HOW ARE CHINESE ADOPTEES EXPERIENCING THEIR ADOPTION IN BELGIUM?

With a qualitative focus on the voices of women

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# ABSTRACT - NEderlands

Deze masterproef, als onderdeel van het studieprogramma Conflict and Development Studies aan de Universiteit Gent, wil de ervaringen van vrouwelijke geadopteerden in België onderzoeken op het vlak van sociale relaties, identiteit, adoptie als praktijk, representatie en koloniale banden. De bevindingen geven een algemeen inzicht in de ervaringen van vrouwelijke Chinese geadopteerden in België, en onthullen hoe maatschappelijke en politieke krachten transnationale adoptie in tijd en ruimte hebben vormgegeven. Bovendien wordt een verklaring gegeven voor het feit dat zoveel geadopteerde meisjes uit China zijn, wat het directe gevolg was van het één-kind-beleid en de algemene zoon-preferentie. Mogelijke discrepanties in de algemene literatuur over adoptie worden getoetst door middel van diepte-interviews. Wanneer de gegevens door de lens van identiteit worden geanalyseerd, blijkt dat geadopteerden vergevingsgezinder zijn ten aanzien van identiteitsgerelateerde kwesties aangezien het één-kind-beleid een belangrijke factor is geweest bij het afstaan van kinderen. Bovendien hebben de ondervraagde geadopteerden zich nooit volledig wit gevoeld aangezien zij door anderen niet als wit[[1]](#footnote-1) worden beschouwd. Dit suggereert dat geadopteerden kwetsbaarder zijn voor racisme en discriminatie vanwege de ondervertegenwoordiging van de Aziatische identiteit in de Belgische media. Hoewel de ervaringen over het algemeen positief werden bevonden dankzij externe factoren zoals vrienden en familie, onderstrepen hun ervaringen ook het gebrek aan langdurige nazorginitiatieven voor geadopteerden in België als gevolg van de schaarse initiatieven die bovendien vaak op lokaal niveau plaatsvinden.

# ABSTRACT

This master's thesis, as a component of the Conflict and Development Studies programme at Ghent University, aims to explore the experiences of women adoptees in Belgium in terms of social relations, identity, adoption as a practice, representation and colonial links. The findings provide a general understanding of the experiences from Chinese women adoptees in Belgium, and they reveal how forces of society and policy have shaped transnational adoption in time and space. An explanation is given to why there are so many adopted girls from China, which was the direct result from the one-child policy and general son preference. Potential discrepancies in general literature on adoption are tested by means of in-depth interviews. When analysing the data through the lens of identity, the respondents show that adoptees are more forgiving towards identity related issues, since the one-child policy has been a main factor of giving up children. Furthermore, the adoptees questioned never felt fully ‘white’ since they are not perceived as ‘white’ by others. This suggests that these adoptees are more vulnerable towards racism and discrimination because of the low representation in the Belgian media.

Although overall experiences were deemed positive due to external factors such as friends and family, their experiences also underline the lack of sustainable aftercare initiatives for adoptees in Belgium due to the specific context in which the initiatives are scarce and on local level.

# Acknowledgement

This master's thesis is the culmination of my master's programme in Conflict and Development Studies at Ghent University. It was beyond doubt the icing on the cake of my study but hasn’t been possible without the help and support of certain people. Therefore, I would like to thank some people who shared this journey with me.

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Finally, I would like to thank the Chinese adoptees in Belgium who have inspired me in writing this topic and whose contribution has been of great value to the outcome and conclusion of this master's thesis. Thank you for trusting me with your adoption stories and for being so open about your past and current experiences surrounding this vulnerable subject. Your input reminded me of the motivational reason behind the thesis, being that we always have to strive to do better.

Louise de Potter,

May 23rd, 2022

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The Recommended corpus

The purpose of this thesis is to shed light on adoptees' adoption experiences in Belgium. Adoption is a multi-faceted procedure which encompasses everything from identity-making to ‘racial’ hierarchies to representation. The practise of adoption is often interpreted differently due to the intricacy and personal experiences of adoptees. Until now, studies of transnational adoption have tended to prioritize the views of adoptive parents or a theoretical approach, resulting in a dearth of adoptee’s perspectives.

With the rise of critical adoption studies, more and more research from the perspective of adoptees has become accessible in recent years. Still, it is very limited and too broad. This research attempts to fill this gap by giving equal weight to the voices and experiences of Chinese women adoptees in Belgium.

The first chapter, the theoretical framework, focuses on a literature review divided into three themes. In the first part, the historical context of transnational adoption with a specific focus on China is interpreted, where a reference is made to the one-child policy, gendercide, political pain points, malpractices and figures. Then, the second part focuses on the adoption process in Belgium, explaining the current policy with all the adoption steps. Here, the panel report of the Flemish government is consulted, in which the aftercare and recognition of illegal practices are paramount. The last part highlights the identity part. It deals with factors such as racism, discrimination, representation, ‘racial’ hierarchies and ‘decolonisation’. The notion of 'othering' is also discussed, with cultural appropriation and the search for one's roots as the central concepts.

The second chapter, methodology, illustrates the research methods from which this qualitative research was conducted and which research group, data collection procedure and analysis were undertaken to arrive at the final findings. In conducting this research, I also highlight my positionality as a ‘white’, non-adopted woman in Belgium. Later within this chapter, the research results are discussed. Based on qualitative in-depth interviews, the research results are analysed. The academic literature is linked to the given interview data and adoptees are probed about their experiences. The interviews are divided into four themes: relationship dynamics, racism and discrimination, identity, and the practice of adoption. Specifically, this deals with identity formation, self-definition, return journeys, language,

communities and in what way this influences well-being, social relationships and self-development. Lastly, the findings of both chapters are presented.

The motivation behind the subject was driven by my own desire to adopt and the interest in China. Its one-child policy plays such a vital part in the adoption history and all its outcomes. Furthermore, the dissertation of Joyce Bex inspired me to conduct a qualitative study and ignited the spark to investigate the topic.

A personal note: I want to emphasise that I am a ‘white’ non-adopted woman myself and am aware of my advantaged position in this society. Although I intend to report as objectively as possible, I suspect that my ‘white’, non-adopted perspective will work its way into this thesis, however subtly and unintentionally. Therefore, I want to make it clear that I neither claim to know more about the Chinese identity nor adoption than adopted women themselves, nor write in their name. There is no such thing as a monolithic, one-sided adopted woman, and personal experiences cannot and should not be homogenised.

**Definitions/ List of abbreviations:**

International adoption = International adoption can be described as transnational adoption and/or inter-country adoption. Within this dissertation, these terms will be used interchangeably.

PRC = People’s Republic of China

**Additional note:**

Within this master’s thesis, the word ‘female’ shall not be used due to the sensitivity of the subject and the additional sexualisation of the word. Therefore, the terms of ‘women’ and ‘girls’ are routinely applied. The term ‘disabled’ will also not be used, instead ‘special needs’ is implemented, since this is the appropriate term used in the adoption scene. Additionally, the notions of ‘racial’, ‘racialised’, ‘race’, ‘white’, ‘ethnic’, ‘ethnicity’, ‘black’, ‘West’, ‘decolonisation’, ‘the Other’, ‘othering’ are placed between inverted commas throughout the text to emphasise that these are not objective labels, but terms that refer to historically charged, contested and changing social constructions.

# Chapter 1: LITERATURE STUDY

## THE ORIGINS AND HISTORY OF ADOPTION

### The origins of early transnational adoption

Transnational adoption is described by Haritaworn et al (2014) as a practice that took place in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, which included moving children from the Global South to the Global North. The origins of early transnational adoption can be traced back to the 1950’s in Asia. An era in which missionaries, medical personal and returning soldiers, publicized the plight of Korean “war orphans” in the aftermath of the catastrophic Korean War. The practice started as a rescue mission with a Christian undertone while it slowly developed into an act of solidarity and charity work which led to the international adoption practice that we know today (Hübinette T. , 2006). Originating countries saw transnational adoption as a method of family planning and a child welfare practice. In many regions within North America, Western Europe and Oceania, transnational adoption became a last resort for wish parents who were infertile but still wanted to become parents (Park Nelson, 2016). Asian countries dominated transnational adoption for many years, more than half the children were sent for adoption to Europe and the United States (Selman P. , 2015). In the United States, domestic adoptions by nonrelatives peaked in 1970 at 89,200 and declined rapidly in subsequent years. As the most desirable adoptive children (healthy ‘white’ enfants) became increasingly scarce and increasingly expensive, and as rates of involuntary childlessness rose, would-be adoptive parents turned to alternatives, including “open” adoption, which encourages various forms of contact between birth and adoptive families, and to domestic transracial adoption and transnational adoption.

Open adoption began in the United States in the 1970’s and remains largely confined to this country, it provides a potential variant on the exclusiveness of adoptive kinship. In open adoption, birth and adoptive parents may meet before the birth of the child (Reitman, 2007). The birth parent can choose the adoptive parents, and there may be a varying degree of ongoing contact after the child’s birth, ranging from exchanges of pictures to occasional visits. Openness in adoption was developed in part as a way of encouraging single women to relinquish their children at a time when the availability of healthy ‘white’ enfants was declining. However, the declination in adoption rates can also be explained due to the availability of fertility treatment and assisted reproduction in the late 1980’s (Lind, 2012).

According to Goody (1969), the practice of adoption can be divided into three main sections:

1. To provide homes for orphans, bastards, foundlings, and the children of impaired families.
2. To provide childless couples with social progeny.
3. To provide an individual or couple with an heir to their property” (p. 58).

The adoption process is an established social practice fuelled by various reasons, many of them being social, emotional, economic and/or political (Dorow S. , 2006). With the practice of adoption, certain power imbalances rise between the sending countries, perceived as developing areas, and the receiving countries, being seen as the advanced industrialized regions. Thus, individuals placing their vulnerable children up for adoption are typically perceived as having lower global status (Wang L. K., 2016). Transnational adoption was the focus point of considerable controversy in the early 2000s. Asia is still the largest sending continent for transnational adoption; however, numbers have been decreasing throughout the years. In the 2000s the adoption landscape changed with adoption candidates waiting up to one or two years in the ability to adopt (Lind, 2012). Today, transnational adoption is also more often seen within a discourse of multiculturalism as a practice of building bridges between different cultures (Park Nelson, 2016).

### The origins of early transnational adoption in the People’s Republic of China

THE ONE-CHILD POLICY

In 1978 China implemented the one-child policy, wherein policies governed “population quality” by enforcing stringent fertility regulations (Das Gupta, et al., 2010). The policy came as a response to the social and economic implications of the country’s population boom (Ma, et al., 2020). During a timeframe of financial insecurity (due to economic reforms), limited fertility rights (due to large-scale birth control campaigns) and a nation-wide preference to a male child (to provide labour power, the performance of ancestral and patrilineal rites of worship and to care for their elders in old age) this assured family-tied restrictions and an imbalance of value within gender (Magistad & Leqiong, 2013). While daughters were perceived to be more dependable, caring, and obedient than sons, this did not influence son-preference (Chen, Ebenstein, Edlund, & Li, 2015). The one-child policy legitimised and continued the control of women's bodies by state authorities in forms of birth control such as (forced) insertion of an IUD, sterilisation, and abortion (Shang & Cheng, 2006). In addition, economic control and punishments were applied to extra-birth families with examples of steep fines, financial levies, social pressure, destruction of property, curtailed career prospects and even detainment of individuals (Ma, et al., 2020). The Chinese one-child policy was successful because it provided rewards for people who signed and adhered to the policy, such as better living conditions, education, and medical services, as well as a higher salary. Having more than one child resulted in the loss of these rights, as well as a demotion or job dismissal (Dowling & Brown, 2009). Although this countered many possible births, it also translated to many parents leaving their daughter up for adoption, to avoid harsh penalties (Davis, 1981). The abandonment of their own children was seen as a crime since it was an illegal practice despite the one-child policy. Hence why, there is often no information or trace of the parents and their identities with the adoption documents (Stuy, 2014).

CHINA’S MISSING DAUGHTERS

The sociocultural status of women in China clarifies why abandoned babies are mostly girls. Women have historically been discriminated against and subordinated to men. Chinese women lacked property rights and had minimal access to education, while male offspring were regarded as more precious (Dowling & Brown, 2009). The one-child policy not only led to an *infanticide* whereby girls were frequently taken by their life even before drawing their first breath but also to a *gendercide* where the abandonment of girls peaked. Parents tried to have a son, and because of the one-child policy, they were limited in alternative choices for the new-born daughters (Johnson K. , 2004). Some were left at birth houses, the People’s Commune[[2]](#footnote-2), orphanages, baby hatches[[3]](#footnote-3), or even on the streets. Orphanages seemed to be one of the safest options, as there supposedly was access to food and medical care (Sidhu, 2018). However, facilities such as the baby hatch were such a popular solution that some of them even closed due to overpopulation. It was not always the parents who abandoned their child or government services who took away the child(ren), but also relatives who took away their relatives' children for fear of being fined or punished. Research by Johnson (1998) shows that in the period from 1986 to 1990, more than 16,000 children were brought to the county social services department.

According to the data, most of these babies were from remote regions, with 92% of them being girls from only a few days old. Some mothers resisted the policy by hiding their children or simply not cooperating with governmental officials. As such, the transition of Chinese children towards Western countries provides an unprecedented perspective on the tension between governmental suppression and grass roots resistance in an intimate panorama (Heynssens, 2016). The illegal abandonment and neglect subsequently ensured that many healthy girls were adopted by foreigners (Han & Du, 2018). Afterwards, another pattern was rising namely birth defects. Researchers suggest that the rise in birth defects (nearly 40 precent between 2001 and 2006), was caused due to the environmental pollutants, especially in coal-producing regions. Even now, estimations are that yearly between 800,000 and 1,200,000 babies are born with birth defects. This led to a peak of babies entering state care due to their disabilities and congenital illnesses. Since the lack of financial, medical, and social support, many of these defect-babies were abandoned in state care facilities (Wang L. K., 2016).

Child desertion has been commonly accepted as a survival strategy for poorer families. The act of abandonment (especially of young girls) tends to escalate during hard times; war, natural disasters, and famine (Blewett & Woods, 1995). In the 1950’s, the sex ratio at birth (SRB) in China was normal, even though mortality rate was higher for girls than boys. However, since the 1980’s, an enormous increase has been reported. In 2010 the ratio of male to female rose to 118 boys per 100 girls (Stephens). Researchers have found that *for every boy born, at least one girl was aborted* (Keyser, 2009). By 1992, at least 48 million women were missing in China[[4]](#footnote-4). Even though government laws have been passed opposing the use of ultrasound technology for sex selection, these same laws were not properly enforced (Lin, 2007). The term of *missing girls* is derived from the undocumented adoption practice at local (birth families) and national (authorities) level, since their birth is missing from official census polls (Nye, 1990). In recent years, the abandoning of healthy daughters has significantly decreased (Wang L. K., 2016).

A STATE-DRIVEN DREAM

China promoted a “survival of the fittest” strategy, whereby citizens were encouraged to reflect on their choices, become selective and strategic and only produce high quality citizens for the greater purpose of China’s growth[[5]](#footnote-5). Hence, Chinese individuals were pressured since their offspring was obliged to bring China into its position of global respect, implement the new economy and fulfil its historical destiny (Vanderklippe, 2014). There is a legal reciprocal parent-child contract whereby the offspring is responsible for caring for the elderly later in life both financially and physically. Because of this agreement, parents see their child as an investment, which needs to prove itself profitable down the road, to ensure and maximize long-term returns (Apter, 2014). The changing socioeconomic context in the People’s Republic of China caused a reshaping of the population where children are valued according to their perceived future economic productivity. This transformation ensured that special needs children[[6]](#footnote-6) were therefore less wanted (Crenson, 2009). In China, public perceptions of disability are rooted in the traditional belief that having a special needs baby in the household is a retribution for previous misdoings. Special needs children were usually kept a secret or abandoned (Dowling & Brown, 2009). A baby hatch in Guangzhou was forced to cease existence in 2014 after receiving 262 babies in less than two months, all of them being special needs children (Scherz, 2014). Although healthy girls leave the facilities quite rapidly, these orphanages serve as a permanent home for the sick and special needs children (Wang L. K., 2016). Additionally, within this context, girls fall into the “low-quality” category, which doesn’t render (enough) (Crenson, 2009). Every thirty seconds a baby with special needs or who’s sick is born in the PRC. Of China’s 900 million peasants, 90% lives totally uninsured. This leads to individual families caring for their special needs and/or sick children without any governmental support (High, 2013).

Consequently, many girls and special needs infants have been abandoned since parents seek another attempt to produce a “high quality” child. Although both son and daughter must care for their elderly, most (rural) couples believe that only sons can carry this burden (Johnson K. , 2004).

Male infants supposedly brought strength to the family by aiding them in economic and political resources, while girls are just “married out” of the parents’ household to live with the husband’s family. China’s national son preference has led to the outcome of this troubling situation whereby discrimination against daughters is encouraged (Wang L. K., 2016). A form of social engineering has emerged from the 1970’s until now whereby the population’s quality and children’s social value was marked by competition, insecurity and future economic potential (Greenhalgh, 2010).

WESTERN MEDIA EXPOSÉS

Since the 1990’s, Western investment flowed towards the PRC together with aid of international humanitarian groups (financial, emotional, and medical resources). Transnational adoption practices have a strong link to colonialism, militarism, and capitalism. The supply of children from China is present, as well as a clear increasing demand for children from China. During the one-child policy, literature and press articles were distributed (on the situation in China) by adoption agencies, creating a need for humanitarian aid from the Global North that functioned as 'development assistance' (Sidhu, 2018). International response appeared after several malpractices in state-run orphanages were exposed (Huijgen, 2021). Deplorable conditions aired on tv through various documentaries: “The Dying Rooms: China’s Deepest Secret” being one of them. Stories of physical abuse, starvations, diseases, unnatural death, and mental abuse (volunteers claiming that food and water was withheld from certain children so they would become malnourished and die faster) gained global notoriety. Another volunteer declared that up to the age of four it was “survival of the fittest” (Blewett & Woods, 1995). Human Rights Watch Asia released a report claiming death rates among orphans in state-run orphanages were awfully high. In Shanghai’s Children’s Welfare Institute[[7]](#footnote-7) up to 90 percent of the orphans died, while nearly 50% died nationwide (Human Rights Watch Asia, 1996).

One of the largest documented adoption scandals took place in Hunan Province, where children were abducted from poor families and offered to Chinese orphanages. Abuses and malpractices occurred not only in orphanages, but also in hospitals and other public places (Stuy, 2014). Despite this increasing number of abuses and malpractices, no additional measures or changes were made within the adoption policy, neither within the country of origin nor within the associated countries of arrival (Bex, 2021).

In 1949, when social welfare services became the political duty of the state, the orphanages began to decline. As a result, private orphanages were closed or reformed into state-run institutions. The state's main responsibility, on the other hand, was finance and operations, with communal health being deliberately disregarded. The lack of healthcare, education, and management that resulted from the reduction in service funding led to the misconducts we recognise today (Cantwell, 2017). Afterwards, China reformed its nationwide orphanage model and began its international adoption program in 1992, allowing foreigners the ‘right to adopt and setting up protocols doing so’. This ensured a rise in transnational adoptions, which was gendered with Chinese girls being the common dominator (90 percent of all adoptees consisted of girls) (Meier & Zhang, 2008).

Research by Stuy (2014) found abuses and malpractices in several Chinese provinces since the start of transnational adoption programmes. In 1998, China was the largest country of origin for intercountry adoptions in the world (Huijgen, 2021). Overall state orphanages have improved their conditions, which was made possible by the large Western funds in this multimillion-dollar industry, however child trafficking continues to be reported (Wang L. K., 2016). Policymakers in origin and destination countries should take actions to prevent child trafficking in China's transnational adoption practices. This based on three adaptations: (1) Putting the needs of the children and the biological families over the needs of the adoptive parents to adopt; (2) China should make efforts to prevent domestic child trafficking; (3) sending and receiving countries should commit to safeguard child trafficking in adoption practices (Meier & Zhang, 2008).

ADOPTION RATES

Since the mid-1990’s, the PRC has been one of the most popular countries for international adoption and on the top of the “sending countries” list. However, statistics show that the proportion of women Chinese adoptees declined from 95% to 74% since 2005 and that Chinese adoption overall has decreased by more than 60% (Dowling & Brown, 2009). Many factors contribute to the declination, such as the abusive practices and the involvement of the sending countries, which scares the receiving countries, since the chances of having an adoptive child who’s a product of child trafficking and/or child buying are increased (Selman P. , 2015).

A second factor of the declination are the strict guidelines which China had ratified during the Hague Convention in 2005.

These guidelines stated numerous rules for possible adoptive parents, such as

1. The protective adopters must be a heterosexual couple.
2. Who have been married for at least two years.
3. And have had no more than two divorces between them.
4. Both adopters must be aged between thirty and fifty years old.
5. Both partners must be healthy and not carry AIDS, mental disabilities, (mental) disorders, BMI of forty or higher, severe facial deformation and loss of limbs and its functioning.
6. One of the adopters must have stable employment.
7. Neither one of the couple can carry a criminal record or carry a history of violence (domestic, child abuse) or a history of addictions/substance abuse (p.318).

With these guidelines, many single parents and same-sex couples were secluded (Selman P. , 2015).

However, the main reason for the implementation of the convention was so that this would protect children and their families from the risks of illegal, irregular, premature or ill-prepared adoptions abroad (Johnson K. , 2016). In Belgium, the implementation of this Convention was introduced as of 1 September 2005. This means that until 2005 Belgian citizens were free to adopt through unauthorised organisations, not needing to pass through the government or even documenting the registration of the adoption itself (Adoptie).

A third factor is that in 2015, China’s one-child policy was abolished and in 2016 officially terminated (Selman P. , 2020). Since then, the two-child policy was introduced, which has extended to the three-child policy in 2021 (BBC, 2021).

A fourth factor is the *five guarantees* rule, which was applied in 2006 and ensured a social security system across the rural areas. These same areas usually sent off the most ‘unwanted’ children, who eventually almost always ended up adopted. With this five-guarantee rule, support is given to the families through regulation, food, clothing, housing, medical aid, and financial support. This ensures a higher quality of life resulting in a better living standard for families and their children who are then able to remain in their villages and can be cared for (Wu, 2013). No exact numbers of Chinese adoptees in Belgium can be presented due to the official censuses not being documented until (Duppen, 2004). However, an estimation made by Selman (2020) indicates that in the time period from 1992 to 2018, more than 150,000 children have been moved from China to the Europe, North America and Oceania as a result of transnational adoption, whereby 1,617 children were sent to Belgium (Figure 1). Furthermore, the Flemish Adoption Centre has released figures indicating that 493 adoptions have taken place via recognised Flemish adoption services in the period from 1991 to 2020 (Figure 2). Nevertheless, these numbers are not accurately portraying the number of Chinese adoptees in Belgium due to the negligence of documentation prior to 2005 and the illegal routes taken as alternative (Kind & Gezin, 2021).

Figure 1: Transnational adoptions from China to 12 recipient nations (ranked by number) (1992-2018).

A screenshot of a computer

Description automatically generated with low confidence

Source: (Selman P. , 2020)

Figure 2: Registered adoptions from China to Flanders through adoption services (1991-2020)

Table

Description automatically generated

Source: (Kind & Gezin, 2021)

## The adoption process In belgium

### Defining adoption

Adoption generally refers to the practice of a child being adopted as one's own by people who are not the natural/birth parents. Regardless, within adoption there are many nuances to be made (Thesaurus, 2011).

According to BFO (2008) following distinctions can be made for adoption in Belgium:

1. *Transnational* adoption exists of adopting a child from outside the established country (Belgium). (p.12)
2. *Domestic* adoption refers to a child being born and adopted within the borders of that same country (Belgium) (p.20).

Within adoption there is the difference between full and simple adoption:

1. *Full* adoption creates a scenario whereby all ties are severed with the biological parents and the child therefore receives the same rights as a biological child, within the household of its adoptive parents. Full adoption is only available for minors and is irrevocable while simple adoption is made possible for both minors and adults, and a revocation is possible (Vlaamse Overheid, 2022).
2. *Simple* adoption refers to the fact that ties with the biological family are not severed and one may keep its biological family name. For transnational adoption, some countries only allow simple adoption (Steunpunt Adoptie) (p.6).

This thesis will focus on transnational adoption. Since 1804, Belgium has acknowledged the practice of adoption in its legislation. However, the law only allowed adult individuals to be adopted. This changed in 1940 whereby the focus shifted to the wellbeing of children. A crucial redefinition in 1969 happened, whereby transnational adoption was officially implemented. This led to a mass adoption of orphans from war -and poorer zones (Pyl, 2010).

According to Infino (2021), to adopt transnationally, the following protocol must be followed in Belgium:

1) The prospective parent(s) must be at least 25 years old, and fifteen years older than the adoptee.

2) Adoptive parents must be at least eighteen years old and ten years older than the adopted child when adopting a spouse's child.

3) The prospective parent(s) must be wedded, legally cohabiting, for at least three years (including same and opposite sex couples) or residing alone.

4) The prospective parent(s) must have finished the established protocol of adoption.

5) The prospective parent(s) must be qualified and eligible to adopt a kid, according to the family court (p.1).

### Transnational adoption process:

The process of international adoption involves the following steps (Federale Overheidsdienst Justitie, 2019):

1. Application (registering with the relevant community central authority[[8]](#footnote-8) with the intention of adopting a child from abroad).
2. Preparation course (The preparation course includes information and awareness sessions on the steps of the adoption procedure and its legal consequences).
3. Eligibility procedure (explained below, under timeframe).
4. Supervision of the adoption plan (cooperation with the adoption service).
5. Adoption decision in the country of origin (Procedures, the conditions relating to age or marital status; the consequences of the adoption (regular or full).
6. Recognition of the foreign adoption decision by the federal central authority.
7. Registration with the municipality (p.1).

TIMEFRAME

Future adoptive parent(s) must go through the eligibility procedure, which takes about two to three years. During that period, compulsory information and preparation sessions are held. When the candidate has been found suitable, a collaboration with an adoption service is started. The waiting period that follows depends on the country of origin and child profile chosen. The average waiting times in the countries of origin vary from two to six years (Steunpunt Adoptie, sd). The country of origin, gender and age can be chosen by the adoptive parents. However, the choice of country is very limited due to the demands each country imposes (Daelman, 2011). Previously in China, it was obligated to ‘donate’ around 35,000 Yuan (approximately €5,050) at the adoption signing. Since 2017, this is no longer required (Savley, 2018).

THE CURRENT ADOPTION SITUATION IN CHINA

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, adoption processing in China was halted for a long time. With the Chinese-Belgian agreement, there is only the possibility of adopting children with special needs (Holt International, 2021). This concerns children with one or more medical conditions until the age of fifteen. A distinction is made between 'Special Needs' and 'Special Focus', whereby children who have been declared adoptable for more than three months fall under the latter (Kind & Gezin, sd). The background information available on these children is rather concise: usually the date of birth is estimated, and the name is given by the orphanage. The disorders may include motor disorders, sensory disorders, and others (Leloup, sd).

REPORT EXPERT PANEL INTER-COUNTRY ADOPTION IN FLANDERS

In Flanders and the Netherlands, investigations have been launched in response to the general criticism of transnational adoption practices. In recent years, an increasing number of inter-country adoptees have raised questions about their adoption history and the adoption procedure. The expert panel was commissioned to conduct research into past inter-country adoption practices, with the aim of revising the current procedure and thereby trying to safeguard current adoptees. In September 2021, the expert panel shared its final findings and recommendations (Opgroeien, 2021).

REFORMING ADOPTION LEGISLATION

The Flemish government established important basic principles to build a positive future vision of intercountry adoption (Verhegge, 2021). On one hand, the report aims for a thorough reform of the adoption landscape and on the other, for justice to adoptees who have been victims of malpractice (Withaeckx, 2021). The report came because of the structurally demonstrated malpractices within transnational adoption in the Netherlands and the negative criticism of many adoptees in Belgium, mentioned above (Van Geel, 2021). This renewed system must take effect as of September 2023 (Verhegge, 2021).The Flemish Government believes in a future for inter-country adoption. It reaffirms that the interests of the child come first. The concept of multi-parenthood is an important basic idea in adoption by always checking whether all parties are willing to maintain contact with the biological or first parent(s) (Vlaamse overheid, 2021). To increase the children's chances of finding a suitable home and to eliminate the risk of abuse even more, the Flemish Government wants to strengthen cooperation at the level of the nations (country of arrival - country of origin). Furthermore, the Flemish Government is examining how it can further strengthen the existing after-care policy and is working on an improved registration of data and document management with specific attention to children with special developmental needs (Kind en Gezin, 2021).

THE AFTERCARE FOR ADOPTEES IN BELGIUM

An open letter from numerous adoptees and organisations on adoption states that “every adopted child has its own 'pre-history' and requirements that stem from childhood. But being adopted does not stop after childhood.” (Avaaz, 2021). Adoptees mainly advocate a structural aftercare system, supported by the government. An after-care system that focuses on three pillars: recognition, (recovery), psychological guidance and the right to descent/ lineage (De Morgen, 2021). Few organisations in Belgium aim to guide adoptees, however not enough people know about the initiatives being taken (Beel, 2019). Since September 2005, transnational adoptees of twelve years and older who have been adopted through a recognised adoption service have the right to consult their adoption file. Files from adoptions that took place before 1 September 2005 are difficult to obtain (Parentia, sd).

AFSTAMMINGSCENTRUM

In Flanders, there is the ‘*Afstammingscentrum’[[9]](#footnote-9)*. This is an independent centre where one can learn more about their heritage when the legal relationship does not correspond with the biological and/or social relationship. The centre has its origins in the recommendations of the expert panel on forced adoptions in 2015, which recommended the creation of a centre of descent and a DNA database (Fiom, 2015). The centre is based on the fundamental right to knowledge about one's own parentage. The centre not only helps in the search for parentage information, but also provides psychosocial support. These centres are examples of government initiatives that can contribute to healing and recovery for adoptees, but also re-defining their identity (Afstammingscentrum, sd). The establishment of the Afstammingscentrum is a positive move forward, but this organisation also needs to be strengthened and given the means to grow. For example, current regulations prevent it from using international DNA databases, which would be a great added value for inter-country adoptees (De Morgen, 2021).

### Illegal practices

According to government statistics, the number of adoptions from China seem exceptionally low, however since most adoptions are not registered with the authorities, the data does not reflect reality (Guérin, 2013). Due to the Western demand for the adoption of Chinese children, illegal practices such as child trafficking started rising. Babies were stolen and sold to orphanages who in their turn sold them to foreigners and making profits when the babies were adopted (Goodman, 2006). These profits were disguised in a form of donation since receiving parents were required to pay upon arrival at their child’s orphanage. Many Chinese parents *sold* their new-born baby since they could not take care of the child and did not want to abandon it on the street, despite this being illegal and carrying heavy penalties (Dowling & Brown, 2009). In 2005 Chinese authorities discovered these criminal operations and since that pivotal point the adoption from PRC has declined significantly (Tong, 2010).

### A double-edged sword

The lives of many adopted children might improve if the money spent on adoption was put into children's services in the sending nations. Neo-colonialism and ethnocentrism are apparent and inherent in the decision-making of adoption whereby adopting happens from emerging regions to rich, powerful countries. The question remains whether child export is a viable solution to a country's childcare issues (Dowling & Brown, 2009). The current realistic image of adoption is that there are too many candidates for adoption but not enough children and transparency on some children’s records; age, medical files, names being forged (Daelman, 2011).

Since there are many negative studies on the impact of adoption, researchers have also tried to highlight the positive/neutralised outcome of adoption. Juffer and Van Ijzendoorn (2005) measured the sense of self-worth amongst 10,000 adoptees and 33,000 non-adoptees. Results showed that there were no differences between both groups. Research has shown that intercountry and transnational adoptees and Belgian born babies do well on the same scale in life. However, issues occur whenever the adoptee is adopted as a ‘late placement’ from an institution. This study conducted by Juffer and van Ijzendoorn (2005) claims that adoption is a very successful procedure when done at the right age.

## Identity-making

### Defining ‘racial’ hierarchies:

In the European context, transnational adoption is often equated with transracial adoption, whereby children from Asia, Africa and Latin America are relocated to Europe. Transnational adoptees are confronted at an individual and structural level with new adjustments in a new country and/or (later) having to make the choice whether to search for their biological family (Trenka, Oparah, & Shin, 2006). Additionally, transracial adoptees are often confronted with racism, marginalisation, and discrimination. These confrontations have an impact on how adoptees view themselves and how they are viewed by their social environment, institutions (Trenka, Oparah, & Shin, 2006). Transnational adoptees of colour can occupy roughly three positions in society according to Wekker et al. (2007), namely:

1. Identifying themselves as ‘white’ without feeling connected to their ‘racial’ or ‘ethnic’ origin.
2. Not feeling at home anywhere.
3. Feeling connected to both the country of adoption and the country of origin (p.74).

These different positions of adoptees indicate the complexity of the concept of identity and how identities are often assumed based on the physical, ‘racial’, or ‘ethnic’ characteristics that reveal how a person identifies. Everyday racism and ‘white’ privilege are mechanisms that can have a significant impact on the well-being of transracial adoptees. Moreover, racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination act simultaneously on each other and reinforce problematic positions of power (Wekker & Lutz, 2001). Eastern and Southern adopted children share a dissimilar look from their adoptive parents. Having a different skin tone and facial features result in unavoidable racism for the adopted child. However, Westerners seem to carry a more positive image towards Eastern/ Chinese adoptees and a more negative image towards Southern adoptees (Howell S. , 2009).

These existing hierarchies can therefore influence the parents’ decision in whether to adopt ‘black’ or ‘non-black’ children transnationally. Adopting from Asia creates higher acceptance within the family and their local communities, than adopting a child from Africa. This translates to the adoptive parents’ limited willingness to create a multicultural family where all ‘racial’ and cultural groups are welcome (Dorow S. , 2006). In a study conducted by Kubo (2010) adoptive parents were asked whether they took ‘race’ into account when adopting their child. ‘Racial’ hierarchies were clearly reflected through their answers in which they stated that Asian children are more assimilable to ‘white ‘culture, while ‘black’ children weren’t. To them it wasn’t a question of nationality, but more if they were going to adopt ‘black’ versus ‘non-black’. Many coloured adopted children experience racism throughout their childhood all the way up to adulthood.

The concept of ‘*racial triangulation’* provides a hierarchical picture – ‘white’ at the top, ‘blacks’ at the bottom, and in the middle everybody else. This theoretical framework points out the ‘white’ superiority, the civic ostracism of everything below ‘whites’, and the inferiority of people of colour (Song, 2004).

Many adoptees experience identity issues regarding their ‘ethnic’, social, cultural, and ‘racial’ identity. When children are unable to identify their culture, it confuses their overall sense of identity (Dalen, 1999). Adoptees who carry a different skin colour often develop a multiple identity. In theoretical matter they grew up in Belgium, in a ‘white’ family but despite their cultural background and ‘ethnic’ features, they are visibly *different*. This visible matter translates from the outside to the inside, where they also feel treated differently (e.g., cultural assumptions and prejudices).

Adoptees claim they’re often reminded of their external dissimilarities (Wekker G. , 2007). Once adoptees grow older, they can be perceived as thieves, thugs, and criminals or as refugees who might not be able to speak the language (Daelman, 2011). Despite the best efforts of the adoptive parents, the structures of racism cannot be avoided through their education as racism exists on a structural level. Even if the adoptive parents give all the love in the world to their child, they cannot prevent their child from facing racism (Bex, 2021). Like the notion of 'identity', 'race' is also a dynamic concept, which means that new forms of ‘racial’ meanings can be constructed all the time (Louie, 2015). Transnationally adopted people of colour are often essentialised and ‘racialised’, with transnationally adopted people of colour often being seen by their close environment as representing a particular population group or culture. This while most transnational adoptees of colour themselves have limited knowledge about the country of origin due to their displacement (Hübinette T. , 2007).

SINOPHOBIA AMONG CHINESE ADOPTEES

Sinophobia is the hatred or fear of China, Chinese people, the Chinese diaspora, and Chinese cultures. In practice, sinophobia manifests itself in unequal power relations, discrimination, and racism against Chinese people. According to Zhang & Xu (2020), Sinophobia has, since the 18th century, become a dominant mode of Western attitudes towards China. Generalisations about China, as the threatening, deviant and inferior *Other*, are used to define the ‘West’. By doing so, the ‘West’ poses itself as an omniscient subject to define others (Zhang & Xu, 2020). Covid-19 has triggered a rise in implicit and explicit racism among Asian populations in North America, Europe, and Oceania. In addition, they experience an increase in the use of ‘racial’ slurs. Such slurs to ‘ethnic’ minorities are called ethnofaulisms (Boon, 2020). Ethnofaulisms are based, among other things, on prejudices about the appearance of members of an ‘ethnic’ group. Mostly, people with Asian looks will receive slurs on their epanthic fold (Pinker, 2007).

Asian women are confronted with racism and sexism, as well as ‘racialised’ sexism. This is a form of sexism based on the ‘racialisation’ of Asian women. Thus, not purely racism or sexism but a combination of both. Asian women are more likely to encounter forms of inequality, fetishism, violence and abuse due to their hyper sexualisation, including in pornography and thus in partner relationships (Ramirez, 2021). The Asian fetish is thought to have its roots in imperial history, when 'white' males perceived Asian women as objects of lust to satisfy their desires (Sun, 2004). In extreme cases, this can lead to psychological problems in. It is important to recognise the emergence and existence of these structures (Kuang, 2021).

REPRESENTATION

A lack of representation and visibility of Chinese or Asian persons in the adoptees’ environment leads to a normalisation of the ‘white’ norm. This ‘white’ norm makes them insecure about their own appearance and thus has a negative impact on the development of their self-image (Trenka, Oparah, & Shin, 2006). The daily images, stories and voices that are released via the media (internet, advertisements, newspapers, radio, and television) construct our individual and collective image. Despite appearing to have little meaning, they form the blueprint of our society that indicates which individuals visibly enjoy certain positions and the ones who do not (Orgad, 2012). It is up to the media to position themselves as institutions who should show non-traditional images, stories, and voices in order to make cultural diversity feasible (Fürsich, 2010).

### The ‘decolonisation’ of adoption

Critical adoption studies have recently generated new academic interest in the colonial power mechanisms that structure today's transnational adoption practices. Within the practice of transnational adoption, the unequal position of power and unequal reproductive rights of affluent adoptive parents in the ‘West’ and the impoverished biological parents in the “South”, play a huge role (Tigervall & Hübinette, 2010). International adoption is therefore seen as a transition from an underdeveloped country to an advanced industrialized region.

Transnational adoption cannot be understood without considering the colonial conceptions and practices, and the structural disadvantages these practices have caused (Sidhu, 2018). In this regard Wekker et al (2001) categorise transnational adoption as a continuation of the colonial project, namely the involuntary removal of children from the Global South to adoptive families in the Global North where the relationship is marked by colonial, ‘racial’ and gendered hierarchies. Therefore, the influence of coloniality in transnational adoption practices is revisited in several studies that consider contemporary theories of coloniality, postcolonialism and decoloniality. (Cawayu & De Graeve, 2020).

To relinquish one’s own children and give them up for adoption to richer countries because of the penile economic situation, is a somewhat weird concept. Although love is universal, it comes in different accents and expressions, interlinked with cultural boundaries. Through adoption, a lot of cultural expressions and habits are erased and adapted to Western norms and values (Daelman, 2011). Even though there are less colour barriers for Chinese adoptees, there is a colonial dominance relationship of the ‘West’ towards the East (2018). The blurring of ‘racial’ and ‘ethnic’ boundaries within the process of transnational adoption are also accompanied by the blurring of cultural boundaries in the adoption country. An example of this is the stereotypical expectation of Asian-born children being excellent at mathematical courses. The significant numbers on Chinese adoption, and the intercontinental environment in which they have been presented, leads to the examination of how adoptive parents address their child’s culture (Quiroz, 2012).

The adoption stream is one-sided, the adoption picture resembles ‘white’ parents with a foreign (coloured) baby, never the other way around. Adoptive parents often want to help when visiting local orphanages after seeing ‘their adoption child’. However, it is important to note that any Western ‘white’ charitable initiatives come from a neo-colonial and paternal framework, where the poorer countries ‘need’ the help from ‘white’ Westerners. Initiatives only point out even more the capitalist practices and neo-colonialism playing in the background (De Graeve K. , 2014). The humanitarian aspect comes to play when adopting from an economically disadvantaged country. However, it is important to remember that these are children, not (charity) *projects*. A tendency of humanitarianism of ‘helping’ or ‘saving’ a child from a ‘less developed’ country, frequently comes forth among adoption parents (Kubo, 2010). The common misconception that children can be given the chance of a (better) life by better economic opportunities in the ‘West’ remains (Johnson, Banghan, & Liyao, 1998). Johnson (2016) takes a critical look at the dominant view on the inclusion of the abandoned children in the local population, also described as the 'rural-adoptions'. Children who were abandoned in rural areas are taken in by a new family within hours or days and thus immediately find their place in the local population. Johnson et al (1998) state this contrasts with children who spend months in orphanages with a high mortality rate and where there are strict restrictions on who can adopt them.

FAVOURISM OF CHINESE GIRLS

It's unknown why foreign families are heavily focused on Chinese girls. According to studies, adoptive parents, who are predominantly ‘white’, middle-class, and well-educated, prefer Asian girls for a variety of reasons associated with gender and ‘ethnicity’ (Zelizer). Adoptive parents may be concerned about their adopted children's dysfunctional social behaviour and view girls as less problematic than boys in this regard (Baccara, 2010). Furthermore, statistics have indicated that around 60% of prospective couples prefer girls to boys (Goldbergh, 2009). Adoption is also heavily disproportionately ‘racialized’ by preferring Chinese girls.

Many adoptive parents assume Chinese girls to be easier to integrate into ‘white’ families than ‘black’ children (Dorow S. , 2006). According to a survey, ‘white’ adoptive families were seven times more likely to want to adopt a non-African child than an African one. According to the survey, American parents would be glad to pay $38,000 more to adopt a child who is not coloured (Ortiz & Briggs, 2003). Asian infants are often favoured because they are culturally distinct but not ‘racially’ so (Kubo, 2010).

PRACTICES OF DISPLACEMENT

Although many adoptions are driven by the prospective parents' infertility or other unforeseen circumstances, occasionally, adoptions are linked to forcible separations. The "lost birds," "métis children," and "stolen generations" are examples of indigenous and minority groups (Native Americans, Aboriginals in Australia, and mixed-race children during colonial times) who were forcibly separated from their parents and then placed in the homes of "white" civilised people as part of a civilising project. As a result, not only children, but also families and nations are involved in global adoption processes (Candaele, 2020). These projects are occasionally paraphrased as ‘ethnic’ and cultural genocides (Hübinette T. , 2006). However, there is reasoning behind the targeting of children since they were perceived as malleable and a vulnerable demographic. During colonial times in Rwanda/ Congo/ Burundi, mixed-race children were ‘evacuated’ to Belgium since European intervention was deemed necessary for otherwise possible degeneration of these children, when left behind on the African continent. In other words, they were ‘*abandoned children in need of rescue*’[[10]](#footnote-10) (Heynssens, 2016).

Bowie (2004) points out similarities between the practices of transnational adoption and the transatlantic slave trade:

1. Both exist due to extreme consumer demand, private market interests and highly driven profits.
2. Both share a pricing system based on the ‘value’ of the person.
3. Both are separated from their biological families/parents and siblings.
4. Both are stripped of their native languages and cultures.
5. Both share a global logistics system whereby the transportation of these people is vital.
6. Both practices share the same vision whereby their reallocation to their new homes will undeniably lead to a civil, wealthy and better future than the one provided at their birth country (p.21).

The same parallel is found in transnational adoption and forced displacement practices (Heynssens, 2016):

1. Both adoption children and mixed-race children were seen as a vulnerable group in need of rescue, by the same Western powers.
2. Both policymakers in China as in Congo feared that indigenous mothers could not take care of their child.
3. During both removals, children were sent to European countries to *benefit* from European education which would correct their previous biological predisposition.
4. In both cases, many biological parents were denied the rights to their child(ren).
5. In both cases, the child was first put under state guardianship before being sent off.
6. Both experience a physical, emotional, and linguistic distance between kin and children.
7. Both experience minimal to no contact with the originating society.
8. In both cases, the institutions were overpopulated with barely enough equipment to provide adequate care for the children.
9. In both cases, the institutions depended heavily on governmental support (p.17).

### Culture keeping

LIVING BETWEEN 2 IDENTITIES

As adoptees get older, many question their personal identity and gain curiosity about their origins, birth culture and motherland. Donaldson’s research (2009) concluded that adult adoptees still struggle with their (perceived) identity and self-image. Most of his participants claimed they felt ‘white’ and lived ‘white’, though the outside world imposes a pre-perceived notion of identity on the adoptee (e.g., as a coloured person based on their skin colour). Being confronted with this notion on a regular basis can have an impact on the self-definition and the interrelated meaning of 'the Other' (Yngvesson B. , 2010). These notions seem harmless, but they imply that you are not from 'here', (in this case Belgium) and can therefore bring about negative feelings. *Self-othering* can result in internalised self-hatred, which implies the silencing of oneself by oneself (Wyver, 2017).

Another study suggested by Basow et al (2008) state the importance of ‘ethnic’ identity and acceptance since this influences the mental wellbeing of the adoptees. The identification of their home country and ‘ethnicity’ depends on how Chinese adoptees were confronted with China and Chinese ‘ethnicity’ in their upbringing. This phenomenon is described as the concept of 'self-definition' (Wekker, Asberg, Van der Tuin, & Frederiks, 2007). People with different roots have different identities. Depending on the moment or the period, but also on the place or the environment, a certain identity may come to the forefront or be considered more important than (one) other (Benyaich, 2013).

One explanation for why Chinese adoptees or Chinese people growing up in Europe identify more with their European identity comes from the number of reference points with which they compare and define themselves, with the difference from the majority group - in this case ‘white’ people - usually being one of the starting points for the results of self-definitions. In other words, adoptees compare themselves to the everyday people around them (Bélanger & Verkuyten, 2010). Asian adolescents are embarrassed or ashamed of their ‘racial’ background and adoptive parents describe their children as apathetic, ashamed, or confused about their ‘racial’ background and cultural heritage (Bex, 2021).

CULTURE KEEPING

*Culture keeping* is often done by adoptive parents when adopting internationally. Culture keeping is when the adoptive parents replicate (partially) the native culture of their adoptive child (e.g., language lessons, certain foods/food habits, cross-cultural contacts, membership in cultural associations, etc.). Culture keeping is based on the social construct of ‘racial’ and or ‘ethnic’ identity or ‘ethnicity’, while being interwoven with the social construction of motherhood (Jacobson, 2008). In the preparation procedure of adoption, future adoptive parents receive information sessions, language courses and cultural workshops on the cultural identity of their adoption child, even when those children are too young to share memories of their birth country (Wekker, Asberg, Van der Tuin, & Frederiks, 2007). While in the previous century, the country of birth and its culture of the adoption child were often ignored or covered up as much as possible, the current paradigm in the Flemish adoption practice emphasizes the importance of the child’s roots. Having knowledge of the country of origin seems to be self-evident nowadays, when adopting transnationally. Exploring the culture of the adoption child is perceived as an essentiality for the adoptive parents as the adopted child.

Gatherings are part of this identity development, where other adoptive parents can interact with one another, and the adoption children gather more information regarding their cultural inheritance. These gatherings often work with cultural traditions, food tastings, language exchanges, etc. VAG (*Vereniging voor Kind en Adoptiegezin*) organizes such “family days” yearly. Through these gatherings, parents want to show their child(ren) that there are other adoptive families in Belgium who have adopted from the same culture/nationality. In this way, they provide their children the opportunity to bond with other peers (De Graeve K. , 2016). The question is Who gains the most from these meetups, exactly? The adoptees? Or the adoptive parents who are proud of their multicultural kindness and charitable work? (Castañeda, 2011). Even though adoption children are legally and effectively removed from their birthland and birth family and given a new identity, the current adoption discourse emphasises the importance of their cultural inheritance and the fact that removing all cultural ties would be extremely damaging and nearly impossible (Marre, 2007).

*Culture keeping* lays largely in the hands of the adoptive parents, because of this it becomes a subjective, one-sided discourse where the specific culture is often a *staged authenticity* since the specific culture is frequently misrepresented by the parents or local organisations (Quiroz, 2012). Thus, Chinese adoptees, grow up with constructions about China and Chinese ‘ethnicity’ that reflect (‘white’) adoptive parents and their environment, where adoptive parents try to celebrate the birth culture of their adoptee, often representing a superficial, stereotyped and/or romanticised version of the birth culture. In practice, the birth culture may be celebrated, for example, by celebrating 'Chinese New Year' (also known as Lunar New Year) or going out to eat in a traditional Chinese restaurant (De Graeve K. , 2010). According to Louie (2015), there are adoptive parents who research more about their child's birth culture and country of origin in order to hone their own (stereotypical) constructions.

CULTURE AVOIDANCE

*Culture avoidance* is another feature of transnational adoption in which the child’s biological culture or origin is not addressed. Some adoptive parents believe that keeping the child’s birth culture, will create separation in their relationship, since the child will feel more connected to its cultural heritage than towards the adoptive parents’ (Spring, 2006). Thus, adoptive parents handle out of fear, and emphasize their child's birth culture and country of origin less, so that they do not become estranged from their children (Cole, 1992). A high proportion of adoptive parents claim not to perceive colour, 'race' or ‘ethnicity’. The logic being that the child can thus grow up not feeling 'different’ (Soon Huh & Reid, 2000). Nevertheless, growing up colour-blind (or 'race-blind') in an age of multiculturalism can only make it more complex for a transnationally adopted teenager, Louie (2015) claims.

CULTURE TOURISM

In conclusion, *culture keeping* refers to maintaining the culture. *Culture tourism* on the other hand refers to the access and appropriation of the selected culture (in this case the Chinese culture), through different forms e.g., ‘ethnic’ festivals, historic sites, root trips, heritage camps, museums, neighbourhoods, etc. The neoliberal environment stimulates *cultural tourism* within adoption (Smith & Robinson, 2006). Lastly, *culture avoidance* refers to its elimination of the cultural heritage. This means that the adoptive child will be stripped of any ties to its original land and that cultural representation will not be displayed (‘ethnic’ holidays, language courses) (Spring, 2006). There is a certain commercialisation of cultural tourism and transnational adoption, generating up to billions of dollars in annual revenues for both sending and receiving countries (Europol, 2005). *Culture* has become a key feature of the adoption practice and a hot topic within the cultural identity debate, due to its bonding capacities between the adopted child and its adoptive parents. However, the question remains: “What are the parameters of culture keeping? How much is enough?” (Quiroz, 2012).

### Kinship

Howell analyses these social gatherings (as mentioned above) and compares them to family meetings, which revolve around *kinning*, also known as the symbolic connection between adoption children and their family/ community (Howell S. , 2006). Transnationally adopted children often get integrated easily into the adoptive parents’ family and kinship due to the parents’ hard work at *kinning* (Howell S. , 2007). Adoption is a story with three parties involved: biological parents, adoptive parents and the adopted person. These parties are inextricably linked (Dejonckheere, 2009). Until the 1990s, most people saw adoption as a severing of the link between natural parent and child. No attention at all was paid to the biological parents and the child was raised as if he or she were their own biological child. However, with time, it became clear that although the legal ties had been severed, the blood bond remained (Willems & Starre, 2006).

### The search for “roots”

A considerable number of Chinese adoptees have a certain interest and/or curiosity about their country of origin, ‘ethnicity’ and birth culture (Ponte, Wang, & Fan, 2010). A significant number of Chinese adoptees and their adoptive parents undertake a “return trip” to China. Such trips are also known as heritage/ motherland/ homeland tours. These tours often offer visits to popular Chinese landmarks but also include visits to children’s orphanages. Many adoptive parents and organisations that arrange for these visits, claim that the trip in search for personal history is essential for the adopted children in their mental and emotional growth. However, the specified outcome has not been systematically proven to be true (Ponte, Wang, & Fan, 2010). Not all adoptees can travel back to their country of origin and make a roots journey, which can make it challenging to find out whether you feel at home in that country or not (Bex, 2021). Thus, it is important to consider that not all adoptees want to return, either emotionally, temporally or financially (Yngvesson B. , 2003). Visiting their birthplace(s) may again raise questions (Ponte, Wang, & Fan, 2010).

According to psychologist Betty Jean Lifton (1994) the lack of knowledge of their cultural heritage leads many adoptees to feel abandoned and alienated, which can be alleviated by reuniting with their birthland and/or their birth family. Some adoptive parents are openminded about the idea of returning to the orphanages in China since it means they will receive more details about their adopted child(ren)’s history (Since the child’s heritage, birth records and birthparents often remains vague) (Kahan, 2006). It is extremely important that the adoptees themselves make the choice to travel back - and not the adoptive parents. For young adoptees, travelling back to the country of origin can instil fear of being abandoned again (Selman P. , 2020). Chinese adoptees apparently feel a stronger connection to the Chinese culture and its Chinese people after their return.

This is often because, for the first time, they were able to walk down the street without feeling like the ‘Other’ or without being stared at (Ponte, Wang, & Fan, 2010). Research by Selman (2020) shows that most Chinese adoptees prefer to start their search at a later age, often when they have already left the parental home. The environment in which adoptees developed their ‘racial’ identity seems to play an important role in this. Adoptees who had a positive development of their ‘racial’ identity, for instance due to the ‘racial’ diversity in their schools or the diverse ‘racial’ role models during their childhood, are more likely to start their search in China (Selman P. , 2020). As child abandonment is an illegal practice in China, the reuniting of first parents with their children is rather sensitive. This makes the chance of a successful search considerably smaller than in other countries. Currently, the biological parents cannot be punished for offences committed more than 10 years ago. This makes searches in China possible, which is why an increasing number of adoptees are returning to China to look for their relatives (Yngvesson B. , 2003). According to Tieman et al (2008), transnationally adopted individuals experience an increase in social pressure to educate themselves about their histories since Western societies have become more transparent about issues within the adoption process.

PARENTHOOD AND GENETIC ANXIETY

The reproduction of children from the adoptee later can cause a ‘genetic anxiety’, whereby the own unknown genetic background must be faced, due to their biological family’s unknown medical history (Willems & Starre, 2006). Parenthood is in fact an opportunity to look back at one's own past. Through the birth of a child, an adoptee comes into contact for the first time with someone to whom he is biologically related (Brodzinsky, 1992).

### Conclusion:

It can be deduced from the above studies that the development of an identity for an adoptee is somewhat different than for someone who is not adopted. Adoption offers additional dimensions to the development of an identity. After all, adoption is part of someone's personal history (Brodzinsky, 1992). Therefore, it is important for adoptees to give their adoption a place in the development of their identity (Willems & Starre, 2006). However, this is not obvious since the adoptee must take into account different identities. To begin with, there is the culture in which one grows up. The family in which the adoptee came as a child will also have a great influence on the development of their identity.

Two other aspects that play a role in identity development are firstly the culture of the country of origin and secondly the natural parents of the adoptee. These aspects should each have a place in the identity of the adoptee. As already shown in the study by Wekker et al. (2007) these studies indicate that the adoption story does not end when a person enters adulthood.

According to Cox and Lieberthal (2005), adoption and the formation of identity continue to have an influence throughout the life of the adoptee and even on that of subsequent generations. Ypenburg (2009) also recognises that identity development is a lifelong process. The question "Who am I?" is therefore influenced by all kinds of force fields. Some of these are hereditary factors, cultural influences, perceptions of others and what is passed on through the family. Since these fields are subject to change, this will also have an impact on the identity of the individual. Furthermore, the images and ideas that Chinese adoptees have about their own ‘ethnicity’, the culture of their birth and the country of origin are thus influenced by how they are perceived within their upbringing and direct environment (Bex, 2021).

Representation within the media influences the self-perception adoptees carry. Asian women are more likely than ‘black’ women to endorse Western beauty ideals and norms (Chin Evans & McConnell, 2003). Adoption is a system of new relationships concerning nations, families, and persons, beyond the reach of the adoptee. The structures of transnational adoption are driven by these 'North-South relationships' (Yngvesson B. , 2010). The child’s interests must be viewed as paramount. Transparency in adoption practices must be possible and family ties must be maintained, so that it is possible to look back with pride to the country of origin and biological family and return if the need arises (Selman P. , 2020).

# Chapter 2: Methodology

This research aims to explore various themes within adoption by organising semi-structured in-depth interviews with women adoptees in Belgium. Literature findings suggest that adoptees have varied expectations, experiences, and opinions about their adoption process. Therefore, delineating adoptees’ experiences from those of adoptive parents is critical. Furthermore, findings suggest scarcity in adult adoptees’ experiences, whereas minor adoptees are often interviewed more. Moreover, there is a shortage in topics such as personal development, disorders, and the impact of adoption.

To answer my research question, a qualitative perception study was conducted. The choice was made to work with qualitative data based on the conviction that each experience is unique to each individual. Working with quantitative research methods would lead to a reduction of the complex reality (Straus, 1987). When working with an in-depth interview, much attention is paid to the meaning and the perception of the person involved. An in-depth interview as a conversation method also offers the possibility to go deeply into certain themes. This research wants to offer space to the wisdom of experts by experience within adoption, namely the adoptees themselves. These experiences are all too often suppressed by the scientific discourse of truth, knowledge, and power (Roets, Goodley, & Van Hove, 2007). Also, the strong focus on social problems of adoptees makes it difficult to bring the experiences of those involved to the foreground.

This study wants to mark a clear change in this area and therefore puts the experiences of the participants first. The interviewee is central as an actor in the whole story. Since there is no previous research of Chinese adoptees in Belgium, no hypotheses can be drawn up. In the stories of the participants, commonalities are sought during the analysis. This methodology is what Polkinghorne (1995) calls 'analysis of narratives'. The core of this qualitative empirical research therefore is the discovery and description of categories and the relationships between them. The following section will enlighten the specific research techniques used, such as the data collection, the composition of the research group and the data analysis. Finally, the procedural ethics and reflections on the position of the researcher during the establishment of this master’s thesis will be examined more thoroughly in the fifth part.

## Research group

The intended target group for this study were transnational women adoptees in Belgium. The inclusion criteria for the study therefore concerned three requirements; firstly, being involved in an inter-country adoption, secondly being born in China and thirdly identify as a woman. This excludes adoptees from other birth countries, domestic adoptees as well as male adoptees. Although this concerns a very interesting group and research here is also desirable, this research chose to include only women Chinese adoptees in the research design.

The main reasons are the underexposed subject matter, the cultural factor, and the political element of the one-child policy. Therefore, to make the participants' stories more accessible for comparison, only women Chinese adoptees were included in the study. Persons who offered themselves for participation in the study but did not meet the above-mentioned inclusion criteria were thus refused.

In total, three persons were withheld from participation, due to not coming from the desired country, origin or gender. Eventually, twelve people were reached who met all the inclusion criteria and were also willing to participate in the study. Therefore, the final study group consisted of twelve participants, all identified as women. The age of the participants ranged from nineteen to 25 years, with a mean age of 22 years. At the time of their adoption, the adoptees were between eight and thirteen months old.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Age** | **Gender** | **Birthplace: rural or urban** | **Quality of relationships with friends and family** | **Age of adoption** |
| **An Mei** | 22 | Woman | Rural | Positive | 12 months |
| **Babeth** | 19 | Woman | Rural | Positive | 8 months |
| **Duo** | 22 | Woman | Rural | Positive | 12 months |
| **Lie** | 25 | Woman | Rural | Positive | 18 months |
| **Lin C** | 22 | Woman | Rural/ Urban | Positive | 15 months |
| **Lin P** | 21 | Woman | Rural | Positive | 11 months |
| **LJ** | 25 | Woman | Urban | Positive | 32 months |
| **Nienke-Lou** | 22 | Woman | Rural | Positive | 12-13 monts |
| **Nina** | 21 | Woman | Rural | Positive | 11 months |
| **Noa** | 20 | Woman | Rural | Positive | 7-8 months |
| **Yani** | 22 | Woman | Rural | Positive | 8-9 months |
| **Yo-Lin** | 23 | Woman | Rural | Positive | 12 months |

## Data collection procedure

The search for possible participants started in April 2022. In this period, numerous social media posts were launched on various channels such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (See Appendix C). Four of the twelve participants were reached through this call. The other participants were found by means of snowball sampling. Contact details of people who met the inclusion criteria were passed on to the researcher via participants who had already been reached or acquaintances of the researcher.

In preparation of the in-depth interviews, a literature study on adoption was consulted, whereby some themes were distilled to serve as a guideline during the interview. As a result of this preparatory process, the researcher came up with a structured list of discussion points which ensured that all aspects were adequately highlighted during the interview. (See Appendix B). Qualitative data was derived from multiple open-ended questions in the interview protocol. The interview included a variety of questions regarding experiences, feelings, and perceptions. The questions were developed with the assistance of the promotor’s input and a friended adoptee. Due to the Belgian/ Flemish scope, the interviews were conducted and transcribed in Dutch. The data was then translated into English for the purpose of this study. The interview translations aimed for conceptual equivalency by adopting sentences that were as similar to their meaning as feasible.

During the interviews, the experience of the adoption through childhood and the process towards adulthood was probed. In addition, the relationship with the adoptive parents was explored in depth. Furthermore, the experiences of the adoptees with the search for their roots and possibly the corresponding roots journey and/or search for biological parents were discussed. Again, the personal experience of these events were pivotal. The researcher's input was as limited as possible. Important for the research is that the information came from the participants themselves and was not insinuated by the researcher. At the end of each interview, the interviewee was the ample opportunity to add to what had been said or what was lacking. The interviews took place in the period of April 2022 to May 2022. As mentioned above, one interview was planned per participant.

PROCEDURAL ETHICS

To protect the participants, ethical considerations were addressed at every stage of the empirical aspect of my research. The basic rules of scientific research are considered procedural ethics (Mortelmans, 2013).

To achieve the desired ecological validity, the interviews were determined at the location chosen by the respondents involved. All participants chose a context in which they felt at ease. This was mostly the home context, private spaces or online. It can therefore be said that the results of the study are representative of the normal actions of the participants in normal acting situations (Wardekker, 1999).

The interview always initiated with clarification on the informed consent form (see Appendix A), after which it was signed by both the participant and the researcher. A short introduction on the topic was given, with the concerning themes. Further guidelines were given regarding data protection, anonymity, transcriptions, and the right to stop the participation at any time. It was indicated in advance that each interview would take approximately one hour, however interviews lasted between 45 and 70 minutes. Additionally, an audio recording of each interview was made, with the verbal consent of each person involved.

## Analysis

As mentioned above, an audio recording was made of all interviews, which were then written out. Initially, the software programme Nvivo was preferred to analyse collected data, since it analyses the qualitative data quickly and efficiently (Mortelmans & Van Looy, 2009). Due to technical difficulties, manual analysing and coding of existing data was implemented. The inductive method was used whereby the codebook was generated while the data was being coded.

As a result, the codes are derived from the processed analytical material, whereby the researcher reread all of the data, gradually developing a set of codes. As a result, coding and drafting the codebook went hand in hand (Mortelmans & Van Looy, 2009). This method of deriving theory from collected data can be placed within Glaser and Strauss' (1967) 'grounded theory' established in sociological research. As a result, the researcher's method is inspired by this method, in which ideas are produced in connection to data. However, the analysed data is not the only source of information since the literature review is also an important part of the research process.

To guarantee internal validity as much as possible, an attempt was made to reach a diverse audience by means of calls through different channels. The materials and procedures used will also undoubtedly have an influence on the internal validity of this study (Wardekker, 1999). The results of this study cannot be automatically generalised to all Chinese adoptees in Belgium. They do give an approximate picture of the potential respondents.

## Findings

The following chapter provides an overview of the data obtained through the qualitative interviews conducted with Chinese adoptees, both offline and online. The collected information will be divided in 4 main themes. When providing quotes below, footnotes are added at the end of the quote which means the original translation (in Dutch) can be found at the foot of the page. A clear distinction is made between the birthparents and adoptive parents, however in the interviews all adoptees have used the word “parents” to describe their adoptive parents. Firstly, the dynamics of various relationships of adoptees will be analysed. Secondly, a focus will be put on the topic of discrimination and the encounter of racism in Belgium. Thirdly, identity and its additional factors will be discussed. Lastly, the conversation on adoption as a practice will be analysed.

### Relationship dynamics

The overview of the empirical data starts with the dynamics of different relationships from the adoptees’ perspective. All interviewees have stated the quality of relations with their friends and family as positive and/or very good.

#### Openness about adoption

Communicating openly about adoption and exchanging feelings regarding the practice between the adoption parents and the adopted child is essential for a trustworthy and social relationship. All participants mentioned their parent(s) openness and transparency about the practice of adoption. The participants’ parents mainly took the initiative to discuss adoption and even supported or anticipated the roots trips and/or the search for the biological parents.

*“My parents have always been very open. They were more open and engaged into the communication on adoption than I was. They have encouraged me to find my biologic parents. As little girl I knew I was adopted since my parents made that clear from the beginning. I have a good relationship with my parents.” [[11]](#footnote-11) (Nienke-Lou)*

However, two out of twelve adoptees did not feel the need to talk about adoption/ were not communicative on the subject.

*“Adoption is not really a topic that is discussed. With my friends, it depends; if they ask me about it, I will answer as much as possible. My adoptive parents would answer honestly if I had questions, but it has never been discussed thoroughly. There have been conversations here and there, but I've never really been a super open person to talk about everything since communication between my adoptive parents and me was always quite difficult (not anymore actually but up until a year and a half ago it was). They probably did tell me about it [adoption] on their own, but also just because I realised that I didn't look like my brothers, sisters and parents. I didn't look like them. So anyway, questions would come from me to them. But it all really remained very vague, and I never really went into depth about it.”[[12]](#footnote-12) (Lin C)*

Some barriers can arise between the adoption parents and the adopted child. Not feeling safe enough, not wanting to be as open with the parents, age barrier, certain restrictions, etc are a couple of examples why children might not open up to their parents. Their first choice might be opening up to friends and their inner circle. Having friends who share the same age, or whom they share hobbies, classes together, etc creates a certain bond whereby the adoptee might feel the need/at ease to discuss adoption.

The adoptees share the same viewpoint of their ability of engaging in the topic of adoption with their friends, however, do not necessarily feel the need too. Following adoptees explain it further:

*“I have had lots of questions regarding my roots and my adoption experience. Friends have been curious and are allowed to ask these questions. I’m very open to it. However, they won’t delve any deeper into the subject unless I’ll make it clear it’s fine to do so. Even though I know I can talk about it, I don’t feel the need to do so.”[[13]](#footnote-13) (Duo)*

*“The same open communication with my parents about adoption is also possible with my friends. I know I can talk to them about it [adoption]. But I don't really feel the need to talk to them about it. If I have a problem or if someone shouts at me, I can tell my friends that I feel bad or that I am being looked at strangely. So, yes, I am very open with my friends.”[[14]](#footnote-14) (Yani)*

#### Openness about racism

Transracial adoptees are often confronted with racism, marginalisation, and discrimination. Some adoptees indicated that racism wasn’t present or on a tolerable level, in which they did not feel the need to talk about any incidents with their parents or friends. Other adoptees felt scared to talk about racism with their adoptive parents or did not want to burden them with it. Most adoptees stated that they preferred not to talk about the subject with their adoptive parents, since they would not understand it anyway. There is more openness towards friends on the subject, than towards family. However, even than a distinction is sometimes made to which friends they will discuss racism with (‘white’ or other Chinese adoptees or other friends of colour).

*“Communication and bullying were subjects that were never discussed with us. I was not open about it. I mainly had the mindset of "Why should I talk to someone about that [discrimination/bullying]? I'm only bothering people with it". I also don't like to put my problems on other people's shoulders. It was my problem and I had to solve it myself. In hindsight, of course, that wasn't such a good idea, because it had a huge impact on my mental well-being, and I think that if I had been more open about it and communicated more at an earlier age, I would have been stronger on my own now and in my adolescent years, but that wasn't the case.”[[15]](#footnote-15) (Lin C)*

*“I recently talked to my parents about such an incident. But they don't really understand it...but I think that's how most people interpret it, that they interpret it as a joke and that I have to be able to handle it. But that still gives me a certain feeling of discomfort and not being at ease. Of course, they don't understand because they don't experience it themselves. My adopted sisters understand me 100%. So they do get me. In addition, I also have those girls that I was adopted with [from China] that I see every year and every time we could talk about that [racism/discrimination] and I knew that I was not alone.”[[16]](#footnote-16) (Babeth)*

*“My parents were very open with us about bullying. At a certain point, my mum wanted to take me to see a teacher [because of bullying at school] and I didn't want to, because that was really embarrassing at that point, going to the school with your mum. But in hindsight, I would have found it much worse if they hadn't intervened and if I would have just accepted it, so I'm grateful for that now. We were able to talk about it a lot at home and how we shouldn't show that behaviour to other children ourselves. So there was communication.”[[17]](#footnote-17) (Lie)*

#### Feelings towards other adoptees

When asking the participants if they’ve ever felt lonely in Belgium as Chinese adoptee, four out of twelve answered yes, the others no. All participants knew another adopted person however for some interviewees it wouldn’t have been an added value in feeling lonely.

*“Sometimes I have felt lonely. Hamme [the respondent's hometown] also had a village mentality, so I sometimes felt alone. People often just did not understand what adopting a Chinese child entailed. The principle and the procedure, especially from so many years ago, is such an intense process and many people do not understand what it entails because of the village mentality and the attitudes they hold dear. As I get older and sit on a very diverse campus [in Brussels], that sense of loneliness comes much less. You see everything here, it's super multicultural and now I feel it much less naturally.”[[18]](#footnote-18) (Noa)*

*“I have not felt lonely as a Chinese adoptee and that is because I know and am friends with enough Chinese adoptees. And I am grateful to my parents for the fact that we are part of the adoption group or the China group, which also includes the Princen family [interviewees 6 and 10]. If I had not had that chance, I would have felt lonely and perhaps gone looking for other adoptees on my own.”[[19]](#footnote-19) (LJ)*

When asked how they would respond when hypothetically a Chinese group of people or a group of Chinese adoptees would move close them, they all answered neutrally that it wouldn’t affect them or wouldn’t excite them as much.

*“I think I would like it if a Chinese group would move closer to me, however I wouldn’t have the urge to go out and befriend them or share a lot of contact with.”[[20]](#footnote-20) (Nienke-Lou)*

*“It would not affect me. It is not that I am going to join it instantly. I don't need to belong to something either. I am a person on my own so I really don't have a need for that.”[[21]](#footnote-21) (Lin C)*

#### Added value of knowing other adoptees

Knowing other adoptees, including Chinese adoptees, can create a connection or a certain bond where adoptees can talk about specific topics that others (non-adoptees) may not be able to understand. With the interviews, interviewees stated that knowing other adoptees was pleasant to talk about certain topics they all have experienced, however it wasn’t the biggest priority to them. The ones who are in contact with other adoptees through adoption groups, have stated that Covid-19 made them meet fewer times and now they do not see each other anymore/ or very little.

*“The added value of having other adoptees in my life is that you are not alone. That you are able to talk about things related to adoption. Not many people have experienced adoption and when you can talk about it together and they understand you 100% because they have been through the same thing, that is very nice.”[[22]](#footnote-22) (Lin P)*

*“I found it an added value. It is not that I still have lots of contact with them, but it was definitely an added value that we could come into contact with other adoptees. Because then you immediately share a bond with each other. They also know what I am talking about when I say that I do not feel at home or welcome here or share something else. They understand me. Because I can't say that to white friends, because they will never understand 100%. So it's nice to be able to share that with someone who understands you 100%.”[[23]](#footnote-23) (Yani)*

#### Affinity towards other ‘racialised’ groups

It is important to inquire about a possible affinity towards other ‘racialised’ groups. This affinity could arise because of shared physical characteristics (Asian appearance) or because of shared background (possible ‘racism’, discriminatory incidents). Out of the twelve interviewees, four adoptees admitted to having more affinity towards ‘racialised’ groups, while eight interviewees did not feel a stronger connection with these groups.

*“No, I have no greater affinity with any racialised groups. I must also say that I was lucky to be adopted as an Asian and not as someone with darker skin. In that case, I think there would be a lot more racist remarks.”[[24]](#footnote-24) (Duo)*

*“Hm, I do have an affinity with people of colour in the sense that we both live in the Western world where the white man is still on top, so to speak. I also have more affinity with Asian people. But I am very aware that the image of Asians is more positive than that of coloured people or Turks or Moroccans and I know that I am lucky to belong to the Asian group, because we would have a better image. So I am aware of that.”[[25]](#footnote-25) (LJ)*

### Racism and discrimination

In the European context, transnational adoption is also often equated with transracial adoption, whereby children from Asia, Africa and Latin America are relocated to Europe. Transnational adoptees are confronted at an individual and structural level with new adjustments in a new country. (Trenka, Oparah, & Shin, 2006). Additionally, transracial adoptees are also confronted with racism, marginalisation, and discrimination. These confrontations have an impact on how adoptees view themselves and how they are viewed by the social environment, institutions, adoptive parents, families, etc (Trenka, Oparah, & Shin, 2006). All adoptees interviewed have experienced discriminatory remarks, most of them very few, while two others experienced bullying behaviour weekly or even daily. All of the interviewees believed that most remarks could be blamed on age and the plain stupidness of people.

*“When I was younger, there was the occasional joke specifically about Asians; about my yellow skin, slant[[26]](#footnote-26) eyes, etc. But as I grew older, not anymore unless they were really simple-minded people. For example, once on the bus I had an incident with blue collar workers, and they made fun of me. But it's been since secondary school that I've experienced something like that where people provoked a reaction in me. I must say that I am always slightly stressed that people might make remarks about my appearance.”[[27]](#footnote-27) (Duo)*

*“In my opinion, I have experienced discrimination to a lesser degree. I have been shouted at before or, when I was in the bus, I have received remarks such as "Bami slice" from young people, but then I just think to myself "Why on earth are you bringing fast-food products into this to insult me? I really can't complain about being racially insulted because I have heard so many worse examples from others. I occasionally experience it to a certain extent but usually more indirectly. With how they look at me. I think the inner racism is even worse. It feels like that. I also believe that people who openly shout these kinds of insults at me are more likely to have some problems of their own [psychological,* *insecurities]. Whereas people who are really disgusted by another person inside, just because they look different, that's harder to deal with.”[[28]](#footnote-28) (Yani)*

#### Influence of Covid-19 on discriminatory remarks towards Chinese adoptees

Literature states that Covid-19 has triggered a rise in implicit and explicit racism among Asian populations in North America, Europe, and Oceania. In addition, they experience an increase in the use of ‘racial’ slurs. Such slurs to ‘ethnic’ minorities are called ethnofaulisms (Boon, 2020). However, during the interviews, eleven out of twelve adoptees stated they have seen no rise in hate slurs or discriminatory remarks since Covid-19 started. Furthermore, most of them were initially scared to experience an increase in discrimination.

*“For me, Covid-19 has not really had any influence. At the beginning I had an incident on the bus with old ladies saying " she has Corona", but that was it.”[[29]](#footnote-29) (Nienke-Lou)*

*“I received a foolish remark twice during Corona in Ghent. I had started working in a South American tapas restaurant. I only worked there four times and two out of four times I was approached in a racist way. I was very shocked at the time, because it had never been shown so openly towards me, it was not part of my everyday reality, which is certainly a luxury. But anyway, there was a drunk group, young white men, and they were really making a fuss. So I kept the conversation to a minimum and just did my duty. At one point I heard "Eih, eih, that's a Chinese, she's going to give us Corona". Anyway, I could deal with that because it was pure stupidity but then, the next time I came to work there, there was another big group of white young men. Suddenly a boy from the table asked me if I had an iPhone charger. I didn't have one, neither did my colleagues or the kitchen staff. I went back to say that and got the response "uh, why the fuck don't you have a charger". Anyway, I didn't answer that because I knew they had been drinking so I left their table, shrugged my shoulders and left. As I step away I hear behind me "But that's a dirty Chinese, a ladyboy anyway" and this in front of the whole restaurant, to get my attention. Afterwards, they also shouted "hey ladyboy" several times. I just started crying and crying.”[[30]](#footnote-30) (Yo-Lin)*

#### Prejudice at school

When discussing racism and discrimination, the additional factor of school comes in to play. To question the school’s responsibility towards racism, xenophobia, sinophobia, is important. Not only to comfort students who share different roots but also to make a position statement on the topic of racism and the intolerance for it. Ten adoptees stated there were no anti-racism campaigns in their school environment. Two adoptees did experience an anti-racism or an anti-bullying campaign.

*“We did get information and lessons about preconceptions in general, but not in depth. And there was no reference to bias against Chinese or Asians anyway. Not at all. Never in school.”[[31]](#footnote-31) (Lin C)*

When asked if there should be more campaigns/courses on discrimination against Asians, in school, eight said yes whereby one adoptee stated that it also needed to include the colonial past, one who doesn’t know, one who says it depends on course and school environment (multicultural or not), one no since it adds in on the ‘racial’ differences in the classroom, one with no data.

*“I do think that racism and prejudice against Asians should be discussed more. But on the other hand, I think it's also a bit complicated because I was the only Asian in the class and I was adopted, so then you automatically start targeting yourself, which I don't think is the intention either. I think it depends from course to course and from school to school.”[[32]](#footnote-32)(An Mei)*

### Identity

#### The “Why” question

Many adopted children struggle with themes such as safety and security. One of the questions that arises in the lives of most adoptees is the why question: "Why did my birth parents give me up?" (Calle, 2011).

All adoptees have thought about this question before, however the majority believed that the one-child policy is the answer to the why question, and it suffices for them. For some adoptees, the why question arose during puberty since they then started to reflect more on their identity and roots.

*“I used to never think about that question, it didn’t even occur to me. It wasn’t important to, since I’ve never seen them are at least not consciously. So, I know nothing about them. That is the reason why I’ve always perceived my adoptive parents as my real biological parents. The last couple of years I’ve thought about the why question more but it is not something I want to research or delve deeper into.”[[33]](#footnote-33)(Nina)*

*“I have to thank my mum that when they went to adopt, they deliberately chose China because the one-child policy was active at the time. Also to give me a reason to say "that's why you were abandoned". And that is also a reason I am satisfied with. I am a girl, they simply preferred boys back then. So to say that I was ever insecure about that? No, never, because I have always been able to accept my answer.”[[34]](#footnote-34) (Yo-Lin)*

*“Especially during my adolescence, I felt extremely insecure about the 'why' question, because during puberty one asks a lot of questions, so I had some difficulties with that. People came to me and asked why I didn't look like my adoptive parents. So I had a lot of confrontations. That was difficult for me to accept, until I got to a certain point in my life where I had the attitude "So be it. That's how it turned out and there's not much I can do about it anyway".”[[35]](#footnote-35) (Lin C)*

#### Self-identification

To analyse how Chinese adoptees identify themselves it is crucial to ask how they describe and perceive themselves. A lot of the adoptees I’ve interviewed have compared themselves to a *banana* due to being ‘white’ on the inside but *yellow* on the outside, others see themselves as a Belgian with Chinese roots. None of the adoptees have identified as being/feeling fully Asian.

*“I always say I am a banana. White on the inside and on the outside how people view me. So I am Belgian, but not completely.”[[36]](#footnote-36) (An Mei)*

*“I see myself more as a Belgian. The only thing Asian to me is my appearance and country of birth. I don't speak Chinese and I have very few Asian friends, but I think that's because I don't live in a city. We were brought up very white, in my hobbies and school I didn't have any Asian friends either. So yes, 80-90% Belgian and the rest Chinese.”[[37]](#footnote-37) (Lie)*

*“Belgian with Chinese roots, that's me. I certainly consider Belgium as my home country, but when I hear something about China on the news, I feel connected to it, naturally. Or when someone says the word "China" or "Chinese", then I sometimes feel addressed as well. So, China is certainly not detached from me.”[[38]](#footnote-38) (LJ)*

*“I have already been asked this question at work last year as to which group I feel most [at home] with, Belgian or Chinese. I remember responding "I feel Yo-Lin", and that must be a mix of the two somewhere.”[[39]](#footnote-39) (Yo-Lin)*

Since self-identification is an intrinsic subject within this theme, it was also important to interpret the adoptees’ views on adoption as a strong part of their identity, if it stands central in their self-identification. Overall, this seemed like a difficult question to answer since lots of adoptees do not feel adopted, it is not present all the time, yet they are reminded of this part whenever meeting someone knew/looking in the mirror. Six adoptees claimed it was a strong part of their identity, three stated it was present sometimes, not always and not dominantly, and three stated it wasn’t part of their identity at all.

*“Difficult question. I suppose it is a strong part of my identity because it will always be there. I will always be adopted, yet it does not define me. I have never felt like 'the adopted one' in my family.”[[40]](#footnote-40) (Noa)*

*“I do think it is a strong part of my identity. I may not realise it as much but I do think it is a big part of my life. I can't deny that part. When people see me for the first time, the first questions are often "where are you from, who are your parents, Chinese or?" and then you always have to explain that you are adopted, so it is always present.”[[41]](#footnote-41) (Duo)*

*“For me, it is not really a part of my identity. The bond with my parents is good, they are my real parents to me, my relationship with my sisters is also good. I also feel completely Belgian.”[[42]](#footnote-42) (Babeth)*

Another intrinsic part of self-identification is the feeling of ‘whiteness’. Often, Asians are excluded from the debate of people of colour, while they are in fact, part of it (Johnson F. , 2015). Asking the adoptees if they feel ‘white’ is to, firstly, confirm or deny this statement and secondly, see if it varies. Nine adoptees felt both ‘white’ and ‘not-white’ due to their ‘white’ upbringing and family, but also not being perceived as ‘white’’ by others. Three adoptees did not feel ‘white’ at all.

*“Very good question. Never thought about it actually. There are times when I can wake up and forget that my Chinese characteristics are still present. So in that regard I do realise that instantly again. From the moment I start interacting with people, the feeling of 'being white' also disappears. That doesn't alter the fact that because of my parents and white upbringing, I do* *enjoy some white privileges. The university, for example, is also a white system and I am just part of it.”[[43]](#footnote-43) (Yo-Lin)*

*“I actually feel very white apart from the fact that I don't look white.”[[44]](#footnote-44) (Nienke-Lou)*

*“I have already had several discussions with my friends on this subject. I do think I am white inside. I was raised with Western values, in terms of food, in terms of everything, but I look Asian. I think I am both.”[[45]](#footnote-45) (Lin P)*

#### Self-image

Many adoptees experience identity issues regarding their ‘ethnic’, social, cultural, and ‘racial’ identity. When children are unable to identify their culture, it confuses their overall sense of identity (Dalen, 1999). It’s important to assess the respondents' self-image to see if they had ever doubted their self-image and if so when. It can be concluded that the majority (eight) of adoptees have doubted their self-image in the past, most of them expressed this doubt the most/only time during their puberty.

*“I was depressed for ten years because I felt extremely insecure due to bullying and comments from other people for that matter. Now I can cope with that and shrug it off, but I used to not be able to. It has affected my self-image a lot.”[[46]](#footnote-46) (Lin C)*

*“Yes, I have questioned my self-image and that occurred more during puberty, of course, because that is the moment when one is shaped. There were lots of things that triggered me and then I realised that maybe it was because I was abandoned.”[[47]](#footnote-47) (An Mei)*

*“I have not doubted my self-image. Because I have always felt that I was welcome everywhere, including at school. I was lucky that I was never bullied at school. It has all gone quite well, actually.”[[48]](#footnote-48) (LJ)*

During the time of self-doubting, resentment may arise from external characteristics. Overall, seven adoptees have never carried a feeling of resentment, two felt resentment during puberty and three did still feel resentment to this day, however much more minimised than in their puberty, it was then at their highest point. Some expressed wanting bigger eyes or being taller.

*“I have not experienced any feelings of resentment, but sometimes I think "did certain events happen because I had a different skin colour, or because I looked different?".”[[49]](#footnote-49) (Nina)*

*“I would very much like to answer that I have no aversion and it is certainly not a full-blown yes. But it is only in recent years that I have been struggling more and more with the idea of "Always the niche, never the prettiest". This quote is from a documentary by Pete Wu and the bananas. I could relate to that very strongly. Because I very quickly have the feeling that I am written off at first sight and that I am always placed in the niche category.”[[50]](#footnote-50) (Yo-Lin)*

*“Yes, I still bear the dislike a little, actually. That was something that happened from primary school onwards. I still carry a bit of that. It was really at its peak in secondary school. Now it has diminished a lot.”[[51]](#footnote-51) (Babeth)*

*“Aversion was not the case. For me, it has actually always been an added value, the fact that I come from China.”[[52]](#footnote-52) (LJ)*

#### The return for roots

A significant number of Chinese adoptees and their adoptive parents undertake a “return trip” to China. Not all adoptees can travel back to their country of origin and make a roots journey, which can make it challenging to find out whether you feel at home in that country or not (Bex, 2021). Nine adoptees returned to China, some of them even multiple times. Two of the adoptees currently have no plans to go back while one was planning to go to China in 2020 but Covid-19 just rose back then.

The three adoptees who have not returned (yet) to China, were asked if they would be open to the opportunity of visiting China in the future. Two out of three would like to go in the near future while the other adoptee would maybe like to go one day and does not feel the need to visit China at this moment.

The nine adoptees who have returned to China, have been asked if their roots trip strengthened their bond with China. Six stated that it in fact did strengthen their bond, while the other three adoptees said it didn’t.

*“It has not created a stronger bond with Chinese culture. It was nice to get to know another culture, even if it felt like a culture shock at times, but it did not make me dig deeper into China or its culture.” [[53]](#footnote-53)(Duo)*

*“I have already returned to China three times. The first time I was four years old, so I hardly remember that. The second time, I saw my orphanage and old caretakers again, that was special of course. But at that time, I was still a child, so I didn't think too much about it. My third time was when I did an internship in Shanghai and by then I was also old enough to ask critical questions about my feelings about China. "To what extent do I feel part of the society, to what extent do I recognise myself on TV?". Those things mainly. They have contributed enormously to the enormous appreciation for the culture. So I definitely want to go back, I love it.”[[54]](#footnote-54) (Yo-Lin)*

The adoptees who have not returned (yet) to China, were asked if they think a roots strip will strengthen their bond with China.

*“I do think that the return trip is going to provide a stronger connection with the Chinese culture. I think it will be very enjoyable to see and experience it in real life because it is a very different culture.”[[55]](#footnote-55) (Nienke-Lou)*

*“I don't know if it will create a stronger bond. It might be that since I don't know much about Chinese culture myself, I'll gain a lot of knowledge about it. But it's not because I would go there that I would explicitly immerse myself in it.”[[56]](#footnote-56) (Lin C)*

Some of the adoptees who have returned to China, were also asked if they at any point felt home in China, the majority did not.

*“At one point I really felt at home in China. That was a very strange feeling, even though I don't know the language and the traditions. It was really an emotional journey because I found it very confusing to feel at home because I'm Belgian too. The following year I had some difficult moments with identity problems.”[[57]](#footnote-57) (Lin P)*

*“I didn't feel at home in China, because there I was also seen as a foreigner. Chinese people sometimes addressed me in Chinese and I always had to explain that I was adopted and couldn't speak Chinese.”[[58]](#footnote-58) (Yani)*

*“Walking around in China and not looking differently was pleasant but as soon as they addressed me and I couldn't answer, I realised I was Belgian again. So I did not feel at home.”[[59]](#footnote-59) (An Mei)*

#### The search for birthparents

Until the 1990s, most people saw adoption as a severing of the link between natural parent and child. No attention at all was paid to the biological parents and the child was raised as if he or she were their own biological child. However, with time, it became clear that although the legal ties had been severed, the blood bond remained (Willems & Starre, 2006). From the twelve adoptees, one has met with her birthparents again. Three of the other adoptees are really open to meet their birthparents, four are open to an extent, however have no high expectations and do not make it a priority, two are not sure and the other two do not feel the need at all.

*“I would be open to meet them. However, I don’t have an emotional connection with my birthparents; therefore, I believe it will be a bit awkward when I’ll meet them for the first time. I’ve never seen or heard them, at least not that I remember, so I still must figure out if seeing them again would be of any importance to me.”[[60]](#footnote-60) (Nina)*

*“I am not going to make an effort to find my biological parents. Suppose, very hypothetically, that tomorrow I get a phone call that they have found my biological parents, then yeah, why not. But then a translator-interpreter has to be arranged for me and I would also need the guarantee that they want to see me. Because if they don't feel the need, then why bring up the past?”[[61]](#footnote-61) (Yo-Lin)*

*“I don't know yet if I would ever want to meet them. Rather, I want to know what my real parents look like and what they are like. In certain areas where I struggle with certain characteristics, which they would also have, I could understand better. And rather not because what if they are dead? Or what if they have a really bad life and living situation? Then I really wouldn't know how to deal with it.”[[62]](#footnote-62) (Babeth)*

When asked, if she had any expectations if meeting her birthparents someday, Yani states:

*“Hm, one should be very careful with that. I have already heard from other adoptees who have met their biological parents that those parents expect their daughter in Belgium to give them financial support and money because they live in poverty. I am not saying that this is the case everywhere, but it does exist. Furthermore, there are also those roots programmes on TV, in which the meeting is depicted in a very fairytale-like, romantic and woolly way. I don't believe in that. I'd rather be realistic about the chance that I won't even find them or that they won't want to meet me, for example.”[[63]](#footnote-63)*

The adoptee who has met with her birthparents again stated the following:

*“I was hesitant at first to meet my biological parents. There was a very strong language barrier between me and my biological family. The only one who could translate was my mum as she speaks Chinese. That led to some made conversations. It was always small talks... I did not necessarily have to get to know my biological parents, but I am grateful that I know them.”[[64]](#footnote-64) (Duo)*

#### Representation

A lack of representation and visibility of Chinese or Asian persons in adoptees’ environment leads to a normalisation of ‘white’ persons in media, books, commercials. Trenka et al (2006) suggests this ‘white’ norm makes them insecure about their own appearance and thus has a negative impact on the development of their self-image. When asked if there are is enough representation in the media and television of the Asian or Chinese identity, eleven adoptees found there was not enough, while one thought it was sufficient.

*“There is not enough representation in the media, if not none. But not only in the media or television, but also in politics and so on. Yes, I find that quite upsetting.”[[65]](#footnote-65) (Yo-Lin)*

*“There is not enough representation. Hardly any in Belgium and there are more Asian people on Netflix, but they are always the best friend of the white main character. Same with black people, they always play the best friend of the white person. That's a shame, of course.”[[66]](#footnote-66) (An Mei)*

When asked about the importance of representing the Chinese and/or Asian identity in media, the vast majority believed it was important, while two adoptees did not. Those who answered it was important to obtain more representation, also stated it should be that way for all ‘racialised’ groups.

*“For me personally, it would make no difference, but I can understand that other people or children would be very pleased to see someone on TV who looks like them and shares the same external features.”[[67]](#footnote-67) (Nina)*

*“I think it is important in any case that it is not only white people who appear on television or take part in a TV programme. It is important that there is a mix of cultures everywhere, even in a company, but it is not essential for me that there are also Chinese people in a TV-show.”[[68]](#footnote-68) (Nienke-Lou)*

When asked if the representation was ever missed during the lifetime of the adoptee, following statements were made.

*“I do not think it is necessarily important. I do not mirror myself with it.”[[69]](#footnote-69) (Duo)*

*“I did miss that at times. I never really thought about it, but I have noticed recently that there can be more representation. That's also because the group of "Untold Asian Stories" made me more aware of it. I feel like 'I have to stand up for myself', that's very important.”[[70]](#footnote-70) (Lin P)*

*“I did miss that though. Because I stand out a lot and I would like to stand out a little less.”[[71]](#footnote-71) (Babeth)*

#### Western beauty ideals

Literature suggests that representation within the media influences the self-perception adoptees carry. Asian women are more likely than ‘black’ women to endorse Western beauty ideals and norms (Chin Evans & McConnell, 2003). However, during the interviews seven adoptees never followed Western beauty ideals, three coloured their hair (whereby motives where not really ‘racially’ motivated), and two have actively tried to follow Western beauty ideals in the past. Most of the respondents were not interested in makeup.

*“I never really bothered with those things. I'm not too bothered about make-up anyway. I've never been ashamed of being the only one with black hair, I've never made an issue of it.”[[72]](#footnote-72) (Nina)*

*“I felt this quite intensely during my adolescence. I always wanted to curl my hair. I wanted to look more Western. I wanted to have rounder eyes, I wanted to be taller because my small legs were typically Asian. I wanted to have blonder hair, because of that I also bleached my hair.”[[73]](#footnote-73) (Lin P)*

#### Culture keeping

Culture has become a key feature of the adoption practice and a hot topic within the cultural identity debate, due to its bonding capacities between the adopted child and its adoptive parents. However, the question remains: “What are the parameters of culture keeping? How much is enough?” (Quiroz, 2012). Three out of twelve adoptees have kept certain parts of the Chinese culture (celebration of Chinese New Year, language learning, eating certain Chinese foods). Five got the possibility of including this however did not want to or did not feel the need and four did not get the chance to learn/include this.

*“If I had indicated that I wanted to follow Chinese lessons, my parents would have immediately agreed and financed it. They support me. But they never pushed me. When I was a child, they took me to the Chinese New Year show, but that was it. I am almost expected to speak Chinese because a culture is appropriated to me, a culture that is not my culture at all.”[[74]](#footnote-74) (Yo-Lin)*

*“My parents were very supportive. When we were little, we went to Chinese lessons, but I was too young and didn't do anything, so then of course it stopped. I thought it was super sweet that my parents were so supportive. I was allowed to explore who I was, who I am, who I want to be. It is not only about being adopted, but also about the support of the parents. That plays a massive part in it. It is essential that the parents are open to giving their child the chance to be who or what they want to be.”[[75]](#footnote-75) (Yani)*

When asking if it would’ve been an added value of learning the language, the following adoptees stated:

*“Not really. As long as I don't feel the need to celebrate the Chinese New Year or learn the language. Sometimes I do find it a shame that I have no knowledge of the Chinese culture, just because I find it strange that I am Chinese and look Chinese but don't know much about it. But I certainly don't mind not experiencing or living it.”[[76]](#footnote-76) (Nienke-Lou)*

*“I sometimes regret not learning Chinese or about the Chinese culture, because I find it such a beautiful thing. I was able to appreciate the Chinese culture even more when I returned home from my roots trip. So I think it would have been an added value, to have known both cultures. I can't blame my parents either, because it's not their culture at all. They don't know it either. They do their best to bring me up, so it's okay. It is just the way it is.”[[77]](#footnote-77) (Lin P)*

### The practice of adoption

Adoption generally refers to the practice of a child being adopted as one's own by people who are not the natural/birth parents. Regardless, within adoption there are many nuances to be made (Thesaurus, 2011).

When asked if the participants believe adoption will continue to exist, all participants answered yes, whereby two believe it will be more difficult in the future to adopt and whereby one believes it will stop in China but remain in other countries in Africa. Almost all participants were positive about the continuity of adoption.

*“On the one hand, I think adoption will continue but on the other hand, I sometimes read stories where things are not going so well. To adopt is also becoming more and more difficult with countries making the adoption rules even stricter and with studies going on with the enormous waiting lists at the moment. These lists are of course going to get much longer and so for these reasons I think it is going to become more difficult to adopt a child.”[[78]](#footnote-78) (Nina)*

*“Adoption shall continue. There will always be children who have no parents and are abandoned. There will also always be people who are infertile or who want to give an extra child a second chance by helping and supporting them.”[[79]](#footnote-79) (Nienke-Lou)*

*“Since the one-child policy stopped in China and they are now using contraceptives openly, I think it's going to gradually stop in China. But I think it will continue in Africa.”[[80]](#footnote-80) (Lin P)*

*“I think it will continue. I would not even see why it would be abolished. Because I believe that it helps both parties. My adoptive parents wanted to have children and their biological mother could not take care of me. Whether it was because of the one-child policy, teenage mother pregnancy or rape, the bottom line was that she couldn't take care of me, so this was the best alternative. She also only wanted the best for me. So, in that way I think it can help both parties.”[[81]](#footnote-81) (Yani)*

#### Vision of adoption

In the interest of finding out the experience of the Chinees adoptees in Belgium, it is beneficial to hear their point of view on adoption. Their perception matters the most. Ten participants perceived the notion of adoption as something positive and were satisfied with the concept of adoption. One participant was rather neutral about the practice of adoption and was mainly critical about the motivational reasons behind adoption. Ultimately, there was one participant anti-adoption since it involves an entire detachment process for the child.

*“In the beginning I looked at it very black and white, since I couldn’t imagine being able to give up your child and give it away to strangers. However, now I look at it more nuanced because I have no clue where I would have ended if I wasn’t adopted. I would’ve probably had a very differently life in China, without knowing where I would’ve ended. My birthparents in China probably had the best intentions for me and my future, so that I could live a better life, here in Belgium.”[[82]](#footnote-82) (Nina)*

*“People often say about adoptive parents that they have done a great job and that they have saved a child, but I think that is a very wrong vision because that should not be the motive. My parents have always said "we adopted out of selfishness, because we wanted a child". And that is why you should adopt, because you want children, not to save a life. For then you do not always have the best interests of the adopted children at heart.”[[83]](#footnote-83) (Yani)*

*“To be honest, adoption should not exist. A child is being removed from its trusted context, so in a way, I'm not in favour of it. I do not support it, but the reality is what it is. Therefore, we have to make the best of it and make the facilities as optimal as possible, which is not easy considering how many malpractices there have been.”[[84]](#footnote-84) (Lie)*

#### Knowing both sides in the practice of adoption

Adoption is a story with three parties involved: biological parents, adoptive parents, and the adopted person. These parties are inextricably linked (Dejonckheere, 2009). There are the biological parents and the adoptive parents. With this question I wanted to analyse if the participants chose one side over another or if one party was more important than the other. Ten adoptees chose to focus on both parties in the matter whereby three participants explicitly mentioned the importance of the government providing support to biological parents to not give up their child and/or to assist when giving up the child. One participant prioritised the needs of the child and another one stated the relevance of additional research into the motivational adoption reasoning of adoptive parents.

*“I think both sides should be heard. On the one hand, it must be very difficult to have a desire for children and not see that fulfilled. On the other hand, the one-child-policy was simple present in China at that time. You could get a fine for having an extra child, something my biological parents probably couldn’t pay. I was simply too much there. The society in China is very different than ours, especially when it comes to punishments and sanctions, which led to a lot of fright. [[85]](#footnote-85)(Duo)*

*“I would prioritise the child. Nevertheless, parents are very important. A baby is nothing without a parent to take care of it. So, I do not deny the importance of both parties, nor all the other parties involved. But I dare to state that I would place the child at the centre of it all.”[[86]](#footnote-86) (Yo-Lin)*

*“I think that both parties should be equally centered. I don't know anything about my biological parents because with the one-child policy it all happened a bit illegally. But I don't think they [biological parents] received any help. They should get that too, especially mental support. Because I think it' s very painful as a mother to have to give up your child.”[[87]](#footnote-87) (Lin P)*

#### Scientific research on adoption

To analyse the opinions on the practice of adoption, it was beneficial to probe if the participants had already examined certain scientific materials such as literature or documentaries. And if so, if they found that research on the topic of adoption was already sufficient. It was distinctive in this theme that adoptees did not know sufficiently about the topic and therefore did not know what to answer. Six out of twelve adoptees did not know if there was already enough scientific research on adoption. Two adoptees believe there is enough scientific research whereby one thinks public debates should be done on adoption since too many people still carry a negative image on adoption. Four participants believed there was not enough research done yet.

*“I think there is always potential for further research. In my last year of secondary school, I did my final paper on adoption, and I did find some stuff and information about it, but it is actually a topic that could be explored more, I believe.”[[88]](#footnote-88) (Yani)*

*“There must be qualitative research, but I personally think that the debate in everyday life is more important. I think there is very little debate around adoption. And when there is debate, it is often in the function of the adoptive parents, or it is negative experiences. I find that distressing and a pity. It* *gives people the idea that adoption is not something positive and the negative idea is then confirmed and taken as the truth.”[[89]](#footnote-89) (Yo-Lin)*

*“I think they should research the impact of adoption amongst the adoptive parents, the birth parents and the adopted child. More research should be conducted anyway, because there happens to be a lot of malpractice in adoption, so that is important. There should also be more research and more investment in aftercare, because I think that is also very pivotal.”[[90]](#footnote-90) (Lie)*

When asked if the opinions of adoptees were heard enough, five adoptees stated they felt unheard, two felt heard enough, two did not know and from three participants I had no data.

*“Usually when you read newspaper articles about adoption, it is focused more about the adoptive parents and perhaps less about the adoptees themselves and how they feel about it.”[[91]](#footnote-91) (Nina)*

*“I have not heard so many people discussing adoption. People make shows about so many things, but not about adoption. I think people assume it is a difficult subject and it can be sensitive to some people, which is also true for some adoptees. There are a lot of adoptees in Belgium and there are also enough of them who want to talk about it.”[[92]](#footnote-92) (Babeth)*

#### Critical adoption studies

Critical adoption studies have recently generated new academic interest in the colonial power mechanisms that structure today's transnational adoption practices. None of the adoptees had heard from critical adoption studies, therefore it was a complex question for many. The significance of these studies was measured among the respondents. Eight participants ought these studies important whereby one wants research to be conducted less on a global scale, but more into ‘white’ saviourism on smaller scale. Three did not find these studies important and one could not decide.

*“I do think it is important that power relations are studied and that they also examine the extent to which the West exercises power over poorer or less developed countries. There must be an equal relationship.”[[93]](#footnote-93) (Nienke-Lou)*

*“I am not going to say that these studies are of high-priority, because of course it is global, on a large scale. But I think it would be more useful to work on a smaller scale, to do proper follow-up and to do local research. I think those power relationships are definitely there, and a lot of people think they are adopting out of the goodness of their heart, which is ultimately pure white saviourism, so those studies should be conducted around that. But it doesn't seem to me to be the essence. It is the follow-up, aftercare, intakes where much more can be done.”[[94]](#footnote-94) (Yo-Lin)*

*“I don't think these studies are that important. If the children can go to a better developed country, it is a wonderful win-win situation for both parties.”[[95]](#footnote-95) (Lin C)*

*“I think the power relations should certainly be examined. It is about human lives and that cannot be regarded as black and white, so I think it should be explored and discussed. Not only adoptees or potential adoptive parents should be talking about it, but also the world and society in general should be aware that it exists, and the power balance is present.”[[96]](#footnote-96) (LJ)*

Since colonial linkages are interlinked with critical adoption studies, the opinions of the participants were asked if they believe there is a colonial link present within adoption. Five adoptees believe there is indeed a colonial link, whereby two of them believe there is a colonial link depending on the country (example: African countries). Four do not know and three do not believe there is a colonial link present in adoption.

*“The developed countries just have the funds to provide for those children and they just want to support those children. So, I do not see the link.”[[97]](#footnote-97) (Nienke-Lou)*

*“Power relations are bound to exist, a colonial link not so much. But then again, that depends on the country.”[[98]](#footnote-98) (An Mei)*

*“There is certainly a colonial connection. When I think of adoption, it is quite often in my mind that it involves a white couple adopting a child from abroad and welcoming it into their world. I have not seen it differently before.”[[99]](#footnote-99) (LJ)*

#### Adopting when being adopted

It could be interesting to see if the adoptees want to adopt later on in their life too. That’s why the question was asked if, firstly, they wanted to adopt later on in life and secondly, if this would be driven due to infertility or due to their own positive experience of being adopted. From all participants, seven answered yes to adoption, whereby three would only adopt when being infertile, four because of their own good experience and/or finding it a beautiful concept. Two persons have given it a thought but are not yet convinced, one would adopt because of her own positive experience and the other one would do it because of both. The last three persons did not want to adopt, whereby two were driven by not wanting children, and the other participant preferring a blood tie.

*“I would adopt a child regardless. If I were fertile, I would have a biological child, but in addition to that, I would adopt a child no matter what. Simply because I cherish the idea behind it.”[[100]](#footnote-100) (Lin C)*

*“The adoption procedure takes a tremendously long time. My mother spent five years going through the procedure to be able to have a Chinese baby. It is very mentally demanding. You are also constantly checked by a social worker; they check your salary. So that is intense. I wouldn't do it if I can have children myself, otherwise adoption would be my second choice.”[[101]](#footnote-101) (Lin P)*

#### Role intermediary organisations

Very few intermediary organisations in Belgium specialised in adoptees and their questions regarding adoption, psychological support, family reunion, exist. Afstammingscentrum is an example. Since these organisations are relatively new, it is essential to assess if adoptees think they are beneficial to them.

All participants ought these organisations vital for adoptees and their personal development.

*“I think it is very important that these organisations exist. It is vital that there is a platform available for people like us [adoptees], where we can turn to. I didn't know about that for a long time, not that I needed it, but recently I did some research and then I came across a platform where you can become a buddy for other adoptees and that really appealed to me. So I'm all for those platforms.”[[102]](#footnote-102) (Yo-Lin)*

*“I think it is very helpful that they exist, because without them, many adoptees would not be able to get the psychological support that is aimed towards them. Support and regulation are extremely vital for adoptees.”[[103]](#footnote-103) (Noa)*

#### Aftercare

Lots of adoptees were mentioning the importance of aftercare for adoptees in Belgium and how this part is still underperformed and lacks funding.

*“I think the role of aftercare is important for adoptees. I have never witnessed aftercare at out house, with my younger brother and me, there was no social worker or anyone who came to talk. I think that is a pity. Just at least come and talk, that's the least. I am very open about adoption but my two brothers have had enormous problems with it, they both had to go to therapy just like me. So I think it's very important that someone professional comes and explains. So I think that's a shame, because I think that everyone should have the chance to talk to someone who is specialised in this. So psychological help should definitely be part of aftercare, but then again, there won't be enough social workers for that.”[[104]](#footnote-104) (An Mei)*

*“I think aftercare is just as important as the pre-selection, some follow-up, I think that's fair. For example, they put my mother through hell [at the selection procedure] and then didn't look at her after the adoption. The intake has to be strict no matter what, but I think the aftercare is equally important. Or just indicate "if you need help as a parent, these are a few addresses you can go to". Because my mother has worked it out and she has done well, but she was still disappointed because that is what she was promised. And that is what I dislike about it.”[[105]](#footnote-105) (Yo-Lin)*

*“The role of aftercare is actually very significant to me. It should be as important as the strict selection procedure for adoptive parents.”[[106]](#footnote-106) (Babeth)*

*“I think aftercare is extremely important. On a time frame of five to ten years, they can set that up to provide support to the adoptee. I know they follow so many strict procedures to get people to adopt and to screen them, but actually what happens afterwards is just as significant, not to say more so. Because after that, you spend your whole life in that family. So aftercare is extremely important and I don't think the government is concerned with that because I haven't seen a single social worker in Belgium. Since I got my nationality as a Belgian, I don't think they care much about it at all. They don't do enough to provide aftercare or to introduce after-checks to see if everything is going well.”[[107]](#footnote-107) (Noa)*

#### Overall adoption experience

At the end of the interview, the overall adoption experience was asked. All participants were positive about their adoption experience. The main themes that aided into the happiness of their positive adoption experiences were family, friends, and the opportunities they might not have had received in their birth country. The openness of the adoptive parents towards them and the topic of adoption, aided in building their relationship. The existence or non-existence of discrimination is also crucially important for adoptees and their self-image. Another important aspect a lot of adoptees mentioned was how positive adoption experiences should be highlighted more, in general life as in the media. Few comments given:

*“I have experienced the adoption positively. Especially because I did not suffer much from racism and because my household situation with my parents was very open. Those aspects have really contributed to the positive experience. I am now at a point in my life where I am very happy. I also had bad moments, but today I can say that it has been very positive. It doesn't feel to me like I've been adopted either. I grew up here and I know I look a bit foreign but that's it.”[[108]](#footnote-108) (Yani)*

*“My adoption experience was positive. To be honest, half the time I forget that I am adopted and when I bring up the fact that I was adopted, in a conversation, I immediately get remarks like "Well, poor thing, that's very awful". Whereas I don't mind it at all and don't have a problem with it. So yes, very positive. And that should be highlighted more, the positive.”[[109]](#footnote-109) (Babeth)*

*“How would I describe that...Within the family it was very positive because there was great communication and so forth. Within society, there could be a bit more representation, along with the part of aftercare. The discrimination and the name-calling was less positive for me, of course. I see the adoption itself as a neutral story and I see my friends and family as a positive story.”[[110]](#footnote-110) (Lie)*

*“This is just my life. I can't really say much else about it. It started with adoption but adoption is not all there is. I am not going to reduce my life to adoption. That's not how I look at myself, or my life. For me, adoption is the start of the life I now have.”[[111]](#footnote-111) (LJ)*

*“I think I am lucky with the family and the good friends I have, yet I know from other adoptees that things are not going well between them and their parents and I find that very unfortunate. So occasionally, I do realise that I am very fortunate. But other than that, it was very positive for me. I am happy, I am delighted.”[[112]](#footnote-112) (Noa)*

*“I have been very lucky with my adoption in Belgium and with my parents. They have given me many opportunities in life. So on the one hand, I am happy that I was adopted because if you compare it to my family in China, it would have been different. I would have had opportunities there as well, but not to the same extent as the opportunities here.”[[113]](#footnote-113) (Duo)*

When asking which theme was the most important one to them, seven adoptees stressed the importance of the identity theme, followed by the importance of spreading positive experiences in the social debate. Other themes mentioned, were the intermediary organisations, roots trip, racism, representation, colonial linkages and the aftercare.

## Positionality

As a researcher in qualitative research, it is also important to question one's own position critically. It is impossible to enter research completely freely and objectively. Each individual is influenced by past experiences and knowledge gained (Heath & Cowley, 2004). Like everyone else, the qualitative researcher is also influenced by these events. The analysis carried out by the researcher will therefore always be coloured to some extent by personal experiences and the cultural position one occupies in society.

This idea is also reflected in the 'grounded theory' of Glaser and Strauss (1967) within which the data analysis of this study can be framed. Within this approach, the researcher is seen as a social being whose experiences, ideas and assumptions contribute to the way in which things are interpreted. It is also interesting to ask whether, as a researcher, one does not make things more special than they are. Henydrickx et al (2005) state that certain phenomena can be unnecessarily magnified by the researcher. It is important to regularly look at the interpretation of the research conducted with sufficient distance to avoid such an exaggeration.

# Chapter 3: Conlusion & recommendations

## Conclusion

By conducting in-depth interviews, this master’s thesis has attempted to gain deeper comprehension in the experiences and needs of women adoptees in Belgium, with focus on the related social and cultural factors. Overall, this research has shown the significance of understanding how adoption is represented by a double transition: The transition from biological family to orphanage and from orphanage to adoptive parents.

The results of this study have shown the impact on self-development by the age of adoption. The first eighteen months are detrimental to the child’s bonding process, further life and emotional and physical strength. On the other hand, does this mean that those children should remain in an orphanage all their life? Few adoptees interviewed have stated that these children, regardless of their age, also deserve a second chance in life, however psychological help should be of importance, especially for this specific group of adoptees.

The characteristics of adoptees, based on their young age, gender and roots, constructed them as a vulnerable group in need of care and protection, during an age where China’s one-child policy was active. The adoptive families aim to protect and support adoptees; however, the adoptive child will undeniably be exposed to racism, discrimination, and name-calling. During the interviews, all adoptees stated to have experienced discriminatory remarks at least once. Even though literature states that Covid-19 has triggered a rise in implicit and explicit racism among Asian populations in North America, Europe and Oceania, eleven out of twelve adoptees stated they have seen no rise in hate slurs or discriminatory remarks since Covid-19 started.

Although the position of adoptees is increasingly being acknowledged in academic domains, the national frameworks surrounding aftercare, psychosocial support and representation do not appear to be fully in line yet and therefore fail to meet their specific needs. Instead, the Belgian adoption system is essentially focusing on the adoptive parents and their selection procedure, rather than the aftermath, which is equally important. The withholding and delay of a national support system upon adoptees sketches the current reality of the adoption landscape today. All of which increases adoptees’ vulnerability and self-doubts on identity.

Many adopted children are conflicted about their identity and the sense of belonging somewhere. During the interview a quote came up which reflects the reality of many adoptees “always the foreigner living between two worlds, never at home”.

This is not telling for all adoptees, since everyone experiences adoption differently, however the theme of identity is reoccurring frequently when adoption is discussed. The practice of adoption is deeply interwoven with notions of identity, global status, and national autonomy. There is a myriad of ways in which roots, identity and inclusion are of importance to transnational adoptees. Several adoption studies pointed out the complexity of the relation between roots and identity.

As long as orphanages and adoption organisations exist with their current organisational structure, it will be difficult or impossible for adoptees to find biological ties. Ideally, these entities should work towards a situation where administration of the biological family is allowed. If not, receiving countries, should invest more in DNA options for intercountry adoptees, since this remains a grey area. It is intrinsic to at least provide the option for adoptees who display a need for it. Initiatives such as the Afstammingscentrum can contribute to these processes by providing psychosocial support for adoptees with questions regarding their origins and root, yet they are unable to undertake any further action regarding possible matching and investigation of the matter.

In both the literature study and fieldwork of this master’s thesis, the significance of communication was highlighted, in which it creates dialogues about transnational adoption with families and/or friends. Upon arrival, the adoptive parents need to be capable of understanding their child’s behaviour and a possible sense of identity shock. Furthermore, open communication is required about the Chinese heritage, adoption, roots and possible discriminatory behaviour, for the adoptee to understand a possible presence of ‘racial’ discrimination and xenophobia which they’ll need to possibly be able to counter.

As seen during the data analysis, lots of participants understood the reasoning behind the relinquishment. To start processing, it is crucial for the adoptee to understand the driven political, economic, and social motives behind the events and decisions that led to their relinquishment. Another key factor of providing stability and self-assurance to the adoptees is knowing their early life details and history. However, until now, this has rarely been the case due to the mostly anonymous abandonments and laws regarding full versus simple adoption.

Transnational adoption cannot be understood without considering colonial beliefs and behaviours, as well as the structural disadvantages these practises have generated. Any ‘white’ humanitarian project in the ‘West’ is based on a neo-colonial and paternalistic premise, in which impoverished countries 'require' ‘white’ Westerners' assistance. Initiatives merely serve to highlight the capitalist and neo-colonial policies at work in the background.

The lives of many adopted children might improve if the money spent on adoption was put into children's services in the sending nations.

Neo-colonialism and ethnocentrism are apparent and inherent in the decision-making of adoption whereby adopting happens from emerging regions to rich, powerful countries. The question remains whether child export is a viable solution to a country's childcare issues and whether transnational adoption has an impact on domestic adoption and fostering.

On a positive note, all the participants expressed happiness in their adoption experience. Relatives, friendships, and opportunities they might not have had in their birth country were the main aspects that contributed to their happiness as a byproduct of their adoption experiences. The adoptive parents' openness and the topic of adoption benefited in the development of their relationship. For adoptees and their self-image, the prevalence or absence of discrimination is equally critical. Adoptees mentioned the importance of publicising the positive adoption experiences more in everyday life as well as in the media.

## Recommendations

Based on the literature review and the in-depth interviews conducted, the following recommendations can be suggested to improve the current adoption landscape for adoptees. Firstly, transnational adoption practices should be supply-driven rather than demand-driven, with the interests of the child and the birth parents outweighing the adoption parents' desire for children. There should be more support (both mental and financial) for the biological parents who have or want to give up their child. It is a tough detachment process for the relinquished child but also for the biological parents who must or want to abandon them. People have their reasons and specific situations for both adopting and giving up their child. The bottom line is to understand each individual situation and both parties.

A change of the current system of aftercare is highly recommended. Structural aftercare begins with the recognition of the malpractices that have occurred in past adoptions. Given the committees of enquiry in the Netherlands and Flanders, which are looking into possible abuses and malpractices within transnational adoption in the past, reparation can be a crucial next step within both the adoption literature and adoption practices. Recovery also connects with healing the colonial and imperial wounds caused by transnational adoption practices. This acknowledgement is important for the victims, but also to use this recognition as a basis for thoroughly reforming the current system and stopping the current malpractices. Secondly, the necessity for structural psychological aftercare, which goes beyond discussion groups among like-minded people, cannot be forgotten. There is a need for adequate psychological guidance by people with experience and expertise. As well as a need for more recognition, specialisation, research, and assessment of the psychological consequences of adoption. The last pillar is based on the right to parenthood and knowing where you come from. The lack of information makes it difficult to construct and experience one's own identity.

The idea of being abandoned can be a response to the lack of information, but also a source of ambivalence and doubt. While an initiative like the Afstammingscentrum exists in Belgium, it is still tied to national and international regulations, whereby no further action can be conducted by them regarding DNA matching. Furthermore, adoptions taken place before 2005 often do not have an international adoption file. Therefore, a national or international framework is necessary to properly handle DNA-matching.

Since all participants have experienced discrimination at least once in their life, this suggests the need for representation, either on television, media, school environment, or digital campaigns. By normalizing the diversity in society, discrimination will decline too. In detail, this means that more persons with Asian descent should be displayed. Furthermore, anti-bullying campaigns around ‘racial’ differences should be introduced.

The media plays a big role in portraying the adoption landscape. The last years, adoption has been displayed quite poorly in tv-shows and newspapers, whereas negative adoption experiences from adoptees were showed. As well as the negative portrayal, it also seems that adoptive parents often get asked in panels whereas the adoptees themselves are often neglected. This makes the recommendation rely on two suggestions. Firstly, adoptees should be heard more in the debate of adoption, since they are the audience reliving it first-hand, whereas adoptive parents should remain more to the background. By no means does this indicate that adoptive parents should not discuss adoption, rather not be placed on the foreground of the matter. Secondly, not only negative experiences should be shown. The interviews have shown that all adoptees had neutral to positive adoption experiences and are overall satisfied with their parents, friends and family.

Lastly, there are still inadequate studies and/or expertise courses on adoption. There is no specific training in Belgium for diagnosis and treatment of adoption-specific pathology. Given the number of adoptees in Belgium, further professional training in adoption-related topics is certainly recommended to determine whether certain complaints or symptoms could be adoption-related.

### Further research

This study was an exploratory study. Previously, little or no research existed within the specific area/gender country this study focuses on. Much research has already been done on adoption, but it is still an umbrella term under which many different topics are possible. Therefore, further research in this direction is certainly appropriate.

Furthermore, it would also be interesting to conduct a study on the identity differences between different adoption backgrounds. In this study, the choice was made to study transnational adoptees. However, domestic adoptions are also an important part of the adoption landscape. During the participant selection process, some domestic adoptees applied to participate in the study. These reactions show that there is also interest within the group of domestic adoptees for participating in such a study. An additional aspect for domestic adoptees is the difference in biological ties but mostly not in physical looks. With this extra emphasis, this target group is therefore definitely worthy of research.

Thirdly, a comparison study can be drawn up into the differences of ‘racial’ backgrounds and or roots countries. This master’s thesis focused on the experience of Chinese adoptees in Belgium, however it can also focus on other ‘ethnicities’. By conducting the same interview questions, various themes can be compared and analysed, to see if differences arise on topics such as racism, (positive) adoption experience, the importance of aftercare, representation, identity. This suggestion is made since most adoptees interviewed for this study stated that their discrimination was fairly tolerable, however, for adoptees of darker skin tone, this might be a totally different reality.

### The relevance of this study

After outlining the limitations of this study and some recommendations for further research, this part will conclude the relevant contribution of the results of this study. Firstly, it appears that there is interest among adult adoptees in participating in research concerning their adoption. Several participants also indicated that they were pleased that a study was finally being conducted on adult adoptees. The fact that within the adoption landscape little is heard from the adoptees themselves is a source of frustration or insecurity for some, especially when the focus is put on the child and/or the adoptive parents and no longer on the adult who also has to learn to live with his adoption process. One woman indicated that she occasionally feels insecure because she has no support in her environment and does not know anyone else who is adopted. A second observation made by some interviewees was that within the social work sector, problems are too quickly attributed to adoption and that not enough specialised support is offered. A better development of the adoption care aimed at adult adoptees and a broad publication of this is recommended for the policy. Theoretically, this study can also make a relevant contribution. It illustrates that research on adoption does not need to start from a negative angle. In this study, the adoptees themselves are given the opportunity to speak. This way, an honest and sincere story is drawn up where neither the positive nor the negative sides are magnified more than necessary. With the above answers as possible strategies to improve the adoption experience of transnational adoptees from China, I hope that this master's thesis can not only contribute to certain discourse within critical adoption studies or the social sciences, but also serves as support for Chinese adoptees.

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# Table of figures

[Figure 1: Transnational adoptions from China to 12 recipient nations (ranked by number) (1992-2018). 14](#_Toc104048823)

[Figure 2: Registered adoptions from China to Flanders through adoption services (1991-2020) 15](#_Toc104048824)

# Appendixes

APPENDIX A: Informed consent letter

Text

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APPENDIX B: interview question guide

Text, letter

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Appendix C: Social media announcement

Text

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1. Opted for the term “wit” because “blank”, due to our country's colonial past, radiates a superiority to people of colour that should not and cannot not exist. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Economical organisation for rural development. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Baby hatches are safe houses located in large cities where abandoned infants are handed over to state care by their parents. The equivalent term in Dutch is ‘*’vondelingenschuif’.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This tabulation accounted for all age ranges. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. People have become *resources* in a market economy, whereby their value can increase or decrease. The “low-quality” category of girls and special needs children are naturally more likely to be abandoned, in this model, where no relative moral restrictions are implemented. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Within the dissertation, the focus on special needs children is limited, due to the specific research angle. However, it is important to note the framing of this specific group in China, as being seen as a societal burden, hindering the PRC’s economics progress. Furthermore, a strong cultural stigma against deformity in China still exists (Holroyd, 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Children’s Welfare Institute/ CWI = The largest and oldest orphanage in Shanghai. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. CAG in Dutch, *Centrale Autoriteit van de Gemeenschap*. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Afstammingscentrum is known in English as the centre of descent. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. This parallel reflects on Chinese transnational adoption, where adoption children were also seen as a vulnerable group in need of rescue, by the same Western powers. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. “De communicatie tussen mijn ouders en mezelf over adoptie is heel open. Zij zijn opener en geëngageerd om erover te praten. Zij hebben ook aangespoord om mijn biologische ouders te vinden. Zij waren ook tegen mij van kleins af aan al heel open over het feit dat ik geadopteerd was.” [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. “Adoptie is niet echt een onderwerp waarover gesproken wordt. Met de vrienden hangt dat af als er iets over gevraagd wordt, dan antwoord ik daar wel op in de mate van het mogelijke. Mijn adoptieouders zouden wel eerlijk antwoorden moest ik vragen hebben, maar dat is nooit echt super ter sprake gekomen. Zo hier en daar wel conversaties maar ik ben nooit echt een super open persoon geweest om over alles te praten dus dat niet echt eigenlijk. Want communicatie tussen mijn adoptieouders en mij was altijd al vrij moeilijk, nu niet meer eigenlijk maar tot een jaar en half geleden echt wel. Zij hebben mij er [adoptie] waarschijnlijk wel over verteld van hun eigen, maar ook gewoon omdat ik besefte dat ik nie top mijn broers, zussen en ouders leek. Ik zag er niet zo uit als hen. Dus sowieso kwamen er dan vragen van mij naar hen toe. Maar allemaal echt eigenlijk super vaag gebleven, nooit echt dieper op in gegaan.” [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. “Er zijn wel al veel vragen gesteld geweest over mijn adoptie en hoe dit kwam. Tot daar eigenlijk een beetje, maar het is niet dat ze daar dieper op ingaan tenzij ik het zelf zou aangeven. Maar ik heb ook niet echt de behoefte om met hen daarover te spreken eigenlijk dus verder gaat het niet.” [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. “Ja, diezelfde open communicatie met mijn ouders over adoptie is er ook wel bij mijn vrienden. Ik weet wel dat ik bij hen erover terecht kan. Maar ik voel niet echt de behoefte om met hen erover te praten. Als ik met iets zit of er zou iemand me hebben nageroepen dan kan ik mijn vrienden wel zeggen dat ik me slecht of raar bekeken voel. Dus, ja, ik ben heel open naar mijn vrienden toe.” [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. “Communicatie en pestgedrag waren onderwerpen dat nooit besproken werden bij ons. dat kwam vooral langs mijn kant. Ik was er ook niet open over. Ik had vooral de mindset van "Waarom zou ik daar met iemand over moeten praten? Ik val daar alleen mensen mee lastig". Ik leg ook niet graag mijn problemen in de schoot van andere mensen. Dat was mijn probleem en ik moest dat zelf maar zien op te lossen. Achteraf gezien was dat natuurlijk niet zo een goed idee want dat heeft veel op mijn mentaal welzijn gewerkt en ik denk dat als ik op een vroegere leeftijd daar opener over geweest en meer had gecommuniceerd, ik sterken in mijn schoenen zou staan en gestaan hebben in mijn puberjaren. maar dat was het geval niet.” [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. “Recent heb ik nog met mijn ouders over zo'n incident gepraat. Maar die begrijpen dat niet echt zo...maar dat is denk ik voor de meeste mensen zo dat zij dat interpreteren als mopje en dat ik daar tegen moet kunnen. Maar dat gij mij toch een bepaald gevoel van ongemakkelijkheid en niet comfortabel zijn. Natuurlijk, zijn begrijpen dat niet want ze maken het zelf niet mee, dus ja. Mijn geadopteerde zussen begrijpen mij 100%. Zij verstaan mij dus wel. Daarnaast heb ik ook die meisjes waar ik samen mee geadopteerd ben [uit China] die ik jaarlijks zie en elke keer konden we daar [racisme/discriminatie] wel over praten en wist ik dat ik niet alleen was.” [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. “Mijn ouders waren heel open tegenover ons over pestgedrag. Op een bepaald moment wou mijn mama dan met mij naar een leerkracht [naar aanleiding van pestgedrag op school] en dan wou ik niet want dat was kei gênant hé op dat moment, om met uw mama naar het school te gaan. Maar achteraf bekeken had ik het veel erger gevonden moesten ze niet ingegrepen hebben en moest ik het zomaar geaccepteerd hebben, dus daar ben ik nu wel dankbaar om. We hebben daar thuis ook wel enorm veel over kunnen praten en hoe we dat gedrag ook zelf niet mochten vertonen naar andere kinderen toe. Dus die communicatie was er ook.” [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. “Af en toe heb ik me wel eenzaam gevoeld. Hamme [dorp waar respondent vandaan komt] had ook echt zo'n dorpsmentaliteit dus dan voelde ik me er soms wel alleen. Mensen begrijpen ook vaak gewoon niet wat een adoptie van een Chinees kind inhoudt. Het principe en de werkwijze, zeker van zo veeljaren terug is zo een heftig proces en velen begrijpen niet wat dat inhoudt vanwege de dorpsmentaliteit en de oogkleppen die ze ophebben. Met dat ik ouder word en op een heel diverse campus zit [in Brussel], komt dat besef van eenzaamheid veel minder. Je ziet hier alles, het is super multicultureel en nu voel ik dat veel minder natuurlijk.” [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. “Ik heb geen eenzaam gevoel gehad als Chinees geadopteerde en dat komt omdat ik zelf genoeg Chinees geadopteerde mensen ken en bevriend mee ben. En daar ben ik mijn ouders wel dankbaar voor dat we deel uitmaken van de adoptiegroep of de Chinagroep, waaronder ook de familie Princen [respondenten interview zes en tien] inzit. dus daar ben ik wel echt dankbaar voor. Moest ik dat niet gehad hebben, zou ik me wel eenzaam gevoeld hebben en misschien zelf op zoek zijn gegaan naar andere geadopteerden.” [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. “Goh, dat zou ik misschien wel fijn vinden [om andere Chinezen/ Chinees geadopteerden in de buurt te hebben], maar het is niet dat ik een enorme drang zou hebben om hen te bevrienden en heel veel contact mee te hebben.” [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. “Het zou geen invloed hebben op mij. Het is niet dat ik mij daar direct bij ga aansluiten. Ik hoef ook nergens meer toe te behoren. Ik ben een persoon op mijzelf dus daar heb ik echt geen nood aan.” [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. “De meerwaarde van andere geadopteerden in mijn leven te hebben is dat je niet eenaam bent, dat je u niet alleen voelt. Dat je er over kan praten wanneer je met iets zit van uw adoptie. Niet veel mensen hebben dat meegemaakt en als je daar dan samen kan over praten en zijn u 100% begrijpen, omdat zij hetzelfde hebben meegemaakt, is dat heel fijn.” [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. “Ik vond dat een meerwaarde. Het is niet dat ik nog enorm veel contact met hen heb, maar het is zeker een meerwaarde geweest dat we in contact konden komen met andere geadopteerden. Omdat je dan ook direct een band deelt met elkaar. Zij weten ook waarover ik praat als ik zeg dat ik me hier niet thuis voel of welkom voel of iets anders deel. Zij begrijpen mij. Want ik kan dat niet kwijt aan blanke vrienden, want zij gaan dat nooit 100% begrijpen. Dus dan is dat wel fijn dat je dat kan delen met iemand dat je wel 100% begrijpt.” [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. “Neen, ik heb geen meer affiniteit met geracialiseerde groepen. Ik moet ook wel zeggen dat ik het geluk heb gehad om geadopteerde te worden als Aziatische en niet als iemand met een donkerdere huid. Dan worden er veel meer racistische opmerkingen gegeven denk ik.” [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. “Hm, ik heb wel affiniteit met mensen van kleur in de zin dat we beide leven in de westerse wereld war de witte man nog altijd vanboven staat, om he zo te zeggen. Ik heb ook wel meer affiniteit met Aziatische mensen. Maar ik ben me wel enorm bewust dat het beeld van Aziaten positiever is dan dat van gekleurde mensen of van Turken of Marokkanen en dan weet ik wel dat ik geluk heb om tot de Aziatische groep te behoren. aangezien wij een beter imago zouden hebben. Dus daar ben ik me wel bewust van.” [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. This word is used by the interviewee. In no way, shape or form does the researcher associates itself with this term. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. “Toen ik jonger was, werd er hier en daar een grapje gemaakt specifiek rond Aziaten; over mijn gele huid, spleetogen, etc. Maar met ouder worden niet meer tenzij het echt simpele mensen waren. Zo had ik eens op de bus een voorval met arbeiders en die maakten een grapje op mij. Maar het is sinds het middelbaar al geleden sinds ik zoiets heb meegemaakt waarbij mensen een reactie uitlokten bij me. Ik moet wel zeggen dat ik altijd lichte stress heb dat mensen een opmerkingen kunnen geven in verband met mijn uiterlijk.” [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. “In mijn ogen heb ik toch echt wel in mindere mate discriminatie meegemaakt. Ik ben wel al eens nageroepen geweest of toen ik in de bus zat, heb ik wel van rare jongeren opmerkingen gekregen zoals "Bamischijf" maar dan denk ik gewoon in mezelf "Waarom haalt gij in godsnaam producten van de frituur erbij om mij te beledigen"? Ik mag echt niet klagen dat ik racistisch belaagd ben want ik heb al zo veel ergere dingen gehoord van anderen. Ik maak het soms mee in bepaalde mate maar meestal juist meer indirect. Met hoe ze naar me kijken. Ik denk dat het innerlijk racisme nog erger is. Dat voelt zo aan. Ik geloof ook dat mensen die openlijk zo'n beledigingen naar mij roepen, eerder zelf ook wat problemen kunnen hebben [psychologisch, onzekerheid]. Terwijl mensen die vanbinnen echt afschuw hebben naar een ander persoon, gewoon omdat die er anders uitziet, ja dat komt toch harder aan.” [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. “Voor mij heeft Corona niet echt een invloed gehad. In het begin had ik een voorval op de bus met oude vrouwtjes die zeiden van "die heeft Corona", maar dat was het dan ook.” [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. “Ik heb twee keer een dwaze opmerking ontvangen tijdens Corona in Gent. I was beginnen werken in een Zuid-Amerikaans tapasrestaurant. Ik heb e rmaar vier keer gewerkt en twee van de vier keer ben ik racistisch benaderd geweest. Ik was er toen heel fel van verschoten, omdat het nog nooit zo openlijk vertoond is geweest naar mij toe, dat was geen deel van mijn realiteit, wat zeker een luxe is. Maar goed, er was een zatte groep, jonge witte mannen en ze waren het echt een beetje aan het uithangen. Dus ik hield de gespreksstof ook tot het minimum en gewoon mijn plicht doen. Op een gegeven moment hoorde ik "Eih, eih, dat is een Chinees, die gaat ons Corona geven". Maar goed, dat kon ik plaatsen want dat was pure domheid maar daarna, de volgende keer dat ik er kwam werken was er weer een grote groep van witte jonge mannen. Opeens vraagt er mij een jongen van die tafel of ik een iPhone oplader had. Bon, ik had dat niet, mijn collega's niet en het keukenpersoneel ook niet. Ik ga terug om dat te zeggen en ik kreeg de reactie "uh, waarom the fuck hebt gij geen oplader". Maar goed, ik ging daar niet op in want ik wist dat ze gedronken hadden dus ik verliet hun tafel, trok mijn schouders op en ging weg. Terwijl ik weg stap hoor ik zo achter mij "Maar dat is een vuile Chinees, sowieso een ladyboy" en dit voor het hele restaurant, om mijn aandacht te trekken. Daarna hebben ze ook nog "hey ladyboy" ettelijke malen liggen roepen. Ik begon gewoon te huilen en te huilen.” [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. “We kregen wel info en lessen over vooroordelen in het algemeen maar niet super uitgebreid, het is niet dat daarin werd verdiept. En er werd sowieso ook niet gepraat over vooroordelen naar Chinezen of Aziaten toe. Sowieso niet. Nooit op school gehad.” [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. “Op zich vind ik wel dat er meer over racisme en vooroordelen tegenover Aziaten moet gesproken worden. Maar aan de andere kant vind ik het ook wat dubbel want ik was de enige Aziaat in de klas en dan nog eens een geadopteerde, dus dan gaat ge uzelf automatisch viseren, wat ook niet de bedoeling is denk ik. Ik denk dat het afhangt van richting tot richting en van school tot school.” [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. “Goh, vroeger dacht ik daar eigenlijk niet over na. Toen was dat ook niet belangrijk voor mij, ook omdat ik mijn biologische ouders nooit heb gekend, of toch niet bewust. Dus ik weet niks over hen. Daarom heb ik ook altijd mijn adoptieouders als echte biologische ouders beschouwd. De laatste jaren heb ik er meer over nagedacht maar het is niet dat ik dat echt wil onderzoeken of verder op in gaan.” [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. “Ik moet mijn mama bedanken dat toen ze gingen adopteren, ze bewust gekozen hebben voor China omdat de eenkindpolitiek er toen was. Ook om mij een reden te geen van "daarom ben je ten vondeling gelegd". En dat is ook een reden waar ik genoegen mee neem. Ik ben nu eenmaal een meisje, ze hadden toen liever jongens. Dus om te zeggen dat ik daar ooit onzeker ben over geweest? Neen, nooit, want ik heb mijn antwoord altijd al gehad.” [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. “Vooral als puber heb ik me extreem onzeker gevoeld over de waarom vraag, omdat ge in uw puberteit superveel vragen stelt, dus daar heb ik het wel wat moeilijk gehad. Ook mensen die naar mij kwamen en vroegen waarom ik niet op mijn adoptieouders leek. Dus confrontaties heb ik wel veel gehad. Dat was voor mij moeilijk om te accepteren, tot ik op een bepaald punt kwam in mijn leven dat ik iets had van "So be it". Het is zo uitgedraaid en veel kan ik er toch niet aan doen.” [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. “Ik zeg altijd dat ik een banaan ben. Wit vanbinnen en aan de buitenkant hoe de mensen mij zien. Dus ik een Belg, maar ook weer niet volledig.” [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. “Ik zie mezelf meer als een Belg. Het enige dat voor mij Aziatisch is, is mijn uiterlijk en geboorteland. Ik spreek geen chinees en heb ook heel weinig Aziatische vrienden, maar dat is denk ik ook omdat ik niet in een stad woon. Wij zijn heel wit opgevoed, in mijn hobbies en school had ik ook geen Aziatische vrienden. Dusja, 80-90% Belg en de rest Chinees.” [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. “Belg met Chinese roots, dat ben ik. Ik zie België zeker al mijn thuisland maar als ik op het nieuws iets hoor over China voel ik me er wel mee verbonden natuurlijk. Of als iemand het woord "China" of "Chinees" hoor uitspreken, dan voel ik me soms ook wel aangesproken. Dus, China staat zeker niet los van mij.” [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. “Ik heb deze vraag al eens gehad op mijn werk vorig jaar bij welke groep ik me het meest [thuis] voel, Belg of Chinees. Ik weet nog dat ik toen heb gereageerd van "ik voel mij Yo-Lin", en dat zal ergens wel een mix van de twee zijn.” [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. “Moeilijke vraag. Eigenlijk is het wel een sterk deel van mijn identiteit want het gaat er altijd zijn. Ik zal altijd geadopteerde blijven, maar het definieert me niet. Ik heb nooit in mijn familie mij gevoeld als 'de geadopteerde'.” [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. “Ik denk wel dat het een sterk onderdeel is van mijn identiteit. Ik besef het misschien minder maar ik denk wel dat het een groot onderdeel is van mijn leven. Ik kan dat deel niet ontkennen. Als mensen mij zien voor de eerste keer zijn de eerste vragen vaak ook "vanwaar kom je, wie zijn je ouders, Chinees of?" en dan moet je altijd uitleggen dat je geadopteerd bent, dus het is altijd aanwezig.” [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. “Bij mij is het niet echt een onderdeel van mijn identiteit. De band met mijn ouders zit goed, dat zijn voor mij ook mijn echte ouders, met mijn zussen zit het ook goed. Ik voel mij ook compleet Belg.” [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. “Zeer goede vraag. Nooit over nagedacht eigenlijk. Er zijn dus momenten waar ik kan wakker worden en het and vergeten dat mijn chinese kenmerken er nog zijn. Dus in dat opzicht realiseer ik me dat direct wel terug. Vanaf het moment dat ik interactie ga met mensen, verdwijnt het gevoel van 'wit zijn' ook. Dat neemt niet weg dat ik door mijn ouders en witte opvoeding, wel genie van sommige witte privileges. De universiteit bijvoorbeeld is ook een wit systeem en ik maak daar ook gewoon deel van uit.” [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. “Ik voel me eigenlijk volledig wit buiten het feit dat ik er niet wit uitzie.” [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. “Ik heb al een paar keer discussies gehad met mijn vrienden over dit onderwerp. Ik denk wel dat ik vanbinnen wit ben. Ik heb de westerse normen en waarden meegekregen, qua eten, qua alles maar ik zie eruit als een Aziaat. Ik denk dat ik beiden ben.” [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. “Ik heb tien jaar in een depressie gezeten omdat ik mij super onzeker voelde door pestgedrag en commentaar van andere mensen ook. Nu kan ik daar mee omgaan en kan ik dat van mij afschuiven maar vroeger niet. Dat heeft wel heel veel aan mijn zelfbeeld gedaan.” [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. “Ja ik heb wel getwijfeld aan mijn zelfbeeld en dat kwam meer aan bod tijdens mijn puberteit uiteraard, want dat is het moment dat je gevormd wordt. Er waren veel dingen die me triggerde en toen besefte ik dat dat misschien kwam omdat ik afgestaan was.” [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. “Getwijfeld aan mijn zelfbeeld heb ik niet echt gedaan. Want ik heb altijd wel het gevoel gehad dat ik overal welkom was, ook op school. Ik heb het geluk gehad dat ik nooit op school gepest ben geweest. Dat is eigenlijk allemaal vrij positief verlopen.” [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. “Ik heb geen gevoel van afkeer gehad, maar soms denk ik wel van “zijn bepaalde gebeurtenissen gebeurd omdat ik een andere huidskleur had, of dat ik er anders uitzag?”.” [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. “Ik zou heel graag willen antwoorden dat ik geen afkeer heb en het is ook zeker geen volmondige ja. Maar het is pas de laatste jaren dat ik meer en meer struggle met het idee van "Altijd de nice, nooit de mooiste". Deze quote komt uit een documentaire van Pete Wu en de bananen. Ik kon me daar heel fel in vinden. Want ik heb effectief heel snel het gevoel dat ik word afgeschreven op het eerste zicht en dat ik effectief altijd in de niche geplaatst word.” [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. “Ja, ik draag de afkeer nog een beetje eigenlijk. Dat was iets dat zich al afspeelde vanaf de lagere school. Dat draag ik nog steeds een beetje. In het middelbaar was het wel echt op zijn hoogtepunt. Nu is het wel al veel verminderd.” [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. “Afkeer was het niet. Voor mij is dat eigenlijk altijd een meerwaarde geweest, het feit dat ik uit China kom.” [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. “Het heeft niet voor een sterkere band met de Chinese cultuur gezorgd. Het was tof om een andere cultuur te leren kennen ook al was het soms zelfs een cultuurshock maar het heeft me niet dieper doen graven naar China of de Chinese cultuur.” [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. “Ik ben al drie keer teruggekeerd naar China. De eerste keer was ik vier jaar, daar weet ik dus bijna niks meer van. De tweede keer heb ik mijn weeshuis en oude verzorgsters teruggezien, dat was speciaal natuurlijk. Maar op dat moment was ik nog een kind, dus stond ik er niet te veel bij stil. Mijn derde keer was toen ik een stage deed in Shanghai en toen was ik ook oud genoeg om kritische vragen te stellen over mijn gevoelens over China. "In welke mate voel ik me deel van de samenleving, in welke mate herken ik mezelf op tv?". Die zaken vooral. Die hebben dus ontzettend bijgedragen tot de enorme appreciatie voor de cultuur. Dus ik wil zeker nog eens teruggaan, I love it.” [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. “Ik denk wel dat de terugreis voor een sterkere band met de Chinese cultuur gaat zorgen. Ik denk dat het zeer leuk gaat zijn omdat in het echt te zien en te ervaren omdat het een heel andere cultuur is.” [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. “Ik weet niet of het voor een sterkere band gaat zorgen. Misschien wel met dat ik zelf niet veel weet over de Chinese cultuur, dat ik daar dan veel kennis over ga krijgen. Maar het is nu niet omdat ik naar daar zou gaan, ik mij explicitiet daarin zou verdiepen.” [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. “Ik voelde mij op een bepaald moment echt thuis in China. Dat was een heel raar gevoel. Ook al ken ik de taal niet en de tradities. Het was echt wel een emotionele reis want ik vond het heel verwarrend om me thuis te voelen omdat ik ook Belg ben. Ik had het jaar erna toch wel moeilijk momenten met identiteitsproblemen.” [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. “Ik voelde me niet thuis in China, want daar werd ik ook al buitenlander gezien. Chinezen spraken me toen soms aan in het Chinees en dan moest ik wel altijd zeggen dat ik geadopteerd ben en geen Chinees kan.” [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. “In China rondlopen en er niet anders uitzien was wel leuk maar vanaf ze me aanspraken en ik niet kon antwoorden, realiseerde ik me wel weer dat ik Belg was. Dus ik heb me niet thuis gevoeld.” [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. “Ja, ik denk van wel [openstaan om de Biologische ouders te ontmoeten]. Ik denk gewoon dat dat een beetje vreemd gaat zijn omdat ik daar ook geen emotionele band mee heb. Ik heb die nooit gezien en gehoord en ik weet dus niet of het voor mij zo belangrijk zou zijn om hen terug te zien.” [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. “Ik ga er geen moeite voor doen om mijn biologische ouders te vinden. Stel, heel hypothetisch, dat ik morgen een telefoon krijg dat ze mijn biologische ouders hebben gevonden, dan goh, waarom niet. Maar dan zou er voor mij wel een vertaler-tolk geregeld moeten worden en dan zou ik ook de garantie moeten hebben dat zij mij ook willen zien. Want als zij daar zelf geen nood aan hebben, waarom dan oude koeien uit de sloot halen?” [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. “Ik weet nog niet of ik ze ooit zou willen ontmoeten. Eerder wel omdat ik wil weten hoe mijn echte ouders eruitzien en hoe zij zijn. Op bepaalde vlakken waar ik met bepaalde eigenschappen struggle, die zij dan ook zouden hebben, dat k beter kan begrijpen dan. En eerder niet want wat als ze dood zijn? Of stel dat ze een kei slecht leven hebben en leefsituatie? Ja dan zou ik echt niet weten hoe ik daarmee zou moeten omgaan.” [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. “Hm, je moet daar heel voorzichtig mee zijn. Ik heb al gehoord van andere geadopteerden die hun biologische ouders hebben leren kennen, die ouders verwachten dat hun dochter in België financiele steun en geld gaat geven aan hen, omdat zij in armoede leven. Ik zeg niet dat dat overal zo is, maar het bestaat wel. verder zijn er ook zo van die roots programma's op tv, waarbij de ontmoeting heel sprookjesachtig gemaakt ordt en geromantiseerd en zweverig. Daar geloof ik niet in. Ik ben liever realistisch dat de kans bestaat dat ik ze niet eens ga vinden of dat ze mij niet willen ontmoeten bijvoorbeeld.” [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. “Er was een heel grote taalbarrière tussen mijn en mijn biologische familie. De enige die kon vertalen was mijn mama aangezien zij Chinees spreekt. Dat leidde dan wel tot gemaakte gesprekken. het waren ook altijd small talks... Ik moest niet persé mijn biologische ouders leren kennen maar ik ben wel dankbaar dat ik ze ken.” [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. “Er is niet genoeg representatie in de media, om niet te zeggen geen. Maar zelfs niet alleen in de media of televisie hé, ook in de politiek en al. Ja ik vind dat wel schrijnend.” [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. “Er is te weinig representatie hé, niet veel. In België amper en op Netflix zijn er wel meer Aziatische mensen maar zij zijn ook gewoon altijd de beste vriend van het witte hoofdpersonage. Idem met zwarte mensen, zij spelen ook altijd de beste vriend van de witte persoon. Dat is jammer natuurlijk.” [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. “Voor mij zou het persoonlijk geen verschil maken maar ik kan het wel begrijpen dat andere mensen of kinderen vooral het fijn zouden vinden om iemand te zien op tv die op hen lijkt en dezelfde uiterlijke kenmerken deelt.” [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. “Ik denk dat het sowieso belangrijk is dat het niet alleen blanken zijn die op de televisie komen of in een tv-programma meedoen. Het is belangrijk dat er overal een mix van culturen is, ook in een bedrijf, maar het is niet essentieel dat er Chinezen meedoen in een programma voor mij.” [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. “Ik vind dat niet persé belangrijk. Ik weerspiegel me daar zelf niet aan.” [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. “Ik heb dat soms wel een beetje gemist. Ik heb daar nooit echt bij stilgestaan maar ik merk de laatste tijd wel dat er nu wat meer representatie mag zijn. Dat komt ook door de groep van "Untold Asian Stories" dat ik me er meer van bewust word gemaakt. Ik heb wel zoiets van "ik moet opkomen voor mezelf", dat is heel belangrijk.” [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. “Ik heb dat wel gemist. Want ik val super hard op en ik zou graag wat minder opvallen.” [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. “Met die dingen heb ik mij eigenlijk nooit beziggehouden. Ik ben sowieso al niet te veel bezig met makeup. Ik heb nooit schaamte gehad dat ik de enige was met zwart haar, ik heb daar nooit echt een probleem van gemaakt.” [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. “Ik had dat heel fel in mijn puberteit. Ik wou mijn haar altijd krullen. Ik wou er westerser uitzien. Ik wou rondere ogen hebben, ik wou groter zijn want mijn kleine beentjes waren typisch Aziatisch. Ik wou blondere haren hebben, want toen heb ik mijn haar ook geblondeerd.” [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. “Moest ik het aangegeven hebben dat ik op Chinese les wou, hadden mijn ouders daar direct mee toegestemd en gefinancieerd. They support me. Maar zij hebben nooit gepusht. Als ik kind hebben ze me wel meegenomen naar de Chinees-nieuwjaar show maar dat was het. Dat wordt ook bijna verwacht dat ik Chinees spreek omdat er een cultuur mij toegeeigend wordt, wat totaal niet niet mijn cultuur is.” [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. “Mijn ouders waren er heel supportive in. Toen wij klein waren, zijn wij op Chinese les geweest maar ik was te jong en deed daar niks voor dus dan stopt het natuurlijk. Ik vond het wel supertof dat mijn ouders daar ook zo open in waren. Ik mocht zoeken naar wie ik was, wie ik ben, wie ik wil zijn. Het gaat niet alleen om het geadopteerd zijn, maar ook om de steun van de ouders. Dat speelt daar een enorme rol in. Het is essentieel dat de ouders openstaan om hun kind de kans te geven in wie of wat ze willen zijn.” [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. “Niet echt. Zolang ik er zelf de nood niet aan heb om het nieuwjaar te vieren of de taal aan te leren hoeft het niet. Soms vind ik het wel jammer dat ik niet zoveel van de Chinese cultuur ken en weet, gewoon omdat ik het dan raar vind dat ik Chinees ben en er Chinees uitzie maar er dan niks van afweet. Maar ik vind het zeker niet supererg dat ik het niet heb ondervonden of beleefd.” [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. “Soms mis ik dat wel heel hard, want ik vind dat zoiets moois. Ik kon de Chinese cultuur nog meer apprecieren na ik terug thuiskwam van mijn rootsreis. Ik denk dus wel dat het een meerwaarde was geweest, dat ik dan beide culturen had. Ik kan mijn ouders dat ook niet kwalijk nemen want het is hun cultuur totaal niet. Die kennen dat ook niet. Die doen hun best op mij op te voeden, dus het is oké. Het is nu eenmaal zo.” [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. “Langs de ene kant denk ik wel dat adoptie zal blijven bestaan maar langs de andere kant lees je toch soms wel verhalen waarbij het minder goed gaat. Om te adopteren wordt het ook steeds moeilijk en moeilijker met landen die de adoptieregels nog strenger maken en waarbij er onderzoeken gaande zijn met de enorme wachtlijsten momenteel. Deze gaan natuurlijk nog veel langer worden en dus om die redenen denk ik dat het moeilijker gaat worden om een kind te adopteren.” [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. “Adoptie zal blijven bestaan. Er gaan altijd kinderen zijn die geen ouders hebben en te vondeling worden gelegd. Er zullen ook altijd mensen zijn die onvruchtbaar zijn of die een extra kind een tweede kans willen geven door die te helpen en te ondersteunen.” [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. “Met dat de eenkindpolitiek in China gedaan is en met dat ze nu openlijk anticonceptiemiddeleln hebben, denki ik dat het in China stilaan gaat stoppen. Maar ik denk dat het in Afrika wel gaat blijven duren.” [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. “Ik denk dat het zal blijven bestaan. Ik zou ook niet inzien waarom het zou afgeschaft moeten worden. Want ik dennk wel dat het twee partiejen a helpen. Mijn adoptieouders hadden een kinderwens en lijn biologische mama kon niet voor mij zorgen. Of dat nu lag aan de eenkindpolitiek, tienermoeder zwangerschap of een verkrachting, het kwam er op neer dat ze mij niet kon verzorgen dus dan was dit het beste alternatief. een moeder geeft haar kind niet zomaar op, dat gebeurt met een bepaalde reden. Die wou ook alleen maar het beste voor mij. Dus op die manier denk ik dat het twee partijen kan helpen.” [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. “In het begin dacht ik daar misschien meer zwart-wit over na, omdat ik het niet kon inbeelden dat je je eigen kind kunt opgeven en weggeven. Maar nu kijk ik er wel meer genuanceerd naar omdat je niet weet waar je was geëindigd moest je niet geadopteerd zjn. Dan had ik waarschijnlijk een heel ander leven in China gehad zonder te weten waar ik ging terechtkomen. Mijn biologische ouders in China hadden waarschijnlijk ook goede bedoelingen voor mij zodat ik een beter leven kon hebben, hier in België dan.” [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. “Mensen zeggen vaak over adoptieouders dat ze dat keigoed gedaan hebben en dat ze een kind gered hebben maar dat vind ik echt een hele foute visie want dat mag niet de drijfveer zijn. Mijn ouders hebben ook altijd gezegd van "wij hebben geadopteerd uit egoïsme, omdat wij een kind wilden". En dat is ook de reden waarom je moet adopteren, omdat je kinderen wilt, niet om een leven te redden. Want dan heb je niet altijd het beste voor met de adoptiekinderen.” [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. “Eigenlijk zou adoptie niet mogen bestaan hé. Een kind wordt weggehaald uit zijn vertrouwde context, dus in se ben ik daar niet voor. Ik ben er niet voor maar de realiteit is nu eenmaal wat het is. Dan kunnen we er maar het beste van maken en de voorzieningen zo optimaal mogelijk maken, wat niet makkelijk is als je kijkt naar hoeveel wanpraktijken er geweest zijn.” [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. “Ik denk dat beide kanten gehoord moeten worden. Want het moet heel moeilijk zijn als je een kinderwens hebt en je kan geen kinderen krijgen. Langs de andere kant, de éénkindspolitiek was er nu eenmaal. Je kreeg een boete als je een extra kind had, iets wat mijn ouders waarschijnlijk ook niet konden betalen. Ik was daar gewoonweg *te veel*. De maatschappij in China is heel andere dan de onze, zeker qua straffen en sancties dus dit zorgde voor heel veel schrik.” [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. “Ik zou het kind centraal stellen. Wat niet wegneemt dat ouders heel belangrijk zijn. de mens is een gemeenschapsdier. Een baby is niks onder een ouder die voor hen zorgt. Dus ik ontken het belang van beiden partijen niet, noch alle andere ettelijke partijen die erbij komen kijken. Maar ik durf te stellen dat ik het kind centraal stel.” [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. “Ik denk dat beide partijen even centraal moeten staan. Ik weet niks van mijn biologische ouders want met het beleid van de eenkindpolitiek is het allemaal wat illegaal gebeurd. Maar ik denk dus niet dat zij [biologische ouders] hulp hebben ontvangen. Zij zouden dat ook moeten krijgen, vooral mentale ondersteuning. Want ik denk dat dat heel pijnlijk is als moeder om uw kind af te staan.” [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. “Ik denk dat er altijd wel meer onderzoek naar gedaan kan worden. In mijn laatste jaar van het middelbaar deed ik mijn eindwerk over adoptie en dan had ik er wel wat zaken en informatie over gevonden maar het is eigenlijk wel een topic dat nog meer onderzocht mag worden, vind ik.” [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. “Er zal wel kwalitatief onderzoek gedaan zijn maar ik vind persoonlijk het debat in het dagelijkse leven belangrijker. Ik vind dat er zeer weinig debat rond adoptie wordt gevoerd. En als er dan debat word gevoerd, is het vaak in de functie van de adoptieve ouders of zijn het negatieve ervaringen. Dat vind ik schrijnend en jammer. Hierdoor krijgen mensen het idee dat adoptie niet goed is en het negatieve idee wordt dan alsmaar bevestigd en als waarheid genomen.” [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. “Ik vind dat ze de impact mogen onderzoeken van adoptie zowel bij de adoptieouders, de biologische ouders, als het adoptiekind. Er mag sowieso meer onderzoek gebeuren, aangezien er heel veel wanpraktijken binnen adoptie zijn, dus dat is wel belangrijk. Er er mag ook meer onderzoek gedaan worden en meer geïnvesteerd worden in nazorg, want dat vind ik ook heel belangrijk.” [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. “Meestal als je krantenartikels leest over adoptie gaat het eerder over de adoptieouders en misschien minder over de geadopteerden zelf en hoe die zich erbij voelen.” [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. “Ik heb nog niet zoveel mensen over adoptie horen praten. Er worden over zoveel dingen shows gemaakt, maar daar nog niet over precies. Ik denk dat mensen denken dat dat een moeilijk onderwerp is en dat dat gevoelig kan liggen bij heel veel mensen, wat voor sommige geadopteerden ook natuurlijk zo is. Er zijn heel veel geadopteerden in België en er zijn er ook genoeg die daar wel over willen praten.” [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. “Ik vind het wel belangrijk dat de machtsrelaties bestudeerd worden en dat ze ook onderzoeken in hoeverre het Westen macht uitoefent tegenover de armere of minder ontwikkelde landen. Er moet een gelijke relatie aanwezig zijn.” [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. “Ik ga niet zeggen dat het een nood is, want het is natuurlijk globaal, op een grote schaal. Maar ik denk dat het nuttiger zou zijn om kleinschaliger te werken, deftige opvolging te doen en lokaal onderzoek te doen. Ik denk dat die machtsrelaties er absoluut zijn en dat veel mensen denken dat ze adopteren vanuit hun goeie inborst, wat uiteindelijk pure white saviourism is, dus die studies zouden er rond gedaan moeten worden. Maar het lijkt me nu niet de essentie. Het is de opvolging, nazorg, intakes waar er nog veel meer aan kan gedaan worden.” [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. “Ik denk niet dat deze studies zo belangrijk is. Als de kinderen naar een beter ontwikkeld land kunnen gaan is dat een mooie win-win situatie voor beide partijen.” [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. “Ik vind dat de machtsrelaties zeker onderzocht mogen worden. Het gaat om mensenlevens en dat valt sowieso niet zwart-wit te bekijken dus ik vind dat het bestudeerd mag worden en op tafel mag gelegd worden. Niet alleen geadopteerden of mogelijke adoptieouders moeten hierover praten, maar ook de wereld en de maatschappij in het algemeen mag zich er bewust van zijn dat het bestaat en de verhouding er is.” [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. “De ontwikkelde landen hebben nu eenmaal het geld om voor die kinderen te zorgen en ze willen gewoon die kinderen helpen. Dus ik zie de link niet.” [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. “Machtsrelaties zullen wel bestaan, een koloniale link niet echt. Allé, dat hangt ook weer af van land tot land.” [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. “Er is zeker een koloniale link aanwezig. Als ik aan adoptie denk ik is het in mijn hoofd ook heel vaak dat het om een blank koppel gaat die een kindje uit het buitenland adopteren en in hun wereld verwelkomen. Ik heb het nog niet vaak anders geweten.” [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. “Ik zou sowieso een kindje adopteren. Moest ik vruchtbaar zijn zou ik een biologisch kind krijgen maar daarnaast zou ik sowieso nog een kindje adopteren. Gewoon omdat ik het idee erachter ook mooi vindt.” [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. “De procedure duurt heel lang om te adopteren. Mijn mama was vijf jaar bezig met de procedure om een Chinese baby te mogen ontvangen. Dat is mentaal heel zwaar. Je wordt ook continue gecontroleerd door een sociale werker, ze checken uw loon. Dus dat is echt heftig. Ik zou er niet aan beginnen als ik zelf kinderen kan krijgen, anders zou adoptie mijn tweede keuze zijn.” [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. “Ik vind het zeer belangrijk dat die bestaan. Het is belangrijk dat er een platform beschikbaar is voor mensen zoals wij [geadopteerden], waar we terecht bij kunnen. Ik heb daar heel lang niet van geweten, niet dat ik er nood aan had maar recent heb ik wel wat research gedaan en toen kwam ik bij zo'n platform waar je een buddy kunt worden voor andere geadopteerden en dat sprak me wel echt aan. Dus i'm all voor die platformen.” [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. “Ik vind het heel goed dat zij bestaan want zonder hen zouden er anders heel veel geadopteerden de psychologische hulp niet kunnen krijgen die op hen gefocust is. Steun en regulering zijn enorm belangrijk voor geadopteerden.” [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. “Ik vind de rol van nazorg belangrijk voor geadopteerden. Ik heb niet gemerkt dat dat bij ons thuis was, bij mijn jongere broer en mij, kwam er geen sociale werker langs of iemand dat kwam praten.

     Ik vind dat wel jammer. Gewoon tenminste komen praten, dat is het minste. Ik ben heel open over adoptie maar mijn twee broers hebben daar enorme problemen mee gehad, die hebben allebei in therapie gemoeten net zoals ik. Dus ik vind dat enorm belangrijk dat er iemand professioneel komt praten. Dus dat vind ik jammer, want ik vind dat iedereen de kans moet krijgen om erover te kunnen praten tegen iemand die daar gespecialiseerd in is. Dus psychologische hulp mag zeker onderdeel uitmaken van nazorg, maar ja, daar zullen dan weer te weinig hulpverleners voor zijn.” [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. “Ik vind nazorg even belangrijk vindt als de voorzorg, beetje opvolging, dat vind ik wel correct. Bij mij voorbeeld, ze hebben mijn moeder zo het vuur aan de schenen gelegd om dan achteraf als het gebeurt is er niet meer naar te kijken. De intake moet streng zijn sowieso, maar dan vind ik wel dat die nazorg even belangrijk is. Of gewoon aangeven van “kijk als je hulp nodig hebt als ouder, dit zijn een paar adressen waar je naartoe kan”. Want mijn mama heeft haar plan getrokken en ze heeft dat goed gedaan maar ze bleef wel op haar honger zitten want dat wordt haar wel beloofd. En dat is wat ik dan jammer vind.” [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. “De rol van nazorg vind ik eigenlijk echt heel belangrijk. Dat zou even belangrijk moeten zijn als de strenge selectieprocedure voor adoptieouders.” [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. “Ik vind nazorg enorm belangrijk. Op een tijdsframe van vijf tot tien jaar mogen ze dat wel opzetten om dan steun te verlenen aan de geadopteerde. Ik weet dat ze zoveel strenge procedures doen om mensen te laten adopteren en hen te controleren maar eigenlijk is wat er na gebeurt even belangrijk of zelf belangrijker. Want daarna spendeer je heel uw leven in die familie en het gezin. Dus nazorg is superbelangrijk en ik denk niet dat de overheid daar zich mee bezighoudt want ik heb geen enkele keer een sociale werker gezien in België. Vanaf ik mijn nationaliteit als Belg had, trekken ze zich er best weinig van aan denk ik. Ze doen er niet genoeg voor om nazorg te doen of na -controles in te voeren, om te kijken of alles goed gaat.” [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. “Ik heb adoptie positief meegemaakt. Vooral omdat ik niet veel last had van racisme en mijn thuissituatie met men ouders die heel open waren. Die zaken hebben daar echt wel tot bijgedragen. Ik ben nu ook op een punt in mijn leven dat ik heel gelukkig ben. Ik heb ook slechte momenten gehad, maar vandaag de dag kan ik wel zeggen dat het enorm positief is geweest. Het voelt ook niet voor mij aan alsof ik geadopteerd ben. Ik ben hier opgegroeid en ik weet ik er een beetje buitenlands uitzie maar dat is het dan ook.” [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. “Mijn adoptie ervaring was positief. Eerlijk gezegd vergeet ik ook gewoon voor de helft van de tijd dat ik geadopteerd ben en wanneer ik dat dan in een gesprek gooit, krijg ik direct opmerkingen van "Allé, ocharme, dat is kei erg". Terwijl ik dat helemaal niet erg vind en helemaal geen probleem mee heb. Dusja, heel positief. En dat zou ook meer belicht mogen worden, dat positieve.” [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. “Hoe zou ik dat omschrijven...Binnen het gezin vrij positief want er was goeie communicatie en dergelijke. Binnen de maatschappij mocht er wel wat meer representatie aanwezig zijn samen met dat deeltje nazorg. De discriminatie en het naroepen was voor mij minder positief, natuurlijk. De adoptie op zich zie ik als een neutraal verhaal en mijn vrienden en familie zie ik als een positief verhaal.” [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. “Dit is gewoon mijn leven. Ik kan daar eigenlijk niet veel anders over zeggen. Het is begonnen met adoptie maar adoptie is niet alles. Ik ga mijn leven niet reduceren tot adoptie. Zo kijk ik niet naar mezelf, of mijn leven. Voor mij is adoptie de start van het leven wat ik nu mag leiden.” [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. “Ik denk wel dat ik geluk heb met de familie en de goede vrienden die ik heb, maar ik weet wel van andere geadopteerden dat het niet goed gaat tussen hen en hun ouders en dat vind ik heel jammer dan. Dus af en toe besef ik wel dat ik heel veel chance heb. Maar voor de rest was het voor mij heel positief dus. Ik ben blij, ik ben gelukkig.” [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. “Ik heb enorm veel geluk gehad met mijn adoptie in België en met mijn ouders. Ik heb heel veel kansen al gekregen van hen in het leven. Dus aan de ene kant ben ik wel blij dat ik geadopteerd ben want als je het vergelijkt met mijn familie in China had het anders geweest. Ik had daar ongetwijfeld ook kansen gekregen maar niet in dezelfde mate als de kansen hier.” [↑](#footnote-ref-113)