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Language learning as culture keeping:

Family language policies of transnational adoptive parents

Abstract

This study investigates how parents of international adoptees explain their decision to pursue birth language education for their children and how they go about achieving their goals. It focuses on the perspectives of 16 white U.S. parents who have at least one adopted school-aged child (ages 5 to 18) either currently or previously enrolled in a community language program. The interviews covered the language experiences of 22 children, all of whom were adopted before the age of 2 from either China or Korea. The parents were motivated to seek language instruction because: (1) the child looks Asian and will be expected to know the birth language; (2) adult adoptees recommend it; and (3) the child wants it. However, their language goals were significantly undermined by problems at community schools. The findings indicate that the adoptive family is a dynamic social unit, influenced by broader social forces and institutions.

Key Words: family language policy, adoptive parents, community schools, heritage language, Chinese adoptees, Korean adoptees

Word Count: 9,674

Introduction

I remember reading things about the social worker side of things. At one point, they said assimilation is the best and now they're saying no, that's not right. You have to give them some rooting in their native culture. My mother used to say, "Now they are American now. They shouldn't be speaking Chinese." I said no, you've got to read [the literature on adoptees]. That's the way it was with her [generation]. (Peter)

Peter is a 51-year-old white American father whose two children were adopted from China as infants. In the above excerpt, he explains how he came to his decision to help his daughters, 7 and 9 years of age at the time of this study, to learn Chinese. Unlike adoptive parents and adoption agencies of earlier decades who largely operated on the belief that foreign-born children who are adopted into American homes should make a 'clean break' from their native cultures and grow up as Americans, the current generation of adoptive parents are urged to promote the child's exploration of his/her birth culture (Lee, 2003; Melosh, 2002; Volkman, 2005). A sizeable amount of research has investigated issues surrounding the 'culture keeping' practices of adoptive parents (Jacobson, 2008) - such as preparing and serving ethnic foods at home, decorating the house with cultural artifacts that represent the child's birth country, participating in cultural events sponsored by adoption agencies, enrolling children in ethnic music or dance classes, and visiting the birth country (e.g., Ponte, Wang, & Fan, 2010; Randolph & Holtzman, 2010; Yngvesson, 2005). However, very little research has examined adoptive parents' perspectives on adoptees' learning of the birth language as a mechanism for engaging with the native culture (But see, Fogle, 2012, 2013; Shin, 2013). This study addresses this gap.

Given that language expresses, embodies, and symbolizes cultural reality (Kramsch, 1998), investigating parents' language-related decisions can lead to a better understanding of how culture is viewed and practiced by transnational adoptive families.

In recent decades, culture keeping has become standard practice in the international adoption community (Quiroz, 2010). Jacobson (2008: 2) states that parents adopting children from overseas are often told by the adoption community that "their children *should* engage in their native cultures; some are told they *must*" (emphasis in the original). In adoption agency literature, parenting workshops and websites, and books and blogs written by adult adoptees, culture keeping is portrayed as an essential means for facilitating a positive ethnic/racial identity and self-esteem in transnational adoptees (Vonk, 2001). Culture keeping is thought to benefit the child by replicating the cultural education adoptees would receive if they were growing up in a family of their own ethnic heritage (Jacobson, 2008). A strong cultural education, in turn, is believed to mitigate some of the challenges of living in a multicultural family (Lee, 2003; Volkman, 2005).

Knowledge of the birth language and culture has been found to be important in international adoptees' sense of belonging with the ethnic community (Higgins & Stoker, 2011; Song & Lee, 2009). In a study of adult Korean adoptees in the U.S., Kim, Suyemoto, and Turner (2010) found that while their participants perceived race to be the main factor in their sense of belonging and sense of exclusion with the white American community, they perceived cultural knowledge, particularly knowledge of the Korean language, to be the most important factor in their sense of inclusion with the Korean American community. Cultural exposure has been found to be significantly related to the ethnic identity development of international adoptees (Lee & Quintana, 2005), and adopted Korean adolescents who perceive their parents as supportive of

their cultural socialization efforts feel more positively about their ethnicity compared to adoptees who do not have such parental support (Yoon, 2001).

But exactly how do white American parents go about introducing their internationally adopted children to their native language?¹ What do they believe is the role of that language in the child's development? Whose help do parents enlist and what difficulties, if any, do they experience in doing so? Who do they listen to for advice and whose suggestions do they accept (or reject)? Before adoption, the majority of white adoptive parents know little about the ethnic cultures and languages of their children (Pertman, 2000). Most internationally adopted children leave their countries of origin as infants or toddlers (U.S. Department of State, 2013) and bring little cultural and linguistic knowledge with them. Since young children do not have the means with which to learn another language on their own, it is largely up to adoptive parents to facilitate language learning if it is to take place. Given the critical role of adoptive parents, this study seeks to understand how parents make their decision to pursue birth language learning for adoptees, and once they make their decision, how they go about achieving their goals.

Family language policy

Family language policy (FLP) refers to explicit decisions parents make about language use as well as implicit processes that legitimize certain language practices in the home (Fogle, 2013). FLP is a relatively new field of study that draws from the theoretical frameworks of child language acquisition, language socialization, second language learning, and language policy (King & Fogle, 2013). FLP considers language policy as it relates to language use in the home among family members (King, Fogle, & Logan-Terry, 2008) and differs from more

¹ In this article, I use the terms 'birth language' and 'native language' interchangeably, and use the term 'heritage language' to refer specifically to the variety taught in community schools.

psycholinguistically oriented studies of bilingualism (e.g., De Houwer, 1990; Deuchar & Quay, 1998; Genesee, 1989), whose primary focus is the child. By emphasizing the role of the family, FLP deals with child language learning as 'functions of parental ideologies, decision-making, and strategies concerning languages and literacies, as well as the broader social and cultural context of family life' (King & Fogle, 2013: 172). The study of FLP can also reveal 'the conflicts that family members must negotiate between the realities of social pressure, political impositions, and public education demands on the one hand, and the desire for cultural loyalty and linguistic continuity on the other' (Curd-Christiansen, 2013: 1).

FLP is motivated by an apparent lack of satisfactory answers to questions such as: Why do some children grow up to be bilingual while others raised in similar conditions become monolingual? What type of language exposure is necessary for children to become bilingual? (Curd-Christiansen, 2013). Because micro analyses of child-caretaker interactions have thus far insufficiently addressed these questions, King et al. (2008) argue that the field of child language acquisition must include within its scope broader issues, such as parental language ideologies and childrearing goals, as well as the support and constraints of the family and the wider community. They maintain that FLP has the potential to illuminate the process of child language development by showing what families actually do with language in everyday interactions, their beliefs and ideologies about language(s), and their efforts to shape language use and learning outcomes.

Most of the earlier research on bilingual parenting focused on two-parent, middle-income homes in which children are acquiring two or more European languages (e.g., Döpke, 1988; Fantini, 1985; Saunders, 1980). But as King and Fogle (2013) point out, more recent work in this area investigates how language processes play out within minority language and/or non-

traditional (e.g. adoptive, single-parent) families in transnational or diasporic contexts (e.g., Fogle, 2012; Okita, 2001; Shin, 2005). For instance, in a study of Sri Lankan Tamil communities in the U.S.A., U.K., and Canada, Canagarajah (2008) shows how Tamil language maintenance goals of the families were thwarted by a host of individual, familial, and societal factors. One such factor is a widespread view among Sri Lankans that English is the superior language, whose roots can be traced back to Sri Lanka's colonial past but still affects language choice in the diaspora today. Canagarajah explains that not all of his participants had the opportunity to acquire English in Sri Lanka - families belonging to the lower caste and class backgrounds and women in general had restricted access to English, which significantly limited their education and employment prospects. Thus, embracing English is one way for these families to compensate for such social and gender inequality.

In addition, the families in Canagarajah's study shifted to English to resolve intra-family tensions stemming from a language barrier between the English-speaking children and the Tamil-speaking (grand)parents. There were subtle role reversals in the families where parents with limited English proficiency relied on their children to get their social and institutional transactions accomplished. This often led to the elders losing face and feeling pressured to use more English at home to prove their English skills to the children (See also, Fogle & King, in press; Luykx, 2005 for discussions of the role of child agency in family language policy). Moreover, in some families that have migrated under extreme hardship, English mastery was equated with their very survival in the new country and pursued without regard for Tamil maintenance. These findings led Canagarajah to conclude that the family's decisions and practices are influenced by macro-social forces and institutions.

Similarly, Fogle (2013) found that macro-level social forces (e.g., monolingual normativity) were evident in the language decisions made by U.S. parents of older children adopted from Russia. The parents in her study believed that children's learning of English was critical in the formation of their family and the children's integration into the U.S. school system. But they also relied on their assessment of the children's cognitive and emotional capacities and educational needs to make decisions about language. For instance, depictions of the children as 'traumatized' and 'from an orphanage' were related to the parents' choice of speech-language therapy instead of ESL classes. Fogle observed that the way that the parents described their children explained some of the contradictions in their language policies. While concerns about adoptees' developmental histories of abuse and neglect led to more English language choices (so as to distance the children from their Russian past), framing adoptees as potential bilinguals led to more Russian language support. Despite these contradictions in parental practice, Fogle asserts that supporting older adoptees' first language maintenance can help smooth adoptees' transition to their new environment. In particular, she maintains that adoptive parents' use of adoptees' first language can facilitate emotional bonding between parents and children.

Parents' use of adoptees' first language is what Shin (2013) investigated in her study of four white American mothers who learned Korean with their Korea-adopted children at community heritage language schools. She showed that the mothers, by incorporating Korean in the daily life of the family, constructed their positions as parents of transnational adoptees and reinterpreted their own racial and cultural identities. The mothers believed that learning Korean as a family would facilitate the children's development of a strong Asian American identity, which they thought was necessary for countering racism and negative social attitudes directed

toward racial minorities. Shin's findings point to a link between race and language in multiracial adoptive families.

Building on this research base, the current study investigates how a group of white U.S. parents who have adopted children from either China or Korea explain and justify their decision to incorporate Chinese and Korean respectively in their family language policy. The findings of this study contribute to a growing body of research on family language policy in transnational and diasporic contexts (See also, Dorner, 2010; Pérez Báez, 2013; Ren & Hu, 2013; Seloni & Sarfati, 2013) and cultures of transnational adoption (e.g., Jacobson, 2008; Song & Lee, 2009; Volkman, 2005; Vonk, 2001).

International adoption in the United States

Formally established in the aftermath of the Korean War, international adoption has been changing the face of the American family for 60 years. An estimated 450,000 foreign-born children have been adopted by American citizens in the last four decades alone (1971-2011) (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2002; U.S. Department of State, 2013). Korean adoptees constitute one of the largest groups from any single country with over 120,000 children adopted into American homes in the last 50 years (Song & Lee, 2009). Although China entered the U.S. international adoption scene much later, it is now one of the top sending countries of adoptees to the United States. More than 70,000 Chinese children, mostly girls, have been adopted by American citizens since 1992 when Chinese adoption to the U.S. began (Ponte, Wang, & Fan, 2010). While more than 100 nations now send children to be adopted into American homes, South Korea and China remain among the top five sending countries of international adoptees to

the United States (U.S. Department of State, 2013). American families with adopted children from these two countries are the subjects of this study.

Methods and Participants

In-depth individual interviews were conducted with 16 U.S. parents - 11 with adopted children from Korea and 5 with adopted children from China (See Table 1). The participants were recruited through my personal and professional contacts, emails through adoptive family networks, and community-based Korean and Chinese language schools. This was not a representative sample of adoptive parents in the United States. To be eligible for this study, the participants had to have at least one school-aged adopted child (ages 5 to 18) either currently or previously enrolled in community Korean or Chinese programs. The interviews covered the language learning experiences of 22 adoptees, all of whom arrived in the U.S. before 2 years of age. As can be seen in Table 1, when there was more than one adopted child in the family, the children were adopted from the same country. All of the participants lived with their spouses in the same household and three participants had biological children in addition to their adopted children. All of the participants and their spouses are European American except for Wendy's husband, who is a second generation Taiwanese American. With the exception of Peter, I did not know any of the participants before this study began. Unlike many adoption researchers who are either adoptees or adoptive parents, I have no personal connections to the adoption community. However, for more than a decade I have been involved in heritage Korean language schools as a parent and a researcher.

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

The prevalence of women in the sample supports Jacobson's (2008) observation that mothers do most of the work involved in language and culture maintenance in adoptive families. Although my recruitment of participants did not limit the project to mothers, far more women than men responded to my calls for participation. Furthermore, while this study was not limited to any region or type of locality in the U.S., the requirement that participants had to have one or more children enrolled in community language programs meant that many of them came from ethnically diverse metropolitan areas with access to immigrant community organizations and ethnic religious institutions which provide heritage language instruction on the weekends.

The participants' children started attending community language schools at different ages and have had varying amounts of classroom language instruction, ranging from 2 weeks to 5 years. Of the 16 parents, 9 have had classroom instruction in their adopted child(ren)'s birth language (ranging from 6 weeks to 4 years) while 7 parents have never received formal instruction in that language. All of the children have participated in culture camps organized by their adoption agencies, and some have visited their birth country since being adopted. In addition to formal language instruction in community schools, some parents (Diane, Sheryl, Wendy) have hired private language tutors and Chinese- or Korean-speaking babysitters/au pairs to increase children's exposure to the language. In addition to community Chinese school, Anne's daughter attended a Chinese FLES (Foreign Language in Elementary School) program offered at her school for 2 years and Wendy's oldest daughter participated in an experimental Chinese immersion program organized by a local university for a year.

To generate the language learning perspectives of the parents, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews adapting an Expressive Autobiographical Interview (EAI) approach (Wallace, 2001). The EAI blends an autobiography technique with a structured expressive

interview method to draw out the participant's view of reality as it relates to a desired topic. The interviewer develops questions around the topic and directs these questions at the participants during crucial points of the participant's narrative account. The questions were related to each participant's reasons for enrolling their children in community language programs, views on individual and family identities, perceived language proficiencies, and experiences at the community schools (see Appendix). Each participant was interviewed once and the children were not present during the interviews. The individual interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours and were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Data Analysis

The interview transcripts were reviewed, coded, and thematically analyzed following grounded theory protocol (Glaser, 2002). In the analysis, descriptive labels were given to topics emerging from the data, and related concepts thus obtained were classified into categories through constant comparison of data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). From this analysis, two main categories presented themselves: Motivations for language learning and How problems with community schools affected FLP decisions. These categories were then related to the language ideologies and practices of the parents and interpreted through the conceptual lenses of FLP and cultures of adoption. I explore the factors shaping the parents' decision making process and attitudes toward adoptees' birth language and culture. These take into account the parents' goals for their children as well as their desire to accommodate the children's wishes. I also examine how the parents position themselves relative to the requests of their children, as well as to the advice given by adoption agencies and adult adoptees and how their decisions are linked to their view of themselves as parents of transnational adoptees. In this analysis, statements parents made

about their children - labels such as 'Asian,' 'Chinese,' 'Korean American,' and 'adoptee' and mood descriptors such as 'frustrated,' 'upset,' and 'happy' - provided discursive resources for making sense of the decisions and actions of the parents (Fogle, 2013). These statements reveal not only what parents choose to do, but also how they explain these decisions and their goals of being 'good parents' (King & Fogle, 2006).

Motivations for language learning

In the interviews, the parents tended to explain their family language policies by using category labels and descriptors to portray their children. In the following, I focus on how the children were constructed as 'Chinese' and 'Korean' - with visibly different physical features from those of their white parents - and how dominant ideologies about race and ethnicity influenced the parents' decisions about language. I then look at the role of adult adoptees' advice on FLP and how the decisions of some of the parents in this study were motivated by a desire to avoid the 'mistakes' made by earlier generations of adoptive parents (i.e., ignoring adoptees' need to explore issues related to culture, identity, and roots). For these families, facilitating birth language learning was largely framed as a way to provide children with the type of cultural education that was thought to be missing in the lives of earlier adoptees.

Although the majority of the parents felt positively about children's birth language, not all parents were always motivated to teach the language to their children and not all children were always motivated to learn it. While most parents believed that an earlier exposure to another language is better than a later one, some feared that forcing reluctant children to attend language classes could result in a backlash to cultural activities. I will examine the descriptors some parents used to illustrate their children's evolving identification with their birth culture and

discuss the role of child agency in shaping family language policy in transnational adoptive families.

'The child looks Asian and will be expected to know the birth language'

When asked why they decided to help their children learn the birth language, the parents typically responded that the child's different racial background (from the parents') was an important reason. They argued that adoptees need to engage with their native language and culture because they 'look' Asian, and others will expect them to behave as Asians. They felt that their children will be identified first and foremost as Asians because of their appearance. This primordial view of ethnicity, which regards ethnic identity as innate and not socially constructed, was common among the parents of this study.

Anne: I want her to have that identity... She is an American now because she's been adopted but I want her to have that strong tie that she's Chinese. I mean, because she looks different than we do.

Joann: Once he gets out on his own, and he goes to college, and he gets a job, he's gonna be seen as a Korean American man. That's the first thing people are gonna see. They're not gonna say, "oh, he's an adoptee."

Sally: Look at them. They are Korean. Now they are growing up with us and they're part of our family and they're also part of who we are but they absolutely need to understand who they are out in the world, or they will never be able to

make sense of what other people are judging of them or how to relate to others that are like them or not like them.

The labels denoting ethnicity seen in these excerpts (i.e., 'Chinese,' 'Korean American,' 'Korean') were found in almost every participant's justifications for seeking language instruction. While other descriptors such as 'adopted,' 'American,' and 'part of our family' also occurred in the parents' discourse, ethnicity labels were used to describe what the parents believed to be the most prominent feature of people's perception of their children. Anne's statement that she wants her daughter to have a strong Chinese identity is based on her reasoning that 'she looks different than we do.' Notice that the other descriptors she uses to describe her daughter (i.e., 'American,' 'adopted') are downplayed in comparison to her assertion that 'she's Chinese.' Similarly, Joann's contention that her son will be seen as a 'Korean American man' and not as an 'adoptee' is based on her view that to most people, his Asian appearance will obscure his other identities as an adoptee, an American, and an English-speaker. Sally also draws attention to her children's Korean appearance ('Look at them. They are Korean.') and explains that her decision to teach them Korean is tied to her desire to help them understand 'who they are out in the world.'

Research shows that Asian Americans frequently experience the expectation of authentic primordial ethnicity based on phenotype (Lee, 2003). Even after cultural assimilation and long-term residence in the United States, Asian Americans experience an assumption of foreignness by virtue of their physical appearance and continually confront the public perception that they are knowledgeable about the languages and cultures of their ancestors (Kibria, 2002; Tuan, 1998). The parents of this study framed their language decisions in terms of these dominant ideologies about race and ethnicity and saw their language efforts as a means to fulfill the ethnic

expectation that adoptees are likely to experience. The parents believed that adoptees, as ethnic minorities living in America, would be held responsible for not knowing their birth language, and considered their language efforts as an obligation toward raising their Asian children, a duty that 'good parents' would not neglect.

‘Adult adoptees recommend it’

Most of the parents in this study were closely connected to the adoption community and knowledgeable about the adoptee experience. They were well-read in the adoptee literature, filled with accounts of earlier generations of adoptees who, in articulating their experiences of growing up at a time when adoptees were expected to make a 'clean break' from their ethnic roots, show what their own parents might have done differently in terms of engaging with their birth cultures (See for example, Bishoff & Rankin, 1997; Trenka, Oparah, & Shin, 2006). Some of the parents in this study have attended workshops and seminars presented by adult adoptees that provide guidance to adoptive parents who are "hoping to learn the best possible parenting practices and mistakes to avoid with their own children" (Jacobson, 2008: 68). The "cautionary tales" of earlier adoptees motivates the current generation of adoptive parents to look for ways to incorporate birth culture into their families' lives (Volkman, 2005: 10). In the current study, some of the parents framed their language decisions in terms of providing children with what they thought was 'missing' in the lives of earlier adoptees.

Joann: When we went to the parenting class, they emphasized culture and language and, you know, gave us resources, books to read, and encouraged us to read blogs of adoptees... And what I kept hearing over and over and over and over and over was language. The language, I mean, yes, the culture's different as well,

but the first thing so many of them said was, "I go back to Korea and the first thing I get off the plane I have to say is I'm an adoptee because I can't speak [Korean]."

Carol: Listening to adult adoptees talk about what was missing is crucial. Crucial... And there's one who had presented at various seminars and stuff and her name is Yoon Mi. And her mother made her attend Korean school. She may have been a little older when she was adopted, I'm not sure. So she may have had some language when she was adopted. She wasn't an infant. But she is fluent. And she's a star of the adoptee community. And all you hear from so many of these others is "I wish I knew Korean." Yeah, very much among the adoptee community... It seems to us that would be the key to gain access to your birth culture, to speak the language. And to be cut off that way, it would just make it harder.

Both of these excerpts highlight the role of language in connecting to one's birth culture. Joann explains that while the parenting class organized by her adoption agency stressed the value of promoting both the child's culture and language, what she 'kept hearing over and over and over and over and over' from adult adoptees was the importance of language. Because she sees language as the critically missing piece in the adult adoptees' attempts to connect with their birth culture, she justifies her decision to help her son learn it. Likewise, Carol feels that in raising transnational adoptees, 'listening to adult adoptees talk about what was missing is crucial.' To illustrate her point, she provides an account of her family's involvement with the adoption community and describes an adult adoptee named Yoon Mi, whose mother 'made her attend

Korean school'. Carol's choice of the verb 'make' suggests that Yoon Mi did not like going to Korean school while growing up. But her mother's authoritarian approach is justified by Carol's assertion that Yoon Mi is now fluent in Korean and a 'star of the adoptee community'. By juxtaposing this rare success story with the situation of most other adoptees who do not know Korean but wish they did, Carol defends her own decision to teach Korean to her children.

'The child wants it'

Recent work in FLP examines the role of child agency in shaping parental language policy (Fogle, 2012; Fogle & King, in press; Luykx, 2003). Rather than being passive recipients of the decisions made by parents, children (especially older ones) have been shown to play an active role in determining language choice in the family and sometimes resisting the decisions made by parents (Caldas, 2006; Dorner, 2010; Gafaranga, 2010). For some of the families in this study, the decision to pursue birth language learning was initiated and driven by the children.

Beverly: [Jason]'s completely immersed in the culture, the modern culture, the history, the language. He rents Korean movies, he belongs to Tiger Cinema, Yes Asia. I mean he's steeped in it... Jason was never interested [in going to weekend Korean school]. So we didn't push it. And I think as he got older he realized that the schools were largely younger kids who would be on his level. And we've heard that sometimes adoptees are not as well embraced [in community schools]... I think [knowledge of Korean] is very very important to him. I think it's central to how he thinks about himself and his future. This is very important to him. I think right now he feels he's more Korean than American... Right now, he's very happy.

It's very much his identity. So I think it's much better than him struggling internally and not being able to sort it out.

In this excerpt, Beverly describes her teenage son's enthusiastic engagement with his birth culture and language. The descriptors she uses to describe Jason's current state - 'completely immersed' and 'steeped' in Korean culture, history, and language - contrast sharply with her depiction of his younger years when he was 'never interested' in learning Korean. She explains that Jason's earlier lack of interest in Korean was what prompted her to not 'push it'. She then offers two more reasons for not sending him to Korean school when he was little: (1) he would have been placed in lower-level classes with younger children, which would have damaged his self-esteem; (2) adoptees are not well-embraced in community schools. By invoking the problems that other adoptees have encountered in community language schools, she projects an image of a 'good parent', who protects her child from potentially negative educational experiences. Beverly then emphasizes the role that knowledge of Korean plays in Jason's construction of his identity. She observes that 'right now he feels he's more Korean than American.' Her use of the phrase, 'right now', suggests that she views Jason's identity construction as a dynamic process, likely to shift as his experiences and circumstances change. Whatever the future trajectory of his identity may be however, Beverly believes that Jason's current state of being 'very happy' is better than 'struggling internally' and 'not being able to sort it out'. These mood descriptors provide Beverly with discursive resources for justifying her decision to promote Korean.

During the interview, Beverly explained that Jason's interest in Korean culture and language began three years ago when he visited Korea for the first time since he was adopted.

Jason's younger brother, Ryan, struggled with 'some things related to his adoption' upon entering middle school, and on the suggestion of a social worker, the entire family took a trip to Korea, where they met with the foster families that took care of the boys before their adoption. Jason, who was 15 at the time of the trip, was not interested in visiting Korea. However, the family's time in Korea was a 'completely transforming experience' for Jason, who returned to the United States wanting to know everything about his birth language and culture. Ever since the Korea trip, Jason has been an avid consumer of Korean popular culture (e.g., K-pop, Korean dramas and movies) and has been attending a community Korean language school on Saturdays.² Beverly explained that for now, only Jason is going to Korean school because Ryan has not shown interest in it. But she pledged her support for Ryan if he decided to learn Korean as well.

Similarly, Linda stated that while she is favorably disposed toward promoting birth culture, she is currently sending only her older son to Korean school because her younger son has not yet expressed interest in learning Korean.

Linda: Edwin has always talked about [finding his birth parents]. Nathan doesn't feel as acutely the loss of culture through adoption that Edwin seems to. I think they're just different personalities. It's entirely possible that Nathan, being the second, he's taking this sort of a wait and see, let's see how it goes here. Edwin talks a lot about finding his birth parents and finding his siblings and family. And learning about the birth culture comes out of that.

Here, Linda attributes Edwin's perennial talk of finding his birth parents to his sense of 'loss of culture through adoption', which she thinks is not felt to the same extent by Nathan. By characterizing the boys as 'different personalities' and Nathan as the 'second' child, she draws

² Unlike most community schools, this school enrolls primarily adoptees and is run by someone associated with Beverly's adoption agency. According to Beverly, 'there are some older adoptees that are wonderful role models' at this school, who make Jason feel 'very comfortable' and welcome.

attention to their differences rather than their similarities (i.e., Both of them are boys, adopted from the same country). But her assessment that Nathan may be taking a 'wait and see' approach acknowledges the possibility that his attitude toward Korean could change in the future.

Beverly's and Linda's insistence on a child-driven language policy demonstrates a common concern among transnational adoptive parents that adoptees would resist the cultural practices that parents try to "foist" upon them (Jacobson, 2008: 99). The fear of imposing culture on children and being rejected by them in the process led to these parents' outlook that each child's desires and interests should dictate language learning. Thus, for these families, children played a critical role in shaping the formation and implementation of FLP.

In the next section, I look more closely at how the children's experiences in the community schools interacted with the parents' motivations.

How problems with community schools affected FLP decisions

To obtain language instruction, all of the families have enrolled their children in community heritage language schools, which are largely funded and staffed by members of the ethnic community and are typically held on weekends in churches, temples, and community centers. Problems with community schools have been extensively documented in the heritage language literature (See for example, Lee & Shin, 2008; Liu, Musica, Koscak, Vinogradova, & López, 2011; Wiley, Peyton, Christian, Moore, & Liu, 2014). These include lack of prestige and recognition from public education systems, poor organization, teaching techniques that ineffectively address the learning styles of children educated in American schools, and inadequate professional development for teachers. Community schools are often attended by heritage language speakers, children of immigrants who hear the language spoken by family

members at home on a daily basis. Consequently, classes assume varying amounts of oral and written language skills and are not appropriate for students with little opportunity to hear the language outside the classroom (Shin & Lee, in press). Despite these problems, adoptive families seeking classroom instruction in Chinese or Korean depend on community schools because these languages are not normally taught in the formal schooling system.

Analysis of the data suggests that, while most of the parents in this study felt compelled to promote language, they were often conflicted about using community schools to accomplish their language goals. Positive attitudes toward adoptees' birth language and motivations to teach it were tempered by what the parents saw as a serious lack of quality in these programs and by the adoptees' (sometimes) violent protests against them. The parents were sensitive to how their children responded to instruction at the community schools and engaged them in conversations about what they were learning and how they felt about their classes, teachers, and peers. While the parents generally wanted to see their children making progress with the language, they wanted them, above all, to enjoy learning it. However, the adoptees often felt 'frustrated' by the problems they encountered in the community schools and complained repeatedly to their parents, which weakened the parents' motivations.

Mary: She was in middle school when we started [Korean school]. She took it for two years... What we found out is that it really wasn't a good fit for Twila. Because socially, she wanted to be with the older kids. But because of her language skills, they put her with the younger kids... And she got very frustrated and so after two years, she goes, 'Mom, I just really don't want to do this anymore.'

In this excerpt, Mary justifies her decision to leave Korean school after two years by explaining why it 'wasn't a good fit' for her daughter. She describes Twila's extreme dissatisfaction with being placed in the same class with younger children and how that made her feel 'very frustrated'. Although the school's placement decision was a consequence of Twila's lack of Korean language skills compared to her same-age peers, being treated as an elementary school student was difficult for a sensitive pre-teenager trying to fit in socially with other middle school students. In the interview, Mary explained that she herself studied Korean for two years in a beginning-level adult class at the same school. But unlike the children's classes, the adult class assumed no prior knowledge of Korean and was composed of a mixed group of students including adult adoptees, adoptive parents, and second- or third-generation Korean Americans who never acquired Korean while growing up. Mary stated that a class like this might have been 'a better fit' for Twila in meeting her social and emotional needs.

In addition to issues related to placement, other problems that the adoptees encountered at the community schools included poor teaching and inadequate professional development of teachers.

Peter: The teacher in my oldest daughter's class was a young man who I think could have been very good but he was really inconsistent. And sometimes he would berate the kids and I don't think he was really giving them a structure... There were two families, both with adopted children... They just became very upset with this guy and left the school... We thought about whether we should stick with it or not, but then when they moved it even closer to our house, we thought okay, let's give it a, at least go to the first meeting.

Wendy: When Julia turned 3, we put her in a beginner class for kids who don't speak English at home, and it became very clear there was no way she could sit through that class. It was mostly writing, even at ages 3 and 4, which is not appropriate... So we pulled her out of the class after 2 weeks... so we started her at a small Chinese language school that had a class in Chinese they were trying that had 3 or 4 kids in the class. And it was taught in a more American preschool way... And that was pretty good but then they didn't have enough enrollment so that ended and then we stole their teacher and she's now our tutor.

Peter describes his oldest daughter's Chinese teacher as someone who 'could have been very good'. But the fact that he was frequently absent and had little knowledge about how to structure his lessons led to his failure as a teacher. He was also harsh in his correction of language mistakes, discouraging students from speaking up in class. Peter explains that when two other adoptive families in the class became 'very upset' with the teacher and stopped coming to class, his family also considered leaving the school. But the school's relocation to an area near his home convinced his family to give the school another try. Wendy faced similar problems with unsatisfactory teaching in a community school. She characterized the first Chinese school that her daughters attended as a large school with mostly second generation Chinese American children. In the above excerpt, she explains why she pulled Julia out of that school - her class consisted mostly of writing, which was developmentally inappropriate for 3 and 4 year olds. She then talks about enrolling Julia in another Chinese language school, where she was taught in a 'more American preschool way'. But when her class got canceled due to low enrollment, Wendy convinced the teacher of that class to teach her daughters as a private language tutor.

As can be seen in these excerpts, the adoptive parents' FLP decisions and practices were significantly influenced by problems in the community schools. It is true that many of the problems with community schools also apply to non-adopted children - traditional heritage language learners are not immune to poor instruction and ineffective teachers. However, in accomplishing FLP goals, adoptive families are more disadvantaged by the fact that community schools often serve as the only source of language input for these families. Although some parents in this study have hired private language tutors and babysitters, the adoptive families generally had limited options for realizing their language goals without community schools. Furthermore, as outsiders to the ethnic community, the adoptive parents faced additional challenges of relating to community school staff. For instance, when parents wanted to voice their concerns about curriculum and instruction to community school teachers and administrators, they were often unsure about culturally appropriate ways to do so. Below, Sally discusses how she approached her daughter's teacher about problems with homework.

Sally: Taylor had so much homework last year it was crazy... Over Christmas vacation, she had like 12 pages of every single line had a word on it that she had to copy over three times on like both sides... And she was 8 years old... I am a Jewish mother. So I marched right in and, you know, wrote the teacher a letter... I'm very friendly with one of the other moms who's actually Korean from Korea... And I'm like, what are you doing with your daughter? She's like, I do the homework for her basically... So, I'm like, I have to tell the teacher this is not workable. You know, if you wouldn't mind also, I don't want her to just think it's the American moms that can't handle it. So I wrote the teacher a note and I said that this is not, I mean, my daughter is a very academically strong person. It's not

that she gets overwhelmed easily, she can keep up with all her regular schoolwork, she never complains. But it's a mountain of work... I probably was a little too loud and clunky in my complaints. And it was a flurry of activity but the homework did get better. I mean, Taylor was begging me to stop Korean school because it was so hard... If I didn't feel so committed to [Korean]... I would have been out of there, I mean, because she was so miserable.

By identifying herself as 'a Jewish mother' and invoking the stereotypes associated with the label (e.g., talkative, overprotective of her children, overbearing), Sally rationalizes what she thinks may have been a culturally inappropriate way for her to approach her daughter's Korean teacher. But to strengthen her case, she consulted with a Korean mother in the class who also found the homework to be unmanageable. Sally's request to that mother to also complain to the teacher was a way of ensuring that the teacher did not 'just think it's the American moms that can't handle it.' She then describes the content of her letter to the teacher and portrays her daughter as 'a very academically strong person' who does not get overwhelmed easily, an industrious student who 'can keep up with all her regular schoolwork' and 'never complains'. With this image of a highly capable student established, Sally goes on to argue that Taylor's difficulty was not due to any lack of ability on her part but to the 'mountain of work' that the teacher had assigned. In complaining to the teacher, she admits that she may have been 'a little too loud' and 'clunky', but she justifies her actions by explaining how Taylor was 'so miserable' and 'begging me to stop Korean school because it was so hard.' While she was satisfied that her various efforts ('flurry of activity') have led to a more manageable amount of homework, she

confesses that the problem wore her down to a point where she seriously considered leaving the school.

As these excerpts show, the adoptive parents' discourses about community schools reveal a sense of powerlessness that comes from having to depend on an ethnic institution over which they had little control. While the parents believed that their children could benefit from a sustained exposure to the birth language, they were, on the other hand, conflicted about making children attend classes that did not seem to meet their needs. Convincing unwilling children to persist in language learning despite the problems they experienced in community schools was a constant struggle that exhausted the parents, leading some families to abandon these schools altogether. Even for the families that have continued with language instruction, leaving community schools was a possibility that they revisited often.

Conclusions

This study investigated how parents explain their decision to pursue birth language education for their internationally adopted children and how they go about achieving their goals. It showed that the parents' decisions about language are complex and shaped by a variety of individual, familial, and societal factors (King et al., 2008). One of the primary reasons for pursuing birth language learning was the parents' perception of dominant social attitudes toward Asian Americans. The parents maintained that their China-adopted and Korea-adopted children *should* learn their birth language because they *look* Asian and that others will expect them to *behave* as Asians by displaying knowledge about their native language and culture. This primordial view of ethnicity fixes ethnic identity to adoptees based on phenotype and minimizes the role of adoptees' other identities (Tuan, 1998). While the parents recognized the importance

of their children's other, more socially constructed identities (e.g., 'American', 'adoptee'), they argued that the visible racial difference of their children from the mainstream white population must be explicitly acknowledged, and that it is this difference that requires engagement with birth language (Jacobson, 2008).

Another factor that influenced the parents' decisions was the adoption community. In particular, some of the parents in this study turned to adult adoptees for advice on whether to incorporate birth language into the life of the family. This pattern is in marked contrast to that of non-adoptive parents who rely primarily on their own social networks and personal experiences with language learning to make FLP decisions (King & Fogle, 2006). The adoptive parents felt that it is crucial to listen to adult adoptees talk about what was 'missing' in their lives and framed their language-related efforts as a way to offset the loss of culture through adoption. In their explanations, the parents described their desire to avoid the 'mistakes' of earlier generations of adoptive parents who largely ignored adoptees' need to explore the birth culture.

Similarly, language learning by (pre)adolescent children in some of the families was driven by the adoptees' own desire to connect with their cultural roots. The parents' descriptions of their older children's identification with their birth cultures indicate that knowledge of the birth language figures prominently in adoptees' deeper-level explorations of their roots (Song & Lee, 2009). In adoptive families, as in immigrant and other types of families living in transnational contexts, family language policy results from interactions between parents and children and involves processes that are both "top-down" (e.g., explicit parent-directed decisions) and "bottom-up" (e.g., child's reactions to parents' decisions) (Fogle & King, in press). The parents' discourses in the data presented here offer a glimpse into the ways in which adoptees establish agency in family interactions. Specifically, some of the children in the families resisted

parental decisions by voicing their objections to their classes and teachers in the community schools. The parents were in turn conflicted about using community schools to accomplish their language goals because of what they perceived as serious lack of quality in these programs and their children's continuous protests against them.

These findings contribute to our understanding of the complexities of family language policy. They show that adoptive families, as other types of families living in transnational contexts, do not make their decisions in a vacuum. As Canagarajah (2008: 170-171) aptly points out, the family is "not a self-contained institution that can adopt its own strategies and devices for language transmission," but is rather "porous, open to influences and interests from other broader social forces and institutions." While culture keeping has become standard practice in the international adoption community and is widely recommended to families adopting children from overseas, practical support is largely lacking for those that are serious about integrating birth language into the family's life. Parents may have favorable attitudes toward promoting adoptees' birth language, but in realizing their goals, they face challenges and mediating factors that impede turning positive attitudes into practice. The data here reveal the conflicts that family members must negotiate between the desire for cultural connection on the one hand, and the practical constraints of social institutions such as community schools on the other. More broadly, these data point to the various ways in which the adoptive family, as a dynamic social unit, is constructed by family members' divergent and evolving conceptions of what it means to be a contemporary multicultural family.

Appendix

Interview Questions

- 1) Please tell me your name, age, where you live, your occupation, and highest education.
- 2) Please tell me about your family. Spouse, partner/children – their age and where they live.
- 3) Please tell me a bit more about your child(ren). For your adopted child(ren), could you please tell me your reasons and circumstances for adoption (when, at what age, from what countries, boy or girl, etc.)?
- 4) Have your child(ren) been attending a community-based language school? If so, for how long?
- 5) Have you received any classroom instruction in Language X? If so, when, for how long, where, and why?
- 6) Please share your reasons for studying Language X.
- 7) Please share your reasons for sending your child(ren) to the community language school.
- 8) How important is your children's knowledge of Language X in their growth? Why do you want them to learn Language X?
- 9) If you or your child(ren) stopped attending the community school, please tell me when and why.
- 10) How many hours of classroom instruction in Language X do you/your children receive per week at the community language school?
- 11) How many hours do you/they spend on Language X homework outside of class per week?
- 12) What is your overall impression of the community language school you/your child(ren) attend(ed)? What is good about it? What is not so good about it?
- 13) How did you/your child(ren) do in the community school? Did you/they like the school?

- 14) How much Language X did you/they learn? How proficient are you/they in Language X (Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing)?
- 15) What was it like for you as a non-native Language X speaker to participate in the community school? Were there any difficulties in relating to the teachers, administrators, other parents and students? If so, what were they?
- 16) What types of support would you like to help you/your child(ren) learn Language X? What advice do you have for parents of international adoptees interested in helping their children learn Language X?
- 17) Have you/has your child visited the child's birth country? If so, when and for how long?
- 18) Is there anything else you wish to tell me about your/your children's learning of Language X?

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Table 1: Overview of the participants and their children*

Name	Sex	Age	Occupation	State of Residence	Child^, Sex (Age), Country of Birth	Length of child's study of the birth language	Length of parent's study of the child's birth language
Anne	F	53	Stay-at-home mom	Virginia	Cindy, F (8), China	3 years	Never
Barbara	F	59	Librarian	Maryland	Tom, M (17), Korea	1 month	Never
Beverly	F	57	Psychiatric nurse	Maryland	Jason, M (18), Korea Ryan, M (14), Korea	3 years Never	Never
Carol	F	51	Office manager	New York	Emily, F (13), Korea Andy, M (10), Korea	4 years 3 years	4 years
Diane	F	47	Clinical psychologist	New York	Sam, M (8), Korea Megan, F (6), Korea	4 years 2 years	4 years
Joann	F	40	Stay-at-home mom	Colorado	Grant, M (5), Korea	2 weeks	6 weeks
Linda	F	50	Stay-at-home mom	Maryland	Edwin, M (11), Korea Nathan, M (9), Korea	4 months Never	Never
Lisa	F	51	Social worker	Virginia	Clarisse, F (9), China	4 years	Never
Mary	F	54	Homemaker	Maryland	Twila, F (16), Korea	2 years	2 years
Nancy	F	46	Preschool teacher	Washington	Marianne, F (9), Korea	1 year	8 months
Peter	M	51	University professor	Maryland	Ashley, F (9), China Felicia, F (7), China	4 years 2 years	3 years
Ruth	F	48	Pastor	Virginia	David, M (10), Korea Kayla, F (8) Joshua, M (8)	3 months 3 months 3 months	3 months
Sally	F	44	Nurse	Massachusetts	Taylor, F (9), Korea Daniel, M	4 years 2 years	Never

					(7), Korea		
Sheryl	F	45	Chemist	Maryland	Michael, M (7), Korea	2 years	4 years
Wendy	F	35	Stay-at-home mom	Ohio	<i>Abigail</i> , F (8) Julia, F (5), China	5 years 2 years	1 year
William	M	56	Computer scientist	Virginia	<i>Timmy</i> , M (11) Jennie, F (8), China	2 months 2 months	Never

*All participants and children were given pseudonyms.

^Italicized names represent the participants' biological children.