Tracing the Red Thread: Chinese–U.S. Transnational Adoption and the Legacies of "Home"

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Abstract: Contemporary forms of globalization have expanded conceptions of "family." A particular instance of this involves U.S. parents travelling to adopt children from China. These families utilize transnational networks in ways that encourage multiple trips "home" to China and may involve heritage tours, humanitarian projects or nascent birth-parent searches. Consequently, adoption tourism, marketed as an "adventurous family journey" to a "far away world" where your "cherished gift" awaits, illustrates the ways in which contemporary notions of kinship are linked to complex forms of travel whereby boundaries between tourism, leisure and social projects are increasingly blurred.

Keywords: China, kinship, tourism, adoption, transnational

Résumé : Les formes contemporaines de la mondialisation ont élargi les concepts de « famille ». On en trouve un exemple particulier chez les parents États-Uniens qui voyagent en Chine pour y adopter des enfants. Ces familles utilisent des réseaux transnationaux dans des manières qui favorisent de multiples voyages « de retour à la maison » en Chine, et qui peuvent comprendre du tourisme patrimonial, des projets humanitaires ou la recherche de parents biologiques, aujourd'hui en émergence. En conséquence, le tourisme d'adoption, mis en marché comme « un voyage familial d'aventure » vers « un monde éloigné » ou vos « cadeaux chéris » vous attendent, illustre les manières dont les notions modernes de parenté sont liées à des formes complexes de voyage dans lesquelles les frontières entre tourisme, loisirs, et projets sociaux sont de plus en plus brouillées.

Mots-clés : Chine, parenté, tourisme, adoption, transnational

Background

A buoyant expectant mother turns to her husband and happily tells him, "It's time." Quickly, the parents bustle around the house hurriedly grabbing jackets, keys and bags and leave their home. They get into their car and arrive at their destination in anticipation of the arrival of their first child. For these parents, featured in a U.S. nationwide advertising campaign by the American retailer J.C. Penney, the delivery of their new child will be at the airport, not the local hospital. The commercial, shown during the 2000 coverage of the Sydney Olympics, ends with the white parents returning home from the airport with their newly adopted Asian daughter. This advertisement is one of an early set of images promoted by IKEA, John Hancock, Target and other retail stores that is indicative of the rising awareness of transnational adoptions. In important ways, this commercial is now dated and inaccurate; Korean–U.S. transnational adoptees no longer travel to the United States to meet their parents, and most other Asian adoptees were adopted by their parents in the country of their birth. Consequently, parents are the ones travelling to far away worlds to meet their children and have become the predominant symbols of transnational adoptive kinship, parental love and commitment.

Cultural anthropologists have long argued that kinship is not a fixed or "natural" category that is solely the product of biology. Adoption, as well as assisted reproductive technology (ART), are key examples of the ways in which families can be viewed as made rather than born (Modell 1994; Weismantel 1995; Yanagisako and Collier 1987). Contemporary U.S. adoption practices were transformed following the end of World War II when parents in the United States began adopting foreign children orphaned by war. Although the bulk of these children were from war-ravaged countries in western Europe, from 1948 to 1953, 2,418 children were adopted from Asian countries, and roughly two-thirds of those children were Japanese (Pertman 2000:54). Con-

sequently, this period marks a turning point in U.S. adoption trends, with adoptive parents beginning to reach across perceived racial and cultural boundaries, a phenomenon that has become even more commonplace since the 1960s.[1]

Like medically assisted reproduction, contemporary forms of adoption now extensively utilize transnational networks and travel; thus, travel and adoption have become deeply interconnected. For example, in addition to preparing to become parents, most adopters must also prepare to travel to an unfamiliar country, often with a significant language barrier. Families may also plan return trips to provide services to Social Welfare Institutes (SWI) or to explore the culture into which their child was born.

Anthropologists and others working on adoption are now exploring the relationship between this form of family-building and travel (e.g., Cohen 2007; Dorow 2006; Kim 2005; Louie 2004; Ponte et al. 2010; Volkman 2005b). In addition, scholars researching Chinese–U.S. transnational adoptions have begun looking at ways in which relationships to a Chinese homeland may be understood as client, ambassador or gift (Dorow 2006), through heritage tours (Kim 2005; Louie 2004; Ponte et al. 2010) and by participating in language classes and activities sponsored by local U.S. organizations such as Families with Children from China, and other forms of "culture keeping" (Dorow 2006; Jacobsen 2008; Volkman 2005a). This article contributes to this recent line of inquiry by focusing particularly on Chinese–U.S. transnational adoptions as well as the interplay between tourism and travel (between the United States and an adoptee's Chinese "home") and kinship, in what I term "kinship tourism."

In the case of Chinese–U.S. transnational adoption, the adoptee is at once a local at "home" in China and also a tourist travelling domestically in China for two weeks and then returning to the United States with a privileged immigration status. This status and newfound prosperity highlight her position at the nexus of disparate interests and experiences of both tourism and kinship. In this way, she literally embodies the ways in which these interests may be bridged.

U.S.–Chinese transnational families are a compelling example of kinship tourism because the number of adoptions increased from a mere dozen in 1988 to over 3,300 in 1996, peaking at 7,044 in 2004. In fact, in the United States, foreign-born children are adopted from China more than any other country.[2] The growth of adoption agencies has kept pace with the demands of prospective adoptive parents, and travel has become both a very important component of the initial adoption process and, for many, an ongoing aspect of family life and identity formation.

In particular, many adoption agencies, counsellors and the Chinese government, through their Ministry of Civil Affairs (responsible for overseeing adoptions), argue for an enduring relationship between China and adoptees. Consequently, travel has become important to families, as they are brought together and work to return "home" to China. In this way, kinship travel is constructed to weave traces and legacies of "home." This research looks at the ways in which Chinese–U.S. adoptees' experiences differ from those of other waves of adoptees because the notion of China as homeland is brought into the adoption process by adoption agencies and counsellors. Moreover, families are encouraged to incorporate this into their family life, a process that begins as parents collect souvenirs on their adoption trip. As their children grow, many families move beyond simply discussing China and instead work to "return home" and "give back."

U.S. parents who seek to establish kinship ties with Chinese children use travel to establish and grow those ties. However, simply describing the nature of this travel is insufficient because it lacks a full exploration of the context and power relations within which travel occurs. In this way, a study of tourism is much more effective because, unlike travel, tourism invokes an understanding of the context in which travel happens, the formation of cultural identity, the interplay between guest and host, the power structures and social relations within which travel is embedded, and the collection of industries that make travel possible.

Tourism and temporary travel have been part of human cultures for a very long time and have roots in pilgrimage, exploration and health. Tourism, as a focus for anthropology, began in the 1970s following the mass tourism made possible in the United States by improved resources and increased leisure time following World War II. Early approaches to tourism treated it as a "manifestation of leisure [which] presupposes a socio-economic milieu in which money and time-away-from-work can be accumulated to be spent at will" (Smith 1989:18). A tourist was merely "a temporarily leisured person who voluntarily visits a place away from home for the purpose of experiencing a change" (Smith 1989:1).

Since the early 1980s, anthropologists have examined more complicated connections between tourists and locals and the way culture is represented and understood in the context of tourism (e.g., Turner and Turner 1978; Nash 1981; Urry 1990). In general, older studies either focused on tourists and their motivations or examined the impact of tourism on locals (Stronza 2001:262). Contemporary

studies employ a transnational analytical framework (e.g., Ebron 2000; Ness 2005) and have also complicated the study of tourism, particularly with regard to space. For example, Hui notes that "numerous studies of tourism remain limited by spacializations that work out acceptable spaces for tourism" (2008:292). Historically, "acceptable spaces" have typically included places associated with leisure (the beach, mountains, historical sites, etc.) at the expense of "dark" places (war memorials, prisons, and sites of infant abandonment) (e.g., Urry 2002) and everyday spaces, such as home (e.g., Hui 2008:304), subjects that are now popular lines of inquiry. Tourism studies have also been complicated by projects that consider a wide variety of experiences that blur the boundaries between host and guest, work and leisure, sex and romance (e.g., Brennan 2004; Frohlick 2010), and reproduction and fertility (e.g., Inhorn 2011; Whittaker and Speier 2010). Importantly, adoption travel transgresses these spacializations and , incorporates "acceptable" destinations such as the Great Wall, luxury hotels, shopping markets and panda reserves with an adoptee's "everyday" spaces (both in the SWI and possibly foster homes) as well as, increasingly, "dark" destinations such as roads and bridges, which are identified as places of abandonment.

Using Chinese–U.S. transnational adoption as an example, I argue that kinship tourism offers anthropologists a way of thinking about new family forms and the complex interplay between guest and host, and local and tourist. It also offers anthropologists a way of thinking about new forms of kinship that are "made overseas" and embedded in larger transnational structures of power.

Methods

I first began this project in 1998 in Pittsburgh when I was frequently asked about my earlier experiences travelling and teaching English in China, by friends, colleagues and their acquaintances who were interested in adopting Chinese children, typically girls.[3] People I spoke with wanted to know more about the situation facing adoptive parents travelling to China and the reasons why there were so many abandoned children, especially healthy baby girls.[4]

While I could help prospective parents with some basic travel information and had seen dozens of adopting parents while in Guangzhou in early 1997, I realized I knew very little about the social issues surrounding the legal status of abandonment and the adoption of children in China. Following a highly inflammatory 1996 BBC television documentary entitled *The Dying Rooms*, foreign access to Chinese SWIs had been severely curtailed, and I was worried that the Chinese adoption community would be reluctant to talk with me about such a sensitive topic.

Ultimately, these concerns were manageable, and I conducted extensive research beginning in 2001. This work is part of a six-year, multisite ethnographic research project conducted in three phases. During the first phase, I conducted fieldwork at various stages of the adoption process and used both formal and informal interviews with parents, staff and volunteers in U.S. adoption agencies and support groups. Research involved extensive participant observation in events such as educational and travel workshops, children's playgroups and a variety of social events in Pittsburgh. I accompanied a group of adopting parents on their two-week trip to China to meet their children in Guangxi Province, and many of their thoughts and experiences are represented here. While all the U.S. parents and the Chinese SWI staff, volunteers and older children were fully informed of and approved of my research, to protect their privacy, I have used pseudonyms for them, as well as for the younger children in their care.[5]

The second phase of this project involved two years of working with NGOs. Funded in part by a Fulbright fellowship in the People's Republic of China, while based in Beijing, I also regularly worked in SWIs in Tianjin and Jiaozuo (both within two hours' travel of Beijing) and Henan Province. I volunteered as a secretary and coordinator for expatriate volunteer groups, local hospitals and international aid foundations that have established relationships with welfare institutes and provide supplemental funding and medical care to orphaned children. I interviewed 12 families who were returning to China to "give back" to children in China and were engaged in service projects organized by church groups and organizations, such as Half the Sky and Our Chinese Daughters Foundation.

The third phase of this project involved two summers (2007, 2009) of research in Beijing conducting additional interviews and returning to SWIs in which I had worked to gain a longitudinal perspective on outcomes for children and service projects.

U.S.–China Travel

> Chinese folklore says, "When a child is born, invisible red threads reach out from a child's spirit and connect it to all important people who will enter the child's life. As the child grows, the threads shorten, bringing closer those people who are destined to be together."
>
> Story printed on the back side of "red thread girl" note cards sold under adoption items at http://www.chinasprout.com/

In China, red thread—in the form of bracelets, wall hangings and ornaments—has a distinctly auspicious meaning. It is quite literally woven throughout the fabric of Chinese daily life and rituals. In Mandarin, the red thread saying, *jian hong xian* (见红线), or "meeting by red thread," is perhaps a timeless image in China. It is most often associated with a Tang Dynasty (618–907 C.E.) proverb known as *hong sheng ji zu* (红绳系足), or "feet linked by red cords." This proverb tells the tale of the old man in the moon, who acts as matchmaker and unites destined couples by tying their feet together with a red thread. This union is often arranged over long distances and despite the objections of family. Given the history of pragmatic, arranged marriage in China, this image is not light-hearted or necessarily romantic but rather a reflection of destiny. And yet, over the past ten years, the red thread has become a powerful metaphor within the community of parents who have adopted from China. Red thread images are widely available through products sold by agencies, support groups, publishers and others serving the adoption community in the United States and China. Many of these items are designed with children in mind and are especially cute and appealing to families with children adopted from China. These communities are exemplified by organizations such as Families with Children from China that support Internet chat groups, local workshops, Chinese New Year celebrations and other events designed to foster a sense of community and participation around the experience of adoption from China. However, the complex and shifting meanings associated with the red thread imagery illustrate the ways in which travel is embedded in the formation of Chinese–U.S. adoptive families as well as the physical and emotional ties many families have to China. Shopping for red thread souvenirs while travelling, adding a small ornament to a backpack or wearing a bracelet may serve as a reminder of China and the ties that bind—a connection to Chinese culture and a form of "culture-keeping" (Jacobsen 2008) by (often white) adoptive parents for their Chinese daughters. For many, this is in anticipation of a more significant connection that often includes a return trip.

U.S.–Chinese adoptive families participate in tourism, and over the last decade, three types have become established: (1) adoption travel in which the family first comes together; (2) homeland or heritage tours organized by both adoption travel agencies and the Chinese government; and (3) "giving back" tours that are linked to development, Christian or charitable NGOs, such as those organized, until recently, by groups such as Half the Sky and Our Chinese Daughters Foundation. Although these forms of adoption tourism are often marketed and discussed separately, what is most compelling is the ways in which the lines between these forms of travel and the ideals of kinship, leisure, travel and service are blurred.

Adoption Travel

> When we get home at 4PM EST on Thursday we will have traveled half-way across the world to a whole new life.
>
> —Email from adoptive parent, 1999

For transnational adoptive families, concerns about cultural integration are central to the adoption process. Following their selection of an agency and their completion of an initial application, parents begin to compile their dossier of required paperwork, which will include their birth, marriage and (if previously married) divorce certificates, references from friends, police background checks, a variety of government immigration-related forms and financial statements. At some point near the completion of this dossier, parents will schedule a home study with a social worker. To complete this, the social worker will visit the home and interview the parents on at least one occasion. They must also have access to any other residents of the home. While there is some variation in the questions asked of parents, one important question that is widely addressed in the home study is, "How do you plan to address your child's Chinese identity?"[6]

Parents often take this question at face value and accept the idea of "Chineseness" as a fact of citizenship and genetic descent. However, there are many ways in which Chineseness can be understood. Andrea Louie addresses the contested notion of Chineseness in her ethnography, *Chineseness across Borders* (2004). Louie examines the ways in which Americans of Chinese descent experience identity as they return to China on "roots" tours sponsored by the People's Republic of China. Louie argues that she is a "'living oxymoron' who fits neither into the category of 'foreigner' nor 'Chinese [though she is 'racially'] a 'descendant of the dragon by virtue of [her] black hair and yellow skin" (2004:14–15). Clearly, for Louie, race, in the sense of Asian physiognomy, is an insufficient marker to be "fully" Chinese. Rather, she sees Chineseness as something that can "be stretched to include the many people of the diaspora and at other times to distinguish one group within the category from another"; for example, Chinese from the Chinese American other (2004:21). Moreover, she "takes Chineseness to be an open signifier, a fluid and contested category that encompasses a

diversity of political, 'racial' and ethnic meanings within shifting and varied contexts" (2004:21). For the agencies with whom I worked, Chineseness is rooted in a link to China as homeland, and tourism and travel offer parents, typically not Chinese, a way to incorporate China into their families and establish those bonds. As part of the adoption process, parents are introduced to the importance of helping their adoptive child(ren) to negotiate their identity as a child adopted from China.

While older adoptive approaches (particularly those for Korean children adopted in the 1980s) encouraged assimilation, adult adoptees have argued that this attempt to erase important racial and cultural differences has been deeply problematic, often leaving them feeling confused and frustrated (Cox 1999; Kim 2005; Pertman 2000). As Korean adoptees have matured, they have addressed the ways in which they were sometimes made to feel ashamed of their heritage or felt their Korean heritage was downplayed to teach them that they were no different from anyone else. This left some children with the feeling that they were or should be "as good as white." Over the past ten years, adult Korean adoptees are returning "home" on heritage tours to Korea. As Eleana Kim explains, this has resulted in a complicated relationship between the Korean state, which views adoptees as part of the global Korean "family" and as a productive link to the global economy, and adult adoptees, who typically seek a more personal experience and do not necessarily feel a nationalistic tie to their "homeland."

As a result of the Korean experience, adoption agencies, social workers and government authorities have promoted practices that are designed to help parents incorporate elements of Chinese culture into their family life. Given that most adoptive parents are not Chinese, travel and a connection to China are articulated as critical to the construction of a feeling of Chineseness. For many parents, this means collecting souvenirs (red threads) and photographs of the initial trip—memories for children who are too young to remember. All of the parents I interviewed and travelled with had a predetermined list of expected purchases for shopping in Guangzhou. While, of course, these lists do vary, several items nevertheless appeared again and again, and all served as commodified (and very often gendered) signposts of the adoption process, the act of becoming parents and, more specifically, the act of becoming parents of adopted Chinese daughters. For example, while China souvenirs abound, many of the stores are filled with frilly dresses, hair bows and pink and red silk *qipao*, traditional Chinese dresses. For many parents, purchasing the special-issue "adoption" Barbie (available only by travelling to the White Swan hotel)[7] constituted an important "memory" and introduction to western notions of femininity for their new daughters.

On my first adoption trip to China, I accompanied a group of adopting parents on their two-week trip to China to meet their children. An adoption agency introduced me to Liz because she needed a travelling companion. Her husband was staying home to care for their three biological children, including two daughters, ages 10 and 12, and a four-month-old son who had quite unexpectedly arrived in the midst of their adoption preparations. Liz was comfortable about caring for her adoptive child but was anxious about travel to China. Consequently, she was eager to have me accompany her. In addition to Liz and me, our group included seven married couples and Kathy, who was travelling with her sister because her husband was also at home caring for their older biological children. In addition to Liz and Kathy, one other couple, Dave and Dana, were in their first marriage and already had children. Three couples were in their second marriages, and at least one of the spouses already had grown children; one of these couples was adopting from China for the second time. The remaining three couples were first-time parents who had no biological children because of fertility problems. All of the participants were white, except for one interracial couple, where the woman was born in Taiwan but had grown up in the United States. This group was among the first to be processed under the new U.S. citizenship legislation.[8] Only three out of the group of 18 had already been to China. None of the parents expressed having had any particular interest in China before their interest in adoption, although all of the parents were pleased to have an opportunity to "see" China.

An important concern of parents while they are in China is Chinese views of their new families. For most parents, there is little chance to interact directly with Chinese people outside of their hotels, primarily owing to the language barrier, as there is only one translator per group. Occasionally, parents do meet students and others who are able to speak English. As our group strayed from the luxury accommodations so accustomed to hosting adoptive parents, the sight of nine pairs of U.S. parents and their Chinese daughters, on a variety of outings to parks, temples and markets, invariably created a stir. After I asked an older woman for directions in Chinese, her friends and others nearby realized I could speak Chinese. They were eager to finally be able to talk to parents about their reasons for adopting from China, their lives in the United States and their impressions of China.

Many Chinese people commented to me that the parents were "doing a good thing" by adopting the children and providing them with good opportunities. Chinese onlookers would frequently hold the children's hands, grab their feet or tickle their necks and exclaim, "Xingfu" (fortunate)! Salespeople in shops and elderly ladies doing *tai qi* in the nearby parks greeted our group, asking me questions about the girls: "How old are they?" "Will they have other brothers or sisters?" "Will they learn Chinese?" "Will they return to China?" In many ways, they seemed to be asking, "Will they still be 'Chinese'?" These questions indicate the enduring importance many Mainland Chinese continue to place on language and culture as signifiers of Chinese cultural identity, particularly for Chinese who leave China.

In between squeezing cheeks and expressing concern that the babies were not dressed warmly enough, they asked about the parents as well. "Where are they from?" "Why do Americans like girls so much?" "How much does it cost?" As I translated, this last question was particularly problematic for parents, who were now much more aware of how large both their incomes and expenses must seem to those who asked the question.[9] Parents, who in the United States had easily answered this question, found that in the Chinese context, the question felt as if someone were asking how much they paid to buy a child. Furthermore, as Helena Ragone (1997) notes in her study of surrogacy in the United States, middle-class U.S. parents are not generally comfortable discussing market forces in conjunction with family relationships because of the seeming contradiction between the altruism of parental love and the payment for services rendered. Since transnational adoption requirements and costs make it nearly impossible for lower-income parents to adopt, adoptive parents of Chinese girls are financially secure. For this reason, transnational adoption has been implicated in a global process of stratified reproduction, whereby wealthy white families adopt children (often Hispanic, African or Asian) from poorer, developing nations (Solinger 2001). However, others have resisted a perception of adoption that is rooted in a tug of war between narratives of exploitation and rescue; instead, they seek to unpack a complex web of privilege and loss (Cohen 2007; Dubinsky 2010). Kinship tourism furthers this approach using an analysis of adoption travel and notions of home as points in which systemic connections can be seen.

Adoption travel to China requires a two-week stay in China to process the Chinese adoption paperwork in the city in which the parents are adopting and the U.S. citizenship paperwork at the U.S. consulate in Guangzhou. One of the first public outings for the newly united families I travelled with was a trip to the Guangxi provincial notaries and adoption bureau. The group was assembled in a small room; with the aid of an interpreter, one by one each set of parents was called up to complete the necessary provincial paperwork. This was a chance for some of the parents to take pictures and have a brief conversation with the orphanage staff representing their child. Following the completion of the paperwork, the bureau director made a short speech assuring the parents that they were certain they would be good parents and wished them well. Lastly, they presented each girl with a parting gift of a string of pearls. The parents were all clearly touched and surprised by the gift.

Once the Chinese paperwork was concluded and the children were officially "theirs," parents began to discuss the upcoming trip to Guangzhou in which they could finalize the U.S. side of the adoption. A significant part of the Guangzhou experience entails shopping, and all the parents had a list of items they considered essential mementos of both China and their adoption. As Dorow has noted, the exchange and purchase of these kinds of gifts represents not just the cultural imaginaries of American adoptive parents but also those of the shopkeepers and facilitators (2004:94). Parents planned to buy items that, for them, signified China: Chinese characters of the girls' *English* names, mandarin jackets and stuffed panda bears. These souvenirs, along with the photographs parents take and the landmarks (both personal and historical), are embedded within a tourism industry that frames the relationship between adoptees and China. For these families, this experience of travel was the first step in a long process of addressing what they perceive to be a cultural heritage being brought into their family.

Heritage Tours

In addition to service projects, return trips, known as heritage tours, have been promoted by both the state (China) and the adoption community to construct a cultural identity by returning home. Heritage tour itineraries are typically marketed as a return "home" for adoptees and include visits to important cultural sites, cultural performances and, of course, shopping. Bridge of Love Adoption Services (BLAS) is a government-run agency that is under the auspices of the Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs. The agency works to facilitate travel and adoption services and utilizes the notions of "home" and a Chinese "motherland" in ways that work to position the state as family. These tours

are intentionally constructed to develop the relationship between the adoptive family and China through a travel experience that builds on the first adoption trip. BLAS identifies the enhancement of these heritage tours as a major goal and states on its website:

> [China Center of Adoption Affairs] will continue to organize various activities and invite the adoption agencies, adoptive families and adoptees to visit China. Heritage tours help the children understand more about their motherland and hometown and develop a *correct perspective* [my emphasis] on inter-country adoption. Through heritage tours, we can also know about the life of the adoptees abroad and the integration of the child into adoptive families.[10]

The passage reveals the structuring of both kinship and nation through heritage tourism (Kim 2005). The itinerary is similar in many ways to a tour that is not organized around adoption and inevitably includes iconic trips to the Great Wall, Beijing historical sites, acrobats and the Terra Cotta Warriors and *lots* of pandas. All of these are important signifiers of Chinese culture. However, some important differences exist as well. For example, adoption travel typically includes an emphasis on "culture study" in the form of small classes on calligraphy, tai qi, dance and so on. Adoption heritage travel also typically includes a visit to the adoptee's home welfare institute and a stay at the White Swan hotel in Guangzhou, where families stayed while the immigration paperwork was processed at the U.S. consulate. Another key difference is that adoptees travel for free: only adults or other children are charged. These tours are an important expression of the goals and desires of Chinese policies. However, they have not been offered regularly, and I have only interviewed two families who participated on this particular tour.

Parents I worked with often discussed returning to China when their children were old enough to appreciate the experience. Kathy, only half-jokingly, suggested that her adoption facilitator's next job could be facilitating reunion trips for the adoptive families that would allow them to travel and explore Chinese culture in a way they were unable to do because of the demands of their new children. Although parents acknowledge that the girls themselves may or may not be receptive[11] to these trips, especially during adolescence, they all considered potential return trips to be valuable and anticipated that this would help their daughters to more fully appreciate their cultural heritage (see also Louie 2004). In addition, the parents see heritage tours as one way they can celebrate the unique way their transnational family was created. Because of the closed nature of these adoptions, parents feel secure that their daughters will be able to return to China to explore their cultural roots without the potential complications and emotional conflicts associated with conducting a search for their birth parents. However, as Ponte and colleagues (2010) have noted, expectations and concerns often differ greatly from parent to child. Moreover, given the experiences of older Korean adoptees, who benefited from changes in Korean attitudes and state policies, there is reason to believe that the circumstances in China will change also. Contemporary DNA testing ensures that a search for birth parents is possible. Recently, there is also an indication that birth parents might, someday, want to be found. Although abandoning one's child remains highly stigmatized, the recent expansion of Chinese "baby hatches"[12] has brought new, often sympathetic, attention to the plight of many Chinese biological parents. Some parents have been dismissed as greedy or selfish, but many are seen to be distraught and desperate because of poverty or illness. My research indicates that children who are perceived to be "disabled" represent the majority of children legally declared abandoned in many regions of China (Cohen 2007). If state policies no longer criminalize child abandonment and the government continues to welcome adoptees as lost "family," birth parents may feel more comfortable being identified. This will be an important area for future research.

Chinese authorities have exerted a degree of influence as adoptive families have begun, through unofficial channels, to search for birth parents. One organization, Our Chinese Daughters Foundation, has pulled out of China and ended work they had begun to do aiding in searches because their "office in Beijing was constantly questioned by the police [which] was troublesome for staff and caused them to worry about their own futures ... While [they] wanted to do this important work, [they] did not want it to cause ... staff any hardships" (Waldmeir 2011). Other organizations are successfully aiding parents but, by using the "back door" (*hou men*), have not yet interfered with the formation of the "correct perspective" the state seeks. In these ways, the state works to reclaim its famously "lost daughters" (Evans 2000) but only in the "correct way"—encouraging adoptees to "come back," constructing itself as home and mother and, through tourism, moulding a legacy of "home" in both literal and symbolic ways.

Giving Back

> Half the Sky was created by adoptive parents of orphaned Chinese children in order to enrich the lives and enhance the prospects for the children in

> China who still wait to be adopted and for those who will spend their childhoods in orphanages. [They] establish early childhood education, personalized learning and infant nurture programs in state-run Chinese welfare institutions to provide the children stimulation, individual attention, and an active learning environment. [Half the Sky]

With the 2005 publication of *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*, an important discussion of adoptees returning to their "roots" in search of their "homeland," birth culture and birth families began (e.g., Kim 2005; Volkman 2005b; Yngvesson 2005). While Chinese adoptees are only now of an age to begin return trips to China in earnest, clearly their experiences will inform ideas about diaspora and third-space cultures. For the moment, other participants in organizing return trips, notably both the Chinese and U.S. governments, adoption agencies, and parents in the United States and caretakers in China, reveal much about the constructed nature of these returns.

The notion of "giving back" to the SWI and China is linked to a construction of adoptees as a gift, one that sometimes implies exchange (Dorow 2006). For example, one key challenge faced by parents when travelling to adopt is that they typically need to make a payment to the director of the SWI, often in cash, for US$3,000 to US$5,000.[13] Although this is payment for services rendered and sometimes articulated as reimbursement for the preliminary medical and social costs of raising the adoptee, parents and adoption groups see it as a donation and the first step to "giving back" and helping children who remain in China. By framing it as a donation, they are resisting any accusations of commodifying children. Here, a notion of service, linked to an ideology of home and homeland through the SWI, is intimately connected to the experience of the family as they participate in adoption tourism. This is an important consideration for families who are able to return to China, who often use missionary or volunteer opportunities as the basis for their trip. I had the opportunity to accompany a mother and her seven-year-old adopted daughter, Katie, on a return visit organized by Half the Sky to Katie's first home. Katie and her mother, along with a group of adoptive girls and their mothers, had returned to China to help build play space at a large SWI on the outskirts of Guangzhou. This idea of return is beginning to have real resonance with families who have adopted from China, as many girls are now old enough to be interested in China, their early caretakers and the children currently in residence. One afternoon, the group had time to travel freely around Guangzhou and pursue their individual interests, be it shopping, family reunions or Katie's return visit to the SWI from which she was adopted. Katie and her mom, Ellie, and their friend, Diane, were committed to the visit but were facing some logistical obstacles, so they approached me as a translator and travel aide. One key problem was that they wanted to phone the SWI to arrange a visit. However, this was not possible because it was Sunday and the office was not staffed. Ultimately, we got the address from the hotel, and a very friendly and helpful cab driver worked hard to locate the SWI. This is often very difficult, since SWIs are typically designed to be private and may not be particularly well known.

First, when we arrived at the SWI with no appointment, I expected we would have problems getting past the guard at the door. His reaction could not have been more surprising. An older man, he was initially surprised but relatively uninterested in our visit, until he realized that Katie had come from this SWI and was returning "home." He knew this was the only place she had lived before her adoption, and he became very excited and called, "She's back!" to other staff walking by. They too became very receptive to our visit. After apologizing and explaining the problems that led to our unannounced arrival, we were introduced to the resident manager, who greeted us warmly. She was not concerned or suspicious, as might have been the case years earlier, but rather was comfortable with arranging a brief visit to the infant area in which Katie had lived for roughly her first year. Katie was treated as a long-lost relative, and although she was seven, there was one caretaker in particular who clearly remembered her and her adoptive parents. Katie's mother was revisiting memories and a place she had left seven years earlier as a very new and excited parent. Katie, frankly, seemed bewildered; only time will tell what this return meant to her. Nevertheless, the staff was eager for her to join them, for her to try speaking Chinese and to see her "roots." It became clear from photo projects displayed on the walls that the SWI had been working with volunteers to create memory books for the children, and they had countless letters and photos from adoptive parents who had kept in touch with them. These relationships and mementos highlighted the ways in which the SWI staff had expanded their notion of family across two continents and had brought the SWI into the global economy and network of NGOs in ways that had been impossible as recently as the late 1980s. Katie's return was an important example of how attitudes in large SWIs, which had gradually grown accustomed to dealing with western parents, agencies and NGOs, had changed since the late 1990s, when the experience of transna-

tional adoption was new and many SWIs were closed as a response to harsh criticisms of neglect and abuse.

While Kim (2005) and others have begun to look at ways in which adoptees and the state often clash with regard to discourses on "roots" and "return" in Korea, Katie's experience illustrates a return of a very different sort. Her return to Guangzhou highlights the ways in which her Chinese caretakers certainly include her in their vision of a global Chinese community and a daughter returned to China. Under a banner of service, Katie's and Ellie's trip was constructed as a way to "give back to China and the welfare institutes" (in lieu of biological parents). Scholars have noted that Chinese–U.S. adoption has often been discussed as a form of gift-giving by parents, adoption agencies and government officials (Cohen 2007; Dorow 2006). As a result, parents who are planning to return to China often participate in trips that offer some venue for "giving back" to other children living in SWIs or to China more generally. In the case of Ellie and Katie, tourism provided the framework for this experience, which, over the course of a week, also afforded opportunities to return to Katie's first home in the SWI, visit important landmarks and purchase souvenirs. In this way, an adoptive tourist experience draws on the kinship labour associated with returning home and helping family. Furthermore, like medical and environmental tourism, it constructs an experience in which the lines between leisure and work are blurred because participants' travel is organized around a service project.

Kinship tourism can also inspire relationships that are more long-term than Katie's. In 2002, a very successful western hospital in Beijing, based on their good relationship with their Chinese partner hospital[14] and the experience of one U.S. member of their staff who had adopted from Henan Province, created a non-profit foundation that would provide medical services to the Henan SWI. Working with a small medical team from a western hospital in Beijing, I regularly travelled to this SWI in Henan Province to help document medical issues that would warrant bringing a child to Beijing for treatment. At the time of my first visit, the SWI was located in a large traditional courtyard-style brick building. The architecture was much like that in other rural areas, except that the buildings were larger and housed over 70 children. It was also next door to a senior citizens' home. The Henan SWI was in a rural area with a large yard dividing the children's and seniors' residences; older children, neighbours and other children were all able to visit. On the day we were there, volunteers from a local middle school had come by to do yard work and meet with the older children in residence.

Despite a fairly strong sense of community that served older children well, resources were limited. The building was old. There were only outdoor bathrooms and no play rooms. Several children shared a crib. The bedding was worn, and there were no strollers, high chairs or toys. However, as a result of the director's work with the central government's Center for Adoption Affairs, he placed several children through transnational adoption and established contacts with the hospital and other NGOs to provide funding and support. Director Hou proudly showed us the new facility, which looked much like a small hospital. The SWI did relocate a few months later, and this resulted in some important improvements for residents. For example, the rooms were all within one structure, and there was no longer any need to go outside to use the bathrooms. In addition, there were improved laundry and cooking facilities, more beds and cribs, and new bedding. The grounds were well kept and had a playground. However, the effect of the new building was also problematic because the children were now residents in an institutional setting and no longer in a building that was integrated into the community. Other children could no longer drift in and out to play and visit. The senior citizens' building was no longer readily accessible. The SWI had gained much but had lost a sense of intimacy and community in the process.

Despite some problems, Director Hou and the staff were pleased with the move. In addition to some material improvements, from their perspective, the building was impressive and created an aura of prestige and professionalism; it looked like a successful SWI *should* look. From this vantage point, it becomes clear that the building represented a relocation, not just of place, but also of identity, in this case, one of professionalism that met global standards of modern care. In discussing the importance of this building with the director and staff, I came to understand that they felt their ability to care for the children was legitimized by the construction of this type of building. Although the larger resident population in the Henan SWI certainly warranted larger spending, they had not prioritized a U.S. "homelike" environment. Instead, they felt that an institutional "home" provided better resources for their children and would better meet western expectations of care, hygiene and development and thus exemplify the multiple meanings of "home."[15] The staff and director were now proud to show visitors around, expecting (often accurately) that the new building would meet the standards of western visitors. In this way, this setting had been reconstructed, at least in part, for a particular kind of "tourist gaze" whereby the director and staff sought to show adoption

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travellers a "world that everywhere shows us our own image" (Urry 2002:9).

Conclusion

Adoption NGO workers, adoptive parents and facilitators do not readily fit into conventional categories of tourists, given the underlying themes of abandonment and loss (Yngvesson 2005); nonetheless, they do reflect emerging forms of global tourism that occur in unlikely, dangerous and often "dark" destinations, such as Auschwitz-Birkenau, extinct coal mines, Northern Ireland and Pearl Harbor (Urry 2002:142).

While adoption tourists are not seeking either the leisure or recreation associated with more conventional forms of tourism, their needs for tourist items and services do constitute a kind of "'tourism reflexivity,' [in which] the set of disciplines, procedures and criteria enable these kinds of places to monitor, evaluate and develop its tourism potential within the emerging patterns of global tourism" (Urry 2002:142). This, in part, accounts for the choices made by Director Hou, who worked to improve the SWI in ways that he read as consistent with emerging global patterns and resources expected by adoptive tourists.

In the case of Chinese–U.S. transnational adoption, the adoptee is at once a local at "home" in China and also a tourist whose privileged immigration status and newfound prosperity highlight her position at the nexus of disparate interests and experiences of both tourism and kinship. In this way, she literally embodies the ways in which these interests may be bridged, a possibility embraced by state authorities, adoption agencies, shop owners and others who benefit from this connection. However, for Katie and other young adoptees, the opportunity to travel home can be bewildering, since they travel as tourists but are treated like family in a home they cannot remember.

In conclusion, one interpretation of kinship travel has been that these types of journeys leave traces and legacies of "home" around the world. This research looks at the ways in which Chinese children adopted in the United States experience this differently from other waves of adoptees because the notion of China as homeland is often incorporated into their family life. Moreover, many families move beyond simply discussing China and instead work to "return home" and "give back." Not all adoptive families employ the strategies discussed here, but they are all encouraged to do so as part of their counselling from agencies and adoption groups. As we look at the example of U.S.–Chinese adoption, it becomes clear that kinship tourism is a process through which parents travel to build their family by utilizing transnational networks, agencies and the state, all of which employ an understanding of kinship to forge familiar and similar legacies of "home."

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Notes

1 The increasing acceptance of transnational and transracial families is due to many sociocultural changes in the United States: notably, the end of miscegenation laws, an increase in ideologies of equality, large numbers of Korean adoptees, and organization and advocacy on their behalf.

2 According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 7,044 children were adopted from the Chinese Mainland by U.S. citizens, the most from any single nation. Of the

22,884 children adopted worldwide by U.S. parents, the second highest number, 5,865, were from Russia (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, n.d.).

3 The Chinese government instituted its birth planning policy (popularly termed the One Child Policy), the "one pregnancy whether boy or girl" policy (*du sheng zi nu*), in tandem with the 1978 economic policies and the drive for "modernization." As a result of this policy in tandem with other factors, there is a significant gender imbalance in the national population (estimates vary, but it may be as high as 120 males to every 100 females). This has impacted the experience of adoption and tourism at every level because the vast majority of adoptees are female and the experience of adoption tourism is linked to books, toys, and clothes aimed specifically at girls.

4 While gender is a significant factor in studies of population, kinship and adoption in China and is a subject I explore at great length elsewhere (Cohen 2007), a detailed exploration of the complex gender dynamics of Chinese–U.S. adoptions is beyond the scope of this project on kinship tourism.

5 At the beginning of all interviews, I introduced myself, including my local and U.S. affiliations, and explained the nature of my research and expectations for publications.

6 I spoke with representatives of five different adoption agencies, and all asked this of their clients.

7 As Dorow (2004) and Volkman (2005a) have already described at length, the White Swan hotel in Guangzhou is renowned for its adoption clientele and provides an important space within which transnational adoption can be considered. However, with the move of the U.S. consulate to another neighbourhood in Guangzhou in 2013, the hotel has become less popular.

8 On October 30, 2000, President Clinton signed into law H.R. 2883, the Child Citizenship Act of 2000, which mandates that, beginning February 27, 2001, adopted children will acquire citizenship automatically. In short, Chinese children can now meet their parents, board a plane, travel perhaps 15 hours and, immediately upon landing on U.S. soil, "become" Americans. The lengthy process of acquiring citizenship, much to the relief of adoptive parents, has been largely eliminated for adopted children, in marked contrast to those who fall into other categories of immigrants.

9 The parents typically spend an average of US$20,000 to complete the adoption. See Appendix A for a detailed breakdown of costs. Although expenses can be quite high, they are somewhat offset by the Internal Revenue Service adoption tax credit, which allows for an income tax credit of $10,000 per child.

10 See Rainbow Kids n.d.

11 Adoptees, especially adolescents, give many reasons for being reluctant to return to China. Notably, China is linked to their feelings of abandonment and also marks them as different from their peers.

12 As of June 1, 2014, International Children's Day, the Chinese government opened up "baby hatches" so that parents could legally, and anonymously, abandon their children. This is a "radical rescue attempt to save nearly" 10,000 children abandoned annually. Importantly, as Nicholas Kristof (2014) noted in an appearance on the Ronan Farrow MSNBC show, this number has stabilized.

13 This donation is a source of great frustration for parents, who need to carry large sums of cash. In addition, it has been a focal point of criticism of the process owing to allegations of corruption and trafficking. See China.org.cn 2011.

14 Joint ventures are mandatory for foreign corporations. Consequently, the hospital had a Chinese partner in order to be considered private.

15 I should qualify here that broader development plans may largely account for the privileging of these kinds of institutions.

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