on the *good* side, the *ugly* side and the *bad* side of international adoption debates. These two paragraphs are crucial to understand the hegemonic stance within the Dutch society towards international adoption. It is important to understand the negative hegemonic stance towards international adoption within the Netherlands, because the negotiation of belonging and the understanding of home between my participants and their family, friends and other acquaintances are formed in dialogue with each other within the Dutch context.

Paragraph four and five together will provide insight into the concept of belonging. Paragraph four will discuss place-belonginess and within this paragraph six factors will be listed which generate place-belonging, and these six factors will be used to analyze the empirical data. Lastly, paragraph five will shed its light onto politics of belonging. Within this paragraph ethnic boundaries and the transracial adoption paradox will be discussed.

§1.1 Emergence of International Adoption of Children

This paragraph will examine the emergence of international adoption and the current state of affairs regarding international adoption.

First, the emergence of international adoption has been shaped by the forces of colonialism, world war II, the Cold War and globalization (Briggs 2009, 1). From the Great War that convulsed Europe in 1914 through the civil and international conflicts that have engulfed many regions of the world almost continuously since then, war refugee crises, ethnic cleansing and movements to defend human rights have all marked adoption (Briggs 2009, 1). In response to massive violence of modern warfare towards civilians, e.g. the bombs dropped on the Basque city of Guernica by Franco's forces, the Allied firebombing of Dresden, the atomic bombs dropped by the US on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the Holocaust, groups across Europe organized to rescue the victims, especially the orphans (Bergquist 2003, 343; Briggs 2009, 3). Instead of committing resources to help orphans within the country, the solution was to pull the children out of the country (Martin 2006, 176). For example, the British *kindertransport* brought 10,000 unaccompanied, mostly Jewish refugee children from Germany and German-occupied Austria and Czechoslovakia to Great Britain, while other were relocated to foster and adoptive homes in Holland and Belgium (Briggs 2009, 3). Thus, international adoption emerged out of war and the first wave of large scale international adoption has its genesis in a post world war II (Briggs 2009, 1). This was also the moment when international adoption became legalized (Bergquist 2003, 343; Briggs 2009, 1).

The second wave of international adoption occurred after the Korean War which is part of the Cold War. Korean society dissuaded the use of domestic adoption as a means of caring for war orphans. Besides war orphans, also mixed children were adopted from Korea and other parts of South-East Asia. These mixed children are either from Asian American descent or Asian European descent and these are the children of U.S. and European servicemen in the Philippines, Vietnam, Japan and China (Briggs 2009, 6; Martin 2006, 177).

Furthermore, in the 1950s and 1960s many countries in North America and Western Europe expanded their national programs to address poverty. This was in response to the Soviet Union who raised during the Cold War the question whether poverty was better addressed by communism than by capitalism (Briggs 2009, 8-9). Native American, First Nations and Native Australian people, which were poor, who had been ignored by the state came to its attention (Lazarus 1997, 256). Those people who had been ignored, received aid and were subjected to regulation and reform. Although Canada, the US and Australia already had boarding school programs with a curriculum of civilizing native people since the 19th century. Efforts to address

poverty brought the native children to the attention of social workers and they began to take these children into the care of the child welfare system. Furthermore, the native children were removed from their parental homes and placed into a white nuclear family, because the native families were seen as uncivilized and the nuclear white Anglo-Saxon family was seen as civilized (Lazarus 1997, 257). These kinds of adoptions were called cross-religious and transracial adoptions (Briggs 2009, 8-9).

These programs, to remove native children from their parents, had contradictory effects on adoption. Namely before these programs, adoption was a mean to rescue war orphans, which everyone was merely positive about (Briggs 2009, 8-9). After these programs, however, not everyone was merely positive about adoption anymore. People spoke about the '*Stolen Generation*', because the native parents were brutally disrupted from their children which were placed into white families (Briggs 2009, 9). Some researchers like Dunch even stated:

The removal of native children is an act of cultural imperialism, because the political powerful nation [Canada, U.S. and Australia] imposes her cultural products (e.g. socially-accepted beliefs and ideologies) over the less powerful society [the natives] (Dunch 2002, 302).

As a response to this paternalistic program, the American congress passed the Indian Child Welfare Act in 1978. This act entails the following goal: '*To protect the Indian children and to promote the stability and security of Indian tribes and families*'. This goal was to be achieved by making sure that Indian child welfare determinations are not based on a white middle-class standard which, in many cases, forecloses placement with an Indian family (Hawkins-Leon 1997, 203).

Moreover, most children circulation in adoption since the end of the Cold War are social orphans. In other words, these children have living parents but have been relinquished by them or taken by the state and declared legally abandoned (Briggs 2009, 10). The world is nowadays divided into two camps for adoption purposes, one consisting of countries (the global West) with low birthrates and small numbers of children in need of homes, and the other consisting of countries (the global South) with high birthrates and huge numbers of such children. In the global West, the number of babies surrendered or abandoned by birthparents has been limited in recent decades due to contraception, abortion and the increased tendency to keep their children. As a result, very few children are available for adoption in comparison with the large number of people who for infertility and altruistic reasons –provide homes for either the

racially, physically, or different child who needs permanency and a loving family— are eager to adopt. Such altruistic reason may be confounded with personal reason too, such as infertility or the desire to expand their family beyond the biological children (Hoopes 1990, 148). In the poorer countries of the world, political turmoil, economic circumstances and war contribute to a situation in which there are very few prospective adopters in comparison with the vast numbers in children in need of homes (Bartholet 1993, 90). Thus nowadays, children move from poorer countries and families to wealthier ones (Briggs 2009 1; Nkrumah 1965, 1).

This paragraph showed that there has been a shift in which children circulating in the international adoption circuit. Namely, from children who were the victims of warfare to social orphans nowadays. Although there has been a shift within the children who are circulating in the adoption circuit, from the beginning up to the present day international adoption has been shaped by colonialism, warfare, and globalization. The next paragraph will elaborate on the debates about international adoption. Three sides –bad side, ugly side and the good side– within these debates will be discussed.

§1.2 The bad side, the ugly side and the good side of International Adoption

This paragraph will reveal three sides of international adoption debates, namely the *bad side*, the *ugly side* –somewhere between viewing intercountry adoption as good or viewing intercountry adoption as bad– and the *good side* of international adoption (Martin 2006, 187).

Already shown in paragraph two, international adoption is highly fused with power relations between nations and colonialism. This is also one of the main critics on international adoption. Those people believe that international adoption is a modern day reverse colonization: taking children out of developing countries and bringing them into developed countries. David M. Smolin, professor of constitutional Law and Director Center for Children, Law and Ethics writes a lot about the connection between international adoption and child trafficking (Smolin 2006 in Martin 2006, 178-179) and reveals the *bad side* of international adoption:

To some intercountry adoption in itself is more or less a form of child trafficking, as it involves the transfer of children from poor nations to rich nations in order to meet the demand of those in rich nations for children. The fact that those seeking to adopt want daughters and sons, not sex or labor, seems to make little difference... it is still a matter of the citizens of rich countries using their wealth and power to “buy” the vulnerable of the poor....

those who really care about the suffering of children in developing nations should provide assistance and help children within their own societies, rather than spending inordinate sums to strip children of their national identity, native culture and language.

Thus, Smolin makes two statements in his argument. First, children move from poorer countries and families to wealthier countries. In other words, through international adoption the ‘global West’ must save poor children from the ‘global South’. The imperialistic view of the global South as backwards and not sufficient to take care of their own business allows dominant, developed cultures to strip away developing country’s most precious resources, their children. Second, by taking those children to other rich nations, the global West disrupts them from their national, racial and cultural identity, because the Western adoptive parents impose a new set of cultural values from the outside to their adoptive child(ren) (Bartholet 1993, 90).

Besides Smolin, other academics also reveal the *bad side* of international adoption. They point out that imposing a new set of cultural values is harmful for the child. They call international adoption, *cultural genocide*. In other words, by disrupting the adoptee from their *own* culture the adoptees *own* culture would fade away (Martin 2006, 168). This concept of cultural genocide, emerged when native children were brutally disrupted from their own culture by placing them into white ‘civilized’ families. Thus, international adoption suffused with the concept of culture, on both an individual and a societal level. Individually, critics of intercountry adoption believe that the loss of a child’s cultural heritage (which according to critics inevitably occurs during intercountry adoption) leads to the loss of the child’s identity. As such, the cultural component, at a minimum, must play a role in evaluating the best interests of the child. In some instances, the threat of loss of cultural heritage can be enough to proscribe intercountry adoption altogether.

Furthermore, also a public debate in the Netherlands about international adoption occurs. The board of child protection of the Netherlands advocates to stop with international adoption and the first step would be to immediately stop adoption from the following countries: China, U.S. and other EU countries. The board of child protection agrees with Smolin who reveals the *bad side* of international adoption, because their motivations for the abolishment of international adoption are: a child has to stay in an environment where it knows the culture, the

social environment and language and a demand-driven market has arisen, where a lot of money is earned by international adoption⁷.

Another researcher, Pauline Turner Strong, professor of Anthropology and Women's and Gender Studies, takes a more moderate position within the international adoption debates. Strong wrote about the adoption of native children by non-native parents in North America and showed the *ugly side* of adoption:

Adoption across political and cultural borders may simultaneously be an act of violence and an act of love, an excruciating rupture and a generous incorporation, and an appropriation of valued resources and a constitution of personal ties (Briggs 2009, 1).

International adoption also crosses political and cultural borders. Thus, according to Turner, international adoption is on the one hand an act of love, because the child is incorporated in a family. On the other hand, it is an act of violence, because the child is disrupted from his/her *own* culture.

The proponents in the international adoption debates, the *good side*, believe that saving children without families by bringing them into loving, adoptive homes should always occur, at whatever cost (Martin 2006, 178). Given the poverty and destitution faced by these children, international adoption seems to provide an opportunity to literally save children from such fates as prostitution, child pornography or forced labor. For the proponents, the practical reality of institutionalized children takes precedence over obscure notions of cultural paternalism and babyselling –citizens of sending countries, including independent facilitators, attorneys, orphanage directors and other, create a system for purchasing infants and children from birth families (Martin 2006, 181; Smolin 2006, 118). Thus, the proponents of international adoption, believe that international adoption is a *good* solution for children who otherwise face prostitution, child pornography or forced labor.

For example, Sara Dillon, professor of Law, argues that international adoption is one method of achieving a child's right to family (Martin 2006, 182). Dillon acknowledges that international adoption is linked to a history of colonialism and imperialism. Dillon, however,

⁷ Source:

<https://www.nu.nl/binnenland/4344660/raad-jeugdbescherming-pleit-stop-adoptie-buitenland.html>

<https://nos.nl/artikel/2212549-kritiek-op-internationale-adoptie-maar-voorlopig-geen-verbod.html>

<https://eenvandaag.avrotros.nl/item/stop-met-internationale-adoptie/>

sees these as distinct concepts and contends that intercountry adoption must be viewed solely within the context of individualized children's rights. Dillion and other proponents in the debate also argue that a child's culture is insignificant at a young age and that there are little variations in the psychological development of children (Martin 2006, 203).

This paragraph showed the three sides of international adoption debates. The debate is between two seemingly disparate perspectives. On the one side, there are those who believe that international adoption is modern day reversed colonialization, which is fused with unequal power between nations, the bad side. On the other side, there are those who believe that saving children without families by bringing them into loving, adoptive homes should always occur, at whatever cost, the good side. The good side, follows an ideological stance which believes when a child's basic human rights are not met, international adoption will be the solution to this problem. Between those sides, the ugly side, argues that international adoption is on the one hand an act of love, because the child is incorporated in a family (good side). On the other hand, it is an act of violence, because the child is disrupted from his/her 'own' culture (bad side).

In academic and public debates in the global West people treat cultural as fixed, and thus also cultural boundaries as fixed. Their argument entails to whom the adoptee 'really' belongs to, namely to the culture, family and country of birth. The boundary they make is between the culture, the biological family and the country of birth of the adoptee and the culture, the adoptive family and the country in which the adoptee will be adopted into. These debates treat cultural, national and family boundaries as fixed, however anthropologists (myself included) argue that these boundaries are fluid, malleable, contingent, pragmatic: a social construction. From this anthropological perspective I will examine how female Chinese adoptees within the Netherlands negotiate belonging and the understanding of home. Therefore, the next two paragraphs will discuss the concept of belonging and the understanding of home.

§1.3 Place-belongingness

This paragraph will elaborate on belonging and the understanding of home. People simply say: 'I belong here', however this phrase is taken for granted, actually people know very little about what belonging stands for and how it is claimed (Antonsich 2010, 645). Antonish 'divides' belonging into 'belonging as a personal, intimate, feeling of being 'at home' in a place (place-belongingness) and a belonging as a discursive resource which constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion (politics of belonging), which will paragraph five elaborate on (Antonsich 2010, 647).

First, it is important to understand how, as an emotional feeling, an individual comes to be attached to a particular place (place-belongingness). Place is felt as ‘home’ and to belong means to find a place where an individual can feel ‘at home’. Home stands for a symbolic space of familiarity, security, comfort and emotional attachment (Hooks 2009, 213). Given the emotional connotation associated with belonging as a feeling at home in a place, this notion also renders in terms of a sense of rootedness or discussed in a relation to (if not even confused with) notions of sense of place, place attachment and place identity (Antonsich 2010, 649). Feelings of belonging to a place and processes of Self-formation are mutually implicated. For example, the question: *Who am I?* cannot be isolated from ‘*Where do I belong to?*’ (Dixon and Durrheim 2004, 457; Loader 2006, 206). Belonging is activated as a personal, intimate, existential dimension which narrates and is narrated by the Self (Antonsich 2010, 650).

Six factors can contribute to generate place-belongingness. First, auto-biographical factors, relate to one’s past history –personal experiences, memories which attach a particular person to a given place– and relations (Dixon and Durrheim 2004, 459). Childhood memories usually play a key role in this context. The place where a person was born and has grown up often remains a central place in the life of that person. The continued presence of family members in that place, as well as memories of deceased family members, also contributes to feelings of place-belongingness (Antonsich 2010, 647).

Second, relational factors refer to the personal and social ties which enrich the life of an individual in a particular place. These ties vary from emotionally dense relations with family members and friends. In order to generate a sense of belonging, these ties, have to be long-lasting, stable, positive and significant. Furthermore, they should also take place through frequent physical interaction. Thus, the contact with completely strangers, ‘weak ties’, with whom we share public spaces are not essential feelings of place-belongingness (Antonsich 2010, 648).

Third, cultural factors, generate feelings of place-belongingness. Language is usually considered as the most important factor (Buonfino and Thomson 2007, 17 in Antonsich 2010, 648). Due to language people can construct and convey meanings in a particular way. Furthermore, to understand what certain tacit codes, signs and gestures mean tacit knowledge is required of a particular culture. Language can be felt as an element of intimacy, because it resonates with one’s auto-biographical sphere, and thus contributes to generate a sense of feeling ‘at home’. Also, other forms of cultural expressions, habits and traditions, materiality of cultural practices can generate a similar feeling (Hooks 2009, 24).

Fourth, economic factors matter, because they contribute to create a safe and stable material condition for the individual and his/her family. Not only from a material perspective, also in relation to make a person feel that he/she has a stake in the future of the place where he/she lives (Sporton and Valentine 2007, 12-13; Jayaweera and Choudhury 2008, 107 in Antonsich 2010, 648; Loader 2006, 211).

Fifth, legal factors (e.g. resident permits and citizenship) are an essential component in producing security. To be or not to be a citizen or a subject entitled with rights (e.g. to stay, to obtain social benefits, to work, etcetera) clearly matters (Loader 2006, 210). This legal status is a formal structure of belonging which serves as a pre-condition to participate in a certain society/nation (Antonsich 2010, 648). In the case of Chinese adoptees, during the adoption process in the Netherlands, the children relinquish their Chinese passport and they become legal citizen of the Netherlands by obtaining a Dutch passport. In other words, Chinese adoptees have the same legal rights as white Dutch citizens in the Netherlands.

Lastly, the length of residence is important for 'incomers' (Hay 1998; Kiely et al. 2005; Markova and Black 2007 in Antonsich 2010, 649). When an individual chooses to live in a different place from which the individual is born into, a sense of belonging, is generated when the chosen place of residence is congruent with the individual's life story. However, when a sense of place-belonging is not met, a sense of loneliness, isolation, alienation, and displacement can occur. This can lead to motivational and also mental health problems (Hooks 2009, 15). Although Antonisch speaks about 'incomers' in the sense of migrants, and refugees, Chinese adoptees are also 'incomers', in the sense that they are not born in the Netherlands, and have an essential past in China, that cannot be easily forgotten. When the adoptee may not feel at home within the Netherlands also, a sense of loneliness, isolation, alienation and displacement can occur.

These six factors form a starting point for the analysis of place-belongingness among female Chinese adoptees. However, to be able to feel at home in a certain place is not only a personal matter, but is also a social one. If an individual feels rejected or not welcomed by the people who live in that place the individuals' sense of belonging would inevitably fade away. The intimate feeling of belonging to a place (place-belonging) should always come to terms with discourses and practices of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion (politics of belonging). Belonging cannot be an isolated and individual affair. Belonging to a place becomes one and the same as belonging to a group of people. In other words, belonging becomes synonymous with identity, both individual and social, that is why, politics of belonging often conflates with

identity politics (Antonsich 2010, 649). Therefore, the next paragraph will elaborate on: politics of belonging.

§1.4 Politics of belonging

Membership to a certain group and ownership of a certain place are both key factors in many politics of belonging (Antonsich 2010, 649; Dixon and Durrheim 2004, 659). Often an (ethnic) group (e.g. native white Dutch) claims that they belong to a certain place (territory) (e.g. the Netherlands). Because of this claim, they also claim the political power over the claimed territory. In other words, the group believes that they own or possess a certain place and therefore, they claim political power over this place (Demmers 2012, 35). Thus the structural link between belonging to a group and belonging to a place is activated both in identity terms and in terms of exclusive territorial ‘possession’ or ‘ownership’ (Antonsich 2010, 649).

In the context of the nation-state a certain nation –a group of people who share common descent, history, culture, language– claims a certain place which they occupy and rule over (Danforth 1995, 4). The state –a relatively centralized, differentiated and autonomous organization successfully claiming priority in the use of force within a large contiguous and clearly bounded territory– has the power to grant belonging to the nation (Tilly 1990).

A lot of dominant ethnic groups or nations, tend to fill the notion that belonging is linked to sameness. In other words, they believe that the ethnic group share the same cultural characteristics –language, culture, values, behavior and religion. If an individual is willing to assimilate to the dominant culture he/she could be included into the group. Moreover, in most cases, the ethnic group and the nation believe that they share a common descent. The newcomer, who does not share the same common descent, can according to most members, never be recognized as a full member of the ethnic group (Antonsich 2010, 15).

However, Barth and his collaborators found evidence of how ethnic boundaries were actually permeable and changeable (Demmers 2012, 28). According to Barth’s findings (Demmers 2012, 28-29) what makes an ethnic identity ‘ethnic’ is to be sought in the social processes of maintaining boundaries that the people themselves recognized as ethnic. In other words, the ethnic group is an imagined, constructed community, created through social interaction. Thus, ethnicity is contextual instead of a thing, and therefore dynamic and changeable.

Ethnic boundary rules differ per ethnic group and change over time. Ethnic boundary rules are also called rules of membership (Demmers 2012, 28). But what are ethnic boundary

rules? The ethnic boundary rules decide who is and who is not a member of the group based on terms of listed features such as religion, language, livelihood, customs and political organization. Sometimes, an outsider is accepted into the group based on their economic status, or in other cases you can marry an insider. Furthermore, it often takes two or more generations before the offspring of a newcomer is accepted as part of the ethnic group (Demmers 2012, 28).

How ethnic boundary rules may work in practice among transnational adoptees can be illustrated by the transracial adoption paradox. The transracial adoption paradox confronts racial/ethnic minority children who are adopted by white parents into a white nation. This entails that the adoptees are visible not the biological children of their adoptive parents. This aspect of ethnicity is very important in the development of international adoptees, because physical attributes thought to be typical of members of family. Because of the physical difference between the adoptee and the adoptive parents, the adoptee may feel that he/she does not *really belong* to his/her adoptive family. The adoptee wants to be identified with his/her own ethnical minority, but they are perceived and treated by others, and sometimes themselves, as if they are members of the majority culture due to the adoption into a white family (Lee 2003, 711). This could also be the other way around, that outsiders treat the adoptee as racial/ethnic minorities but ascribe themselves as members of the majority culture. This paradox shows how other people and the adoptee create boundaries about inclusion and exclusion. These boundaries could differ from each other which leads to a questionable and ambiguous ethnic identity which may always be evident in the life of the international adoptee.

In sum, paragraph four and five together illustrated that in order to feel 'home' two concepts are important: place-belongingness and politics of belonging. This paragraph revealed on the one hand that ethnic groups or nations tend to fill the notion that belonging is linked to a common descent, which is often the hegemonic stance (also the case within the Netherlands). The newcomer, who does not share the same common descent, can according to most members, never be recognized as a full member of the ethnic group. On the other hand, this thesis can be refuted by the fact that ethnic boundary rules are not fixed, but permeable and changeable. The transracial adoption paradox illustrated how ethnic boundary rules may work in practice among transnational adoptees. Within the transracial adoption paradox a contradiction exists regarding to the identity of the international adopted person between the international adoptee and outsiders. The next chapter will examine the context of this research, because the negotiation and construction of belonging and the understanding of home will be constructed within the Dutch context. Therefore, the hegemonic stance towards people of color (non-whites), and to (female) South-East Asians within the Netherlands will be revealed. Moreover, firstly the

context will provide background information about the one-child policy of the Chinese government, because that is the reason why a lot of Chinese parents did abandon mainly their daughter(s).

Chapter 2: Context

Introduction

Chinese adoptees in the Netherlands have to deal mainly with two nations in their lives, namely; China (sending country of international adoption children) and the Netherlands (receiving country of international adoption children). The abandonment, the way Dutch society perceives non-whites, and to be more specific, South-East Asian women influences how Chinese adoptees in the Netherlands negotiate belonging and the understanding of home in the Netherlands. Therefore, first, the one-child policy will be elaborated on, because due to the one-child policy in China, a lot of new born babies were abandoned in China, which eventually have been adopted by Western parents. Second, the Dutch self-image will be elaborated on to illustrate the Dutch climate towards 'race' and 'racism' within the Netherlands and how the Dutch society perceives South-East Asian women in particular. Note that the representational regimes of the sexuality of different groups of women do not come into being independently from each other; they are relational and hierarchical. Therefore, the last section of the context will elaborate on how race, sexuality and gender intersect with each other in the Dutch society.

One-child policy

The one-child policy established in 1979 (Roessingh 2010, 83-87; Zhang and Goza 2006, 151), the Chinese state's attempt to curtail population growth, called for all couples to limit themselves to a single child. In a lot of areas, this became a one son or two children policy: parents were allowed to try for a second child –a son– if the firstborn was a daughter. Enforcement measures included steep fines for over-quota children, sterilization, and the threat of forced abortion in the event of future pregnancies. These policies had serious consequences for gender relations in China. Mothers who gave birth to baby girls might be subject to verbal and physical assault from their husbands and in-laws (Roessingh 2010, 83-87; Volkman 2003, 32). The oldest son is the most important for Chinese parents, for two reasons. First, China has a patrilineal kinship system which entails that the oldest son and his spouse have the responsibility to take care of the parents and also live with the parents (Zhang and Goza 2006, 155) and second, because of honor. Thus, when a couple is restricted to only have one child, they badly need a son to assure their honor and pension.

One form of discrimination against girls was infant abandonment. In the late 1980s, large numbers of healthy abandoned baby girls began to crowd China's state-run orphanages (Johnson 1996 in Volkman 2003, 33). Most couples in China, however, expressed in the 1990s

that they wished to have a daughter and a son, but felt under pressure if they failed to produce a son. So, many couples, who already had a daughter, felt that they had no choice but to abandon their second, or third daughters, in order to give in the future birth to a son. In other words, the abandonment of girls, depended on the birth order and the gender of siblings (Johnson, Banghan and Liyao 1998, 475; Roessingh 2010, 83-87).

The abandonments were illegal and took place in secrecy. The baby is left where parents hope the baby will be found: the steps of a police station or hospital, the side of a well-traveled road, a busy marketplace, a train station, or perhaps at the entrance of a house where a family lives who already had one son and no daughter, and decide to adopt a girl (Volkman 2003, 32). There were also boys which were abandoned in the 1990s, but this was not very common. Most boys were disabled or severely ill, and it would be likely that the parents could not take care for the boy because of the disability (Johnson, Banghan and Liyao 1998, 476). Thus, due the one-child policy, China was struggling with a lot of girls who were abandoned and international adoption became the solution to place these girls in families.

In the beginning of the '90s the international adoption out of China started (Selman 2009, 582). The first Chinese adoptees in the Netherlands, were adopted in 1992 (Hoksbergen 2001, 11). Between 1993 and 2000, 1391 Chinese children were adopted by Dutch parents, and China became the number two sending country (first sending country was Colombia) of children in the Netherlands. In 2015, the Chinese government official abolished the one-child policy⁸ and the Chinese government decided that couples are now allowed to have two children instead of one. Already in 2013, the policy was a little bit eased for couples who are both an only child themselves, because they are already allowed to have two children. This also has its consequences for China as a sending country for children in international adoption. Not only the supply of children declines, but also the attitude of China changed into a policy that they have to take care of their *own* children. In other words, foster care and national adoption are more encouraged nowadays.

The Dutch self-image

The Dutch self-image is recently scrutinized by Wekker in her book *White innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (2016). Wekker argues that the Dutch think of themselves as being an innocence, small, but just, ethical nation: color-blind, thus free of racism, as being inherently on the moral and ethical high ground, thus a guiding to other folks and nations

⁸ Source: <https://nos.nl/artikel/2065761-china-schaft-eenkindpolitiek-af.html>

(Wekker 2016, 2). Due to this Dutch self-image, as color-blind, the discourse 'race' and thus also 'racism' are inherently denied which is also the case in Wekker's study to adoptees of color within the Netherlands, the adoptees reported that one of the most prevalent, not very helpful, reactions from their white adoptive families, when they remarked on their experiences with race (e.g. discrimination) was: *'Whether you [adoptee of color] are yellow, purple, or blue, we love you anyway'* (Åsberg and Wekker 2007, 45; Wekker 2016, 77).

Wekker argues that a deep structure of inequality in thought and affect based on race was installed in the nineteenth century in European imperial populations and that is it from this deep reservoir, the cultural archive. The cultural archive foregrounds the centrality of imperialism to Western culture. The cultural archive has influenced historical cultural configurations and current dominant and cherished self-representations and culture (Wekker 2016, 2). In other words, four hundred years of Dutch imperial rule plays a vital but unacknowledged part in dominant meaning-making processes, including the making of the self in Dutch society (Wekker 2016, 2).

Another researcher, Chan, agrees with Wekker's statement because he states that the stance by Western powers towards Asians can be traced back to the colonialization (Chan 2014, 34). The colonialization of many countries in Asia fostered a sense of ownership and a justification of superiority over another racial group, namely Asians, by Western powers. Asian people were perceived as commodities, submissive, and as economic units of labor. Asian women were not only economic commodities, but sexual stereotypes developed to make women sexual commodities. Especially during World War II, Korean War and Vietnamese War, Asian women were perceived by American soldiers as prostitutes and sexual objects. This perception was then and is until now not only restricted to Western soldiers, but also portrayed and perpetuated through film and other media in the global West. As a result of these wars and media images, Asian women have suffered from a cultural stereotype of being exotic, subservient, passive, sexually attractive and available (Chan 2014, 34-35).

Intersectionality in practice

Wekker argues that the white Dutch self-image is based on the intersection of race, gender and sexuality, which genesis can be traced back to the imperial era (Wekker 2016, 21). Therefore, this section will examine how the intersection of race, gender and sexuality work in practice in the Dutch context according to Wekker. Moreover, representational regimes of the sexuality of different groups of women (gender) do not come into being independently from each other;

they are relational and hierarchical (Wekker 2016, 32). In the contemporary Dutch society, Islamic women are represented as sexually backward and oppressed, but dominant representational regimes of Islamic women in the global West have undergone radical changes, from hypersexuality in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to current asexuality (Lutz 1991 in Gloria Wekker 2016, 32). Black, that is to say African diasporic, women are generally seen as “*too liberated,*” with a rampant sexuality, doing it indiscriminately with men and with women, doing it for money, “*going where their cunts lead them*”. Asian sexualities, such as the representations of Indo and Thai women, different as they may be, have in common the construction of submissive and ultrafeminine femininities, with long-hair, and attractive in traditional ways. Chinese female adoptees also meet this stereotypes of Indo and Thai women. While South-Asian women, Arabic women and black women are reduced to one entity the white female sexuality seems to be the neutral and normative variety (Gloria Wekker 2016, 32).

Conclusion

In sum, the context showed that Chinese adoptees in the Netherlands, are mainly female due to the one-child policy. This is because, Chinese parents badly need a son to assure their honor and pension and when a couple is restricted to only have one child, they felt that they have no choice but to abandon daughter(s) in order to give in the future birth to a son. Second, although female Chinese adoptees in the Netherlands legally belong to the Netherlands, due to their Dutch passport, their physical appearance ‘betrays’ them that they do not share the same common descent as many of the white Dutch citizens. According to Åsberg and Wekker (2007, 7), the way ethnic origin of international adoptees will be considered and the value that is attributed to this by institutions, adoption parents, families and the social environment will influence how the adoptees will think about their selves and how they negotiate and construct belonging and the understanding of home. The next four chapters will present the empirical data of this research. To begin with: the construction of belonging within the family.

Chapter 3: Construction of belonging within the adoptive family



Figure 5: Family photo of Eva⁹

*You our daughter,
You are born so far away
Waiting for you was dreaming
And long for that day
That we would come home with four
And from now on
We are grateful to be your father and mother
We want to give you warmth and love
May you feel in this home
At home¹⁰*

⁹ Eva is a pseudonym for the participants Dutch first name. See chapter 4 for the division between a Dutch first name, Chinese first name and exotic/Chinese sounding first name.

¹⁰ Text from the arrival card of Karlijn. A lot of adoptive parents will send an arrival card when their child arrives in the Netherlands.

Introduction

Within the adoptive family interesting constructions of belonging takes place regarding the adoptive family, biological family and China. On the one hand, there is the adoption family who lives in the Netherlands, and on the other hand, the biological family who lives in China (country of birth). Due to the adoption the adoptee legally belongs to the adoptive family and the Netherlands, however the biological parents and China are for most of the adoptees and their families which I have spoken still of importance. This chapter will elaborate on how the construction of belonging within the adoptive family takes place. I will illustrate how this construction takes place, by first introducing one key informant, Yu Yan¹¹. I have chosen to introduce Yu Yan, because her life is very similar to the other girls I have met during fieldwork; she is a student and is brought up with one younger sister who is also adopted from China.

Yu Yan

I got to know Yu Yan via Facebook (one year ago, when I was in the process of searching for my biological parents) and within one year we became genuine friends. Yu Yan, was born in Guiping, Guangxi China and recently turned eighteen years old (May 2000). Yu Yan is a very intelligent girl, an excellent student, and besides studying she has a part-time job and likes to spend time with her friends. Yu Yan lives together with her parents and younger sister in the dynamic city: Amsterdam. Yu Yan is raised by sweet, loving and understanding parents and when I was invited for dinner at their home, her mother told me that she always dreamed about adopting a child and when it turned out biological parenthood was impossible, they; Yu Yan's parents, naturally choose for adoption. During dinner Yu Yan's mother became so emotional and tears appeared in her eyes when we spoke among other things about the abandonment of babies:

Can you imagine? You have to put down your baby on the side of the road...

Do you know how the baby will feel? This can lead to attachment

disorders... You girls are so brave... – Mother of Yu Yan¹²

¹¹ Yu Yan is a pseudonym for the participants Chinese first name. Yu Yan is drawn from the phrase *Yu Xiao Yan Ran*, which describes women who have beautiful smiles. I have chosen this name for my participant, because she has a beautiful smile (source: <https://theculturetrip.com/asia/china/articles/the-11-most-beautiful-chinese-names-and-what-they-mean/>).

¹² Informal interview with the mother of Yu Yan and Yu Yan, 07-03-2018.

The same emphatic, loving and caring character can be found in Yu Yan. Although, Yu Yan has a beautiful and bright smile, her smile covers the pain she feels about the abandonment and the loss of her biological parents. Because of this Yu Yan recently made a documentary about her life as an adoptee as a final assignment for high school in cooperation with her friend. Her documentary starts with the following voice over¹³:

Where most lives start lovingly... From the beginning of my life I had been tormented with a loss, a rejection, and a question mark. I always knew that I have been adopted. For me it is something very normal and I do not know better. When I was a little girl, I was told that I did not come from my mother's belly; I came from the belly from another mom, one from China. One day, when I was about three years old, I came to my parents and said: My parents are dead, aren't they? That is why you are taking care of me. An assumption that I just made. Because, anything that is not explicitly mentioned is imagined by a child. My parents where in a bit of a shock, why is such a little girl worrying about such big things?

The introduction of Yu Yan's documentary illustrates her feelings of rejection, born out of abandonment. Also, she feels that she has lost her biological parents because of the abandonment. Through semi-structured interviews and participant observation, I have noticed that she is not the only one who feels this way. Moreover, abandonment is a topic which was spoken extensively about within the adoptive family along with another topic: the biological parents. Because of this notion, the next section of this chapter will elaborate on the abandonment and how the construction of belonging takes place regarding the biological parents within the adoptive family.

Abandonment and the construction of belonging towards the biological parents

This section will examine how female Chinese adoptees feel and think about abandonment, and how this may generate or may not generate feelings of belonging towards the biological family. Yu Yan explained the impact of the abandonment¹⁴:

¹³ Voice over of Yu Yan's documentary, 31-01-2018.

¹⁴ Semi-structured interview with Yu Yan, 01-03-2018.

I am afraid of rejection. I always told myself that if the person who should love me unconditionally, my mother, was able to abandon me, anyone could leave me. I was afraid to fail, because I thought that if I did something wrong, I would be rejected and the fear for being left alone was something I had to learn to deal with.

Yu Yan states she is afraid of rejection, because the one that should love her unconditionally, her biological mother, rejected her by abandoning her.

Another participant, Mae¹⁵ (twenty-one years old) also told me about the impact of the abandonment¹⁶:

Sometimes I feel lonely, the feeling of loneliness hits me. I think about why did my parents abandon me? Who are they? Do they miss me? Do they love me?

Loneliness, is felt by more participants that I have spoken during fieldwork. Just like Mae they state that they feel lonely when they think about their abandonment. The reason why adoptees feel lonely is because the one that should love them unconditionally left them.

Another participant, Eva (twenty-one years old, who found her biological parents in 2008) just like Yu Yan thought and talked at a very young age about her biological family. I will illustrate this through a letter Eva wrote to her biological mother when she was eight years old¹⁷:

Hello mother,
Where are you?
Who are you?
What is your name?
Why did you put me somewhere?
Do you love me?
I miss you!
Do you miss me?

¹⁵ Mae is a pseudonym for the participants 'exotic' first name.

¹⁶ Semi-structured interview with Mae, 03-03-2018.

¹⁷ Semi-structured interview with Eva, 30-03-2018.

This letter illustrates how she thought and talked about her biological mother. Eva illustrates that she misses her mother, she wants to know who her mother is and she wants to know why her mother abandoned her. Eva explained to me why she wrote the letter¹⁸:

When I was very young, at the age of eight I often felt sad. I cried that I missed my biological parents. Therefore, my parents encouraged me to write something to my mother.

Thus, due to the abandonment Eva has the feeling that she has lost her mother, therefore she feels pain and feels sad about it. Another participant, Lynn¹⁹ (twenty-four years old), who also was lucky enough to find her biological parents in China²⁰, had just like Yu Yan and Eva the feeling of missing her biological mother at a very young age. I will illustrate this based through a story Lynn's mother shared with me²¹:

When Lynn was around eight years old, she became very quiet. She did not talk a lot about her feelings at all. So, I had to guess, what is going on with my child? I did not want to throw it on adoption immediately, because besides an adopted child, she is just a child. Maybe, she had a rough time at school, I did not know. Eventually she came to me: 'I want that my mother from China, just ring our doorbell'. She missed her mother, and how did we solve that? It was around Mother's Day, maybe that triggered her. So, we decided to make something for her mother in China, just like she made something for me at pre-school for Mother's Day. We bought a box, and in that box she could put everything that she wanted to make for her mother; for example, paintings and letters.

Lynn also explained to me why she wanted to know who here biological parents were²²:

¹⁸ Semi-structured interview with Eva, 30-03-2018.

¹⁹ Lynn is a pseudonym for the participants 'exotic' first name.

²⁰ Searching in China for the biological parents is very difficult, because the adoptees do not have any information about their biological parents. Therefore, they have to search through media (television broadcast in the 'place of birth' of the adoptee, by placing an advertisement in the local newspaper and social media (e.g. WeChat and Weibo)). When potential family members react, they will do a DNA test.

²¹ Semi-structured interview with Lynn and her mother, 27-03-2018.

²² Semi-structured interview with Lynn and her mother, 27-03-2018.

I just wanted to look like somebody in terms of physical appearance. I never saw a Chinese person who really looked like me. Sometimes that is very frustrating. I just wanted to know: whose eyes do I have? From whom do I have my character? What is my Chinese mother like? When I was seventeen I wanted to search, but it seemed impossible in China. I only knew the story of Eva who did find her biological parents. I tried to gain more information about searching, and through Facebook [closed Facebook pages about Chinese adoption] I gained this information. [It took Lynn altogether, approximately four years to find her biological parents].

Thus, besides the feeling of missing her biological mother, Lynn also wanted to know her biological parents because she was eager to identify with someone in terms of physical appearance and character.

Antonisch states that relational factors refer to the personal and social ties which enrich the life of an individual in a particular place. These ties vary from emotionally dense relations with family members and friends. In order to generate a sense of belonging, these ties, have to be long-lasting, stable, positive and significant. Furthermore, Antonisch argue that they should also take place through frequent physical interaction (Antonsich 2010, 648). Although, the relation between the adoptee and the biological parents is not physical, long-lasting and positive (not positive because the biological parents rejected the daughter). The narratives above illustrate that for these adoptees the personal ties between her and her biological parents are of significant importance. Therefore, I argue that feelings of belongingness towards the biological parents will be generated. Moreover, auto-biographical factors, relate to one's past history – personal experiences, memories which attach a particular person to a given place– and relations (Dixon and Durrheim 2004, 459). The place where a person was born and has grown up often remains a central place in the life of that person. The continued presence of family members in that place, as well as memories of deceased family members, also contributes to feelings of place-belongingness (Antonsich 2010, 647). This is also vivid in the narratives above, because the continued presence of family members, in this case the biological parents, contributes to feelings of place-belongingness towards China.

Although a lot of girls' that I have spoken stated that they miss their parents and are curious about their parents, they doubt if they want to search. Liya²³ (eighteen years old) explained to me why she doubts whether she wants to search²⁴:

I want to know who my biological parents are. However, I am afraid. Maybe I will not find them, and then what? Maybe I will get so disappointed, that I cannot handle it. Or suppose I will find them. Maybe I will find answers to questions that will be too much [e.g. how did the abandonment take place?] or maybe we cannot develop a relationship.

The main reasons they are doubting whether to search: afraid not be able to find the biological parents (because it is well known that searching in China usually leads to no result), questions that will come after finding the biological parents (e.g. *Why did they abandon me?*) and afraid to deal with the biological family because it may be too intense (e.g. *How can you build a relationship with them and preserve this relationship? How do you deal with cultural differences? Can I feel at home with my biological parents?*).

Not every adoptee that I have spoken to is interested in searching for her birth parents, for example, Feng Mian (twenty-one years old)²⁵ told me²⁶:

I actually never felt sad about the abandonment, because there is a difference between raising a child and giving birth to a child. ... Therefore, I think that a big gap has arisen between nature and nurture. The only thing that makes me related to them is because I have their genes. Yes, maybe it is nice to know where my DNA comes from, then you can find out which diseases you may carry. But I do not think that will add significant value to my life. The nurture has more value for me than the nature. You can point out the most random people and say: Those are your parents, and I would believe them. Maybe there are people who feel a bond with them, but I do not feel it. I am too down-to-earth to feel that bond.

²³ Liya is a pseudonym for the participants 'exotic' first name.

²⁴ Semi-structured interview with Liya and her mother, 06-04-2018.

²⁵ Feng Mian is a pseudonym for the participants Chinese first name. Feng Mian reflects the scenery: Falling asleep in the woods as the breeze swishes through. It is also the name of the famous painter Lin Feng Mian. I have chosen this name for my participant, because she is very creative, she writes and paints (source: <https://theculturetrip.com/asia/china/articles/the-11-most-beautiful-chinese-names-and-what-they-mean/>).

²⁶ Semi-structured interview with Feng Mian and her mother, 27-01-2018.

In contrast to the other girls who have the feeling of missing their biological parents, Feng Mian makes a strong division between nature and nurture, and because of this, she does not feel sad about the abandonment. She states that her adoptive parents, are more important to her, because they took care of her, and her biological parents did not. By uttering this statement, Feng Mian makes explicit that she feels that she belongs to her adoptive parents and not to her biological parents, because her biological parents are not of significant importance to her she does not generate feelings of belongingness towards her biological parents. Therefore, she also does not generate feelings of place-belongingness towards China.

Some girls do want to search for their biological parents despite the doubts they have whether to search or not. Yu Yan explained to me why she wants to search for her biological parents²⁷:

Everyone's life is like a story, but adoption is like a book where the first few pages are missing. The feeling that something is missing will never let go...It is not possible. However, I always feel guilty when I think about my biological family. It is like I betray my adoptive parents. As if I am not satisfied with them as parents, and therefore want to find my biological parents. That is not the case. Without my parent here, I would not be the person who I am today, however without my biological parents I would not be here at all. It is their blood that flows through my veins. They are a part of me, like I have been a part of them. This is something that no one can ever change.

Although she feels that searching for her biological parents would be ungrateful to her adoptive parents, because the adoptive parents gave her a better life, and a prosperous future by adopting her. Yu Yan's adoptive parents ensure her that, that is not the case, and they genuinely hope that Yu Yan will find 'the first few pages of her life'. The other adoptive parents that I have met during fieldwork also told me that they genuinely hope that their daughters will find the biological parents. The mother of Lynn and Loi²⁸ (seventeen years old) told me about searching to biological parents:

²⁷ Semi-structured interview with Yu Yan, 31-03-2018.

²⁸ Loi is a pseudonym for the participants Chinese first name. Loi is the Chinese word for thunder. I have chosen this name for my participant, because she has a very strong character (source: <http://www.momjunction.com/baby-names/chinese/page/3>).

The mother of Lynn²⁹:

I do not know if I speak for every adoption parent, but I genuinely think that every adoptive child deserves to meet once his/her biological parents. It does not matter if long-term contact will be established. It is just important to know who your biological parents are. Do I look like them? Why did they abandon me?

The mother of Loi³⁰:

My heart is big enough for her biological parents. I am also curious who they are and what they look like. Does she have any brothers and sisters?

The mother of Lynn also told me about the search for the biological parents of Lynn³¹:

When Lynn told us, that she wanted to search for her biological parents. I asked her: what can I do for you? And what do you want me to do? So I went searching online for more information, for example on Facebook [closed Facebook pages about Adoption from China], and together we gathered a lot of information. We did it together, I helped her wherever I could. We did it together, that was so special, and this made our bond stronger.

Thus, searching for the biological family becomes a collective activity within the family, because the adoptive parents find it important that their daughter find out where they come from. Moreover, because of the collectivity of the searching process, the adoptive parents and the adoptee are brought together. It is remarkably, on the one hand, due to the feelings of missing the biological family, feelings of belonging towards the biological family and China will be generated. On the other hand, searching for the family becomes a family event, and because of that, the adoptee and the adoptive parents bond will be stronger. Therefore, searching for biological parents generates a sense of belonging towards the adoptive parents, due to the

²⁹ Semi-structured interview with Lynn and her mother, 27-03-2018.

³⁰ Semi-structured interview with Loi and her mother, 23-02-2018.

³¹ Semi-structured interview with Lynn and her mother, 27-03-2018.

relational factors. In other words, due to the collectivity of the searching, the relation between the adoptee and the adoptive parents will be stronger.

Not only the abandonment and the biological parents are important topics within the adoptive family, also China is an important topic. The next section will elaborate on the construction of belonging to China within the adoptive family.

Construction of belonging to China

This section will elaborate on how within the adoptive family feelings of belonging towards China is constructed. Yu Yan told me about how feelings of belonging towards China were constructed within her family³²:

When I was just a little girl, I already felt that I was different than my friends [in terms of physical appearance]. (...) Because of that, I always was interested in my origin. Not only I was interested in China, also my parents tried to make us [Yu Yan and her younger sister] more familiar with the Chinese culture. So, when I was little we went to Chinese New Year in the city center, my parents told me Chinese fairy tales, and in the beginning, I only ate rice with chopsticks. Although they gave me chopsticks, because I did not eat anything when they gave me cutlery.



Figure 6: Yu Yan eating with chopsticks



Figure 7: Yu Yan at Chinese New Year in the city center of Amsterdam

³² Informal interview with the mother of Yu Yan and Yu Yan, 07-03-2018.

This illustrates perfectly, how China is another central theme within Yu Yan's life and how Yu Yan's parents try to make her more familiar with the Chinese culture. Antonisch argues that cultural factors (e.g. cultural artefacts, cultural expressions, habits, traditions, and language) generate feelings of place-belongingness (Buonfino and Thomson 2007, 17 in Antonsich 2010, 648). Thus, by exposing Yu Yan to Chinese cultural artefacts and Chinese cultural events, the adoptive parents try to generate feelings of place-belonging towards China.

Within other adoptive families that I have visited they also have a lot of Chinese cultural artefacts in their homes. Such as: Chinese paintings, Chinese lanterns, chopsticks, Chinese sculptures, Chinese tea service, photos of their roots trip hang prominently in the living room and panda plush toys.



Figure 8: Example of a Chinese cultural artefact (1)



Figure 9: Example of a Chinese cultural artefact (2)



Figure 10: Example of Chinese cultural artefact (3)



Figure 11: Example of Chinese cultural artefact (4)

Moreover, I have noticed that the parents, mainly the mothers, were sometimes more excited about the Chinese cultural artefacts than the adoptee herself. I will illustrate this due to the following conversation I had with Eva³³:

³³ Semi-structured interview with Eva, 30-03-2018.

I [Karlijn] saw on Facebook that your mother received her new Chinese painting from China.

Yes, really ugly, but she is completely happy with it.

I do not care about the Chinese culture however my parents are totally crazy about it.

My parents like to eat with chopsticks, but I really hate it.

I just grab a fork or a spoon.

They also have a whole drawer full of different chopsticks, they really have a lot.

Eva told me how she feels about the exposing to Chinese cultural artefacts by her mother³⁴:

I do not feel Chinese at all. ... I think it is annoying that she is so obsessed with it. Yes, I came from China, but not everything should be about China.

Thus, the mother of Eva tries to generate feelings of place-belongingness towards China by exposing her daughter to Chinese cultural artefacts. Eva, however rejects the Chinese cultural artefacts, because she does not identify herself as Chinese. Because of this, there is an underlying unnoticed tension within the family about the ethnic identity of Eva.

Furthermore, travel programs and other programs about China are extremely popular among the adoptive families. Especially the television program *'Door het hart van China'*³⁵ (Through the heart of China) which was broadcasted on the television during my fieldwork. The following conversation is about *'Door het hart van China'* and it illustrates once again that the adoptive mother is more excited about China than her daughter Anne-Li³⁶ (twenty-one years old)³⁷:

My mother always texts me:

³⁴ Semi-structured interview with Eva, 30-03-2018.

³⁵ Door het hart van China: A television program made by Ruben Terlouw and Maaïke Krijgsma about the life of the ordinary Chinese people (source: <https://www.vpro.nl/programmas/door-het-hart-van-china/service/over-het-programma.html>)

³⁶ Anne-Li is a pseudonym for the participants 'exotic' first name.

³⁷ Semi-structured interview with Anne-Li, 25-03-2018.

‘Door het hart van China’ is on the television.

However, I really do not care.’

Yes, I always text her when ‘Door het hart van China’ is on the television, because it is a wonderful program about China. I really love it.

This short conversation also illustrates that the mother of Anne-Li tries to generate feelings of place-belonginess towards China by texting her daughter that Door het hart van China is on the television. For Anne-Li China is not of significant importance, because she is not interested in her biological family at all, and therefore no feelings of place-belongingness towards China will be generated.

Most of the adoptees that I have spoken with really loved the program, for example Zhi Ruo³⁸ (twenty years old; who did found her biological family) told me about Door het hart van China³⁹:

Recently it was about the Tao. My family in China is half Buddhist and half Taoist. I think it is very important that I know how they think about life. ...And also with those funerals, so special! So, I asked my dad [adoptive father]: is this so throughout all of China? So, if my grandmother in China passes away, does she also get a funeral like that? And my father said: probably. Then I thought: wooh, so special!

Thus, the program ensures that the adoptee and the adoptive family become closer to China. They genuinely believe that by watching television programs about China, they get more familiar with the Chinese culture. Thus, just like the cultural factors, Door het hart van China only generates feelings of place-belongingness towards China if the adoptee finds the biological parents of significant importance.

Yu Yan explained to me why China is very important to her⁴⁰:

³⁸ Zhi Ruo is a pseudonym for the participants Chinese first name. Zhi Ruo is composed of two Chinese herbal plants (Zhi and Ruo). The ancient Chinese likened beauties to herbal plants. I have chosen this name for my participant, because she is very feminine (source: <https://theculturetrip.com/asia/china/articles/the-11-most-beautiful-chinese-names-and-what-they-mean/>).

³⁹ Semi-structured interview with Zhi Ruo, 09-02-2018.

⁴⁰ Informal interview with the mother of Yu Yan and Yu Yan, 07-03-2018.

I was just twelve days old when my biological parents' abandonment me. According to the official files, I was found at a bus station. I always imagined that they have left me wrapped up in a blanket at the bus station. They, my parents, have hidden themselves waiting until I was found. The moment that someone found me, they left with pain in their hearts. After I was found at the bus station I was taken to the police station. The police brought me to the orphanage, where I spent my first year. (...) Together with six other girls about the same age we were brought to the Netherlands. I know these girls longer than I know my parents, this creates a special connection. The first year, we played together, we ate together, and we slept in the same bed; we were together day and night. And now... we all live in the Netherlands, living our own lives, and we do not see each other more than once a year, unfortunately. But that special connection is still there. These were my first girlfriends, this was my family, they are my China sisters.



Figure 12: Proposal photo⁴¹ of Yu Yan

Figure 13: Yu Yan with her China sisters

⁴¹ Adoptive parents receive a proposal photo from their adoptive child from the adoption agency before they adopt the child.

Although Yu Yan cannot remember the moments in China, she imagines how it would be, she develops a narrative. This narrative exists out of: personal experiences from the past which are attached to a particular place (auto-biographical factors). Thus, by holding on to the fact that she is born in China, that she played and ate together with her China ‘sisters’ in China, Yu Yan generates feelings of place-belonging towards China.

The next section will elaborate on an event, Gotcha-day. Due to the celebration of Gotcha-day feelings of belonging towards the adoptive family will be generated and it also may contribute to the ambiguous identity of the female Chinese adoptee. Both will be explained within the next section of this chapter.

Gotcha-day

Gotcha-day (in Dutch called Hebbesdag or Adoptie dag) is the day that the adoptive parents ‘got’ their child. Feng Mian told me how within their family they celebrate Gotcha-day⁴²:

We celebrate Gotcha-day like a mini-birthday. We always go out for dinner, and we get a little present from my parents. They always give us [Feng Mian, her younger brother and younger sister] a book about China or about adoption

This illustrates that Gotcha-day is like a second birthday for some girls. They are going out to dinner, or can choose what they want to eat that day and they often get a little present from their parents. The girls who celebrate Gotcha-day acknowledge this day as an important day, because this made them one family.

It is very interesting that the girls refer to Gotcha-day as a second birthday. I will explain this metaphorically: Gotcha-day is like a birthday; when a mother gives birth to a child, it also marks the birth or expansion of a family. Therefore, when the adoptee and the adoptive parents celebrate Gotcha-day, it marks the ‘birth’ of their family. Thus, Gotcha-day contributes to feelings of belonging towards the adoptive family, because by celebrating Gotcha-day relational factors will be made explicit on that day, namely the long-lasting relation between the adoptee and her adoptive family. Lynn and her mother told me how they celebrated Gotcha-day⁴³:

⁴² Feng Mian is a pseudonym for the participants Chinese first name. Feng Mian reflects the scenery: Falling asleep in the woods as the breeze swishes through. It is also the name of the famous painter Lin Feng Mian. I have chosen this name for my participant, because she is very creative, she writes and paints (source: <https://theculturetrip.com/asia/china/articles/the-11-most-beautiful-chinese-names-and-what-they-mean/>).

⁴³ Semi-structured interview with Lynn and her mother, 27-03-2018.

We used to go to Schiphol on that day [Gotcha-day].

Yes, my husband took a day off when she was little and did not go to school.

We went to Schiphol to watch planes,
because I came by plane to the Netherlands.
... And then I got a balloon, I still remember that.

... And at certain point, she went to school
and then... it stopped.

However, that day [Gotcha-day] never
passes by without conscience.

I already have a small present for her, but
she has to wait another three weeks for it.

This little conversation between Lynn and her mother, illustrates how by celebrating Gotcha-day not only feelings of belonging can be generated to the adoptive family. By acknowledging Schiphol as the intermediate between China and Holland, symbolically and subconsciously this ritual within their family, contributes to the ambiguous identity of Lynn. The ambiguous identity of Lynn is thus, not completely Dutch, not completely Chinese, but in between these two nations.

Conclusion

Within the adoptive families which I have met during fieldwork interesting constructions of belonging take place regarding the adoptive family and the culture, family and country of birth of the adoptee. First, the stance towards the biological parents is of significant importance if the female Chinese adoptees will generate feelings of belongingness towards the biological parents and China. On the one hand, if the biological parents are of significant importance for the Chinese adoptees they will generate feelings of belongingness towards the biological parents, due to relational factors. Moreover, the female Chinese adoptees generate feelings of place-belonging towards China, because the continued presence of biological parents is of significant importance to them. On the other hand, if the female Chinese adoptees value the nurture more

than the nature, they feel that they belong to the adoptive family and therefore will not generate feelings of belongingness towards the biological family because they are not of significant importance to them. Therefore, they do not generate feelings of place-belongingness towards China.

It is remarkable that searching for the biological parents generate both feelings of belongingness towards the adoptive family and the biological parents. Although the adoptees may feel that searching for the biological parents would be ungrateful, the adoptive parents ensure that this it is not the case. They acknowledge how important this is for their daughters, and because of this searching for the adoptive family becomes a family event. The bond between the adoptee and the adoptive parents becomes even stronger due to this search, and thus feelings of belongingness towards the adoptive family will be generated.

Furthermore, the construction of belonging to China is vivid in every adoptive family. On the one hand, the parents try to generate feelings of belonging to China by exposing their daughters to Chinese cultural artefacts, and to Chinese cultural events. By exposing their daughters to Chinese cultural artefacts, the parents subconsciously reinforce the adoptees Chinese ethnic identity. By rejecting the cultural artefacts and television programs about China, the female Chinese adoptees negotiate with their parents their ethnic identity. In their opinion they acknowledge that they came from China, but China is not of significant importance, because their biological family is not of significant importance to them. Therefore, I have noticed that there is an underlying unacknowledged tension within some families about the ethnic identity of the child. On the other hand, the female Chinese adoptees who are interested in searching for their birthparents, generate because of this place-belongingness towards China. They acknowledge that China is of significant importance in their lives, because their biological family lives there and they have lived in China for a sufficient time, and because of that, they do not reject Chinese cultural artefacts and Chinese cultural events.

Lastly, Gotcha-day marks the long-lasting relation between the adoptee and her adoptive family. Therefore, celebrating Gotcha-day contributes to feelings of belonging towards the adoptive family. Besides generating feelings of belongingness towards the adoptive family in the case of Lynn, it also may unconsciously generate feelings of belongingness to the ambiguous identity; not completely Dutch, not completely Chinese, but in between the Netherlands and China.

Chapter 4: Ethnic boundary rules in practice



Figure 14: Fluidity of ethnic boundary rules illustrated⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Source: <https://obv.org.uk/news-blogs/employment-tribunals-challenging-discrimination-work>

Introduction

This chapter will examine how ethnic boundary rules work in practice within the Netherlands among female Chinese adoptees and how they deal with these ethnic boundaries. Ethnic boundary rules decide who is and who is not a member of the group based on terms of listed features such as religion, language, livelihood, customs, shared common descent, and political organization. This is also the case in the Netherlands, where white Dutch people inherently believe that they share a common descent, by claiming that they are ‘native Dutch’ (Wekker 2016). According to Wekker the Dutch think of themselves as being a small, but just ethical nation: color-blind, thus free of racism, as being inherently on the moral and ethical high ground (Wekker 2016). The physical appearance of the female Chinese adoptees ‘betrays’ them that they do not share the same common descent as the majority of the Dutch people, because their physical appearance does not match with the stereotype Dutch woman -white skin blond or brown hair, and light eyes (often blue). In other words, at first sight the female Chinese adoptees are categorized as ‘ethnic Chinese’ within the Netherlands, regardless of their feelings towards their own ethnicity and that they legally belong to the Netherlands. Although ethnic boundary rules are portrayed as being static, they are permeable and changeable (Demmers 2012, 28-29). How ethnic boundary rules may work in practice among transnational adoptees can be illustrated by the transracial adoption paradox. The transracial paradox entails: the adoptee wants to be identified with his/her own ethnical minority, but they are perceived and treated by others, and sometimes themselves, as if they are members of the majority culture due to the adoption into a white family (Lee 2003, 711). This could also be the other way around, that outsiders treat the adoptee as racial/ethnic minorities but ascribe themselves as members of the majority culture. This paradox shows how other people and the adoptee create boundaries about inclusion and exclusion. These boundaries could differ from each other which leads to a questionable and ambiguous ethnic identity which will always be evident in the life of the international adoptee.

Ethnic boundary rules in practice

The participants that I have spoken were ‘confronted’ with their Chinese appearance from the moment they set foot on ‘Dutch soil’ and onwards. But what are these confrontations? Loi told me the following: *‘Did they never see a Chinese before, because they are staring at me.’* Moreover, not only Loi told me this, the majority of the adoptees that I have spoken claim that they have the feeling that other people stare at them because they look ‘Chinese’. Because of the staring the adoptee feels that she is different from others. In other words, the female Chinese

adoptee becomes aware that she does not match to the profile of native Dutch females but she matches to the profile of Chinese females. In other words, she becomes aware that *other* people believe that she *belongs* to the Chinese ethnic group, regardless of her own stance towards her own ethnicity.

Furthermore, all the female Chinese adoptees that I have spoken told me about discrimination that they have faced within the Netherlands. Aafke⁴⁵ (twenty-five years old) told me about her experiences with discrimination in public places (e.g. streets, stations, etcetera)⁴⁶:

In those villages, those Dutch people, they said things like: poop Chinese, spring roll, can I have two spring rolls with sambal bij⁴⁷, can I order number this and that⁴⁸?

This illustrates that completely strangers call things that they associate with China and Chinese people at public places to the Chinese adoptees.

Moreover, also at more private places discrimination occurs (e.g. at work and in classrooms). Eva told me about discrimination on the street and at her workplace⁴⁹:

Poop Chinese, chinky eye, bami pangang⁵⁰, you hear everything! When people say that, I always think such a good story. Or they ask: do you also eat dog and cat? No! What the fuck? They [colleagues] also say at work: Did you eat dog yesterday? Seriously? They try to be funny, however they only say such things, because I am Chinese.

⁴⁵ Aafke is a pseudonym for the participants Dutch first name.

⁴⁶ Semi-structured interview with Aafke 20-03-2018.

⁴⁷ Sambal bij: Sambal is a kind of chili sauce and at the Chinese takeaway in the Netherlands the Chinese takeaway always ask: Would you like to have sambal? [Wilt u sambal hebben?]. However, the employee of the take away often does not say: Wilt u sambal hebben? but asks: Sambal bij? This sentence is grammatical incorrect, and because of that people like to say *Sambal bij* to actually make a fool of Chinese people by uttering this statement.

⁴⁸ Can I order number ...? When people order food in Chinese restaurants or Chinese takeaways they often say the number of the dish instead of the name of the dish, because it is hard for Dutch people to pronounce Chinese dishes.

⁴⁹ Semi-structured interview with Eva, 30-03-2018.

⁵⁰ Bami pangang: Popular Chinese dish that people order in Chinese restaurants and everyone in the Netherlands is familiar with this dish.

Thus, not only at public places also at more private places discrimination occurs (e.g. at work and in classrooms). Although these questions, *'Did you eat dog yesterday?'*, *'Can I have two spring rolls with sambal bij?'* *'Can I order number this and that?'*, and the random name calling of female Chinese adoptees in public and more private areas are inherently discriminatory they are accompanied with a lot of laughter. I will illustrate this due to my own experience with a discriminatory statement in a private place. One month ago (May 2018), my own mother said jokingly during dinner: *'Witte Lijst'*. I told her that this was not a joke, and that this is inherently racist. She said that it is was *just* a joke and then we stopped talking about it. Due to the accompanied laughter people set the inherently discriminatory statements and questions away as a joke. Within the Netherlands, due to the stance of the Dutch as being 'innocence', a climate prevails the safe position of having license to utter the most racist statements, while in the next sentence saying it was a joke or it was not meant as racist (Wekker 2016, 17).

Thus, through discrimination, and the staring the adoptees become aware that they are different from the majority of the Dutch population, namely the white Dutch.

Ethnic boundary rules cover a lot of features, but I argue that the aspect of names is essential for female Chinese adoptees within the Netherlands. The next section will elaborate on the names of the female Chinese adoptees.

Name of the adoptee

In the orphanage in China a first name and a surname will be given to the adoptee. When the child will be adopted, the adoptive parents can choose to keep the first name or to give the child a different first name. The surname of the adoptee will be changed into the surname of one of the adoptive parents, in most cases the father. There are different motivations to change the name of the child.

For example, the adoptee has been given a Dutch first name accompanied with her Chinese name that was given by the orphanage, as a second first name and in most cases the last name of the adoptive father. For example: Karlijn Xiu Xiu van Driel⁵¹. The mother of Sophie⁵² (twenty-four years old) told me the following about this⁵³:

I genuinely believed that it would be easier for them [her two daughters] to have a Dutch first name. For example, if they will apply for a job, they have a Dutch name instead of a foreign name. I thought that it would help them to fit

⁵¹ I use my own name to illustrate the patterns to ensure the anonymity of the participants.

⁵² Sophie is a pseudonym for the participants Dutch first name.

⁵³ Semi-structured interview with Sophie and her mother, 24-03-2018.

in. (...) We chose to keep her Chinese name, because it is given by the orphanage, it belongs to her, we cannot brutally take it. It will be the only 'thing' she will keep from China.

Thus, the motivation of the parents to give the child a Dutch first name is because by giving the child a Dutch name, she would have been protected against discrimination and thus the child would fit into the Dutch nation. What emerges here is the aspect of color-blindness of Dutch people, because the parents believe by giving the child a Dutch name she would completely fit in the Netherlands. This is not the case because also adoptees with a Dutch first name face discrimination due to their Chinese appearance. The motivation for the preservation of the Chinese name as second first name is: this name already belongs to her, we cannot take this away, this is the only thing she will keep from China.

Other adoptive parents give the child an exotic sounding or another Chinese name. Again, the second first name is the Chinese name that was given by the orphanage and the last name is in most cases of the adoptive father. Thus, for example: Ka-Lin or Kaiya (pronounce: Kai-Ya) Xiu Xiu van Driel. The mother of Loi explained to me why she and her husband have chosen to change the name of Loi⁵⁴:

When the adoptee agency sent us the Chinese name of Loi, we [mother and father of Loi] decided that we wanted to change it. I also have a difficult name, and everywhere I come I have to say my name three times, or I have to spell it on top of that. I would not want that for Loi. Loi is an easy name to pronounce, and it is also a Chinese name however it is a lot easier than her Chinese name that was given by the orphanage.

The mother of Lynn also explained to me why she and her husband have chosen to change the name of Lynn⁵⁵:

We [my husband and I] always said to each other: if it is a Chinese name that we can pronounce, we will keep the name. Thus, not that you have to say your name like twenty times, and people still say 'uuuh' every time you say your name. So, we heard Lynn's Chinese name, but we could not pronounce it so

⁵⁴ Semi-structured interview with Loi and her mother, 23-02-2018.

⁵⁵ Semi-structured interview with Lynn and her mother, 27-03-2018.

we chose Lynn. We chose Lynn, because its sounds Chinese, but it is also a lot easier than her Chinese name that was given by the orphanage. We decide to keep her Chinese first name, but it will be her second first name. We think that it is important to keep her Chinese first name. It belongs to her, and people in the orphanage know her by that name.

Thus, adoptive parents change the name of their adoptive child into another Chinese name, or change the name of the child into an ‘exotic’ name, that sounds Chinese, or a Dutch/Western name that sounds ‘exotic’/‘Chinese’ is because the adoptive parents find the pronouncing of the Chinese name too difficult. By giving their child another Chinese name they ‘preserve’ subconsciously the Chinese ethnic identity of their child. Again, the motivation for the preservation of the Chinese name as second first name, is because this name already belongs to her, we cannot take this away, this is the only thing she will keep from China.

Although the majority of the adoptive parents that I have spoken changed the first name of their daughters into a Dutch name or a Chinese/exotic sounding name. Some adoptive parents chose that the adoptee maintains her own first name, which is sometimes accompanied with a second Dutch first name or an easier Chinese name. Again, these children adopt in most cases the surname of their adoptive father. Thus, for example: Xiu Xiu Karlijn van Driel. The mother of Feng Mian explained why she and her husband want to preserve Feng Mian’s Chinese name that was given by the orphanage⁵⁶:

Feng Mian, was already fourteen months old. She was already listening fourteen months to: Feng Mian. Feng Mian, that is who she is, and that is her name. (...) If you are adopted from another country, what will you keep from that country? The clothes you are wearing? We took some ‘soil’ from the ground of the orphanage. Besides the clothes and a little bit of ‘soil’, you only can keep your name. So, who are we to take that away? That is how we saw that. (...) We also chose to give all three children a second first name. We chose a Dutch name, because maybe the children would not like their Chinese name or maybe they thought their Chinese name is a difficult name, but none of my children use their second first name.

⁵⁶ Semi-structured interview with Feng Mian and her mother, 27-01-2018.

Thus, the motivation to preserve the Chinese name that is given by the orphanage is: this name already belongs to her, we cannot take this away, this is the only thing she will keep from China and the most important motivation: she is already listening to that name and therefore we cannot brutally call her a different name. The reason why some parents gave their child a second Dutch name, or an easier second Chinese name, is because of the pronunciation problems accompanied with the Chinese first name. Thus, if the surrounding has difficulties with the Chinese name of the adoptee, the adoptee can choose if she wants to use her Dutch name or 'easier' Chinese name (e.g. Lin and Jin).

Although the parents who gave the child a Dutch first name believe that she will be protected against discrimination and thus the child would fit in without a doubt into the Dutch nation. What the parents forget is that their child does have the physical characteristics of a female Chinese. This leads according to my participants to a lot of confrontations. Noor⁵⁷ (twenty-six years old) told me the following about it⁵⁸:

In high school my classmates asked: how is it possible that you have a Dutch first name? Therefore, I will tell them that I am adopted.

Thus, what people actually trying to say is: *'Your name does not match to your appearance.'* Therefore, they have to explain that they are adopted and that they come from China. Thus, the Chinese appearance in combination with a Dutch first name contradict to the hegemonic believe of a *echte Nederlander* with a *Nederlandse* naam. In other words, it is strange that a woman with a Chinese appearance has a Dutch name, and because of that, she has to prove to other people why she has a Dutch first name instead of a Chinese first name.

What is remarkably, most of the adoptees that I have spoken do not like their Dutch first name, and wished that they had a Chinese first name, either their name from the orphanage or another Chinese/exotic sounding name. Aafke explained why she wanted to keep her Chinese name⁵⁹:

I really wanted my Chinese name [name that is given by the orphanage]. Just like you adopt a puppy from the shelter, the puppy already has a name, and feels connected to it. Why would you give the puppy another name? You make

⁵⁷ Noor is a pseudonym for the participants Dutch first name.

⁵⁸ Semi-structured interview with Noor, 05-02-2018.

⁵⁹ Semi-structured interview with Aafke 20-03-2018.

it only more difficult for the puppy. Although you may not like that name, he already has that name. I understand that people find my Chinese name difficult to pronounce, however people from Morocco in Holland also have difficult names like Kaoutar and eventually you will learn that. I think that it is just culture-barbaric. You disrupt the child from her Chinese name that was given by the orphanage. Why would you give a Chinese looking girl a Dutch name?

In Aafke her opinion, a Dutch first name and a Chinese appearance could not go together. Thus, she not only has to deal with outsiders, that believe that her name does not match her appearance, she also believes this. Not only Aafke told me this, also other adoptees who have a Dutch first name told me this, for example Sophie⁶⁰:

I really do not like my Dutch name. It is so basic, nothing special at all. Like there are so much Sophie's out there. I would rather have a more exotic name, because it matches my appearance. However, I would not want my Chinese name that is given by the orphanage, because it is too difficult. I like: Jade or Yasmin, that would fit me better than Sophie.

The adoptees who have a Chinese first name or an exotic/Chinese name are not confronted with: *'Your name does not match your appearance.'* Feng Mian told me the following about it⁶¹:

I was talking with my friends about my adoption. I already knew them a year, and they really said: huh? They thought that I was half Chinese and half Dutch, because of my Dutch surname.

Not only Feng Mian told me this, also other adoptees state that other people often think that they have one Chinese parents and one Dutch parent, because the adoptee do have a Dutch surname. Because of the Dutch surname, in combination with the Chinese first name and the Chinese physical characteristics people think that the adoptee is half Dutch and half Chinese.

⁶⁰ Semi-structured interview with Sophie and her mother, 24-03-2018.

⁶¹ Semi-structured interview with Feng Mian and her mother, 27-01-2018.

Zhi Ruo (20 years old) told me that nobody confronts her with her Chinese name⁶²:

People never confront me with my name. They think that I have Chinese parents and when I tell them that I am adopted, they are in a bit of a shock.

It is interesting why people think that Feng Mian is half Chinese and half Dutch, and that in the case of Zhi Ruo people think that she is completely Chinese. This is because Feng Mian has a very Dutch surname (e.g. Jansen), and Zhi Ruo has a German surname which is not recognized by the majority of the people as a German surname, because people often believe that her surname is Chinese (e.g. Jung instead of Schweinsteiger).

I asked Zhi Ruo if she was happy with her name⁶³:

I am happy with my name. It fits me, I never got questions about my appearance and my name, just like other adoptees got. I would not want a Dutch first name, this is my name, and if my name was very Dutch, like: Lotte, Sophie or something. I would accept it, of course, but I would not like it.

All the girls who had a Chinese name or an exotic name were satisfied with their name, and never wanted a Dutch first name. They are satisfied with their name because according to them their name matches their appearance.

Thus, this part illustrated that ethnic boundary rules in the Netherlands are not only made through physical appearance but also through first- and surnames. The next section will elaborate on how the female Chinese adoptees deal with these ethnic boundary rules.

Dealing with ethnic boundary rules

This section will examine how the female Chinese adoptees which I have spoken deal with the ethnic boundary rules within the Netherlands. The girls who have a Chinese name or a Dutch name that sounds exotic/Chinese, do not have to change their name into another name to reinforce their ethnic Chinese identity. The girls who have a Dutch name often do this and I will illustrate it with an example from my own life:

⁶² Semi-structured interview with Zhi Ruo, 09-02-2018.

⁶³ Semi-structured interview with Zhi Ruo, 09-02-2018.

When I was around fourteen years old, I was sick and tired of being confronted with the question: Why do you have a Dutch name? So, I decided to change my name on Facebook from Karlijn van Driel into Karlijn Wu. Remarkably, less people asked me why I had a Dutch name. People, indeed thought and believed due to my Chinese last name that I had at least one Chinese parent.

Not only I did this, also other participants that I have met have been doing this. For example: Aafke, she uses on Instagram her Dutch first name accompanied with her Chinese name, and Mae, she uses her Chinese surname on her Instagram as surname instead of her Dutch surname. These girls but also myself included, try to re-construct their ethnic identity into a more ethnic Chinese identity, by changing their name on social media. When they change their name on social media, they are aware that other people will not confront them with: your name does not match to your appearance. Thus, by changing their name on social media they deal with the ethnic boundary rules within the Netherlands.

Already mentioned, due to their physical appearance all the girls will be confronted with staring and discrimination within the Netherlands. How do the girls deal with ethnic boundary rules which are based on physical appearance? Aafke and Feng Mian explained to me what discrimination did to them.

Aafke⁶⁴:

You notice that you are different and that you feel isolated. I have to prove myself. It is just hurtful. You start thinking about things like: I would never do this to another person. Discrimination, it hurts.

Feng Mian⁶⁵:

Although people say things like: Poop Chinese, or something. I do not feel bothered by it. I am just as Dutch as them, I live here almost whole of my live. Because I maybe look Chinese, does not mean that I am Chinese.

⁶⁴ Semi-structured interview with Aafke 20-03-2018.

⁶⁵ Semi-structured interview with Feng Mian and her mother, 27-01-2018.

Why does Aafke feel isolated due to the discrimination and Feng Mian does not feel bothered at all by discrimination? On the one hand, Aafke identifies herself as Chinese, because she changed her name on social media into her Chinese name. Therefore, it hurts when people uttering racist statements about Chinese people. On the other hand, Feng Mian is aware that she is ethnic Chinese, however, she feels Dutch, because of that, she is not bothered when people uttering racist statements about Chinese people, because she does not identify herself as Chinese. Thus, in the case of Feng Mian outsiders threaten her as being part of a racial/ethnic minority but she ascribes herself as being a member of the Dutch population. In this case, the transracial paradox is thus applicable.

Conclusion

This chapter examined how ethnic boundary rules work in practice within the Netherlands among female Chinese adoptees and how they deal with these ethnic boundaries. First, discrimination and staring occurs, because the female Chinese adoptee does not match to the profile of native Dutch females. Therefore, the female Chinese adoptees become aware that they are ethnic Chinese regardless of their own stance towards their own ethnicity.

Second this chapter illustrated that ethnic boundary rules within the Netherlands are also made through names; both the first- and surnames. Female Chinese adoptees with a Dutch first name are often confronted with: your name does not match to your appearance, because the Chinese appearance in combination with a Dutch first name contradicts the hegemonic belief of a *echte Nederlander* with a *Nederlandse* naam. Therefore, the female Chinese adoptees have to prove to other people why they have a Dutch name instead of a Chinese first name. In other words, they have to explain that they are adopted, and because of that they have a Dutch first name. The female Chinese adoptees with a Chinese name or a Dutch/Western name that sounds exotic/Chinese, are not confronted with your name does not match your appearance. Sometimes people think that the female Chinese adoptee is half Dutch and half Chinese, because of the Dutch surname. In other cases, other people believe that the female Chinese adoptee is completely Chinese, because the surname of the adoptee are not recognized as Dutch.

Remarkably, most of the adoptees that I have spoken who have a Dutch first name, do not like it, they wished that they had a Chinese first name, either the name from the orphanage or another Chinese/exotic name. The motivation is: the Dutch name does not match to their Chinese appearance.

Lastly this chapter examined how the female Chinese adoptees which I have spoken deal with the ethnic boundary rules within the Netherlands. First, the girls who have a Dutch name often change their Dutch name into a Chinese name on social media. They re-construct their ethnic identity into a more ethnic Chinese identity and by doing this they are aware that other people will not confront them immediately with: your name does not match to your appearance. Second, the last section examined how the female Chinese adoptees deal with ethnic boundary rules based on physical appearance; discrimination and staring. On the one hand there are adoptees who feel isolated and hurt through discrimination. On the other hand, there are adoptees who does not feel hurt through discrimination. I have noticed that the adoptees who self-identify as ethnic Chinese, feel hurt by racist statements and the adoptees who feel Dutch, are not bothered by racist statements about Chinese people, because they do not identify themselves as Chinese. In their case the transracial paradox is applicable.

Chapter 5: Hegemonic ideas about the family in practice

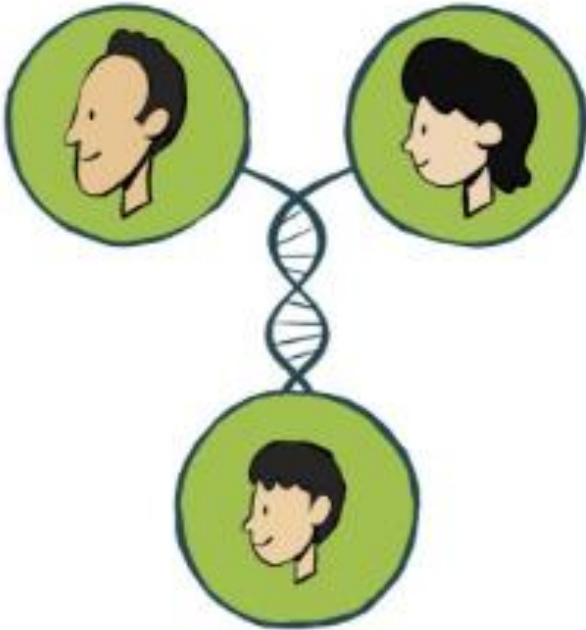


Figure 15: Hegemonic idea of a family illustrated⁶⁶

⁶⁶ <http://www.genesinlife.org/genes-your-health/how-can-knowing-my-family-history-help-me-stay-healthy>

Introduction

This chapter will examine how female Chinese adoptees are confronted with hegemonic ideas about the family in public areas and how they deal with these confrontations. The hegemonic idea regarding the family within the Netherlands is: physical attributes thought to be typical of members of a family. Therefore, the physical and social ties binding an adoptive family together are looked on by the majority as weaker than natural ties of blood (Terrel 1994, 155). Moreover, because the female Chinese adoptees are not the biological children of their adoptive parents, people believe that the children do not ‘really’ belong to the adoptive parents. The next section will examine how female Chinese adoptees are confronted with hegemonic ideas about the family in public areas.

Hegemonic ideas about the family in practice

Due to the interaction between female Chinese adoptees with or without their parents both in public and private places, they become confronted with the hegemonic ideas about families. When other people find out (e.g. through their Dutch name, or the adoptee tells people herself) that the girl in front of them is adopted the following questions arise:

Do you know your ‘real’ [or biological] parents?

Is your sister [or brother] your ‘real’ sister?

Do you want to search for ‘your real’ parents?

When people ask: ‘*Do you know your real parents [or biological parents]?*’ they assume in their questions that the adoptive parents are not really the real parents of the adoptee because the adoptee does not share the same *genetics* with their adoptive parents. In other words, the girls that I have spoken told me that they feel hurt by these questions. For example, Loi told me how she feels about these questions (first name: Chinese and surname: Dutch)⁶⁷:

For example, in my class my classmates ask: how is it possible that you have a Dutch surname? I will tell them that I am adopted and then they ask: do you know your real parents? I always get emotional when people ask these kinds of questions. I was so afraid that people would ask me more questions about it,

⁶⁷ Semi-structured interview with Loi and her mother, 23-02-2018.

that I have told my classmates they could no longer ask these kinds of questions again.

These questions are painful for adoptees because adoptive parents are not fake parents (just like the brothers and sisters, they are not fake), they are real. They are real for two reasons: first, legal factors, which is an essential component in producing security (Antonsich 2010, 648). The adoptive children are legally the children of their adoptive parents. This generates belonging towards the adoptive family, because they legally belong to each other. Second, relational factors generate place-belongingness (Antonsich 2010, 648). The personal ties, which adoptees have with their parents, generates place-belongingness; in this case belonging to the adoptive family. Although, they share not the same genes, this makes adoptive parents not fake parents. In other words, when people refer to real parents, they subconsciously appoint the adoptive parents as fake parents. This hurt, because by uttering this statement the adoptee would not really belong to the adoptive family, however this is not felt by the adoptee, they do belong to the adoptive family.

Not only are these questions painful, the adoptees perceive those questions as extremely rude and annoying:

Loi⁶⁸:

It is annoying and rude because literally everyone wants to know every detail about your private life. ... Nobody will ask this to a Dutch person.

Yu Yan⁶⁹:

When I tell people that I am adopted, it seems that I gave other people permission and the legitimacy to ask everything about me and my adoption. How old were you when you were adopted? Is your sister your real sister? Do you know your real parents? [no] Why don't you know them? Do you want to find your real parents? You just get to know someone and suddenly you are expected to tell your whole life story, no matter how personal it is. I have learned throughout the years, many people are not in search for a *real* and *honest* answer, they are in search for a heartwarming story.

⁶⁸ Semi-structured interview with Loi and her mother, 23-02-2018.

⁶⁹ Informal interview with the mother of Yu Yan and Yu Yan, 07-03-2018.

Thus, the listed questions within this chapter, are rude and annoying because completely strangers gave themselves permission and the legitimacy to ask personal and private questions about adoption.

Not only are these questions sensitive in the sense that people assume that adoptees not *really* belong to their adoptive family. Most of the girls that I have spoken struggle themselves with questions like: To whom do I *really* belong? and What and where is home? Yu Yan told me about her struggle⁷⁰:

When I was just a little girl, I already felt that I was different than my friends. (...) and when I came into puberty I struggled with the question of who I really was. Although puberty is characterized with identity problems (Who am I? What is my place in this society? etcetera), when you are adopted you do not even have answers to basic questions such as: to who am I related? and I began to doubt who I really was. Who was I supposed to be? What are the expectations of others?

Thus, when people constantly ask those questions the adoptees will get reminded of their intern struggle with these questions.

The girls that value the nurture more than the nature, and thus not struggle with the question: to who am I related? also told me about their experience with questions about adoption, for example, Feng Mian⁷¹:

For example, when people ask me: where do you come from? I answer with China; however, I am not somebody who immediately says: I am adopted, because when people are really interested they will ask more about it. So, I am willing to talk about adoption if the person in front of me is really interested and not just curious.

This illustrates that the girls I spoke to who value the nurture more than the nature, are more willing to talk about adoption if the person in front of them genuinely is interested in adoption.

⁷⁰ Informal interview with the mother of Yu Yan and Yu Yan, 07-03-2018.

⁷¹ Semi-structured interview with Feng Mian and her mother, 27-01-2018.

Conclusion

This chapter examined how female Chinese adoptees are confronted with hegemonic ideas about the family in public areas and how they deal with this confrontation. Due to the interaction between female Chinese adoptees with or without their adoptive parents both in public and private places they will be confronted with hegemonic ideas about families.

When other people find out that the female Chinese is adopted questions arise about the biological family (e.g. do you know your 'real' biological parents?) and the adoptive family (e.g. is your sister your 'real' sister). Within these questions an assumption is made, namely: the adoptive parents are not the real parents of the adoptee, and thus the adoptee does not 'really' belong to the adoptive family. This is hurtful for the adoptees that I have spoken, because they are legally their parents, and the personal and social ties between the adoptive parents and the adoptee is of significant importance, which generates belongingness to the adoptive parents. The questions are also perceived as being extremely rude and annoying, because other people gave themselves permission and legitimacy to ask personal and private questions about adoption.

On the one hand, the girls who are struggling with the question to who they are related, will get reminded of their intern struggle with these questions, for them these questions are more sensitive. Therefore, some adoptees even tell other people that they do not want to talk about adoption. On the other hand, the girls who value the nurture more than the nature, are more willing to talk about adoption if the person in front them genuinely is interested in adoption and not curious.

Thus, this chapter illustrated, that the female Chinese adoptees are being confronted with hegemonic ideas about the family by outsiders through questions about their adoption. They, however can decide for themselves to what extent they want to answer those questions.

Chapter 6: Friendships



Figure 16: Loi (participant) with her best friend⁷²

'It was just camp, just one week, one summer, once a year, to meet up with other adoptees, hang out with them for a whole week. We did not talk about adoption all the time. It was not like: adoption, adoption, adoption, for like a whole week. It was just like seeing other people a whole week like you. Knowing that you had an unspoken bond. Very similar experience from the area. You can just be yourself for a week and at the end of the week, you are kind of ripped away from that and to hide that for a whole year was very painful for me, but it also became part of my identity.' – Michael McDonald (Male Korean adoptee from the U.S., adopted at three months old)⁷³

⁷² Loi and her best friend come from the same orphanage and are adopted at the same time. They consider each other as *brother* and *sister*.

⁷³ Source: https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10155718677585067&id=224000785066

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the important friendships of the female adoptees that I have spoken., namely; *reaching out to other Asians* and *reaching out to other Chinese adoptees*. Moreover, how do these friendships contribute to the feeling ‘home’.

Reaching out to other Asians

I have noticed that some girls that I have spoken had Asian friends who are not adopted. Noor told me how she came into contact with Asian non-adoptees⁷⁴:

My parents had besides me also foster children, and their first two foster children came when I was around eight years old. They were two boys from China who lived in the Netherlands with their mother. Before they came I felt quite Dutch, but when I came into contact with my foster brothers subconsciously I felt more Chinese. They looked like me, I never felt such a strong identification with anyone in terms of physical appearance. [Unfortunately, the brothers and their mother are deported to China]. (...) In 2004 and 2006 I went back to China with my adoptive parents. We also visited my foster brothers and it was wonderful. I felt home in China, and I wanted to become more Chinese. I was dreaming about having a Chinese family. (...) During high school I came into contact with other Asians and we became friends. They all were children from Vietnamese migrant families. I came to their home, and we ate Asian food. (...) Unconsciously you want to belong to something, it felt good. I felt normal when I was with them, I did not feel different when I was with them.

Due to the ‘accidental’ contact with the Chinese foster brothers, which was warm and loving, a sense of belonging to the ‘Chinese’ foster brothers were generated. The aspect of physical appearance is also of importance, because Noor identifies with the brothers in terms of physical appearance. The hegemonic stance towards ethnic groups and nations is a believed shared common descent, which can be observable through physical characteristic. Noor subconsciously began to identify with her Chinese foster brothers in terms of physical appearance, because they shared the same observable physical characters with each other like

⁷⁴ Semi-structured interview with Noor, 05-02-2018.

eye shape and hair color. In other words, due to the identification in terms of physical appearance with her brothers she began to self-identity herself as ethnic Chinese.

Through this self-identification as Chinese, she feels connected to other Chinese and Asian people and they become more interested in the Chinese culture and other South-East Asian cultures (e.g. Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Thai, etcetera). In other words, she wants to *belong* to Asian/Chinese people in terms of ethnicity and culture. Because of this, she made social contact with other Asians who live in the Netherlands (e.g. Vietnamese, Indonesian, Chinese, Thai, Japanese, Korean and Filipino). Thus, due to their self-identification as ethnic Chinese (Asian) and the desire to be a part of a group, she reached out to other Chinese and Asian people. Loi also due to her self-identification as Chinese reached out to other non-adopted Chinese people, so I asked her about this⁷⁵:

I saw on Instagram that you have a lot of contact with other Chinese people?

Yes, I have a lot of contact with other Chinese people. They understand me, because they are also different in the Netherlands. I am Chinese and they are also Chinese, therefore we belong more to each other.

Not only do some Chinese adoptees become friends with non-adopted Asian. The majority of the girls that I have spoken had a lot of contact with other Chinese adoptees. Therefore, the next section will elaborate on the friendships between Chinese adoptees.

Reaching out to other Chinese adoptees

Almost all the girls that I had spoken agreed upon the fact that the most important identification is with other Chinese adoptees in the Netherlands and therefore they actively reached out to other Chinese adoptees online (closed Facebook group and WhatsApp group, see introduction:

⁷⁵ Semi-structured interview with Loi and her mother, 23-02-2018.

in the field). Eva explained to me why the most important identification is with other Chinese adoptees⁷⁶:

I would never feel completely Chinese however, I would never feel completely Dutch either, but when I interact with other Chinese adoptees, I feel recognition and acknowledgement. We are the same, because we do not completely belong to the Chinese, but we also do not completely belong to the Dutch. We do not completely belong to the Chinese because we do not speak the language and are not familiar with the Chinese culture and we do not completely belong to the Dutch, because we do not look like Dutch, however we are brought up by Dutch parents. We are a different group, we are our own group.

According to Eva, Chinese adoptees are ‘the same’, because they have the physical characters of a Chinese person, and are brought up in the Netherlands by Dutch parents. Eva believes that because the adoptees do not speak Chinese, and are not familiar with ‘the Chinese culture’, they could not completely belong to the Chinese and due to their physical appearance, they could not completely belong to the Dutch. Loi also explained to me why she identifies with other adoptees⁷⁷:

When I talk to you guys [other (female) Chinese adoptees], I know that you understand and feel what I am saying. When I discuss this topic [abandonment and the related pain] with my friends [non-adopted friends], they do not understand it completely.

Loi state that other adoptees feel, understand and know their hardships in terms of abandonment. The unspoken bond is felt, because they share the same past and personal experiences which generates belongingness.

Eva also told me⁷⁸:

⁷⁶ Semi-structured interview with Eva, 30-03-2018.

⁷⁷ Semi-structured interview with Loi and her mother, 23-02-2018.

⁷⁸ Semi-structured interview with Eva, 30-03-2018.

When I discuss certain topics with my other friends, like the relationship with my adoptive parents, growing up in an orphanage, they do not get it completely. They try to understand it, but they do not understand it. When I discuss these topics with other Chinese adoptees they know what I am talking about.

Eva also has the feeling that other Chinese adoptees understand her hardships in terms of growing up in an orphanage and relationship with their adoptive parents, because they share the same past which generates belongingness. Therefore, Eva easily feels a connection with other Chinese adoptees, which I call: the unspoken bond.

Conclusion

This chapter elaborated on the remarkably friendships of the female adoptees, *reaching out to other Asians* and *reaching out to other Chinese adoptees* were discussed. First, reaching out to other Asians emerges when the female adoptee ‘accidentally’ came into contact with Asians and because of that they identify themselves as: ethnic Chinese. Due to self-identification and the desire to be a part of a group (desire to belong), the female Chinese adoptees reach out to other Chinese and Asian people. Second, female Chinese adoptees reach out to other Chinese adoptees because they feel an unspoken bond. The unspoken bond is felt, because they share the same past and personal experiences which generate place-belongingness.

Thus, illustrated above the friendships between adoptees and the friendships between adoptees and non-adoptees exists out of familiarity, security and comfort. Hooks states: home stands for a symbolic space of security, comfort and emotional attachment (Hooks 2009, 213). Therefore, these friendships contribute to the feeling ‘home’ among female Chinese adoptees within the Netherlands.

Conclusion

By examining how female Chinese adoptees in the Netherlands negotiate and construct belonging and the understanding of home the anthropological knowledge about the meaning and implications of aspects of culture and social order in relation to adoption will be expanded.

Place is felt as 'home' and to belong to means to find a place where an individual can feel 'at home'. Home stands for a symbolic space of familiarity, security, comfort and emotional attachment (Hooks 2009, 213). For female Chinese adoptees it is possible to feel at home in the Netherlands. The way how female Chinese adoptees construct and negotiate this is formed in dialogue with others in the Dutch context. I have noticed that most of the female Chinese adoptees that I have spoken feel pain and feel sad about their abandonment. They try to deal with this fact by searching to the biological parents and by making contact with other female Chinese adoptees. Both contribute to the feeling of home within the Netherlands. First, searching to the biological family, because searching for the adoptive family becomes a family event. The bond between the adoptee and the adoptive parents becomes even stronger due to this search, and thus feelings of belongingness towards the adoptive family will be generated which contribute to the feeling of home in the Netherlands. Furthermore, contact with other Chinese adoptees also contributes to the feeling to be able to feel at home in the Netherlands, because they feel acknowledge in their personal feelings towards adoption when they hang-out with other Chinese adoptees.

Although female Chinese adoptees mostly in the form of rude questions are being confronted with the hegemonic stance that shared genes thought to be typical of a family. The female Chinese adoptees that I have spoken deal with this by choosing if they want to answer certain questions about their family. Despite the hegemonic stance, the female Chinese adoptees are able to generate belongingness towards the adoptive parents through Gotcha-day, the process of searching, legally the female Chinese adoptees belong to the adoptive family, and lastly through relational factors.

Staring to female Chinese adoptees and the discrimination of female Chinese adoptees both contributes to the ambiguous identity of the adoptee; other people perceive them as Chinese regardless of their own stance towards their own ethnicity. Interestingly, girls with a Dutch first name are being confronted with: your name does not match to your appearance and therefore some female Chinese adoptees which I have spoken re-construct their 'Chinese' ethnic identity, by changing their name on social media, into their Chinese name. Furthermore, within the family subconsciously events and/or actions contribute to the ambiguous identity of the female Chinese adoptee, for example by celebrating Gotcha-day at Schiphol Airport and

exposing the female Chinese adoptees to Chinese cultural artefacts, Chinese cultural events and programs about China. However, the adoptees who do not like the Chinese cultural artefacts respond to this by rejecting the cultural Chinese artefacts, Chinese cultural events and programs about China. The girls, who are interested in China, do not reject the Chinese cultural artefacts, Chinese cultural events and programs about China.

Within international adoption debates a strong division is made between the country, culture and family of birth of the adoptee and the country, family and culture where the adoptee will be adopted into. Anthropologists argue that ‘The Chinese culture’ nor ‘the Dutch culture’ exists, because culture is a social construction which is malleable. I will reject the stance that disrupting the children from their ‘own’ culture would be *cultural genocide*, because the female Chinese adoptees themselves do not experience this. For example, within the adoptive family itself, the adoptive mother is mostly more interested in Chinese cultural events and Chinese cultural artefacts than the female Chinese adoptees themselves. By making this explicit, the bad side must listen to the feelings and thoughts about belonging and the understanding of home of international adoptees themselves before uttering harsh statements like that.

Lastly, I will like to present the drawbacks of this research. First, all the participants that I have spoken were interested in adoption and their roots. Thus, this research will give insight into how female Chinese adoptees who are interested in their roots and adoption negotiate and construct belonging in the Dutch context.

Second, the intersectionality between gender, race and sexuality were not very vivid within this research. Participants mainly told me about discrimination, but I could not analyze how the aspect of gender and sexuality played a sufficient part in this. Maybe because I am female Chinese myself who is living in the Dutch context and therefore I also became color-blind to this phenomena within the Dutch context.

Thus, I would like to suggest doing further research among female Chinese adoptees who are not interested in their roots and adoption because that will provide a more holistic picture of how female Chinese adoptees in the Netherlands negotiate and construct belonging and the understanding of home. I also would like to suggest conducting research among male Chinese adoptees because they might negotiate and construct belonging and the understanding of home in different ways than the female Chinese adoptees do. It would be interesting to compare these with each other, and maybe then the aspect of intersectionality will be more vivid.

Summary

This research examined how female Chinese adoptees in the Netherlands negotiate and construct belonging and the understanding of home from an anthropological stance. The motivation to conduct this research is a very personal. I am a Chinese adoptee and I have struggled with the question to whom I belong and what exactly home is.

This research will contribute to the anthropological knowledge about the meaning and implications of aspects of culture and social order in relation to adoption. Furthermore, by analyzing international adoption debates within the theoretical framework this research would like to contribute to international adoption debates.

The theoretical framework will delve into the emergences of international adoption, the international adoption debates and belonging. Belongingness will be used to analyze the data which I have gathered in the field.

I have conducted fieldwork to obtain data. I used the methods of participant observation, semi-structured interviews, informal interviews (conversations) and small talk to obtain data. To analyze the data, I have used Nvivo in which I have coded all the data in three steps; open-coding, axial-coding, and selective coding. I also kept a diary to write my own feelings and thoughts down during the fieldwork, which I have reflected on in the personal reflection.

The results illustrated interesting ways how female Chinese adoptees negotiate and construct belonging and the understanding of home. I argue, that it is able to feel at home in the Netherlands for female Chinese adoptees. The adoptees do not make harsh boundaries between the culture, country, and family of birth and the culture, country and family where they are adopted into. By making this explicit, I would argue that the bad side of international debates is too simplistic, because it treats those above boundaries as fixed. It also states that removing children from their *own* culture would be *culture genocide*. To conclude I would argue that the bad side of international adoption debates must listen to the feelings and thoughts of international adoptees about belonging and the understand of home when they utter harsh statements like that.

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