Making Transnational Families through "Quiet Migration:" NRIs Adopting Children from India.

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Introduction

Adoption is a process of individual decision making. Parents on both sides of any adoption make decisions about whether, when and how to relinquish a child and whether, when, and how to adopt a child. In our paper we focus on the adoption of children from India by Non-resident Indians (NRI) who are citizens or permanent residents of the United States. As we take note of the individual characteristics of the parents and the particular circumstances which underlie the decision to adopt, a broad profile of the adoptive NRI parents emerges: affluent, unable to bear a biological child (possibly related to career-related delays in child-bearing), distanced from traditional mores which stigmatize child adoption in India yet seeking a "way to strengthen cultural and family ties with India." What also emerges from our research is the *Indian state's* interest in this profile and the fact that the state specifically reaches out to Indians settled abroad or NRIs to adopt unwanted children (NRI Adoption Petition). Thus what is clear is that though adoption certainly encompasses individual processes and influences, it also brings into play forces and structures beyond the level of the individual, and in this paper, we examine the role of the state in shaping transnational adoption practices. We focus on India and China—two "donors" in the international adoption arena—comparing NRI and domestic Indian adoption on

the one hand, and Chinese domestic and transnational adoption on the other to highlight the ways that states play a central role in what at first may seem to be a private act. We find adoption to be a particularly revealing window on state intervention in shaping society and social priorities, through the public regulation of the private process of family formation (see also Riley and Van Vleet). Because transnational adoption typically requires direct state involvement, it makes visible what is sometimes less visible: the way that the modern state is deeply involved in population and family management and how state policy links abandoned children to families, development strategies, national domestic agendas and international relations.

Adoption in India and China

As a post-colonial state""developing" out of third world-hood into an emerging economy, the Indian state and society has to answer for a large number of unwanted and abandoned children. Factors such as the stigmatization of single motherhood, son preference, the perception of girls as expensive because of the prevalence of dowry, and widespread poverty have resulted in large numbers of abandoned girls and children with disabilities who were considered a burden by their families. In general, the government's record on child welfare has been abysmal, notwithstanding lofty and largely empty policy pronouncements. But since the 1980s, the Indian state has made some effort toward what it terms the "rehabilitation" of these abandoned children: through a patchwork of state and non-governmental agencies, some of these children are placed with adoptive parents.

In India, traditionally, adoptions were a private arrangements made by families within the network of extended kin, with the primary social aim of ensuring lineage continuity. In the three

decades following independence, there was no formal system in place to regulate adoption, and the Indian state sought to stake out its position vis-a-vis children without families through what might be considered rather ad hoc measures. Modern adoptions however, tend to be more public with varying involvement of governmental and non-governmental agencies. Currently, adoption in India is governed by personal or civil laws which vary by religious affiliation. Thus, Hindu personal law allows for adoption of Hindu children while Muslims and Christians do not have a codified law for adoption. Until 2001 they could adopt under the Guardianship and Wards Act of 1890 which as the name suggests gave guardianship rights to the adoptive parents and no inheritance rights to the adopted child. However, as the government has taken up adoption as part of its wider policy on child welfare and begun to develop a centralized infrastructure to regulate domestic and international adoptions, there have been some significant changes. To this end the Juvenile Justice Act of 2000 enables every eligible individual, regardless of his or her religion, to adopt a child. Following the government's stated priority of acting in the "best interest of the child " and in keeping with its declaration n that "the nation's children are a supreme important asset," this Act is intended to address the interests of orphans and abandoned children, who are designated to be without religion and therefore free for adoption by anyone. The Act promotes adoption as an alternative to institutional care" (A. S. Shenoy, Indian Council of Social Welfare 2007)

Before any adoption placement action begins, the Indian government is required to make certain that the children are actually "free" to be adopted; sometimes poor families place children temporarily in orphanages or other institutions during periodic crises and have not abandoned them. So women who wish to give up a child at birth are given thirty days to change their

minds, and police undertake pro forma “missing person” procedures to rule out the possibility that an abandoned child was a victim of trafficking. The government defends itself against the charge of bureaucratic inefficiency by claiming vigilance on behalf of apparently unwanted children and arguing that there are more families in need of children than “available” children since institutionalized children are not all legally free for adoption. One estimate puts the number of institutionalized children at 1.5 million of whom 14 percent are adoptable (Gudmundssen 2002: 2) Although the statistics on such children and on adoption are very poor, there is enough evidence to suggest that only a tiny fraction of orphan and abandoned children in India get adopted, reflecting lingering social biases as well as procedural obstacles . In a statement to the press in 2007 the Minister for Women and Child Development put the number of adoptions at approximately 4000 a year. She went on to promise that the government was working to expedite adoptions by foreigners and hoped that this would improve adoption “numbers as most NRIs want the process to be completed fast” (Chaunan 2007) .

The international adoption of Indian children dates to the 1960s; in the early years, such adoptions were few in number and were not well regulated Vocal public pressure brought on by periodic malpractice and sensationalizing media attention forced the Indian government to clarify its policy on transnational adoption in the mid-‘80s. Drawing on guidelines and principles put forward by international organizations such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Hague Convention on Inter-Country Adoption and the International Council on Social Welfare, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment came up with its own set of guidelines regulating and centralizing international adoption. A Central Adoption Resource Agency (CARA) was set up by the government in 1988 to facilitate and consolidate all

transnational adoptions under its authority. It oversees a network of state adoption or "placement" agencies and designates adoption agencies in foreign countries as official "sponsoring agencies." For NRIs in the US, this means that they have to go through an Indian government-authorized sponsoring agency in the US which links them to a placement agency in India and that agency in turn provides them access to the actual institutions where the children are housed. For any adoptable child, the government has argued that adoption is an alternative and not inferior form of family formation and has stated the preference of finding an adopting family within India for each child. If they meet the eligibility criteria which include financial security, age restrictions and household composition which includes same-sex couples but allows for single parents, domestic Indian families have first access to the youngest and healthiest children, bolstering the government's preference for these adoptions. It bears noting that domestic adopters may not be confined to state approved agencies and the fact that only "foreign" adoptions are subject to stringent regulation has elicited criticism from constituencies such as NRIs who would prefer to have the same advantages as domestic adopters. NRIs are the second preference for adoption and tend to have access to children between the ages of two and three years. For the third group, foreigners without ties to India, no stated preferences are considered. They are encouraged– one might say given no choice but– to adopt older children and those with special needs.

Thus the government avoids accusations of being caught in a neo-colonial trap of "selling" children to foreigners while being pragmatic about the reality that domestic Indian adopters have a very poor record in adopting older, darker and disabled children. One outcome of the state's intervention has been the impression that it was discouraging foreign non-Indian adoption and

this may be reflected in the relative reduction of transnational adoption at the same time that domestic adoption figures show a relative increase http://www.adoptindia.nic.in/database.htm). More recently the government has committed to expediting international adoptions—both NRI and non-Indian. What emerges then is that through the way it sets its priorities for adopting parents, the state makes clear that some groups are more centrally part of the Indian community than others. While those residing in India are seen as the parents most fit to adopt Indian children, NRIs are also included as part of the extended, essentialized and imagined Indian community which is thought to share the same cultural values as the adopted child's birth family (though critics point out the tenuousness of the argument given that most children given up for adoption are likely to come from very different caste-class backgrounds from that of their adoptive families (Anand and Chandra 2001: 3892)

In China, the state also plays a central role in the production of unwanted and abandoned children. While a preference for sons has existed for centuries in that society, many scholars argue that it was the combination of son preference and the state's birth planning policy that has led to the millions of "missing girls." Because their need and desire for sons– who will carry on the family line and take care of their parents in their old age– clashes with the state's imposed one child policy (or two for rural parents), some parents abort, kill, abandon or just do not report the birth of their daughters. That way, they hope, they will be able to try again to have a boy. The healthy children who end up in orphanages are nearly all girls (boys with serious mental or physical disabilities are also sometimes abandoned) and it is from this population that transnational adoptions occur. While the Chinese state discourages (and has made illegal) the abandonment, abortion, or killing of girl babies, the birth planning policy has been a state

priority since 1980. The state is unwilling to risk challenges to that policy and the central place of birth planning in government practices has shaped many practices in China, including adoption.

It is illegal to abandon a child or to relinquish a child specifically for adoption. Therefore, when a parent decides that s/he does not want to raise a child, his/her options are limited (Riley). Some babies may be quietly (and without official sanction) adopted by family members. In other cases, parents might abandon their new-born babies in hospitals, where officials might arrange an informal adoption into a family known to be looking for a child. Many abandoned children end up in state institutions, coming either from hospitals or after being found in a public area where, presumably, parents placed their child in hopes that they would be quickly spotted and taken in. Because of the necessary anonymity of most child abandonment in China, birth parents rarely have any ties with the child or adopting family afterward.

State-run institutions often house both abandoned children (nearly all of them girls) and disabled children. Most of these children spend their entire childhood in these institutions, with no hope of being adopted by either Chinese or foreign parents. While there have always been abandoned children, the numbers of abandoned girls in state-run institutions have risen steadily since 1980 (the beginning of the strictest birth planning policies). It is assumed that the Chinese government's decision to open the country to foreign adoption, made in 1991, was partly a response to this increase in numbers of abandoned baby girls. Since that year, the numbers of girls adopted by foreigners rose steadily until 2005 when more restrictive requirements went into effect. Unlike India, China has not made a specific appeal for overseas Chinese to adopt Chinese

children, although the applications of overseas Chinese adoptive parents (particularly those who were born in China) are expedited (Goodhopeadoption.org) and may get priority if desiring a boy.

An interesting piece of the state's adoption policy has been its reluctance to allow Chinese couples to adopt these girls. While informal adoption is quite common in China (Johnson), with reports of such adoption increasing (Meier and Zhang 2008), state sanctioned adoption is still difficult, and rarely do domestic adoptions occur from the state-run orphanages; domestic adoptions are more likely to take place between relatives or between people who themselves know one another or have found someone to act as an intermediary. The government's rules allow Chinese parents to formally adopt, but only when they do not have biological children and after showing proof that they are unable to produce a child biologically. Other parents– such as those who have one biological child but who would like to adopt a second child– have a more difficult time adopting domestically. One explanation for the state's restrictive domestic adoption policies is that allowing parents to adopt after they bear a son might encourage parents to abandon girls, have a biological son, and then adopt a girl from a state institution. That, the state would argue, threatens the success of the control of population growth, for which the birth planning policies were developed. There is some disagreement among scholars of Chinese adoption about the role of foreign money in the decision of the government to turn to foreign over domestic adoption. Those institutions which are designated sending institutions for foreign adoptions receive some of the money that foreign adoptive parents pay as part of the adoption process. Whether those amounts played a role in the government's decision is not clear, with some scholars arguing that it did (Meier and Zhang 2008) and others arguing that it was not

enough to make a difference (Johnson). Whether or not money also played a role, in the state's discouragement of domestic adoption, we can see the primacy of birth planning policies and the ways that that priority has been important in shaping adoption.

China officially opened to foreign adoption in 1992 and since that time, some 10,000 Chinese children have been adopted by foreigners, with the majority going to the United States (Meier and Zhang 2008). In the early stages of this adoption program, many foreigners who were unable to adopt elsewhere found a favorable climate for adoption in China. Single women, lesbian couples and older couples were all welcomed, at least at first. Since the earliest years of foreign adoptions, the Chinese state has become more restrictive in who is permitted to adopt. In 2006, it enacted the strictest regulations, allowing only couples with certain characteristics to adopt: couples had to have been married for at least three years; be healthy (meeting certain mental and physical requirements and not be obese (a BMI less than 40)); and have certain requirements that reflect financial stability. Even with these new restrictions, adopting parents and adoption agencies have found that relative to adoptions from some other countries, the Chinese adoption process goes smoothly and without too many surprises.

State practices in India and China around adoption thus have similarities and differences that are key to the consequences and outcomes of these processes. In both cases son preference and poverty have contributed to the numbers of children– especially girls– who are available for adoption. However, in the case of China, adoption has taken a second place to the state's major effort to control population growth through birth planning policies. In this way, the government demonstrates its belief that before all else is the health of the nation and that birth planning is the

only way to help China to become a successful world player. The priority of birth planning (over, say, child welfare) has helped to produced the millions of girls who every year are abandoned. That priority is not in alignment with the standards created by international groups such as the United Nations, which has put the child's interest first. Nevertheless, the state's preference for foreign over domestic adoptions is a way of maintaining birth planning goals while still providing for the some of the millions of abandoned girls.

In the rhetoric of the Indian state, the best interests of the child and ethical adoption takes precedence. In many ways, such an emphasis aligns India with international standards and rhetoric. Thus in 2007 the state announced the "cradle scheme" which enables babies to be left anonymously in cots outside orphanages or shelters as a way of preventing female infanticide. In recent years the state and non-governmental organizations have sought to promote adoption through low key public media campaigns such as "parenthood not procreation" and the state has taken steps to regulate domestic and international adoption. While it explicitly favors domestic over foreign adoption, the state recognizes that certain categories of unwanted children will only be adopted abroad and solicits NRIs and non-Indians to fill these parent roles. Nevertheless, when we look closely at its position on NRI adoption, we see the ways that the Indian state is at the same time asserting a separate version of good adoption practices. Rather than simply following international standards, India is seeing the Indian diasporic community as part of and connected to the country in ways that non-NRIs are not. As a prominent adoption authority noted, the "best rehabilitation of the child is in the country of origin according to the UN Convention on the Rights of Children and the Hague Convention" (Nilima Mehta, Interview June 2009) and following from this, NRIs offer adopted Indian children cultural continuity. The

Indian news media has also represented the CARA authorities as leaning towards NRIs to take on the "hard to place" children: typically older, with special needs, with the hardest placements left for non-Indians. As we have noted earlier the explanation for this "policy" is that such children are less likely to find placements with domestic families (Apparao; Mehta).

Perhaps the key similarity between India and China is the way that the state in both is very much involved in the production and results of abandoned children. Despite the different stances toward foreign adoptions on the part of the two, because of the state's economic and social practices that are only indirectly related to adoption, both countries have produced millions of adoptable children, most of them girls. Most of these children remain in child orphanages and institutions for their entire childhood, some are adopted domestically, and many others are adopted into families living outside of India or China. We now turn to an examination of the consequences and outcomes of these adoption practices.

Consequences and Outcomes

Now that we have seen the role the state plays in shaping adoption, we ask: how do these state mediated adoption practices play a role in turn in producing or shaping transnational communities and families? Do the different emphases of the Chinese and Indian states produce different kinds of transnational families and communities? To examine these questions, we compare two kinds of the families: those made up of white parents and adopted Chinese children and those of NRI parents and children adopted from India. In this way, we are able to examine the ways that state preference plays out in adoptive families and communities.

China encourages foreigners to adopt the abandoned children housed in its state institutions. Nearly all children who are adopted from China are adopted by families living in the west (and especially in the United States, which accepts the majority of foreign adoptions from China), and there, by whites. In this process, where the children's racial difference marks these families as adoptive and where the Chinese state has explicitly prioritized these families, China is encouraging transracial families. However, for the American families that are being formed, because of the racial politics in the United States, this racial difference often goes unacknowledged. As one adopting parent of a Chinese child explained, "To be honest, with me it was a racial thing. I didn't want a black child… And I just don't have any biases about Asians, so for me it was an easier fit…." (quoted in Dorow 2006: 47). That fit comes because Asians are often seen as "model minorities" or even honorary whites (Tuan).

In this environment, and because of the widely-held norms of intensive parenting among well-educated, privileged parents in the United States generally (Hays; Stone), adoptive parents of Chinese children have consciously sought to connect their children to their homeland. These efforts at "culture keeping" are also actively encouraged by the adoption agencies which facilitated the adoptions. Adopted Chinese children are enrolled in language classes, dance classes, celebrate Chinese holidays, and some also join "roots trips" back to China (Yngnesson). The parents also often seek to familiarize themselves with Chinese cultural practices. Some have characterized these practices as "culture bites" or "culture lite" (Anagnost; Volkmann), underscoring the relatively shallow nature of these connections. Nevertheless, for these parents, part of being good parents of adopted kids includes these activities and efforts. Through them, they hope their children develop strong cultural identities within the United States and potential

future cultural ties to China. However, their children are being raised as American– not even Chinese American– children; most of these children grow up in a white American world.

Ironically, though raised in white families and communities, these Chinese children are often seen by outsiders as foreign or Chinese-American, as racially different. In this way, their experiences parallel second- and later-generation Chinese immigrants who have grown up in Chinese families in the United States but see themselves primarily as Americans (Kibria). The reactions and assumptions of others often form the basis of politicization and a renewed and changed identity as Chinese. Chinese adoptees may well undergo this same process and that experience may encourage them to explore their identity and connections to China as they get older and develop independent lives.

In some ways NRI adoption of Indian children is a similar process to that of Chinese adoption; NRIs are also foreigners to India, and these adoptions are transnational (only NRIs who are also American citizens are allowed to adopt under US laws). However, in key ways, these adopting families are also not foreign to India; because they are emigrants from India, they are considered to be– by those in India and often by the NRIs themselves– to be culturally Indian. Therefore, even though the children may have come from different linguistic, religious, or caste background, there is an assumption that the adopting parents and children will share a cultural connection and that, unlike in the case of white parents adopting Chinese children, these Indian parents will not have to consciously create cultural connections between the children and India. Also influential in this process is the fact that to outsiders, these families look alike and may well pass for a biological family. That may make daily life easier for these families; it is likely that

they are not as often challenged on their origins as are transparently transracial families, allowing them to avoid having to explain to others (and in some cases to the adopted children) their family-building strategies and beliefs.

For adopting NRI families, the challenges they face are similar to those faced by any NRI family: how much connection should the children have to the birth culture? Should parents worry that their children are "too" American? In fact, many NRI adoptive parents argue that their decisions are the same as those that NRIs with biological children have to make. They do not have to address the issues that white parents with Chinese children do about how to deliberately create a cultural background; cultural continuity or cultivation of Indianness is assumed. Nor do they have the pressures from outside (from adoption agencies and others) to create and maintain cultural/national connections as do white parents of adopted Chinese children.

We can see the differences between these two types of adopting families in the role of trips back to the "homeland." White parents often feel obliged to take their adopted children back to China, trips often designated as "root trips." But because most of these children and their American parents have no connections to people in China, these trips most often focus on national monuments, cultural performances, and other events that might induce knowledge and understanding of the country, but are not likely to produce enduing personal relationships with those in China (Dorow 2006b). As foreigners often unfamiliar with China, the adoptive parents themselves are learning about the country and its culture.

For NRIs, trips to India are often part of their lives even before any adoption. While they may include visits to tourist sites, these trips usually focus on family visits, strengthening and even creating ties between residents in India and the US. When NRIs return to India with their adopted Indian children, strengthening family connections may be even more important. Family members may not have been completely supportive of an adoption that likely crossed linguistic, caste or religious lines. In any of these trips to India, the parents (of both adopted and biological children) are not themselves learning about a new culture; a primary focus is making the connections between the children and relatives. For many NRIs adoptive parents, one issue they have to deal with is getting the family in India to accept the adoption; developing stronger ties between those in India and in the United States might facilitate that acceptance.

How do these different and similar challenges faced by adopting families influence the construction or maintenance of transnational communities or families? When we consider the impact and implications of these two different transnational adoption processes, we have to consider four different groups: the adopted children, the adopting parents, the US-based communities in which these families reside, and relevant communities in India and China.

The experience of these Indian and Chinese adopted children, in terms of identity and connection to communities, may be quite different. For the Chinese children, they struggle to straddle their very American way of life with others' assumptions that they are innately connected to China. They grow up as members of white communities, but they do not always feel that they completely belong to either white America or China (Freundlich and Lieberthal). White parents can feel that without careful cultivation, the kids will be consumed by white culture and that it is

their responsibility to prevent that. Nevertheless, their own lack of connection to China means that the relationship between these Chinese kids and China is necessarily superficial. For NRI adopted children, on the other hand, their struggle is focused on how to become as American as possible. As the children (adopted or not) of immigrants, they are seen as foreigners. NRI parents struggle with the balance of allowing their children to be too assimilated into American culture and holding on to "Indian" values.

The adoption experience may be most different for the two sets of parents involved. For NRIs, they themselves often maintain connections to two worlds. For them, the more unfamiliar culture is that of the United States. As adopting parents, they face nearly identical challenges as immigrant parents of biological children, balancing the competing pulls of Indian and American cultures. They are less likely to be seen as deficient in teaching their children about their birth cultures; there is an essentializing assumption that the children are absorbing that cultural knowledge by osmosis.

White parents, however, have to carefully cultivate their children's and their own knowledge and connection to China. Even as they are doing that, there is little assumption on the part of Chinese that these parents have a "real" connection to China (for example, from a Chinese perspective, they do become "honorary Chinese" through these adoptions) and therefore the connections they are making for their children will always be suspect, especially by Chinese. Some Chinese-Americans and others worry that while adopting parents expose their children to snippets of Chinese culture, these white parents are not teaching their Chinese children the politics of immigration, oppression, and colonialism that are a central part of the history of

Chinese Americans (Volkman). In addition, for these parents, the United States is always home, and so while they do not have the challenges of balancing dual national identities that Indian parents face, their children consequently struggle to create their own Chinese identity.

Adoption is helping to shape transnational communities and families in both cases, and there are some similarities in the two processes. Indeed, that most of the adopting parents are from similar socio-economic backgrounds (educated and middle to upper middle class professional) is key. That similarity may help to account for how in both groups, a thoughtful approach to developing ethnic, national, and cultural identity in their children is seen as imperative. But in many ways, the types of transnational connections are not the same for the two groups. NRI children are often coming into existing transnational communities that have ties to both India and to other American-based Indian networks. While once immigration to the US often meant the attenuation of ties to the homeland, with better communication and cheaper travel, the ties between the US and India are now more circular. In many ways, these children do not expand those communities, but contribute to them as would biological Indian children, especially as the next generation of an immigrant group. Because they are seen as "as if" families– the same as biological families– and not crossing racial boundaries, they may come to see themselves as mostly like biological families as well and not as challenging already existing community lines. In these communities, there is less of a necessary choice of one culture or the other but a recognition that both can exist simultaneously.

In contrast, in those communities in which Chinese children are growing up in white families, adoption is helping to create new transnational connections. On the one hand, those new

connections can be seen as limited and shallow. As we saw about the root trips, these children's ties (and those of their adoptive parents) are not likely to be enduring or extensive. On the other hand, because of the presence of these children, these white communities may be encouraged and even forced to recognize the wider world and to develop new racial and cultural sensitivities. Particularly important here is the transracial aspects of this process, so that visibly, these families challenge American family norms of biological connectedness.

From the viewpoint of India and China, these new transnational connections may be perceived as a more radical change. NRIs are making families in ways seen as unconventional in India. They draw on American values in their decision to adopt and the adoptions themselves often break taboos by crossing lines of caste, class, and religion. And because of the connections between these American Indian communities and those in India, these new families are challenging Indian notions of family making. In addition, most of the children adopted by NRIs are girls and in a culture with strong son preference, these adoptions are thus helping to change people's perceptions of the value of girls. In this way, the influence of these adoptive families is truly transnational and they are creating an alternative notion of Indianness, a postmodern Indian who is beyond caste, religion, and even nationality.

In contrast, those in China are not likely to perceive white American families with Chinese children as a new form of Chinese family. These children– even though born in China– do not help to create transnational webs of belonging for their adopting parents. From the perspective of China, the children are seen as forever connected to their birthplace, but white parents who do not have their own relationship or a direct connection to China will always be seen as outsiders.

In that way, these families do not function in the same way as do NRI families, and do not create transnational connections beyond the children themselves.

The state is also involved in the ways that in both cases, these adopted children are seen as belonging to their birthplace. In the Indian case, NRIs are actively sought out and encouraged to be partners and potential contributors to a better, more advanced, India. In the case of China, any "oversesas Chinese" is seen as having an innate connection to the motherland. While sometimes seen as potentially dangerous because of the possibility that non-resident Chinese will interfere with government policies, these Chinese are nevertheless considered part of a global Chinese community which is centered in China. Because these children were actually born in China, there may be an assumption of an even stronger bond between them and China than would exist for other diasporic Chinese.

Conclusions and Implications

These adoptions– Chinese adoptions by white American parents and Indian children by NRIs– illuminate both the importance of the context in which they take place and the ways that transnational communities are changing and developing. These Chinese children are breaking normative assumptions about families, and their creation and composition. Visibly different from their adopting parents, these children live at the heart (or edge) of transnational, transracial groupings. Those around them see them as different from the rest of their families and the communities, yet also have to recognize how deeply connected they are to these families and communities. In that way their racial difference may have a potential power of enlarging the imaginations and understanding of the community around them. At the same time, to the extent

that they are seen as fitting in, as being "just like" the rest of the (often predominantly white) community, many around them may well see them as honorary whites, and not as Chinese. As one community parent explained to the parent of an adopted Chinese girl, "Oh, don't worry; I don't think of her as Chinese! She seems just like a white kid, and I just think of her as white." (Authors' files). The way that race and ethnicity get erased in such moves is troublesome and suggests how such adoptions are always breaking new ground, but sometimes reinforcing stereotypes of racial difference. Because they do not have close ties to communities in China, these families do not always or directly challenge Chinese notions of family or race.

As similar as the adoption of Indian children by NRIs is to Chinese adoptions by white parents, there are also important differences. Many of those differences are also rooted in the contexts in which these adoptions take place. Because children pf NRIs often "look like" their adoptive parents, visible differences are not likely to challenge long-standing notions of family, immigrants, race or ethnicity. The presumed ethnic sameness of NRI adoptions means they are not breaking new ground. However, when we examine these adoptions more carefully, we see that they do indeed represent new forms of family-making. However similar they look, these children often come from backgrounds (caste, class, religion, ethnic) that differ from their adopting parents. The borders these adoptions cross may not be as visible as the ones crossed in the Chinese adoption cases, but they are as important nevertheless. In addition, because these adopting parents often have strong ties to communities in India, these families may be even better positioned to break new ground. We can see these parents as modeling new family forms, and new norms about crossing ethnic, caste and religion borders in construction of families and in the value of girls.

In fact, in many ways, we can see that the results are opposite what they might seem to be at first. The Chineseness of one group gets incorporated as white. The boundary crossing of the other group comes to be seen as natural and acceptable. And the direction of influence is different for the two groups. The situation of NRI families– with their strong ties to both India and the United States– and the ways that adoption is less visibly noticeable in these families means that their influence may be more strongly felt in Indian communities in the US and in India. For Chinese adoptions, their clear visibility and the communities in which they take place mean that their influence may be most strongly registered by white mainstream American communities.

Beyond those contributions from adoption processes, of course, are those made by the individuals who are themselves directly involved. However viewed by others, both Indian children adopted by NRIs parents and Chinese children adopted by white parents are part of new transnational processes; we can see them as the new global children. How these children of the new generation deal with and use their identity may influence how they bring issues of transnationality into the wider society. These transnational issues involve identity claims, imagined communities, roots connections, bi-racial or bi-ethnic identity, essentializing or de-essentializing moves into or out of assumed categories, and many others. As these children mature and negotiate these issues, those around them– white parents and communities, communities in India, and immigrant parents, among other actors– will also have to negotiate them. These kinds of moves may have the power to help us all to re-imagine and reform transnationality in any number of ways.

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