CHINESE CUSTOMARY ADOPTION: BIRTH CONTROL POLICY, FAMILY ADOPTION TRIANGLE, AND INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE IN CONTEMPORARY RURAL CHINA

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Chinese Customary Adoption: Birth Control Policy,
Family Adoption Triangle, and Individual Experience in
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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it reproduces no material previously published or written, nor material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text.

_____(Signed)

MENG, Ling_____(Name of student)

Acknowledgement

From the time I decided to study this topic until now, I had many times thought of giving it up. Indeed, my own life experience is the original intention for me to do this research. However, due to over-familiarity, sometimes I feel unable to continue and think that there is nothing new in the research. I cannot imagine how I could have completed this dissertation without the encouragement and support from my supervisors, friends and family members during the five-year doctoral study.

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Xinfeng, in addition to taking care of us in daily life, often organized mini seminars with us to discuss recent progress of thesis writing.

Then, I am extremely indebted to my families. I ought to thank my biological parents for giving me life, but I am most grateful to my adoptive parents for raising me up. I appreciate my old parents, Meng Xianhe and Zhang Delan, for not only bringing up a crying infant, but also raising her to be the only Ph.D. student in the whole village, in their limited economic conditions. Throughout my schooling, it was their frugality and strong support for my education at all costs that enabled me to concentrate on study without fear of the pressures of survival. My old father, who is now over 70 years old, is suffering from cerebral infraction that prevents him from moving and speaking easily. I feel guilty for not providing them with life assistant and emotional comfort when they needed me most. The unforeseen event happened to them also prompted me to complete my thesis as soon as possible; after all, they are getting old fast, and I did not want to leave myself with any more regrets. I would like to thank my elder brother Meng Liang, elder sister Meng Qingyun, sister-in-law Chen Yunxia, and brother-in-law Dong Qiang, in taking care of our parents during my thesis writing and providing as much financial support as they could when I had no income at all. Without their help, I would not have been able to write my dissertation with undivided attention in recent few months. I have to show appreciation to my parents-in-law, Zhang Hongming and Han Ruifang for their assistance with my

because of my daughter and husband that I have been able to reconcile with my

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that she has brought me happiness and joy. I hope she can always be lovely and grow

up freely.

Abstract

Due to the enforcement of one-child policy since the 1980s, customary adoption has become widespread in rural China as a family strategy to subvert state policies. Through the birth-control campaign, peasant couples would temporarily give their unplanned or unwanted children to relatives or friends so they could have another child. Most existing studies on this phenomenon were conducted by looking at China's population policies, but few studies have paid attention to the families and individuals involved in customary adoption.

Scholars have long pointed out that family is not only about blood relationships. Instead, the family is a concept subject to social construction and personal choice, and is characterized by fluidity, uncertainty, and reconfiguration. The emergence of customary adoption has, to some extent, enriched existing family patterns and relations, and can be employed to study change and continuity in contemporary Chinese families. Four different types of adoption triangles were identified from observing an adoptee's perception and closeness with their birth and adoptive families: birth family is more important (physiological); parenting is greater than childbirth (emotional); both families are equally important (harmonious); and the individual is more important than the family (independent). The main question of this study is: how and why family relations among adoptees, birth families and adoptive families differ despite being in the same sociocultural and institutional context? In other words,

why do different types of relationships between individuals and families develop in similar structural contexts?

Based on empirical data obtained from interviews and fieldwork conducted in Jiangli County, Northern China between 2017 and 2018, this study argues that the family is no longer merely composed of fixed relationships. Instead, it is determined and chosen by individuals, based on mutual economic and emotional interactions with their families. The choices and decisions made by individuals are not spontaneous and arbitrary, but arise from interaction, negotiation, and compromise with related family members in a specific context. Ultimately, it is found that although confronted by structural constraints from institutions and cultural norms, individuals actively use strategies to cope with them rather than passively accept them. In exerting their agency, individuals continue to reshape and renegotiate their identities and family relations.

This study examines customary adoption at three different levels: a) local policy practice, b) family-family and family-individual interactions, and c) individual life experiences and agencies. Through these analyses, this research not only provides a more comprehensive explanation for the diversity of family relations, but also contributes to a better understanding of the complexity and dynamics in Chinese families.

Table of Contents

List of Tables and Figures

Tables

Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

I was almost abandoned at birth since my parents preferred a son after their first daughter rather than a second daughter. I was eventually raised by my maternal grandparents and my unmarried uncle, thanks to contributions by my maternal aunt. Neighbours in my adoptive village mocked me, saying "You are a black child[1]," "Go back to your own family," and "your mother and father have abandoned you." Despite these sad events, I felt my life was not bad because of my grandparents' love. When my grandparents passed away, my parents took me home. Since then, I felt like I went from heaven to hell. I hated them and did not like this family. I had to live precariously every day without eating or sleeping well. My father was better than my mother because he liked me much more. For example, he would also think about me first when having delicious food. My mother had a negative view of me. My sisters looked down on me. They grew up with my parents and suddenly there was me— the "crazy" girl, so they never respected me. Once, my elder sister threw her chopsticks away because my father put food into my bowl. My younger sister, perhaps because she was too young, often said that this was not my family and asked me to leave. I always believed I was an outsider. I was scared of being beaten by my mother and I felt uneasy

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[1] This is a child without a legal household registration or born outside the family planning policy in China. They are called *hei hai zi* in Chinese, or "black children."

when I was home. I quietly called my mom a "bad person." She heard me once

and beat me so badly my nose and mouth bled. What I wanted most was the

weekends, only during the weekends can I return home—my uncle's home…

(Huanping[2], December 2015)

Over four years ago, I started focusing on second daughters who were born under the 1.5-child policy in a village of Northern China. These daughters often had older sisters and encountered unique experiences because of the policy and their parents' preference for sons. At that time, I met Huanping, a 25-year-old girl, who shared her experience of customary adoption in rural China. Like Huanping, I was also adopted into my paternal aunt's family. Thirty years ago, I was born in a hamlet in North China when the family planning policy was strictly implemented. My birth parents were disappointed by my birth as they wanted a son rather than another daughter. According to the population policy at the time, my parents were not permitted to have a third child. In most rural areas, a couple was allowed to have a second child within a few years if the first child was a girl. The one-child policy in rural China had become a one-son-or-two-child policy, also known as the 1.5-child policy. As my parents admitted that they would like a son, I was transported on

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[2] When I mention all respondents and places in the dissertation, fictional names are used to replace all identifying names and places.

bicycle to my aunt's family (my father's elder sister) three days after birth. Since then, I was fostered by my aunt's family.

I was surprised by Huanping's life story, especially the way of her birth family treated her, though I was also an adoptee. Why did we have such different life experiences of customary adoption? And what about the lives of others who were like us? Since then, I have paid attention to this phenomenon and learnt that it was academically called "customary adoption." Admittedly, my identity and life experience generated the initial impulses to explore this topic.

Huanping's childhood memories and tearful narratives on family relations brought us closer and made me recognize these as personal issues and intimate family affairs; but are these individual problems disconnected to wider social, cultural, and historical conditions? C. Wright Mills pointed out that most people only direct interest towards the "private orbits in which they live" and "do not possess the quality of mind essential to grasp the interplay of man and society, of biography and history, of self and world. They either cannot cope with their personal troubles in such ways as to control the structural transformations that usually lie behind them" (Mills, 1959, pp. 3-4). In his work, the ability to link individual life with the macro-historical background is called the sociological imagination, which enables us "to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society." An essential distinction in the sociological imagination is that between "personal troubles of milieu"

and "public issues of social structure" (Mills, 1959, pp. 5-8). As an adoptee and a sociological researcher, I became interested in using the sociological imagination to understand this adoption practice, the individual life experiences, and family relations by placing them in their historical, political, economic, and social context.

Research Background

In the literature, customary adoption is defined as "an arrangement for the care of a child, made between the birth parent(s) and the adoptive parent(s) who are usually relatives or members of the same community," which "at least favors transactions that respect and maintain blood-link relationships" (O'Halloran, 2015, p. 752). It is an "open" form of adoption, which means "the child generally knows he or she has been adopted; the child knows his or her birth parent(s); open adoption enables the child to maintain access with his or her birth family and community" (*ibid*, p. 757). This definition generally applies for Chinese families as well[3].

Given the primacy of family in Chinese society, early empirical studies on customary adoption have discussed it in the context of Chinese family institutions and

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[3] Only in exceptional circumstances can adoption be arranged with strangers or non-relatives. See, O'Halloran, Kerry. *The Politics of Adoption: International Perspectives on Law, Policy and Practice* (3rd ed.) (Dordrecht Netherlands: Springer, 2015), pp.761. Wolf, Arthur P., and Chieh Shan Huang. *Marriage and Adoption in China, 1845-194*5 (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1980). Waltner, Ann. *Getting an Heir: Adoption and the Construction of Kinship in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1990). Baker, Hugh D. R. *Chinese Family and Kinship* (London: Macmillan, 1979).

kinship systems (X. T. Fei, 1946a; Johnson, 1983; Lang, 1946; Marion J Levy, 1963; A. P. Wolf & Huang, 1980). These studies find adoption practices to be complex reflections of a variety of forces, including demographic, economic, and cultural factors, that interact and shape family organization. However, with the Chinese Communist Party exerting party-state power on Chinese families, including on the practice of adoption, since 1949; prior research did not account for that degree of state power through laws and policies over adoption processes.

During this state-mandated fertility transition period from the late 1970s to January 2016, the family planning policy, including its one-child policy, caused a lot of controversy concerning its outcome and costs. This also led to increasing academic attention on the revival of customary adoption in rural China, especially from the 1980s to the 1990s. Some researchers saw it as a resistance strategy for rural residents who wanted a son or more than two children (X. X. Chen, 2004; Greenhalgh & Li, 1995; Ku, 2003; Li, 1993; White, 2003), while others saw it as a reason for the demographically lower number of girls or as an unintended consequence of the one-child policy (Johansson, 1995; Y. Shi & Kennedy, 2016). Some looked at factors affecting adoption from the perspective of the family and individuals (Lid, Larsen, & Wyshak, 2004; W. Zhang, 2006b).

Although these studies suggested that increased adoption impacted a large number of children (especially girls) and families; only a handful have focused on the

human experience of customary adoption in rural China (Johnson, 1996, 2004, 2016b; Johnson, Huang, & Wang, 1998; W. Zhang, 2001, 2006a). The most influential work was Kay Ann Johnson's 2016 book *China's Hidden Children*, where she explained why so many healthy girls were abandoned and adopted in China. Johnson not merely paid attention to abandoned children and domestic adoption in China, but also expanded to studies trafficked and internationally adopted Chinese children. Through her impressive investigation on adoptions across central and south China, and analysis on the politics of Chinese domestic and international adoption, Johnson's research has provided critical insights on the phenomenon and showed profound implications on the human cost of the Chinese population policies.

As Johnson (2016b) stated in the *Preface*, her initial motivation for studying infant abandonment and adoption was that she adopted a Chinese female baby in 1991. Hence, this research shared experiences of both Chinese birth parents and adoptive parents in the same cohort, concentrating on parents who struggled to form families in an era of population control and rapid socioeconomic transformation. The voices and perspectives of abandoned and adoptive children were largely absent, even though the research generally mentioned children without registrations suffering a bare life.

But in practice, how do these children go through everyday life and how do they perceive their experiences? How do these experiences shape their individual lives and their relations within families? These issues are relatively ignored. In addition to a

shortage of adoptees' voices, Johnson (2016b) idealizes the implementation of adoption laws in grassroots society, leading to an overemphasis of the role of the state in regulations and laws and an underestimate of the importance of the agency of local officials, village cadres, families, and individuals. Further, Johnson discussed birth parents of abandoned children and adoptive parents of adopted children, but paid little attention to birth and adoptive parents of the same children. Therefore, the entire process of abandonment and adoption within a family and village is still largely an uncharted terrain.

Research Questions

Existing studies have a general consensus that adoption is shaped by the social structures and cultural norms of a particular context (MacDonald, 2016). Similarly, adoption has long-term implications for adoptive children and their biological parents, adoptive parents, and kinship networks. Existing studies do not answer my initial problem why adoptees have different experiences. During my fieldwork, I found that reasons for customary adoption were similar, but adoptees lives, the fetters and entanglements between them and their adoptive and biological families were very diverse. The followings illustrate how diverse these lived experiences were:

[My relationship with my adoptive parents] has been broken, with only polite greetings between us and no feelings of family affection. Blood is thicker than

water; the blood bond will never change. You cannot falsify truth or validate lies. It is just like a doctor placing an artificial leg to a person, it is still not a natural leg. My adoptive parents always regarded me as an adopted child. I am not the same as the daughters they gave birth to. Even having their surname and being raised by them, I am still not their child. (Haoyang, male, 36-year-old)

My parents are so unfamiliar that I still cannot live with them. There is always a gap and I do not want to cross it. I only regard them as my birth parents—that's all. There's no emotion involved. By comparison, my maternal grandparents are my life. Although my grandpa passed away, I never thought about my life without my grandma. No one can replace her in my life, and no one loves me like her. (Wangqing, female, 28-year-old)

Grandma Li and my parents are both playing the role of parents. They all do what is good for me in their own way. I try my best to balance and not cause trouble between the two families. My mother might be upset if I was extra nice to Grandma Li. Now I am closer to my mum, and I am grateful to my Grandma Li for bringing me up so well and being so tolerant of me. (Biyao, female, 21-year-old)

I have a bad relationship with my [birth] parents. I rarely reach out to them. When I was in my most painful times, I would not contact my parents. I do not

expect any further connection to my birth parents apart from our blood bond. By comparison, my relationship with my aunt's family is closer and more casual. I seldom return to my aunt's family since leaving at aged seven. Growing up, I began to realize I have to take care of myself most and I can care for my biological parents the least. (Yage, female, 26-year-old)

These interview narratives showed different understandings and feelings between their families and individual selves. To better capture this diversity and complexity, I extend my inquiry to investigate intergenerational family relationship and social interactions among all involved parties. Through this extension, I ask: given that these cases are within the same institutional and cultural context, why do such divergent relationships between adoptees and relevant families exist? And how are these complex family relationships possible? This study of family relations in the adoption triangle (Figure 1.1) constitutes an entry point and a unique approach for exploring the social construction of family relations in contemporary rural China.
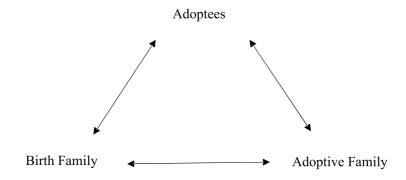
Figure 1.1 Adoption Triangle

To answer these questions, I asked more specific questions:

1. How do state policies and cultural norms contribute to the formation of customary adoption? How has the practice of customary adoption changed and continued in different historical eras? How are national policies related to customary adoption implemented in practice? How do differences in policy practice shape family relations in the adoption triangle?

2. What kind of daily care do families in an adoption triangle provide to adoptees? How do various care modes affect the relationship between adoptees and the two families? How do adoptive and biological families interact with each other? How, and to what extent, do family interactions influence adoptee's interactions and relations with them?

3. What do adoptees go through in different families in their everyday lives? How do they perceive their identities, life experiences and interactions with families? How do these perceptions and experiences impact adoptees' relationships with their families? What strategies do individuals use to resist these structural forces to reshape their life courses and identities?

4. How do adoptees understand the meaning of family and define the boundary between the two families? How, and to what extent, do their understandings

of the family change their interactions between family members? How has

the function of the family in the adoption triangle changed?

Research Methodology and Fieldwork

Personal Experience and Methodological Reflections

My research interest in family issues, especially family and intergenerational

relationships, stems from my personal experience. Growing up in foster care, it is

difficult for me to have a sense of belonging. Although my adoptive family's parents

and older siblings always cared for and loved me, I still feel like an outsider at certain

moments. As my adoptive parents aged and the family situation worsened, I felt that I

was their burden. Raising me and paying for my education made their life more

difficult. This guilt always kept me feeling detached from them. I realized that they

treated me well, but I dared not to actively seek their help. This ambivalence caused

me to feel hostile towards my birth family because they believed my experience was

not their own fault, but something to be attributed to history. Further, not living with

them made it impossible for me to get close to my blood-related family members. The

existing kinship between the two families forced me to balance my relationship with

them and to try to maintain the relationship between the families rather than worsen it.

Complex family relationships like mine are not unique because they exist in anyone who grows up between two families and has to deal with their complicated family triangles. These are the reasons why I have been determined to research on family relations, and adoption triangles in customary adoption to document this important phenomenon that happened under China's unique birth control policy. As this research started, I found that the actual situations and differences in family relationships are more complex than what I imagined. Behind every adoption triangle, there are individuals with ample reasons for their complex relationships and choices.

As Spicer (2011, p. 482) argued, "all research, whether qualitative or quantitative, is part of the social world that it is studying". For some researchers, personal goals and experiences could be "a major source of insights, questions, and practical guidance in conducting their research" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 36). I do not object to individual experience being a starting point for research but, in the process of research, I am still wary about the limitations related to my personal experience. Therefore, in case selection, I chose as many diverse cases as possible, with adoptees of different genders, ages, and life stages. I also searched for as many as families and individuals in adoption triangles as possible for the interviews to maintain data integrity; and used personal life histories as a guiding principle to avoid narrow and thin content.

The fundamental epistemological assumption of this qualitative study is social constructionism. According to social constructionism, reality is not objective and

given by nature, but is socially defined through ongoing actions, negotiations, and agreements (Andrews, 2012); even the research itself is also part of the reality-constructing process (Hjelm, 2014). By extension, it is concerned with meaning-makings and understandings as the central features of human activities (Neergaard & Ulhøi, 2007; Sliverman, 2010). In this study, this social constructionist assumption highlights the understandings and interaction processes people engage in to continually make meanings in family relations (Harris, 2010, pp. 71-86).

In my research, qualitative interviews were the main method of data collection. The term "qualitative interview" is used to signify different interview methods practiced in qualitative research (Bryman, 2012). The two foremost interview methods used were in-depth interviews[4] stressing personal subjective meanings and oral history interviews[5] focusing more on individual life experiences of certain

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[4] During the in-depth interview process, apart from uncovering hidden feelings behind subjects' answers or experiences, researchers also gain knowledge of their underlying emotions. For Wengraf (2001, pp. 5-6), in-depth interviews also imply the researcher's reflexivity to "get a sense of how the apparently straightforward is actually more complicated, of how the 'surface appearances' may be quite misleading about 'depth realities'". Moreover, without limiting questions and answers, in-depth interview has the potential to reveal multiple perspectives on a given topic. See, Wengraf, Tom. *Qualitative Research Interviewing: Biographic Narrative and Semi-Structured Methods* (London: SAGE Publications, 2001).

[5] The oral history interview puts stress on the importance of temporal context and memory by means of interviewing people about their past experience (Bornat, 2012). Through oral history, the memory of historical events showed more complicated dimensions. Voices of marginalized groups are also heard and used to complement official archives or elite narratives. Data from oral history can be seen as sources for understanding changes and continuities in society across time, generations and epochs (Thompson, 2000). See, Bornat, Joanna. "Oral History and Qualitative Research." In Bren Neale and Karen Henwood (Ed.). *Timescapes Methods Guides Series* (United Kingdom, 2012). Thompson, Paul Richard. *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (3rd ed) (Oxford:

important events. The two methods were often intertwined in interviews.

In-depth interviewing, as described by Marvasti (2004, p. 21), delves "into the subject's 'deeper self' [and] produces more authentic data." It is meant to gain access into hidden perceptions of subjects[6]. Through in-depth interviews, I uncover emotions, relationships, and underlying meanings in my informants' everyday lives. The most important use of oral history is to show a grassroots perspective of far-reaching events, such as the implementation of family planning policy and customary adoption in China. In this study, oral history is not only to collect data on birth parents', adoptive parents', and adopted children's past life experiences, but also to draw accounts from village cadres as well as local officials on the 1.5-child policy. In oral history interviews, unusual events often left my informants with vivid memories and these events, I discovered, provided underlying meanings for my informants that they attach to their identities, social relations, and lives.

During interviews, to gain participants' trust in a relatively short time, I disclosed my adoptee identity at proper times. The purpose of this self-disclosure was

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Oxford University Press, 2000).

[6] As J. M. Johnson (2002, p. 106), writes, In-depth interviewing begins with common sense perceptions, explanations, and understandings of some lived cultural experience... and aims to explore the contextual boundaries of that experience or perception, to uncover what is usually hidden from ordinary view or reflection or to penetrate to more reflective understandings about the nature of that experience. See, Johnson, John M. "In-Depth Interviewing." In Jaber F Gubrium and James A Holstein (Ed.). *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2002), pp.103-119.

to emphasize our equal status and shorten the distance between us. At the same time, given my status as an adoptee, reflexive fieldnotes were recorded throughout data collection and analysis to make transparent the possible effect of personal experiences during the research process. I kept reminding myself to transcend my personal perceptions and compare my own experiences with others to raise new questions. This means that the interview process is often open, adjusted and reflective. In addition, when I found different members in the same adoption triangle having different opinions on the same question, I would first try to clarify the actual situation through comparisons and look for reasons behind the different answers and specific contexts; then, I would analyze the differing views and see them as coexisting interpretations of the individual truths.

Through the interview process, I observed the interview, including our location and interviewees' behaviors, emotional reactions, and expressions (S. Yang & Sun, 2005). These factors facilitated in my understanding of interviewees' responses and the meanings behind them. In the research, my interests were not limited to the interviewee's verbal memories and personal feelings. I also asked how individuals in adoption triangles interacted with their families? What attitude adoptees held towards their parents in everyday life? What is the current relationship between the adoptive and original families?

To answer these questions, I had to supplement interviewees' verbal responses with my observations. Such observation allowed me to better grasp the feelings and practice of interviewees. At the same time, I used some data-gathering strategies, such as "hanging out, casual conversations, and incidental observations" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 88) to provide momentous contextual information from different perspectives.

Contemporary rural China is still male-dominated and females in these places often do not express their views on public issues. Therefore, most studies on Chinese rural families, especially on intergenerational relationship, rely on male respondents (Yan, 2003). Intergenerational relations, then, mainly refer to the relationship between father and son while ignoring the mother and daughter perspective. This male-dominant perspective limits our observation of rural China families. In this study, however, females became the main narrators as I also looked at childbearing and parenting practices. My research emphasized women's voices and demonstrated family relationships from a female perspective. This female-focused research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of family relations.

Profile of Field Site and Data Collection

To understand customary adoption and family relationships in rural China, I conducted eight months of fieldwork (from July to August 2017 and March to September 2018) in Jiangli County in northern China.

With a rich history and culture, Jiangli enjoys the reputation of being "the place of three kingdoms and five districts—the state of cultural prosperity." Holding the ruins of Beixin culture (5300BC to 4100BC), the county is seen as one of the earliest cradles of Chinese civilization. Jiangli was established as a prefecture as early as the Qin Dynasty (221BC to 206BC). The name of this county has changed over its long history, but the area continues to this day. The most recent change was in 1988, when the name "Jiangli" was approved by the State Council as a county-level city. To date, Jiangli county is 1,495km^2 and contains 21 townships, including 1,250 administrative villages and neighborhood committees. Moreover, Jiangli County is in close proximity to the hometown of Confucius and Mencius. This geographical location and historical continuity have brought residents of Jiangli county to become immersed in traditional culture and social norms, especially in patriarchal family values and son-preference fertility values.

The county is located in Huanghuai Plain, west of Taiyi Mountains and east of Weishan Lake. As there is substantial arable land, Jiangli county has become a significant grain-producing area with primary production of wheat, corn, and potatoes. Apart from this, natural resources such as coal, limestone and water are abundant in this county. Its economy focuses on production and processing, coal-related industries, and light industries while its service industry is still developing, having less than 40% of its economic composition. From this viewpoint, Jiangli is a typical industrial area

in the late stage of industrialization. Since the transformation in the pattern of economic growth in 2014, vast numbers of machine tool, textile, and chemical factories have been closed, and local construction has also slowed down (Magnier, 2015).

When the People's Republic of China was established, there were 127,229 households with a population of 625,872 in Jiangli. With economic development, quality of life has improved, and population growth has accelerated. In 1958, the county grew to 173,226 households with 770,123 people, resulting in its first population growth peak. In 1963, Jiangli started family planning, coupled with the impact of the great famine, which saw the birth rate decrease. During the Cultural Revolution, family planning was impacted and the population increased dramatically, exceeding 1.03 million in 1970, making it the second largest growth area (Local History Compilation Committee, 1990, p. 87). After the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh CPC Central Committee (1978), the central government controlled its population to accelerate modernization, leading to the implementation of the one-child policy in 1979. Jiangli was not exempt from this policy. Since then, the county entered a period of low growth and stable population development.

In 1988, *Regulations of Family Planning Policy* was passed in the province, which strictly prohibited births outside of planning and imposed qualifications for having a second child in rural areas. To have a second child, the first child must be a

daughter and the mother must be more than 30 years of age. However, in 1988 and 1989, Jiangli was ranked by the provincial government as one of the worst counties to implement the family planning policy. Because of its high birth rate and inaccurate statistical reporting, Jiangli officials were strongly criticized by their superiors in 1990 and, since then, the implementation of family planning policy became increasingly strict (S. Huang, 2009). However, Jiangli today still has a population of 1.75 million, making it the most populous county-level city in the province.

Indeed, the policies and socio-cultural environment of Jiangli provided appropriate conditions for customary adoption, making it an ideal field site for collecting data for this study. At the same time, as I grew up in a village in Jiangli, it was also convenient and feasible for me to conduct the study in my hometown. As a native, I could use my personal connections to establish contact with local officials in grassroots government and village cadres. As an adoptee, I could gain successful access to other adoptees and dispel any worries about their special identity.

I conducted my pilot study from July to August 2017. My research required input from the family planning branch of the local government, so the first stop of my fieldwork was the local Health and Family Planning Bureau (HFPB)[7]. Prior to this, I

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[7] During my fieldwork, the National People's Congress and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (NPC and CPPCC) passed the State Council's institutional reform plan and decided to form the National Health Commission as a component of the State Council, no longer retaining the National Health and Family Planning Commission. The corresponding local government departments have also changed accordingly.

lived in the countryside for a long time and had firsthand experience of the implementation of family planning policies. However, I never had any contact with grassroot bureaucrats in the local government. Thus, I had little data about how birth control was practiced at the meso level even though this information constituted an important background for the customary adoption that became widespread.

As I tried to enter the HFPB to make up for this lack of knowledge, the local area had already moved into the "two-child policy" era. Bureaucrats in the HFPB were wary of me when they heard I was doing research related to the family planning policy. Later, I learned that they contacted the cadres in my village. After my identity was verified, I was permitted to meet Director Jiang, who was in charge of the Family Planning Guidance Office of the HFPB. My first meeting and conversation with Director Jiang laid the foundation for my field research. I was allowed to enter the HFPB to conduct my research. Based on the pilot study, I returned to Jiangli in March 2018 to undertake fieldwork for a second time. I spent two months conducting semi-structured interviews and collecting archival material in the HFPB office and another four months doing in-depth interviews with individuals in adoption triangles.

In the HFPB, I interviewed eight grassroot officials responsible for the enforcement of family planning policies (see Table1.1). These interviewees'

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The Jiangli County Health Bureau was established in January 2019. My thesis refers to it as the Health and Family Planning Bureau as that was what existed during my fieldwork.

memories and narratives gave me a deeper understanding of policy practice at the grassroots level, and the different roles that local governments played in policy implementation. In addition, in the HFPB's archive room, I collected and sorted through a large number of report letters on the population policy in Jiangli County from the 1990s to early 2000s. In the process, I discovered the phenomenon of customary adoption was widespread in various towns throughout the county.

Table 1.1 Information about Local Cadres

Title	Gender	Position
Director Jiang	Male	Director, Office of Family Planning
Mr. Sun	Male	Staff, Office of Family Planning
Ms. Yu	Female	Staff, Office of Family Planning
Ms. Meng	Female	Staff, Office of Family Planning
Director Li	Female	Director, Office of Policy and Regulation
Director Zhu	Male	Deputy Director, Office of Policy and Regulation
Ms. Gao	Female	Staff, Office of Policy and Regulation
Director Gan	Female	Director, Office of Family Planning in Township

To enrich the understanding of customary adoption, interviews with village cadres were inevitable. Out of feasibility, I used the personal network in my hometown to interview seven village cadres in four villages (see Table 1.2). As the work experience of these village cadres spanned the entire process, from the start, development and abolition of the 1.5-child policy at the grassroots level, I was able to grasp the policy's entire timeline and see the role village cadres played in customary adoption practices.

Table 1.2 Information about Village Cadres

Title	Gender	Position	Tenure of Office
Secretary Li	Male	Village Party Secretary	2011-2013
Secretary Wang	Male	Village Party Secretary	1978-present
Director Qian	Female	Village Family Planning Office Staff	2007-present
Director Sun	Male	Village Head	1990-2017
Director Zhao	Female	Village Family Planning Office Staff	1988-present
Secretary Zhou	Male	Village Party Secretary	1991-2004
Secretary Wu	Male	Village Party Secretary	1970-1980

While investigating the policy context, I also became aware of the difficulties I had in doing my fieldwork in villages. At first, I limited my field locations to two villages, but I realized that was not feasible since adoption triangles involved three parties (adoptive family, birth family and the adoptee) or four parties (adoptive family, birth family, the adoptee, and the adoptee's current family by marriage). This means my research must be centered on the relational network rather than villages.

Customary Adoption Triangles in Jiangli County

During the fieldwork period, in addition to local grassroots and village cadres, I interviewed eight members in five birth families and seven members in four adoptive families (see Table 1.3). I also conducted in-depth interviews with sixteen adoptees, including twelve women and four men (see Table 1.4).

Table 1.3 Information about Families Members in Adoption Triangle

Members of Birth Family	Members of Adoptive Family
Wanqing's father and mother	Wanqing's maternal grandmother
Biyao's mother	Biyao's uncle and his mother (Grandma Li)
	Yage's maternal aunt and uncle

	Fanfan's maternal aunt and elder male cousin
Qichen's sister	
Yanwan's grandmother and aunt	
Xiuying's sister and aunt	

Table 1.4 Information about Adoptees

Name	Gender	Age	Marital Status
Wanqing	Female	29	Single
Yage	Female	27	In a relationship
Biyao	Female	22	In a relationship
Xiuying	Female	22	Single
Huanping	Female	26	Married with two daughters
Yanwan	Female	28	Married with two sons
Wanru	Female	30	Married with two sons
Feifei	Female	28	Single

Yiyi	Female	28	Single
Meimei	Female	29	Married with a son
Fanfan	Female	18	Single
Yanan	Female	29	Married with a daughter
Muqing	Male	29	Married
Decheng	Male	29	Single
Qichen	Male	25	Married
Haoyang	Male	37	Divorced with a daughter

For ethical considerations, all interviewees were adults over 18 years old and were aware of their adoptive identities. The age of adoptees ranged from 18 to 37 years old[8]. Most were fostered by their maternal grandmother's, paternal aunt's and maternal aunt's families, and they were usually the first or second daughter in their birth family. The age range between all interviewees was 19 years, all in different life stages and different relationships statuses and family structures. The educational backgrounds of adoptees were also varied. Most received or are receiving higher

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[8] Due to research question and research method, the age range of informants here is rather narrow. Certainly, birth-control policy has a profound influence not limited in adoption triangle, but also in other aspects of individuals' life experience, Although in this study I focuses on adoptees' past and current life experience, I will do discuss and predict their future life, like marriage and reproduction in conclusion.

education. Only two adoptees did not finish high school. Seven adoptees are married, two in stable relationships, six single and one divorced with a daughter.

After officially starting my fieldwork, I realized I might not be able to reach multiple parties in each adoption triangle. In practice, not every individual I contacted wanted to be interviewed, especially in the parents' generation; and some adoptees were less willing to permit me to interview their biological parents. This inevitably limited our understanding of family relationships in customary adoption. Interviews with birth families were particularly difficult. They often refused my interviews and said they did not want to recall the past. Although adoptees agreed to be interviewed, they were rarely inclined to help me contact their biological or adoptive parents. As a result, my research was mainly from the perspective of adoptees. Fortunately, in addition to my own experience, I successfully interviewed two complete adoption triangles. Since many cases in adoption triangles were not complete, I tried my best to make interviews deeper and use the depth of my data.

Among 12 female adoptees' birth families, 11 families eventually had sons, and the rest had 3 daughters. These birth families were more likely to have more than two children and the common gender order of children was girl-girl-boy with the first or second daughter being hidden through customary adoption. Families with three daughters were eventually forced to give up childbirth and accept the reality of no sons or continued to try for a son. As for the four male adoptees' birth families, two

families had a son on top of these adoptees themselves. They brought their second son to another family to avoid the punishment of an unplanned birth. In one family, after having two daughters, the third-born son would be raised by his maternal grandmother. There is only one family with four sons. They chose to abandon their youngest son because of economic hardship and to avoid the penalty of extra births. The boy was adopted by a family with only two daughters. All adoptive families have their own children or grandchildren. They temporarily raised these "hidden children" to help their relatives and did not intend to keep the children for themselves, except for the case of bringing up a son to continue their family lineage.

I carried out separate interviews with individuals in adoption triangles via face-to-face interviews, WeChat (voice or video), QQ (voice or video), telephone and other remote communications due to space and time limitations. Each interview lasted at least an hour and I conducted follow-up interviews with some interviewees, such as Wanqing, Huanping, and Biyao, during the data collation stage.

Organization of This Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters. This chapter served as an introduction to the thesis. In the next chapter, I review two parts of the literature on family relationships: one on the study of family relations in the context of social change and the other on the related study of family intergenerational relations. I will

point out shortcomings in both and work out a comprehensive analytical framework that addresses those integrates and addresses those shortcomings. This analytical framework looks at multiple levels of macro-meso-micro analysis and provides an explanation for these research questions from top-down and bottom-up perspectives.

Chapter 3 presents the institutional-cultural structure and changes in customary adoption practices in the context of history with particular attention to customary adoption practices in rural China. I divide the history of customary adoption into three periods, namely, traditional (before 1949), Maoist (from 1949 to the late 1970s), and contemporary (from late 1970s). In traditional China, there was a wealth of customary adoption practices, and its representative forms included the adoption of male heirs and the phenomenon of "child brides-in-law" related to the marriage institution. State intervention in the Maoist era greatly reduced the traditional form of foster care, but it did not completely disappear. In special times (such as the Great Famine), the practice increased significantly. The implementation of family planning policies constituted the most important institutional background for a massive revival in customary adoption practices in contemporary China. The national restrictions on number of births and traditional fertility values led to widespread customary adoption.

Chapters 4 to Chapter 6 discussed the findings of this research at different levels while also accounting for empirical explanations of research questions. Among them, Chapter 4 focuses on policy practice; Chapter 5 highlights relationships between

families and interactions within the family; Chapter 6 emphasizes personal experiences and the identity of adoptees.

Chapter 4 analyzes how the family planning policy was implemented differentially, and how this differentiated policy practice affects the formation of several family relationships. In the implementation of family planning policy, grassroots and village cadres played a vital role. My research found that in this process, village cadres and grassroots family planning commissioners can have dual roles as strict enforcers of policies and invisible protectors of villagers. Moreover, the specific roles that local cadres adopt are based on their social relationships with particular villagers or families. Therefore, the implementation of policies is inherently "differentiated," which also causes the same policy to have diverse effects on individuals and families.

Chapter 5 discusses the interaction and relationship between birth families and adoptive families, as well as the interaction between the two families and the adoptee. Customary adoption practices in contemporary rural China mainly occurred within kinship relationships. This chapter shows that the relationship between adoptees and their families in the adoption triangle is not only affected by the interaction between the two families, but also by the adoptees' existence that affects the interaction and inherent kinship between the two families. More important, blood-based closeness only accounted for one dimension of the relationship between a fostered person and a

specific family or individual, the more important dimensions were economic and emotional interaction. Whether between two families or in daily care within families, economic and emotional interaction are crucial factors in building family relationships.

Chapter 6 underlines the impact of an individual's experience and identity on family relationships and reshaping the individual's identity by family relationships. The adoption triangle constitutes a contradictory structure where the adoptee is at the center, and the experience of being in this structural position has its similarities between adoptees. However, this study revealed the ambivalence of adoptees regarding their own structural position are markedly different. These ambivalent experiences vary considerably in relation to the individuals' memories, cognitive strategies, and self-identities. Adoptees who have had fewer ambivalent experiences growing up generally do better with families on both sides. Those who have had more intense contradictions in their upbringing tended to have more tense relationships with both families, especially their biological parents. Despite being structurally constrained by contradictory roles, adoptees still actively and strategically construct and renegotiate their relationship with both families. At the same time, they also exert their agency to reshape their identities and life course between their birth family and adoptive families.

Chapter 7 concludes the research and addresses the significance of this study to the theoretical understanding of family and family relations. In this chapter, I discuss the transformation of my personal identity, highlighting individual agency in customary adoption triangle and reflecting on the research questions. I summarize the findings of previous chapters and discuss how these findings explain the core issue in this study and elaborate on a new interpretation of the current Chinese family. This study sees the concept of "family" as not having a fixed definition but is, rather, a dynamic relationship of choice based on everyday interaction.

In addition, inspired by the theory of family modernization and individualization, this research puts the discussion of family relationships into a more comprehensive analytical framework that considers macro-structure, meso-practice, and micro-interaction. This study's analytical perspective on family relations not only takes the individual as the core, but also places the individual in the adoption triangle. I argue that in current China, especially in rural areas, individuals are not completely free from the constraints of family. Even by paying more attention to individual life and emotional expression, it is not possible to ignore the persistence of existing cultural norms and values in the family.

Afterwards, I discuss implications of this research for our understanding of China's customary adoption practices and the unintended consequences of family planning policies. Individuals in customary adoption have paid a heavy and

irreparable price under the dual constraints of policy and culture. For this generation of adoptees, most are now married and have children. Their past experience and understanding of family relationships affect their perceptions of current family relationships and getting along with the next generation. At the same time, more people are paying attention to this group as a product of history and presenting their experiences in a way different from my thesis. Those who have witnessed it also constantly reflect on its impact on their lives, and continue to make their voices heard. Finally, I reflect on the limitations of this research and advance the idea that this research needs to be further deepened. For instance, the influence of sibling relationships within family relationships and the post-marital family relationship of adoptees has to be explored in depth.

Ultimately, this study analyzes the phenomenon of customary adoption to understand the complexity of family relationships in rural China. There are already established theoretical perspectives and analytical pathways in the discussion of family relations in academia. I will thus conduct a review of the research perspectives on family relations and, from that basis, propose an analytical framework.

Chapter 2: A Framework for Understanding Family Relations and Customary Adoption Practices

This research aims to investigate why and how different relationships are formed between individuals and families within the same institutional and cultural context. The study also explores the differences and complexities of family relationships (especially intergenerational relationships) in rural China through customary adoption practices. To better address this question, this chapter reviews family relations from two perspectives: family relations in social changes and intergenerational relationships.   Finally, on the basis of existing theoretical studies, this chapter establishes a comprehensive analytical framework to explain diverse family relationships in rural China.

Studies on Family Relations in Social Change

Sociological approaches on family life and family relationships have moved from family modernization thesis towards individualization thesis. While the two different research paths have respectively enriched the theoretical foundations of family studies, an increasing number of scholars have developed and revised these perspectives for the Chinese context.

Understanding Changes of Families: from Modernization to Individualization

Family modernization thesis, which looks at the relationship between family change and social structure, was derived from Parsons' the structural-functionalist family theory. The family modernization thesis asserts that the patriarchal, extended family is being transformed into the egalitarian, nuclear family through the processes of industrialization, urbanization, and rationalization. Here, the concept of "isolation" is the most important feature in the nuclear family as this form of family is not as closely connected as traditional families and kinship networks, and therefore not subject to rights and obligations of extended kinship. In this way, the nuclear family best succeeds in attaining the values of individualism and egalitarianism that is required by industrialization and urbanization (Goode, 1963; Parsons, 1943; Parsons & Bales, 1955).

However, being rather homogeneous and assuming the unidirectional evolution of family change, family modernization theory has been questioned by other researchers. Goode (1982) admitted in his reprint of *Family* that there are different family forms in modern society, and the nuclear family is but one of many. Still, there is no inevitable connection between family change and industrialization. Culture, ideology and other factors can impact families. Some scholars have also pointed out that nuclear families in industrial societies are not completely isolated, and there are still modes of mutual assistance and emotional support between family bonds and

relatives (Ben-Amos, 2000; Hareven, 1975; Sussman, 1959). Moreover, this perspective is based on developed Western countries and puts forward a one-way family development model that does not necessarily universal and ignores the experience of non-western societies (Hutter, 1998). Although family modernization theory provides the criteria and concepts of social change, family and individual behavior, yet it is more important in family research to understand the processes of complex and diverse family changes rather than classify them (Hareven, 1976).

Individualization theory, on the other hand, provides an alternative perspective for family studies focusing on both the macro social structure and individual's micro lives. Family researchers have increasingly emphasized the importance of the individual, especially an individual's freedoms, desires and emotions. The main proponents of this theory are Giddens (1991), Bauman (2000), and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002).

In discussing modernity, Giddens (1991) introduced the concept of "de-traditionalization" where individuals gradually rid themselves of the constraints of external social forces; these constraints included cultural tradition, family and blood relations, and class status. Bauman (2000) added that modern social structures force individuals to be proactive, independent, and responsible for their own lives. This "self-determining" life is achieved through a series of social institutions, such as the education system, labor market, and state regulation. Modern social institutions

are on the one hand reducing individuals' dependence on tradition, family, and community, and on the other hand continuously increasing their influence on individuals. Finally, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) argue that individualization itself is a kind of structure—what they call "institutional individualism." Individuals will then have a "selective life", a "reflexive life", or "self-determining life", but it is fraught with risks and uncertainties. In the past, life was prescribed by family bonds and traditions in village communities, social hierarchies, and class rules. Now, individuals must make decisions and take responsibility for them, and these consequences vary from individual to individual.

The views of Giddens (1991), Bauman (2000), and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) on individualization stress the new tensions "between the increasing demands for individuality, choice and freedom being imposed on individuals on the one, and the complex and unavoidable dependence of these same individuals on social institutions on the other." (Yan, 2010, p. 3) Therefore, the result of individualization is not that individuals need not depend on others, but that they have more room to choose their own life. This does not mean that traditions and social groups no longer play a role, but they are seen as resources available to individuals rather than constraints. In other words, individuals no longer agree with maintaining and yielding to tradition, but selectively use tradition to serve their own lives.

Modernization and Individualization of Chinese Families

Early accounts of Chinese family institutions and family life mainly focus on traditional society's kinship system (Baker, 1979; Hsu, 1971; Lang, 1946; Marion J. Levy, 1949). Early anthropologists' studies of Chinese families mainly focus on the lineage and kinship system in familism and lineage model (for an overview, see Santos, 2006). Freedman (1958, 1966) proposed "the lineage model" to analyze Chinese kinship in village community, in which patrilineal descent played an essential role. In this model, the analytical priority was given to the lineage over the family, and to men over women/children. Then, there are some feminist challenges to this model. For example, M. Wolf (1972) discussed the uterine family, a largely informal female-centered kinship group which composed of a woman and her children (especially her sons).

Summarized by Santos (2006), contemporary themes surrounding Chinese kinship include: (1) guanxi, reciprocity and relatedness; (2) attachment, desire, gender and practice; (3) power, social change and political economy. To fully understand kinship in China, we should understand "the interplay between the 'official' and the 'practical', the public and the domestic, descent and alliance, men and women, politics and economy, orthodoxy and resistance" (Santos, 2006, pp. 329-330). All these studies remind us about the continuing importance of kinship in understanding Chinese families today.

Without overemphasizing the "traditional order," C. K. Yang (1965) could be the first scholar to explore "modern changes" to the Chinese family system. His work suggested that the modern Chinese family began to develop during the revolutionary transformation between the pre-Communist and Communist period. Accordingly, changes to the traditional family were subject to laws and policies as well as pressures from revolution. His conclusion is different from the Western family modernization perspective, seeing state regulation of family life as a consequence of industrialization and urbanization (Goode, 1964). As family modernization theory has been dominant in family studies, it continues to be used, despite revision, in analyzing changes in Chinese families (Tang, 2010). Many scholars still believe that Chinese urban families are modernizing with industrialization and urbanization leading to gradual nucleation of the family structure. With the nuclear family becoming a mainstream model for the family, the horizontal axis of husband-wife relationship has also gradually replaced the vertical axis of father-son relationship (Hu, 2004; Xu, 2001; Xu, DeFrain, & Liu, 2017; S. Yang & Shen, 1995).

In recent years, more scholars have applied individualization theory to studying changes in Chinese families. Yunxiang Yan (Yan, 2009, 2011) is arguably the foremost researcher applying this theory to Chinese families. He used individualization theory to analyze private lives and emotional transformations in Chinese rural families. Before Yan, the academic understanding of Chinese families

was dominated by three theoretical models: the economic family, political family, and cultural family models (Xiaohui Zhong, 2020). The economic family model saw the family as an economic unit and attaches its importance to its function in the overall economy; the political family model emphasizes power relationships (especially gender and intergenerational) within the family and includes the relationship between the family and the state; and, the cultural family model sees the family as the basic unit that continues cultural traditions and ethical norms. Yan (2003) argued that these three models ignored the individuals in the family and refocused research on "individuals and their emotional lives", thereby opening up new ways to understand private lives in China.

Yan (2011, pp. 228-229) summarized the "individualization process of the family in rural China" into four notable features: first, rural family has been liberated from kinship organization and state-sponsored community; second, individuals have gained more autonomy and freedom in family life; third, intimacy, privacy, and material comforts have become more important; and fourth, there is an emergence of the trend towards "instrumentalization of family relations" and "rising conflicts among self-interested individuals." However, unlike Western society, Chinese individuals still lacked institutional mechanisms to re-embed themselves outside the family and were forced to return to the family and personal networks to seek help.

Consequently, family was still an important part for individuals to obtain self-identity (Yan, 2011).

Others have also shown that Chinese families were experiencing a trend towards individualization (D. S. Davis & Friedman, 2014; Hansen & Svarverud, 2010; Thogersen & Ni, 2010), and Chinese researchers have also developed new analytical concepts and frameworks in family studies through individualization theory. Yifei Shen (Shen, 2010, 2019), for instance, proposes the concept of the iFamily through her research on urban family life in Shanghai. By taking the individual as the core of the study and directly highlighting their emotional life, Shen emphasized that the iFamily is "an individual-centered but subject to social conditions family model with close intergenerational ties." It is also "a family model in which individuals choose or have to rely on their family members to resist risks due to lack of sufficient social support in the process of seeking survival and development." (Shen, 2019, p. 44) In the iFamily, no individual was independent of the family. The individualization process here was always accompanied by the support of the family network, which is a kind of "family-oriented individualization" (Shim & Han, 2010).

To sum up, existing empirical studies in Chinese context have shown that in contemporary Chinese family life, individuals still thought and practiced the family economic model within the framework of the family, and the individual's freedom and emotions were still bounded by the family on a moral level (C. Xing, 2017).

Moreover, these studies draw our attention to the enduring power of traditional customs and values in family change, crucial aspects not to be neglected when studying Chinese families. We should especially stress the perpetuation of inequality within the constraints of these traditional structures (Xiaohui Zhong, 2020). More importantly, regarding social change and the diversity of family life in China, modernity and tradition are not opposed to one another, but are coexistent, intermingling, and interacting (Ji, 2017; X. Wu, 2017).

Due to the dynamics of modernization and individualization, intergenerational relationship is by nature complex and ever-changing. We move on to the typology and explanatory framework of family intergenerational relations to gain a better grasp for later discussion.

Research on Family Intergenerational Relations

Intergenerational relationship, arguably the most fundamental kind of family relationship, is the vertical relationship between members relating by blood or adoption. In intergenerational relationships, parent-child relationships are the bond and core, from which any form of intergenerational relationship and family member relationship are derived and expanded.

Current studies on the typology of intergenerational relations are mainly based on the theoretical framework of intergenerational solidarity proposed by Vern Bengtson and his colleagues (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Bengtson & Schrader, 1982). This theory describes intergenerational relationships in families with functional dependence among group members (organic solidarity), norms internalized by group members (mechanical solidarity), and emotion and contact interactions. M. Silverstein and Bengtson (1997) summarized six dimensions of family intergenerational solidarity: structure, association, affect, consensus, function and norm; and further refined three underlying dimensions: affinity (emotional closeness and affirmation), opportunity structure (geographic distance and frequency of contact and activities) and function (exchange of assistance and support). On the basis of these three meta-dimensions, Bengtson and his colleagues developed a typology[9] of generational relationships between adult children and their parents in American families, including five types: tight-knit, sociable, obligatory, intimate but distant, and detached.

The model of intergenerational solidarity has been used to understand the types of family intergenerational relationships in different countries and to make cross-cultural comparisons (J. Shi, 2015). However, there are inherent limitations

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[9] This typology was based on a latent class analysis of intergenerational exchange proposed by Hogan, Eggebeen, and Clogg (1993). See, Hogan, Dennis P., David J. Eggebeen, and Clifford C. Clogg. "The Structure of Intergenerational Exchanges in American Families." *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol.98, Issue 6 (1993), pp. 1428-1458.

with this theoretical model, such as overemphasizing the solidarity in family intergenerational relations, only seeing conflict as a lack of solidarity, and ignoring the conflicting perspectives (Ingrid Arnet & Julie Ann, 2002; Kurt Lü scher & Pillemer, 1998). Even if the conflict perspective was added to the intergenerational solidarity model (Bengtson, Giarrusso, Mabry, & Silverstein, 2002), it remained a dichotomous model, seeing only solidarity or conflict. Thus, harmony, conflict, and ambivalence should altogether be considered in the typology of intergenerational relationships, opening up spaces for examining different relationship types, such as amicable, disharmonious, ambivalent, and emotionally detached (Ferring, Michels, Boll, & Filipp, 2009; Gaalen & Dykstra, 2006; Hank, Salzburger, & Silverstein, 2017; Merril Silverstein, Gans, Bengtson, Giarrusso, & Lowenstein, 2010).

Stemming from Western intergenerational solidarity theories and measurement models, typological research on intergenerational relationships in Chinese families is continually developing. These Chinese intergenerational relationships can generally be grouped into three dimensions: a) geographic proximity or frequency of contact, b) exchange of instrumental support, and c) emotional closeness (Zeng & Li, 2020). Based on these three dimensions, Although various studies[10] were different in data

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[10] For example, Cui and Jin (2015) used typological methods to uncover four intergenerational relations in migrant workers' families: tight-knit, near but emotionally-detached, distant but emotionally-close, and detached ties. M. Guo, Chi, and Silverstein (2012) examined five types of intergenerational relationships in rural families: tight-knit, nearby but discordant, distant discordant, distant reciprocal, and distant ascending. Compared in urban families, Ma (2016) found five types of adult parent-child relationships: intimate and reciprocal, intimate but distant, utilitarian, emotional, and detached. Q. Huang, Du, and Chen (2017) argued that the types of

selection, measurement indicators, and naming, the resulting types of intergenerational relationships can be roughly classified into tight-knit, support but distant, and detached (Q. Guo, Xie, & Li, 2020).

While such typological divisions can effectively describe the characteristics of intergenerational relations across cultures, few studies have described the process of intergenerational interactions in everyday life. The reliance of studies on questionnaire data also prevents them from discussing the rich and complex practices of intergenerational relationship beyond general typology (Yan, 2016).

Studying intergenerational relationships in Chinese families helps shed light on the nurturing and supporting functions they carry. This function is summarized by Fei (1983) as a "feedback model" where parents bring up children, and adult children provide financial support and life care for their elderly parents to repay their parents' nurturing. Family resources are balanced through a two-way flow between generations. With the transformation of social structure and demographic structure, the traditional intergenerational relationship based on the feedback model has become

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intergenerational relationships between adult children and elderly parents could mainly divided into three types, including tight-knit, support but distant, and detached. See, Cui, Ye, and Xiaoyi Jin. "Intergenerational Relationship in Migrant Families in the Context of Rural to Urban Migration: A Typological Analysis." *Population Research*, Vol.39, Issue 3 (2015), pp.48-60. Guo, Man, Iris Chi, and Merril Silverstein. "The Structure of Intergenerational Relations in Rural China: A Latent Class Analysis." *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol.74, Issue 5 (2012), pp.1114-1128. Ma, Chunhua. "The Structure of Adult Parent-Child Relationships in Chinese Families of Urban Areas and Effects of Social Class." *Journal of Social Development* Vol.3, Issue 3 (2016), pp.44-70;243. Huang, Qingbo, Peng Du, and Gong Chen. "The Typology of Intergenerational Relations between Adult Children and Older Parents." *Population Journal*, Vol.39, Issue 04 (2017), pp.102-112.

an intergenerational exchange model, suggesting a lasting reciprocity and exchange of material resources between parents and children, rather than an obligation to raise the children. Given no subsequent intergenerational mutual assistance, intergenerational relations will be weakened (J. Chen, 1998; Y. Guo, 2001). Interestingly, recent studies also show that in the intergenerational mutual assistance and exchanges, the phenomenon of "grace flowing downward" (*en wang xia liu)* or "chewing the elderly" (*ken lao*)—adult children receive more support from their parents than they provide to their parents—has become increasingly common (Dong, 2019; X. He, 2009; W. Liu, 2017; Song & Qi, 2011).

Seeing the diversity and complexity of intergenerational relationships in China's transitional period, more scholars have started studies from the living individuals in the family from the perspective of individualization, thereby forming various analytical concepts. Along this train of thought, Yan (2018), after observing new trends in Chinese family relations, proposed the concept of "neo-familism"—a concept makes partial return to tradition, yet goes beyond tradition while recognizing individual emotions, desires, and choices. Neo-familism argued that when a de-embedded individual faces life risks alone, their lives become difficult and they will become more dependent on their families and intergenerational relationships, suggesting the individual's greater emotional needs from their family. Young individuals, especially under changing intergenerational relations in rural China, with

declining parental authority and growing individual awareness and power, increasingly rely on their elders' support to pursue better lives. Crucially, familial resources flowing downward as the goals and meaning of life are transferred from adult children and elderly parents to the third generation of children, creating some forms of descending familism. Through this intergenerational intimacy, filial piety is understood as "caring and supportive but not obedient" (*xiao er bu shun*), emphasizing the emotional dependence between generations rather than the obedience of the younger generation (Yan, 2016).

Further, the analysis of intergenerational relationship through the lens of individualization have also led some scholars to propose the concept of "negotiative intimacy" (Xiaohui Zhong & Ho, 2014). Here, family is understood as a tool to satisfy individual interests and emotional needs, and negotiation have become the core of family relationships. Based on a study of intergenerational cooperation in the apartment-purchasing process among only-child families in Guangzhou, Xiaohui Zhong and Ho (2014) showed how individuals re-embedded into the family relationship and also reflected an individual's strategies in using family resources to seek help. At the same time, the study concluded that the relationship between parents and children are not static, but a temporary consequence of mutual negotiation, balance, and compromise. More specifically, the intergenerational relationship was a process where the two generations found a suitable balance between individual

satisfaction and family responsibilities while embodying it in family practice. In this process, the emotions, obligations and powers between generations were redefined so individuals in the family were re-embedded into a "negotiative intimacy."

Of course, while understanding intergenerational relationships at the individual level is important; structural constraints also have to be taken into account. Individuals in intergenerational relationship are still restricted by social structures and traditional norms of filial piety. This leads to the ambivalence of individuals struggling to find a balance between independence and dependence, and making strategic choices in negotiation (J. Shi, 2015).

Intergenerational ambivalence theory (Bengtson et al., 2002; Connidis, 2015; Ingrid Arnet & Julie Ann, 2002; Kurt, 2002; K. Lü scher & Hoff, 2013; Kurt Lü scher & Pillemer, 1998) views intergenerational relations as a result of constant negotiation between individuals and structures. Thus, we can neither ignore the agency of individuals nor overlook the constraints of macro structures and norms in intergenerational relations. Holding those points in mind highlights the dynamics of interplay, solidarity and conflict between individuals and structures, as well as the processes and strategies exerted by family members to resolve conflicts. While this perspective underscores the process of negotiation and interaction in intergenerational relations and the structural factors behind it, it combines the macro and micro studies

of intergenerational relations. Thus, intergenerational ambivalence has enhanced understandings on today's complex and changeable intergenerational relations.

Specifically, some scholars have interpreted the phenomenon of *kenlao* as embodying "structural tensions and intergenerational ambivalence in transitional Chinese families" (W. Liu, 2017). In Liu's study, she argues that a harmonious *kenlao* family rationalizes this behavior and gains intergenerational recognition and acceptance, which is an intimate relationship formed on rational collusion and reciprocal cooperation between generations. Conversely, a conflicting *kenlao* family is filled with rational conflict marked by emotional kidnapping (W. Liu, 2017). In all of this, the mutual construction and tension between family members' interests, emotions, and values   provided entry points for understanding how conventionality and modernity shaped intergenerational relationship in today's Chinese families. To better understand the evolution of intergenerational relationships in contemporary Chinese families, it is also necessary to understand ambivalence in specific Chinese contexts and identify the structural forces that affect changes in Chinese intergenerational family relations.

Both family modernization and individualization theories stress macro-historical changes in family relations and attempt to draw out developmental trends in family relations, while also reminding us of the macro-structural context. Existing research on   intergenerational   relations   highlighted   both   structural   factors,   the

micro-interactions between family members, and individual emotions and moods. Nevertheless, the literature has generally neglected the intermediate mechanism that connects the macro to the micro. To fill the gap, this research establishes a multi-level comprehensive analytical framework encompassing the macro-meso-micro levels and utilizing customary adoption as a case to present and explain diverse family relationships in rural China.

Analytical Framework: Types of Family Relations and Customary Adoption Triangle

Almost all typological studies on family intergenerational relations are based on intergenerational solidarity. As mentioned, this theoretical concept derives the types of intergenerational relations from three meta-dimensions: affinity, opportunity structure, and functional exchange. The current dimensions of intergenerational relationship types in Chinese families were also derived from these three meta-dimensions: proximity of residence or strength of connection, mutual support, and emotional closeness (Zeng & Li, 2020). Thus, the division of family intergenerational relationships in this study is based on these three major relationship dimensions. According to these dimensions, there are theoretically eight possible ideal types (that is, a total of eight quadrants including x, y, and z axes). However, in my study, I only find four empirically existing types of family relations.

This research extends the typology of intergenerational relationships from individual-to-individual relationships to individual-to-family relationships. In particular, in adoption triangles, the type of family relationship is divided between the fostered children's identification with the two families. In the existing social and cultural norms, the foster-care recipients in the adoption triangle have a dichotomous perception of the two families. For instance, one is the physiological family relationship that "birth family is more important"; and the other the emotional family relationship that "nurture is greater than birth." In these two types, the foster-recipient either agrees with the importance of blood connection or the significance of nurturing bond, and there is no third option. As individual emotions and autonomy gradually play a role in the family, there are other possibilities for family relationships in the adoption triangle. When the fostered person maintains a good relationship with both families, this means that the adoptee's consensus with the two families forms a harmonious family relationship that "both families are important"; when the fostered person does not identify with either family or seeks self-independence, it will have an independent relationship as the "the individual is most important".

Family modernization theory sees family change being caused by societal change. This explanation accounts for the process and complexity of change between society and family, but fails to see the family as a unit in itself. Individualization theory remedies its shortcomings by placing the individual at the core of family

studies. However, traditional structures still hold much influence in Chinese society, which means individuals are not completely free from the family, and only focusing on individuals cannot explain the complexity of Chinese family relationships. Thus, after presenting the diverse family relationship types in a customary adoption triangle, this research attempts to propose a comprehensive analysis framework. This framework explores the various family relations both from top-down and bottom-up perspectives and provides a convincing explanation for research questions in this study. This analysis framework can be seen in Figure 2.1.
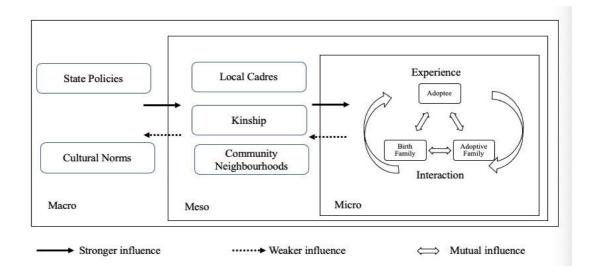
Figure 2.1 Analytical Framework

First, the framework consists of three levels: macro-meso-micro. The macro level includes national policies and cultural norms, the meso level contains local cadres and community neighborhoods, and the micro level is the interaction and

individual experiences within the adoption triangle. This study emphasizes the powerful shaping effect from macro to meso to micro, while seeing effects in the reverse direction (micro to macro) as relatively weak. For this study, macro-level institutions and culture indirectly affect families and individuals through intermediate-level mechanisms and actors. For example, family members undergo the effects of national policies through interactions with local policy executors, such as grassroots and village cadres. In practice, grassroots and village cadres may strictly implement political tasks and policy orders arranged by higher-level government authorities, while also being influenced by informal networks in local communities and their own emotions and interests. Local cadres take advantage of local resources to ally with villagers to weaken state power, so that the implementation of policies conform to the logic of local people's daily lives. This differentiated policy enforcement affects family practice and individual experiences.

Similarly, families and individuals will also be affected by local cultural norms. The most important component of the cultural norms in this research is the male preference "patriarchal culture". By using the term of "patriarchal", the framework emphasizes "the predominance of men in positions of power and influence in society, with cultural values and norms favoring men", especially the norm that "descent and relationship are reckoned through the male line" in rural China context (Santos & Harrell, 2017, p. 7). The patriarchal culture not only constitutes one important factor

contributing to the customary adoption phenomenon, but also influences the identity and experiences of individual adoptees, thus shaping dynamic family relations as well. In addition, the cultural norms also include the local expectations prescribing interactions between individuals and families, especially how one person should treat her or his parents (e.g., the filial piety culture) and how one should deal with the adoptive relations.

Second, this research framework highlights the strategy and agency of actors. As a family practice, customary adoption is itself a strategic arrangement made by families in specific structural contexts. As such, individuals are not passively accepting the influences of institutional and cultural structures even if they are greatly affected by them. Individuals often have strategies reflected in their actions when facing structural pressures. Through these strategies, identity and family relationships may be reshaped. The strategies and choices that individuals wield are based on their structural position and available resources. Practically, individuals can act as family members against external policy pressures together as a family while, at the same time, working to throw off the shackles of family to seek self-interest while relying on family resources and relationships. These strategic practices shape the relationship between the individual and family. In turn, through the specific practice of family relations, individual identities are reconstructed.

Finally, this framework comes down to interactions and experiences within the customary adoption triangle. The adoption triangle includes an adoptee, a birth family, and an adoptive family with the adoptee being the central axis and link in this relationship. What I seek to highlight in this framework is that the complex relationships in the adoption triangle are dynamic and interactive, rather than static and isolated. To be specific, the relationship and interaction between the birth and adoptive families may influence the relationship between the adoptee and the two families. How the foster person handles the relationship between the two families results in changes to the established kinship between the two families.

In our case, kinship is no longer based on fixed blood and marriage ties, but is gradually built on intimate relationships on account of economic and emotional exchanges. Meanwhile, individuals understand and construct the family through choice and negotiation in different situations. In addition, the experience and interaction of individuals in the adoption triangle can lead to a reshaping of family relationships. That is, while an individual's life experiences affect the interaction between them and their family members, it may also have a profound impact on their future intimate and parent-child relationships. In short, family relationships are constantly being reshaped or reproduced in the long-term.

Based on this framework, this research provides a multi-level and intersectional understanding of family relations. The tentative argument is that the divergent

relationships between adoptees and relevant families are combined results of differentiated policy implementations, dynamic family interactions, and distinct personal experiences. No single factor can fully address the diversity of family relations in customary adoption. By contrast, factors at different levels in this research are interlocking and co-constitutive. Thus, providing a comprehensive explanation is perhaps the major contribution this research can make in relevant areas.

Conclusion

This chapter started with the different definitions of family by Chinese and Western scholars, and presented new features of the current family. It then introduced the two mainstream theoretical paths of family studies, namely family modernization and individualization theories. These two theoretical perspectives have different emphases and we saw how each influenced studies on Chinese families. One focused on social change and family change, and the other highlighted individual choices and the family. Both fell short in explaining the complexity of Chinese families.

Afterwards, I used intergenerational relations as an entry point to study family relationship. I then reviewed empirical studies on the typology of intergenerational relations and drew attention to the explanatory framework on intergenerational relations, especially analytical concepts in the Chinese context. Although current family research places emphasis on the macro-structural context and highlighted the

micro-interactional and emotional mood between individuals, they ignored the intermediate mechanism that connected the two levels.

Finally, grounded in existing literature, I proposed a classification of family relationships in customary adoption into four types: physiological, emotional, harmonious and independent, to show the diversity of family relationships. Then, on the basis of existing theoretical perspectives and empirical studies, I proposed a comprehensive analytical framework for this research that investigated the macro-meso-micro level factors in family relationships to address the intermediate mechanism. The next chapters will turn to examining and discussing customary adoption and family relations in the context of wider socio-historical transformations.

Chapter 3: Customary Adoption in Rural China: Past and Present

Laohu, a nearly sixty-seven years old villager in Meng Village, was an adopted son of his elder uncle. His uncle used to live alone in a dirty house behind our village and fed on the sheep farming. I also knew this unmarried grandfather without a birth child when I herded goats in my early childhood. Laohu often looked after his uncle when his uncle was aged. This grandfather, unfortunately, died at about seventy-three years old in 2003, while Laohu at that time, was fifty years old. According to the custom, Laohu held a proper funeral for his uncle, nominally his adoptive father. Hence, after the funeral, Laohu became the sole inheritor of his uncle and inherited all the family estate of his uncle (including the house, land, and sheep). At the same time, Laohu had no obligation to support his birth parents and lost his rights in his birth family. This adoptive relation became crucial when his uncle was aged and sickish, especially at the time of his uncle's death. In fact, Laohu was still raised by his biological parents and had a poor relationship with his father. Despite this, he still attended his father's funeral organized by his younger brothers. Laohu's case was not unique. There were several childless bachelors like Laohu's uncle and some families without sons in our village. These people were also cared for by their nephews in their old age and their funerals were all held by their nephews. This conventional form of adoption was called "passing the succession" (*guoji*), in which a family with multiple

sons would give one son to a relative family having no sons in the same surname. Such an adoption was commonplace for people in imperial China and in early new China.

Many years later, I realized that I shared similar experience with Laohu, although in different forms, and above all, I was a girl. When I was a kid in the 1990s, I was always informed that I was adopted by my paternal aunt. Neighbors used to tease me about my awkward family status and urged me to return to my birth family. I ran home in tears and asked why my birth parents did not raise me. My maternal aunt frequently told me, "They have no choice but to hide you in our family, because of the strict birth control policy. They will take you home when you have a younger brother. Moreover, you are not the only one. There are a lot of children like you in our area." I still remember that I did not have a legal identity in the household registration system (*hukou*) until I was eight. Because of this, I had to suffer from the irregular inspections by family planning officials. For example, I had to stay in a cornfield and a cellar for a long time. When I grew up, I began to realize that some of my peers were also adopted by their relatives, such as their maternal grandparents, maternal aunts, paternal aunts, maternal uncles, and remote kinsfolk, for the same reason. This kind of adoption focused on foster care from adoptive parent who take great pains to bring up a child (*laba haizi*). Some girls even became foundlings, and they did not know their real identities and their birth families at all. They might be found in a

roadside ditch by their adoptive father or mother; bought by their bachelor father under the cloak of adoption. Their families and neighbors together concealed their identities and kept it as a secret. Therefore, no one dared to joke about them for fear of their identities being disclosed by accident.

Laohu's and my experience present two forms of customary adoption in rural China. In the customary adoption of heirs, the pointed heir must be the same clan in strict accordance with the long-established kinship system. And these adopted heirs must be filial to their adoptive families just like biological sons, especially when their adoptive parents pass away. However, they are often not raised up by their adoptive parents. Unlike the traditional adoption, the adopted children similar to me, whether from the same clan nor not, would be brought up in their adoptive families at least for a period of time. Furthermore, most of the adoptive families already had their own sons and daughters. The adoption of Laohu was deemed conducive to all parties involved. Nevertheless, the adoption as I have experienced was to give assistance to birth family against the state policy.

Why does customary adoption have a long history? Why does this adoption practice exist extensively, especially during the period of the birth planning campaign? What new features have the birth-control campaign brought to adoption practice? Is there continuity compared with adoption practice in the past? How does adoption influence family relations and kinship in contemporary rural China? By and large,

how should we deeply understand the purpose and family relations of customary adoption when China goes through radical modernization?

This chapter provides a historical context for China's customary adoption, especially focusing on aspects of family relations. It begins by tracing the formation of customary adoption within cultural norms and economic considerations in traditional China (before 1949). The chapter then examines how customary adoption continues after the establishment of the People's Republic of China (1949 to 1978). It will highlight the transformation of customary adoption based on population policy and modern adoption law since the 1980s, focusing on the previously one-child policy and the later 1.5-child policy in rural China. After delineating adoption in different eras, the continuity and change in customary adoption will be discussed to further analyze the formation of family relations of adoption in contemporary rural China.

Customary Adoption in Traditional and Patriarchal China (before 1949)

In Chinese rural society, customary adoption has a long history and even becomes a social institution in traditional and patriarchal context. Without doubt, the long-lasting existence of customary adoption cannot be separated from the features of family and kinship in Chinese societies. Traditional Chinese family has been conceptualized as "patriarchal, patrilineal, patrimonial, patrilocal", in which the

cardinal reason of family's significance stems from the ideology of Confucius[11] (Conn, 2013; Hsu, 1971; Johnson, 1983; Lang, 1946; Marion J Levy, 1963; Santos & Harrell, 2017; Thornton & Lin, 1994; C. K. Yang, 1965). Gender bias and inequality prevail in this ideology. The idea, man is superior to woman in a traditional family, explicitly stated in Threefold Obedience[12] in the Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial (*Yi Li*) (Knapp, 2003). Simultaneously, the rooted kinship system emphasizes the significance of men as well as of relationships traced through the male lineage, and the practice of ancestor worship is a good example. Apart from cultural norms, in material life, parents needed male labour force to support family and they also consistently regarded sons as a form of life security when they were aged. By comparison, daughters were only temporary members in their natal families before marriage and regarded as "split water" to serve their husbands' families after they got married. Accordingly, when taking adoption in patriarchal rural China into account, it

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[11] At the same time, Confucianism also was in favor of adoption: "Confucian emphasis on upbringing and cultivation as the key to character provides further support for ties built on nurture and social relationships rather than on biology and heredity" (K. A. Johnson, 2002, p. 384). See, Kay Ann Johnson. "Politics of international and domestic adoption in China." *Law & Society Review*, Vol.36, Issue 2(2002), pp.379-396. Nancy E. Riley & Krista E. Van Vleet. Adoption: private decisions, public influences. In *Contemporary Family Perspectives: Making families through adoption* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2012), pp. 55-72.

[12] Accordingly, a woman is required to be subordinate to her father before marrying, then to her husband after marrying, and finally to her sons when her husband dies. Women had to follow their male relatives due to their natural inferiority, ignorance and silence in public affairs. See, Keith Knapp. "Sancong Side". In Xinzhong Yao (Ed.). *The encyclopedia of Confucianism* (London; New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003), Vol. 2, pp. 524.

is worthwhile differentiating between male adoption and female adoption, each of which had dissimilar purposes and processes.

In view of infertility and high infant mortality in traditional rural China, heirless families existed in large numbers. As mentioned, the prevalence of ancestor cult also empowered parents to have male heirs with a sufficient motivation and legitimacy. Only men could carry out ancestral sacrifices and perpetuate family line in patriarchal society (Chu & Yu, 2010; Hsu, 1971; S. M. Huang, 1989; Johnson, 1983; Lang, 1946; M. C. Yang, 1945; Yuen, Law, & Ho, 2015). Consequently, adoption of sons necessarily became one of the most important alternatives for familial continuity. Often, for the ritual purity, adoption was restricted to arrangement between "agnatically related kin" only—the preferred form of adoption was nephew-adoption—but in practice, it was merely a sort of ideal patterns. In this case, an adopted sons would no longer have birth right in his natal family in exchange for full entitlement in his adoptive family (Baker, 1979, pp. 8-9). If a man did not have a nephew in his brother's family, he could adopt a boy in an extended family; failing this, in the population of the same surname. If he did not find an heir in the whole kindred, his bloodline should be indicated "end".

However, in reality, a divergence between clear rules and life practice, customary adoption of "outsiders", coexisted (Baker, 1979; Parish & Whyte, 1978; Waltner, 1990; Watson, 1975). As for the adoption of outside sons, Waltner (1990)

explicates that, in Ming and Qing China, adoptive parents might be inclined to cross-surname adoptions of boys. In general, boys outside the patrilineal group had complete loyalty to adoptive parents with cutting off from natural parents. In the adoptions from outside the patrilineal clanship, adopted heirs not only had rights to inherit property, but also assumed responsibilities for supporting the aged parents, mourning them after their deaths, and continuing ancestral sacrifices. More importantly, these heirs were required to change their surnames to their adoptive families' surnames. Through this, adoption could provide a satisfactory substitute for the tie between parents and natural children. The explanation from Waltner (1990) also reveals that adoptions stressed ritual purity and put more emphasis on the significance of nurture, the possibilities of moral transformation, alongside the socio-ethical dimensions (like loyalty) of the relationship between adopted heirs and parents. Adopted children, especially from outside the adoptive family, were usually described by the idiom "caterpillar son" or "mulberry insect children" (*minglingzi*[13])

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[13] Specially,

[t]his wasp imprisons the green caterpillar in her nest, while she herself raps and taps outside day and night, praying: "Be like me! Be like me!" Then after a certain number of days—I forget exactly how many, but probably seven times seven—the caterpillar turns into a slender-waist wasp. That is why the Book of Songs says: "The bollworm's young are carried off by the sphex." This bollworm is the green caterpillar found on mulberry trees.

This term stemmed from the old folk that slender-waisted wasps seems to be all female and need to adopt the grubs of mulberry insects to continue their line. Furthermore, the wasps would transform these grubs into wasps after a period. See, Arthur P. Wolf, & Chieh-shan Huang. *Marriage and adoption in China*, 1845-1945 (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1980), pp.110.

(Allee, 1994, p. 135; Conn, 2013; K. A. Johnson, 2002, p. 383; Johnson, 2004, pp. 98, 383; Ransmeier, 2017, p. 183; Ryznar, 2016, p. 32; Waltner, 1990, pp. 25, 74-75; A. P. Wolf & Huang, 1980, p. 110; Zheng, 2001, p. 40). This considerably well-known folk belief completely foregrounds the influence of nurture rather than nature on the children, which by implication an adopted child was integrated entirely into the adoptive family and lost all trace of his or her birth family.

Historically, compared with heir adoption, female adoption was less significant for the Chinese family, yet many practices and customs concerning this kind of adoption existed (Crook, Gilmartin, Xiji, Hershatter, & Honig, 2013; X. Fei, 1946; X. T. Fei, 1946a, 1946b; Johnson, 1983; K. A. Johnson, 2002; Johnson, 2004; Johnson et al., 1998; Lang, 1946; Marion J Levy, 1963; Skinner, 1997; A. P. Wolf & Huang, 1980; Yen, 2015). Among poor and rural families, it was common for a newly born girl to be given away and adopted as a prospective daughter-in-law (*tongyangxi*) in her adoptive family, namely "infant marriage". This female adoption relevant to

minor marriage were caused by two reasons: economic destitution[14] and dearth of girls owing to female infanticide[15].

In traditional China, the high cost of bride price and wedding dowry in a major marriage could be prohibitive, sometimes even reaching a family's one-year income (Crook et al., 2013; X. Fei, 1946; X. T. Fei, 1946b; Johnson, 1996; M. Wolf, 1972; Yan, 2005). If a family could not afford such a bride for a son in major marriage, this could lead to a failure to reproduce offspring to carry on the family line. By contrast, the initial payment of adopting a female infant was low; the expenses of nurturing a girl as a daughter-in-law often comprised merely food and clothing. Hence, this transactional marital tradition including both betrothal gifts and dowries exacerbated the situation—raising a daughter was an economic burden (Yen, 2015). In rural

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[14] At the same time, children could be sold. For girls, there was a ready market to act as servants, concubines and prostitutes in their useful ages. In rare situations, boys were sold as designated heirs and servants, but they were more likely to be adopted out of a poverty-stricken family which could not support them. (Cohen, 2005; Ransmeier, 2017; Watson, 1980). See, Myron L. Cohen. *Kinship, contract, community, and state: Anthropological perspectives on China* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005). Johanna S. Ransmeier. *Sold people: Traffickers and family life in north China* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017). James L. Waston. Transactions in people: The Chinese market in slaves, servants, and heirs. In J. L. Watson (Ed.), *Asian and African systems of slavery* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980).

[15] The female infanticides by ways of drowning, smothering, and burying alive, became a custom which "the poor regarded the practice as an almost legitimate means of maintaining their minimal standard of living and, in any case, as a dire economic necessity." (B. He, 1959, p. 60) Two large-scale fertility and contraception surveys of 1982 and 1988 in China has provided available evidence indicating that there was a high rate of female infanticide in the 1930s and early 1940s (Coale & Banister, 1994). See, Bingdi He, *Studies on the population of China, 1368-1953* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959). Ansley J. Coale & Judith Banister, "Five decades of missing females in China", *Demography*, Vol.31, Issue 2 (1994), pp.459-479.

communities, biological daughters would finally marry outside of their natal families with their dowry, neither supporting for their parents nor continuing the natal family blood. However, adopted girls would remain in adoptive families, taking care of their parents, and would bear their children. The financial difficulty and patriarchal bias aggravated female infanticides. Consequently, the unbalanced sex ratio actually caused great trouble for boys in underprivileged families to get mates and it also influenced the age gap between husband and wife. Therefore, to expand family lineage, relieve destitution, avoid costly wedding preparations and exchanges, many poverty-stricken families engaged in both adoption of child brides and the giving up or trade of birth daughters with other families. Here the custom linked the adoption practices and Chinese marriage which both interacted to influence kinship structure and family organization[16]. Hence, unlike other customary adoptions, the adoption of girls as infant bride attached great importance to marriage and emphasized their conjugal relationship in a family.

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[16] As A. P. Wolf and Huang (1980) pointed out, the family composition involved three institutions: the *jia* (or the household), the descent line, and "the uterine family" (M. Wolf, 1972). Marriage and adoption were regarded as strategies by which families manipulated to solve immediate issues of concern to the *jia* and the uterine family, as well as to accomplish an object of family continuity. But in fact, the adoption-related marriage was ultimately viewed as "the institutionalization of a female strategy" (A. P. Wolf & Huang, 1980, p. 290), particularly with mothers, that many women utilized this means to protect their sons against their daughters-in-law in uterine families. See, Arthur P. Wolf, & Chieh-shan Huang. *Marriage and adoption in China, 1845-1945* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1980). Margery Wolf. *Women and the family in rural Taiwan* (Stanford, California: Stanford Press, 1972), chapter 3.

In fact, in adopting of girls, both natal and adoptive family had connections with each other, not in a strange status. Since an adopted girl entered the foster family, she had become a member of her husband's family, a daughter-in-law, a married woman, though she was still a baby. She was told that it was time for her to marry her adoptive brother and sleep together at the appropriate age without any formal bridal procession. She also had the same rights and duties in her foster family and natal family as other married women in a major marriage. However, compared to other daughters-in-law in major marriage, the status of adopted daughter-in-law was more like to be a daughter, as a result of her mother-in-law's foster from a very early age. Under this circumstance, the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law significantly improved[17]. Unlike the major marriage, constructing a relationship between two families, this sort of arranged adoption and marriage seldom forged an ongoing link. Even if the two families were connected, the tie between a daughter and her biological parents often weakened[18] (Crook et al., 2013). As a consequence, the

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[17] This was most evident in the case in which the family had no daughter. Even the adopted daughter-in-law who were abused by her future mother-in-law in her childhood, gradually accustomed to her status, could still endure her mother-in-law after marriage. See, Xiao Tong Fei, *Peasant life in China: A field study of country life in the Yangtze valley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp53-54.

[18] As stated by writing from A. P. Wolf and Huang (1980), on important occasions, such as wedding and birthday, an adopted daughter's foster family took priority over her natal family. See, Arthur P. Wolf, & Chieh-shan Huang. *Marriage and adoption in China, 1845-1945* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1980).

affinal ties in adoption-related marriage was loose, and in many cases, it was non-existent, which affected the normal kinship structure (X. T. Fei, 1946b).

Except for these economic contributions, the practice of female adoption in rural areas was also used for emotional therapy. A married couple who was childless or whose children died at birth or in infancy would like to adopt a female infant as a daughter to overcome infertility and lead to the birth of a son (K. A. Johnson, 2002; Johnson, 2004; Ryznar, 2016; A. P. Wolf & Huang, 1980). In most cases, an adopted daughter was matched with the later-born son in her adoptive family when they grew up. In a way, these childless families also adopted female children as daughters. The adopted girl could marry into another family or have a uxorilocal marriage as a biological daughter only if the adoptive family never had a son when the girl was old enough to get married. At this time, the natal family of the adopted girl often was in dispute with her adoptive family about the arranged marry.

In brief, in traditional China, adoption was deeply embedded in Chinese culture, kinship system and socioeconomic condition. Different modes of adoptions existed in traditionally patriarchal society under the influence of Confucianism. Although there was an inconsistency between cultural norms and adoption practices, the purpose of adoption, with both male and female, were to continue or expand family lines within the consideration of family lineage and kinship system. The relationship between parents and adopted children was also examined through the term "loyalty" in

Confucian discourse. Female adoption was often related to minor marriage in both situation of which the family adopted girls as daughters-in-law and as hopes for bringing sons. For an adopted daughter, the adoptive family was still more significant than her natal family. However, unlike the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law in major marriage, the relationship between them was greatly modified due to this sort of female adoption.

Customary Adoption in Chinese Countryside in Maoist Period (1949-1976)

Since the PRC established in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party has exercised the party-state power to shape a new institutional and moral milieu for Chinese families. The Marriage Law of 1950, one of the first national reform acts in the new era, empowered individuals with the freedom of marriage and divorce, and provided the protection for women and children for their lawful interests (Hershatter, 2007; Johnson, 1983; Ocko, 1991; Stacey, 1983). Under the Law, infant drowning, infanticide, and marriages with child brides shall be strictly prohibited; mutual obligations between (natural/adoptive) parents and (natural/adoptive) children were regulated; neither parents or children shall be abused or abandoned. The Law also introduced the socialist system that claimed equal rights to men and women, instead of the system of inheritance as the product of the feudal patriarchal system. In the early 1950s, in tandem with the marriage reform, the nationwide land reform campaigns in countryside confiscated the lands of former landlords and redistributed

them among peasant families and all women. Its purpose was to destroy the economic basis of long-established landlord-tenant system and gave a fatal blow to the traditional family structures (Broyelle, 1977, p. 115; Ono, 1989, pp. 185-186; J. H. Zhou, 2003). In short, in a powerful way, the state has infiltrated into the countryside in pervasive and subtle control, profoundly changing Chinese traditional patriarchy.

The CCP's ideology of gender equality also contributed to improving the social and familial status of girls, and had a practical implication for female education in government literacy programs (Naftali, 2016). In 1958 with the Great Leap Forward, female participation in urban and rural production dramatically increased, since men had been drawn into work on industrial development. In this process, the country acknowledged the women's contribution to socialist construction and made efforts "to promote women's entrance into traditionally male spaces and occupations"(Z. Wang, 2017, p. 224). Meanwhile, gender equality and women's contribution were expressed in some propaganda slogans: "women carry half of heaven on their shoulders"; "Times have changed. Whatever men comrades can do, women comrades can do." (Hershatter, 2004; Naftali, 2016, p. 34; L. Xing, 1999; Xueping Zhong, Wang, & Di, 2001) The state authority also glorified women's participation in collectivized agriculture and industrial production through propagating "Iron Girls" and "Model Workers", considered indispensable to socialist construction in the Maoist era (Hershatter, 2011; Z. Wang, 2017) .

In addition, there had been significant improvements regarding the care and welfare of children. During the period of the Great Forward Leap, the people's communes (*ren min gong she*), as the largest collective units, had shared work ethic and food distribution, represented by work points system and communal dining. At that time, the distribution system of the people's communes was based on population to ensure the basic ration needs of rural residents, and then on work points earned in collective work. As collective members, children, whether they participate in collective work, could obtain collective benefits to guarantee the fundamental demands for their lives (X. Liu, 2018). The powerful government concurrently promulgated and implemented policies to enhance children's welfare. Families with many children or with difficulties could receive family allowances and other supporting policies, so as to prevent the life of children into trouble and the phenomenon of abandoned baby. Children were not merely "the private property (*si chan*)" of their parents, they had already become "future citizens (*gong min*)", red and specialized (*you hong you zhuan*) successors of the socialist state (Naftali, 2016, p. 36). These policies worked to eliminate the custom of infanticide and to construct maternal and childcare facilities all over the country (Croll, 1980). As a result, the rules in laws and policies, low infant mortality, and probably diminishing childlessness might lessen the need for adopting children from the 1950s to the 1960s (W. Zhang, 2006a).

However, institutional care and customary adoption have spread across the decades up to the present. The female adoption rate was higher than that of male adoption in the early 1950s—a conceivable indication of customary adoption of female infants as daughters-in-law (W. Zhang, 2006b). On the other hand, according to the Ministry of Civil Affairs, there were 25,960 orphans living welfare institutions between 1949 and 1954 (Bai & Wu, 1996). Yet only 3,665 children were hosted in child welfare homes in the end of 1978 out of a mass shutdown of welfare homes during the Cultural Revolution (Meng & Kai, 2009). Inevitably, the growing number of outcast and homeless children became street kids and adopted children in customary adoption.

During Great Famine from 1958 to 1961, extreme food shortages and disasters caused many rural families unable to raise infants and children so that they were forced to abandon them to survive. The foundlings were under the care of welfare homes, as well as under arranged adoption driven by the government in different regions (Lin, 2015; Luo, 2016). Therefore, , the population of abandoned, adopted children and orphans increased sharply at the beginning of the 1960s (Lid et al., 2004; Meng & Kai, 2009). Unlike female infant abandonment in the past, during the famine there was a growing rate of abandonment of boys, mainly because of living problems. After the famine years from 1959 to 1961, adoption rates of girls and boys evened out (W. Zhang, 2006b). Although the number of abandoned infants in cities had increased,

that of foundlings in rural regions still accounted for the majority. According to a

press report from The Beijing Newspaper[19], during the Great Famine, at least fifty

thousand abandoned children from regions south of the Yangtze River were adopted

by relatively wealthy families in northern China (Luo, 2016). When these abandoned

kids gradually knew their birth identities, they commenced to seek their biological

parents and relatives since the 1980s. In the beginning, they inquired information

from welfare homes, or published Notices for Missing Families in the newspaper, but

most of these efforts were fruitless. By the 1990s, there was a wave of tracing

biological relatives around the country.

In sum, RPC state reforms and propaganda campaigns resulted in a weakening of

family obligations, a reshaping of relations within the domestic sphere, and an

elevation in the status of children of both genders within society as a whole.

Nonetheless, as discussed by D. Davis and Harrell (1993, pp. 1-2)[20], despite these

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[19] Some stories of abandoned children seeking for their biological relatives are reported in detail in the Beijng Newspaper. See, Luo, Ting. Jiangnan qier [Foundlings from regions south of the Yangtze River]. *The Beijing News*. (2016, August 1) Retrieved from http://www.bjnews.com.cn/inside/2016/08/01/411905.html

[20] From the viewpoint of D. Davis and Harrell (1993, pp. 1-2),

[T]he Communist revolution created contradictions. On the one hand, it undercut the power and authority of patriarchs and destroyed the economic logic of family farms and businesses. On the other hand, it created demographic and material conditions conducive to large, multigenerational households with extensive economic and social to nearby kin. See, Deborah Davis & Stevan Harrell. "Introduction" in Davis, D., & Harrell, S. (Eds.) *Chinese families in the post-Mao era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp.1-2.

state-mandated regulations to destroy the traditional Chinese family, "many key policies actually stabilized and strengthened families." For example, with improved hygiene, sanitation, and famine relief, the death rate was reduced, which contributed to the stable formation of family units. Besides, a national system of household registration (*hukou*), as a system to control rural to urban migration and to administer food rationing, also intensified intra-family interactions and transfers. While these changes have led to a relatively limited demand for foster care and adoption, institutional adoption and customary adoption persisted. These practices are evident in rural areas and at particular times in history (such as the Great Famine years).

Customary Adoption in Contemporary Rural China (1978-present)

Under Deng Xiaoping's leadership since 1978, China initiated the policies of "economic reform" and "open door" to promote economic development and attract foreign investment, eventually to achieve "The Four Modernizations". To date, after forty years, China's economic reforms and opening-up to the world "have hastened the whole country's modernization and integration within the global market economy" (Naftali, 2016, p. 70). This macro-historical transformation has also changed Chinese families. Reform leaders moved to disengage the state from control over land, labour, and markets; by contrast, in family reproduction, they demanded that fertility of married couples should be controlled by state. Rarely had the paradox of state power been more acute than between 1979 and 1983 (D. Davis & Harrell, 1993). In the

countryside, the Deng's reform dismantled the People's Communes, and abruptly

subcontracted more than 80 per cent of all farmlands to individual families on the

basis of fifteen-year leases. As D. Davis and Harrell (1993) concluded, by the

mid-1980s most rural families were "operating in a political economy of family

tenancy where the agents of state authority had less control over the labor, land, and

loyalty of rural residents than at any time since the Land Reform of the early

1950s"(p.2). The agrarian economy based on household shrunk family size, while the

need for male forces resulted in strengthening son-preference value.

Population Policy and Adoption Law Affecting Customary Adoption in Rural China

In the late 1970s, Chinese government intensified family planning policy to

control population and to pursue rapid modernization and prosperous economy (Feng,

Poston, & Wang, 2014; Greenhalgh, 2003, 2008; Greenhalgh & Winckler, 2005;

White, 2006). In the early 1980s, the policy evolved into "one-child" policy which

inhibited the birth rate to alter the demographic structure and promoted family

transformation (Bloom, Canning, & Sevilla, 2003; Hussain, 2002). Particularly, the

implementation of one-child policy within fertility transition has reformed the family

structure from extended family to nuclear family and improve the status of women

(Ding & Hesketh, 2006; V. L. Fong, 2004; Lee, 2012; J. S. Zhang, 2017). For

instance, family size became remarkably smaller over the decade of the 1980s; the

number of households grew at a faster rate than the population (D. Davis & Harrell,

1993; Zang, 2016). In 1980, rural households averaged 5.5 members and urban households 4.4; by 1988 they dropped to 4.9 and 3.6, respectively (D. Davis & Harrell, 1993, p. 7).

The one-child policy was initially enforced on the majority of Chinese families with across regions, yet with varied paces in different localities. Only in certain exceptions[21] could families be allowed to have two children within the birth quota after the approval of local government. For example, in many areas, a married couple having a second child needed to satisfy the following conditions: their first child was disabled; or they conceived a child after adopting a baby and had been infertile for many years after marriage; or in a family, the remarried one had only one child and the other was married for the first time. The policy steadily strengthened in the wake of a comparatively loose period from 1980 to 1981(Greenhalgh, 1986). In late 1982 and early 1983, since the family planning policy was determined as the fundamental policy to the whole nation, the implementation of this policy was coercive at any cost

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[21] On October 20, 1982, the General Office of the CPC and the General Office of the State Council forwarded the "National Family Planning Work Summary", which listed ten situations in which some rural residents with difficulties could have a second child: (1) the first child has a non-genetic disability and cannot become a normal labor force; (2) recombination of the family with the original only one child, the other party is a first marriage; (3) a couple become pregnant after adopting a child because of infertility in several years after marriage; (4) among two or three generations, a family have only one son for each generation; (5) only one of the brothers is able to reproduce; (6) a couple is in uxorilocal marriage; (7) both husband and wife are single children; (8) disabled soldiers; (9) both the husband and wife are returned overseas Chinese; (10) households with special difficulties in remote mountainous areas and coastal fishing areas. (P. Peng, 1997) See, Peng, Peiyun, *Zhongguo jihuashengyu quanshu* [Encyclopedia of China's Birth Control] (Beijing: China Population Press, 1997), pp.21.

(Aird, 1990; Scharping, 2003; Wong, Buckley, & Piao, 2015). For example, women with one child were required to undergo IUD insertion; the forced abortion needed to be executed for women in unauthorized pregnancies; the compulsory sterilization was enforced for couples with over two children (Bossen, 2002; M. Fong, 2016; Zong, 2013). These mandatory campaigns were powerfully conducted to ensure that couples had only a single offspring, whether son or daughter.

Although the socialist revolution brought improvements for female status, it failed to achieve the real gender equality and family reforms due to the deep-rooted patriarchal ideology and structure, especially in rural China (Andors, 1983; Johnson, 1983; Stacey, 1983; M. Wolf, 1985). In the countryside, the essence of culture values was predominately based on kinship relations and an emphasis on the filial obligation to continue the ancestral line through a male offspring (White, 2003). Additionally, practical considerations of manpower in agricultural work and of familial support for aged parents deeply affected parents' preference for sons. Therefore, in rural areas, the son-preference fertility value and the disadvantageous social status for daughters still existed. Most people were confronted with public pressure to obey the birth control in state policy, and also with the private pressure to have a son in a family (Ku, 2003).

Under this condition, common citizens and villagers also developed a series of strategies to fight against this policy and achieve their fertility goals (Ebenstein, 2011;

Jiang, Li, & Feldman, 2011; White, 2003; Zhu, Lu, & Hesketh, 2009). For instance, villagers sometimes evaded the detection of an "out-plan" pregnancy until the birth of a son; they also resorted to female infanticide and female infant abandonment, or illegally employed the ultrasound technology to identify the sex of a fetus and to undertake the sex-selective abortion underground. At times, they violently resisted family planning officials by attacking or murdering local cadres who imposed abortions or sterilizations. In a word, the enforcement of the one-child policy in the countryside confronted enormous challenges and prevalent resistance. In turn, these resistances eventually impelled the state to loosen the one-child policy in rural areas.

In 1984, in response to forceful peasant resistance at the local level, the central government issued Central Document 7. It was enacted to construct the one-child policy that was pragmatic and flexible on the regional level, easy for local officials to operate, yet capable of achieving the goal of reaching 1.2 billion population by 2000. This document was to adjust the birth limit by "opening a small hole to close up a large one" to entitle married couples under certain qualifications to have a second child in the countryside (Greenhalgh, 1986; Scharping, 2003; L. Shi, 2017; White, 2003) In 1986, the birth control policy was further modified in some provinces to permitted rural couples have a second child if the first child was a girl (Greenhalgh & Winckler, 2005; Scharping, 2003; L. Shi, 2017). This means that single-daughter couples could have one more chance to own a son. At the same time, depending on

the various provincial regulations, a couple should comply with the requirements for spacing between two births and a minimum age for the mother. For example, in Shandong Province, a rural mother with a single daughter needed to have a second child after thirty years old and the two births had no spacing year. This adjusted version of one-child policy in rural China, namely the "one-son-or-two-child policy", is also known as the "1.5-child policy". Evidently, the implementation of the "1.5-child policy" indicated that the state made substantial concessions on the traditional fertility value. Although the state condemned the cultural preference for males, it did concede that in economic and social realities sons were more valuable than daughters (Greenhalgh, 1993; Greenhalgh & Li, 1995; White, 2003). Rural women and girls were thus caught in the tragic situation of two mutually incompatible discourse modes. With no escape from this dual oppression, many female rural residents chose, or were forced by family members to choose as a strategy to guarantee the birth of a son.

Beginning from the 1980s, there was an increase in infant abandonment, girls in particular, as a consequence of conflicts between fertility value of son-preference and enforcement of the one-child policy and the subsequent "1.5-child policy" (M. Fong, 2016; Goodkind, 2011; Johansson, 1995; Johnson, 1993, 1996, 2004, 2016b; Johnson et al., 1998; Naftali, 2016; W. Zhang, 2001, 2006a, 2006b). At the same time, there were cases of unplanned birth, or in other words, without official permission. Since

births, they became unreported children, popularly known as black children (*hei hai zi*) without household registration (*hu kou*) and existed unofficially. A huge number of unreported infants, overwhelmingly second or latter-order children, were girls, while a few were boys. Moreover, administrative policies such as the "one vote veto rule" from the early 1990s, eventually led to the coercive and cruel impacts of population policies on rural families and rural children who were born unplanned. Some parents abandoned infants on the streets or at stranger's doorsteps, which might cause infants' death, institutionalization in a state-run orphanage, fortune adoption, or even international adoption[22]. Notably, underreporting or "hidden" girls are demonstrated to be an important component of China's missing girls phenomenon in a recent study (Y. Shi & Kennedy, 2016). According to this study, unreported female births, or hidden girls, account for 73 per cent of the 15 million missing girls from the 1990–2010 birth cohorts in the 2010 census. Furthermore, domestic adoptions, in which most of the girls adopted may register in hukou system after the age of one, with a total of 700,000 account for about 6 per cent of the 11 million additional females from 1990 to 2010. Compared to 60 million missing girls in a demographic explanation, Y. Shi and Kennedy (2016) suggest around 25 million girls do actually

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[22] Discussions on international adoption, See, Leslie K. Wang, *Outsourced children: Orphanage care and adoption in globalizing China* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press 2016). Margaret Ryznar, "Adoption in China: Past, present and yet to come", *Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law*, Vol. 45, Issue 1(2016), pp.27-51.

exist, but went unreported at birth, only appearing on government censuses at a later stage in their lives.

Despite a long history of adoption practices, the state first legislated adoption in details in the Marriage Law of 1981. In the 1990s, the adoption regime was further reformed by the government and finally enacted the first 1991 Adoption Law of the People's Republic of China, going into effect in 1992, to regulate conditions of legal adoption, likely in response to the one-child policy. For instance, Greenhalgh and Li (1995) point out that, to an increasing extent, more girls than boys were given away for adoption while parents were encountered the situation of no sons within limits of children's number in villages of Shaanxi Province. In other words, families in rural areas inclined to take advantage of customary adoption or arranged adoption to hide children (usually girls) against population policy and to produce sons with one more chance. Therefore, in coping with this phenomenon, the adoption law stipulated that only childless persons with age of over 35 years old at the same time with abilities to rear and educate an adoptee could adopt a child. With one exception, adoption of an orphan, a disabled child, or a foundling could undertake without all of the usual legal restrictions. It explicitly emphasized that all placing out a child for adoption and adoptions could not violate the laws and regulations of family planning policies. However, at the same time, the reform of adoption regime finally recognized certain customary adoptions in the first 1991 Adoption Law of the People's Republic of

China. Specifically, Article 7 allowed childless citizens under thirty-five to adopt collateral blood relatives without all of the usual legal restrictions. The Chinese government once again revised its adoption law in 1998, in response to a surge in orphan population. Most importantly, the minimum age of adoptive parents was lowered to thirty. The 1998 law further loosen adoption restrictions by allowing couples with children—previously allowed to adopt only special needs children or those whose parents were deceased—to adopt children in social welfare institutions whose parents were not known.

The legislative framework currently in place, for both domestic and international adoption, has to be viewed in the context of China's previous one-child policy. This policy was the cornerstone of all discussion regarding adoption because it restricted the number of domestic homes available for adoption, resulting in many children whose families were unable to care for them. Subsequent law supported this policy, such as Article 3 of the 1991 Adoption Law of the People's Republic of China: "Adoption shall not contravene laws and regulations on family planning."(Ryznar, 2016) Parents therefore could not raise more than one child, which stagnated domestic adoption and prompted much international adoption.

In the legal procedure for adoption, the adopters were required to show their identification and household registration status to local authority, like civil affairs bureau. They also needed to submit certified documents (such as their marital status

and their ability to bring up and educate children) provided from the village committee. Moreover, providing the proof of childlessness from the family planning office was also crucial. Obviously, these requirements made legal adoptions tedious and difficult. Those who did not meet the official conditions for adoption hide their adoptions, and the adopted children also had no household registrations like unplanned ones. When discovered, these families in unregistered adoption were fined as much as the social upbringing fee (*shehui fuyangfei*) for violating population policy. Yet, despite legal qualifications and heavy fines for illegal adoptions, a great many informal or customary adoption without registration still occurred after 1992 (W. Zhang, 2006b).

Adoption Practice in Contemporary Rural China

Majority of the scholars studying adoption in contemporary China argue that present adoption practices have been powerfully affected by the state-mandated family planning programs, especially the implementation of the 1.5-child policy from the 1980s to the 1990s in rural China (Y. Chen, Ebenstein, Edlund, & Li, 2015; Johansson, 1995; Johansson & Nygren, 1991; Johnson, 1993, 2004, 2016b; Johnson et al., 1998; Lid et al., 2004; Ryznar, 2016; W. Zhang, 2001, 2006a, 2006b). Statistically, the overall number of adoptees rose sharply from 150,000 annually in the 1970s to around 400,000 in the period from 1984 to 1985, and to over 500,000 in 1987. Furthermore, the adoption of girls increased dramatically from 160,000 in 1980

to 420,000 in 1987, while the adoption of boys, correspondingly, raised to 120,000 in 1987 from 55,000 in 1980 (Johansson, 1995; Johansson & Nygren, 1991). These data came from the National Two-Per-Thousand Sample Survey on Fertility and Contraception conducted in 1988 by the State Family Planning Commission, rather than official statistics of registered adoption, therefore included cases of unreported informal-arranged adoption. These data show that the number of adoptions increased over time, especially after the implementation of one-child policy. Besides, the number of adopted girls far exceeded that of boys. According to the overall numbers of adoption estimated by Johansson (1995), about 6 million adopted children were living in China in 1988, with only a small part of it formally registered, suggesting that most adoption in China at that time were informal.

Also studying adoption from the same database, Lid et al. (2004) examined that the effects of several factors, including childlessness, sex composition of birth children in the family before adoption, child death, and family planning policy, on the probability of adopting a child from 1950 to 1987. During this period, childless women were more likely than women with children to adopt children and they did not have a gender preference. Women with children by birth used adoption to circumvent the strict family planning programs, alongside securing a child of the "missing" sex in their family. Besides, women experienced the death of a child were more likely to adopt than those who had not. In conclusion, child adoption was employed as a

strategy in the construction of family among those not fulfilling their ideal family size on account of infertility, child death, restraints enforced by birth-control policies, or a mixture of these factors.

These studies have pointed to the increase of adoption which have influenced plenty of children (especially girls) and families, but only a handful of research[23] concentrate on modern adoption practices in China, let alone relations of adoption triangles (Johnson, 1993, 1996; K. A. Johnson, 2002; Johnson, 2004, 2016b; Johnson et al., 1998; W. Zhang, 2001, 2006a, 2006b).

As many have argued, contemporary adoption patterns reflected the enforcement of the state family planning programs during the previous decades. The birth control campaigns have intensified the informal adoption, especially in the 1980s and the

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[23] The studies on the practices of child adoption in contemporary rural China are mainly conducted by Kay Ann Johnson and Weiguo Zhang. See, Kay A. Johnson. "Chinese orphanages: Saving China's abandoned girls". *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, Issue 3 (1993), pp.61-87. Kay A. Johnson. "The politics of the revival of infant abandonment in China, with special reference to Hunan". *Population and Development Review,* Vol.22, Issue1 (1996), pp.77-98. Kay A. Johnson. "Politics of international and domestic adoption in China". *Law & Society Review,* Vol.*36*, Issue 2 (2002), pp.379-396. Kay A. Johnson. *Wanting a daughter, needing a son: Abandonment, adoption, and orphanage care in China* (St. Paul, Minn.: Yeong & Yeong Book Co, 2004). Kay A. Johnson. *China's hidden children: Abandonment, adoption, and the human costs of the one-child policy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016). Kay A. Johnson., Banghan Huang., & Liyao Wang. "Infant Abandonment and Adoption in China". *Population and Development Review,* Vol.24, Issue 3 (1998), pp.469-510. Weiguo Zhang. "Institutional Reforms, population policy, and adoption of Children: Some observations in a north China village". *Journal of Comparative Family Studies,* Vol.32, Issue2 (2001), pp.303-318. Weiguo Zhang. "Child adoption in contemporary rural China". *Journal of Family Issues,* Vol.27, Issue 3 (2006a), pp.301-340. Weiguo Zhang. "Who adopt girls and why? Domestic adoption of female children in contemporary rural China". *The China Journal*, No.56 (2006b), pp.63-82.

1990s. It enabled more children, mainly girls, to be adopted in rural society and, meanwhile, generated an increasing demand for adoption at the family level. Families with daughters temporarily hide girls (overwhelmingly second or latter order) through customary adoption in families of their relatives and friends to avoid birth planning punishments (e.g., over-quota fine and forcible sterilization). They adopted out one or more daughters to gain the authorized quotas for the birth of sons as well. Families with sons normally stopped reproduction but chose to adopt girls, since they yet desired to achieve another widespread "two child two genders" ideal, namely "a son and a daughter make a family complete" pattern[24]. In some circumstance, many couples who had undergone sterilization largely owing to the birth-control operations also took advantage of adoption for having more children, or for a child of missing gender.

Aside from being a strategy or resistance to the birth control policy, the adoption of girls is also for the sake of economic and emotional considerations (W. Zhang, 2006b). Due to very few abandoned boys, in adoption practice, it is more expensive to informally adopt a son than a daughter. Apart from the cost of the actual adoption transaction, the long expenditure of raising a child, as well as the education and marriage expense should also be considered. The adoptive parents, in fact, may utilize

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[24] This pattern can also be abstracted into "wanting a daughter, needing a son" which is discussed in Johnson's another book. See, Kay Ann Johnson, *Wanting a daughter, needing a son: Abandonment, adoption, and orphanage care in China* (St. Paul, Minn.:Yeong & Yeong Book Co 2004).

a bride price of adoptive daughters to as economic support for old age, but they need to pay higher wedding expense for adoptive boys than that for daughters (Yan, 2003, 2005). At present, married daughters have started to practice filial piety to their natal parents and provide physical, emotional, and financial supports for the elderly (L. Shi, 2017). Adoptive parents also believe that daughters are emotionally closer and more loyal to them than sons. Thus, the increasing female adoption is not merely a result of increasing availability of girls for adoption, but a reflection of the incremental value of daughters in contemporary rural China, although son-preference still persists (W. Zhang, 2006a).

Accordingly, there are kinds of family relations in different adoption patterns (Johnson, 2016b). In the 1980s, compared to strict enforcement of family planning policy, local authorities did not keep a watchful eye on informal adoptions prevalent in rural society (Johnson, 2016b; W. Zhang, 2006a). People usually employed customary adoption practices for evading restrictions on childbearing. In customary adoption arranged among relatives and friends, the foster care relation is transparent, somewhat fluid for directly involved parties. The birth families could keep an ongoing relationship with their adopted-out children, while the children also were supported by the two families' resources. Some adopted-out daughters would return their birth families once they had a younger brother. Still, they remained in touch or care for their adoptive parents because of the affection and close relation shaped in bringing

up in adoptive families. By the early 1990s, adoption regulations and laws enacted in 1991, through suppressing Chinese customary adoptions, shored up the enforcement of birth planning policies, and promoted the strengthening government control over relinquished children. At that time, numerous birth parents abandoned their children on the doorstep of those they had secretly investigated. The targeted adoptive families usually raised the abandoned children as their biological ones and kept secret of children's identities. But once found by the local birth planning officials, the adoptive families were forced to pay a fine for an illegal adoption just as over-quota children. Some informally adopted children without legal identities began to be arranged in state orphanages by local officials. Over the same time, the over-quota birth guerrilla families relinquished their babies in county towns or in public places of cities. In this case, these birth families never knew exactly what happened to their children, while adoptive parents who picked up the children would also keep secret from others to avoid being found by children's birth families. In sum, no matter what kind of abandonment and adoption of children, a majority of birth parents felt that they were compelled by policies and surroundings, without choices. The emotional outcomes of "coercion and complicity", "loss and guilt" followed some parents for many years (Johnson, 2016b, p. 55). However, a large number of adopted children expressed indifference, hard feelings, or hostility for their birth parents. By contrast, they conveyed their affection and loyalty to their adoptive parents who saved and raised them.

These existing research constantly highlighted abandonment and adoption of children in rural China from the perspectives of cultural, socioeconomic, and political background, and of adoption patterns, in adoption practice. However, the voices and perspectives of abandoned and adoptive children are still largely absent. At the same time, the public and local media begin to discuss and report the issues of adoption, foster care, and unplanned birth from the children's life experience.

Speaking of adopted children's voice, there is a piece of old news that reported the suicide of two high school girls with experience of adoption. On Friday, March 27, 2009, Xiaoyan, a female student in Hongqiao High School of Yueqing City, committed suicide by drinking pesticide at home. Her parents found her and took her to the hospital, but unfortunately, she was dead. Twenty days later, April 17, another Friday, Xiaodan, another female student in the same school, killed herself in the same way[25]. There are so many sayings about the reasons why two girls committed suicide. Some people guess that it was due to academic pressure, while more people mentioned that the two girls have the same life experience—that is, growing up in

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[25] About the detailed introductions, See, Xie, Liang. Two adopted girls committed suicide successively in Yueqing City [Yueqing liangnvsheng xianhou zisha]. *Zhe Jiang News.* (2009, May 6) http://zjnews.zjol.com.cn/05zjnews/system/2009/05/06/015486268.shtml; Adopted and out-of-planned girls committed suicide. *Sina News.* (2009, May 26), reprint the news from *Southern Metropolis Weekly*, http://news.sina.com.cn/s/2009-05-26/095317891729.shtml

someone else's home to dodge the birth planning policy. Both of them are all out-of-plan children who are fostered or adopted at birth.

Xiaoyan's birth parents are both local government officials, and they were only permitted to have one child at that moment. According to the one-child policy, Xiaoyan became an out-of-plan child. In her life, Xiaoyan had been sent to two adoptive families. Eventually, her *hukou* was registered in a distant relative's family, but she lived in another relative's family. According to the statement from the school, Xiaoyan was tortured by her family situation, because she knew that she had been abandoned to her adoptive parents by her birth parents. Xiaoyan left a suicide note on her computer. Those last words are "I want my biological parents to regret for a lifetime". Hence, she chose suicide to wreak vengeance on her birth parents, just like what her last words said.

Slightly different from Xiaoyan, Xiaodan was abandoned by her birth parents in order to avoid paying a financial penalty in the form of the "social child-raising fee". Her adoptive parents raised this little baby girl, who was placed at their doorstep 18 years ago at the age of only 42 days, as if she were their own biological daughter. Furthermore, Xiaodan never knew her own real identity. In fact, Xiaodan's biological parents have a total of four daughters, and Xiaodan is the third one. Two of them were adopted and the other one has already been taken back. Nevertheless, before Xiaodan's suicide, her biological parents had been to the school to find her, at least

three times. Xiaodan also changed the personal status on QQ: "The road ahead is too long, and I cannot see the end." In addition, she left some words on her home computer, "I am just a little bit caught in a dilemma." That because her birth parents came to the school several times and wanted to take her away from her adoptive parents.

In an area that seriously violated the birth planning policy, adoption and abandonment was so common that these cases could not catch most people's attention. Consequently, the relevant individuals in this phenomenon were also be overlooked. After almost a decade, the birth planning policy has been changed to a two-child policy in China. These two adopted girls reminded society of the misery of adopted children at the expense of their lives.

Conclusion

The history of customary adoption has continued well into the present, indicating a significance of cultural continuity. However, the revival of customary adoption in rural China since the 1980s have not exactly duplicated the adoption practice in the past, and it has re-emerged with new features and complicated purposes. The circulation of daughters and arrangement in kinship among families has been likely to continue wherever state control of fertility coexisted with a persistent son preference. These complex dynamics have continued to develop as they affected by changing

state policies, socio-economic transformations and evolutions in the family. That is to say, customary adoption in contemporary rural China fully demonstrates a combination of continuity and change.

Firstly, in terms of continuity, cultural roots of customary adoption remain. Despite the state having intervened the family sphere and individual life, customary adoption still exists among families, aiming to obtain sons to carry on the family line or attain an ideal family pattern (more children, two genders). In addition, the ambivalence in cultural discourse, such as "blood is thicker than water[26]" (*xue nongyu shui*) and "The parent who raises the child has greater weight than the one who gives birth" (*Yangfumu dayu shengfumu*) also affect and reshape family relations among adoption triangles.

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[26]This phrase is an old proverb in English. Its definition from Cambridge Dictionary is "family connections are always more important than other types of relationship". In general, blood ties between families are regarded as stronger than bonds of friendship or love. (https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/blood-is-thicker-than-water) The anthropologist Schneider (1984, pp. 165-201) proposed that this premise became a fundamental assumption to the study of kinship. At the same time, he also argued that, under the influence of this assumption, studies of kinship overstated biological facts of kinship, ignoring other sociocultural elements. In addition, the axiom could not "account for the so-called extension of kinship, only explaining "some aspects of some of the relations between very close kin" (Schneider, 1984, p. 199). In local context of my field site, this phrase also becomes a norm which stresses the importance of blood ties between adoptees and birth families, especially comparing with adoptive families in no real blood relations. See, David M. Schneider. *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1984).

Secondly, the patterns and purpose of customary adoption practice has been altered to a larger or lesser degree. In traditional China, high infant mortality and the influence of Confucianism enabled male adoption as a means to continue family lineage. At the same time, there was minor marriage on the adoption of infant girls as little brides for economic considerations, or female adoption for childless couples who believed that it would produce more chance for reproduction. However, since the PRC established in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party has exercised party-state power to regulate and influence the adoption practice by laws and policies (e.g., marriage law, family planning policy, and adoption law). The first result of these regulations is that the adoption of heir and child marriage have been repealed. Therefore, there was no detailed custom and rules for customary adoption. Since the 1980s, due to the one-child or 1.5-child policy, a married couple without a son might buy a boy from black market of child-trafficking to maintain family line. Family might also foster a baby girl who was abandoned or hidden to avoid the punishment of the family planning policy. A girl was adopted as a biological daughter to achieve an ideal family pattern with two children in different genders. According to statistics mentioned, the situation of gender patterns in adoption has also reversed. Female adoption under the era of the one-child policy occurs more frequently and more severe than that of boys.

Thirdly, unlike adoption practice in the past, process of customary adoption in contemporary China usually involves more parties in addition to natal family and adoptive family. As the family planning policy clearly stipulate that the adoption practice cannot violate family planning policy, a successful customary adoption also needs the collusion, concealment and protection of local villages and cadres. In other words, customary adoption has already been related to the powerful force and the later compromise of the state, due to the existence of middle interface between the state and the family, namely local cadres in community. The roles of local cadres and villagers also have impacts on the relationship among adoption triad. In short, the adoption triangle is not a closed relationship, but is influenced by the complexity of the external environment.

It can be concluded that the condition of adoption is shaped by structures and social norms of a particular context in which people are lived (MacDonald, 2016). The expectations and responsibilities that associated with being members in family practice, their understanding towards to life experience, their strategies and family relations practiced in adoption triangle, are both the expressions of their agency, and can serve as the prism which reflect underlying structural constraints they encountered in customary adoption over time. Similarly, adoption practice has life-long implications for adoptive children, their biological parents, their adoptive parents, and their respective kinship networks. Based on this, it is vital to employ both

top-down and bottom-up perspectives to engage in the complexity of family life for the individuals whose most significant relationships are temporarily or permanently altered through adoption in the context of contemporary rural China.

In the following three chapters, I will explain and analyze the diversity of family relationships in adoption triangle on three levels: local practice and interaction, family practice and interaction, and individual experience and strategy.

Chapter 4: Customary Adoption and Social Relations in Local Practice

In the village where I grew up with my adoptive family, my two uncles worked as a village party secretary and a village head successively. After the 14-year term (1991-2004) of Uncle Zhou, Uncle Xiao quitted from town family planning office and was elected as the village party secretary and the village head until now. Despite this intimate bond, my biological parents would visit them on holidays with tobacco and alcohol as gifts to thank them for concealing me. After I had a legal *hukou* registration, my family could stop giving gifts. In major traditional festivals, such as Lunar New Year and Mid-Autumn Festival, many villagers, including villagers who practiced customary adoption, went to Uncle Zhou and Uncle Xiao's home to give them gifts to make connections. Once Uncle Zhou left the village committee, villagers no longer gave him gifts. When family planning policy was strictly enforced, villagers often said, "Whether you are caught by higher-level officials depends on your relationship with village cadres." So, why did village cadres act as an umbrella to cover local villagers? How did they play those roles?

Since the 1980s, China Studies scholars have discussed the roles of grassroots cadres in state-peasant relations (Greenhalgh, 1993; Shue, 1988; Unger, 1989; J. Wang, 2012). Shue (1988) claimed that the ability of the state to penetrate villages would be enhanced, as the protective webs weaved by local cadres was diminished by

market reforms. In her view, "the market-based weblike structural substitutes of the Deng reforms" (Shue, 1988, pp. 131-132) had changed the honeycomb pattern of local interests between cadres and peasants, making peasants exposed more directly to state power than before. Unger (1989), on the other hand, argued that under Deng Xiaoping's leadership, "the state in China, though still strong, has pulled back dramatically from its earlier efforts to directly control what occurs in the villages… By reinstituting peasant smallholding, the state has also, as seen above, curtailed the daily controls over the peasantry that had been exerted by local cadres" (Unger, 1989, p. 134).

On "state-society" relations, existing studies constantly emphasized the influence of local cadres' actions. For instance, L. Zhou (2016) focused on the role of grassroots cadres as monopolists in internal affairs and contractors outside the system. Cadres make greater use of institutional space to seek their own interests and ultimately become rentiers in grassroots society. Sun and Guo (2000) in their research found that local cadres become winners of tasks by means of their formal status and informal power. These studies, however, neglected the effect of task attributes in practice and the cadres' own resources on their actions (Yun Peng, Feng, & Zhou, 2020). In addition, some empirical studies discussed how grassroots society (generally referring to township governments and villages) implement the family planning policy and what their working logic are in detail. They mainly demonstrated how local cadres

and villagers took advantage of their relational network to struggle against state power, circumvent tough state policies, and played an important role in the formation of customary adoption (Ai, 2011; Johnson, 2016b; Ouyang, 2011; W. Zhang, 2006a, 2006b; X. Zhou, 2010). Nevertheless, these studies dwell on the role of local cadres as intermediary actors between state and peasant, while ignoring the influence of their actions between farmers and families.

As mentioned, the formation and resurgence of customary adoption is an unintended consequence of the collision between the coercive one-child policy and reproductive culture (that is, continuing the family line and having more children means having more happiness). The previous chapter described the diversity of family relationships in customary adoption triangles. So, in exploring the factors contributing to the complex family relations in adoption triangles, we pay attention to the question, "how state power influences individuals." I address this question by investigating how the implementation of state policies by grassroots government is linked to customary adoption, and how it varies; how these policies directly affect the families and individuals involved; and what role policy executors play in practice. I will focus on discussing the role of village cadres who work with villagers and their families in the village play, and how they influence families and individuals in adoption triangles.

China's one-child policy varies greatly across provinces, ethnic groups, and even within the same county. The policy acts on families in vastly differentiated ways due

to collusions between grassroots governments[27] (X. Zhou, 2010), and differing strategies and informal social relations used by families to achieve their reproductive goals. In this process, village cadres and family planning officials have the dual roles to enforce the policies and protect the villagers. Local cadres' specific role is based on their social relations with particular villagers (or families) and the effectiveness of a family's strategies, thus making policy implementations inherently different. Due to this differentiated policy practice and interactions between actors, the formation of customary adoptions and the various family relations in adoption triangles become possible. At the same time, customary adoption, as an accommodating strategy, has become a way for local rural families to bend the iron bars of state policies (Yusheng Peng, 2010).

State Power and Local Practice of Population Control in Jiangli City[28]

When putting policy into practice, what role did each government levels play to realise birth control targets? And what social factors contributed to the formation of customary adoption? In Jiangli county, family planning work was launched in 1964 by the provincial government. At that time, the government proposed all married

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[27] Grassroots government here mainly refers to the town and village committees when facing inspection by county government departments.

[28] This section discusses how population control practice based on the one-child and 1.5-child policy occurred in local society.

couples should abide by the birth-control policy and have sparser, fewer, and better educated children. It was advised to only have a maximum of two or three children per couple with a gap of four to six years between births. As Mr. Wu, Meng Village's then-secretary, recalls, the policy's slogan was, "One child is not too few, two is just fine, but three is too many" (IN170725)[29]. By 1973, the local government advocated for a couple to only have two children with a gap of four to five years. Then, in 1979, the Provincial Revolutionary Commission issued the *Pilot Provisions on Several Issues Concerning Family Planning*, which proposed that a couple should ideally have one child, and a maximum of two, with the birth interval being over four years.

Afterwards, in March 1980, the provincial government issued a document requiring each couple to have only one child. In September, the Central Committee of the CCP issued an *Open Letter to All Communist Party Members and Communist Youth League Members on the Issue of Controlling China's Population Growth*. This letter expressed the goal, "to strive to control the total population of China to within 1.2 billion by the end of this century" (P. Peng, 1997, p. 16). Since then, the one-child policy has been enforced throughout the country as a reasonable and lawful policy. In the next few years, state and local governments adjusted their fertility policies in light of actual conditions. The so-called "open small holes and block large ones" (*kai xiao*

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[29] "IN" refers to "interviews" and the following numbers represent the year, month and day. For example, IN170725 refers to an interview on July 25, 2017.

kou, du da kou) allowed couples in special conditions to have a second child. However, rural households with one daughter were never allowed to have two children. It was not until 1986 the provincial government published the *Decision on the Implementation of Spaced Births of a Second Child in Rural One-Daughter Households*, which stipulated that one-daughter mothers must be at least 30 years old to give birth to their second child.

In 1988, this administrative decision was incorporated in local legislation and incorporated into provincial family planning regulations, mandating that birth applications must be approved by the county-level family planning department before a couple could obtain a birth certificate to continue giving birth. On January 1, 2016, the one-child policy was officially abolished, and a universal two-child policy came into effect. Even though the one-child policy was invalidated, the state still controlled population growth. According to Ms. Li, Director of the Policy and Regulations Office at the Health and Family Planning Bureau (HFPB), "[Family planning] is merely a policy and standard for a period of time. In the past, births were restricted, and now they are encouraged. They still follow a plan." (IN180615)

However, an important lesson for state governance is "uniformity in policy making and flexibility in implementation" (X. Zhou, 2010). In other words, while implementing national policies, grassroots governments often adopt approaches that navigated "policies from above and responses from below," and work together to

respond to top-down policy requirements and inspections. In practice, county-level, township, and village governments play different roles in policy execution.

As the most populous county in the province, Jiangli has a population of 1.74 million and nearly 300,000 women of childbearing age in 2018. In the county, the HFPB had up to 80 staff but today about 30 staff. Thus, HFPB staff cannot directly manage the fertility status of the masses in many aspects. The HFPB has a dual role as both executor and manager. The bureau not only carried out policies formulated by higher-level government, but set targets for grassroots governments to complete based on demographic situation. This bureau supervised local cadres through assessment, supervision, inspection, and other methods.

In contrast to county-level governments, township governments and related departments have to directly enact policies on villagers. The phrase "a thousand threads above, one needle below" was used to describe the daily work of grassroots cadres in towns and villages. Not only do they have to implement the policies and achieve the expectations of higher-level government, but they also have to impose them on villagers.

> We hold a family planning work meeting every year called the "reward-and-punishment meeting." In this meeting, we look at the bureau responsibility indicator that was assigned to the township at the beginning of the

year. Our indicator was set by the township's leaders. The target would last for three to five years each time, and this is known as the "term target." The township's departments implemented the work according to the fertility target and county-level government conducted assessments on its work once or twice a year with rewards and punishments. If the indicators showed goals were met, they would be awarded, commended, and rewarded. If not, they would be notified of criticism or given yellow card warnings. These were all the accountability systems. If a township reached enough yellow card warnings, the county-level government had to implement a one-vote veto. Even if the township government did other tasks well, it would be useless when the year-end appraisal was done. (Mr. Jiang, Chief of the Family Planning Office in HFPB, IN170803)

Mr. Jiang's description of the work at the grassroots level in the township was validated when I interviewed staff from the Family Planning Office of Lanhe Township:

For assessment, there were several assessment systems for villages and zoning offices. [The assessment] looked at how far an indicator was achieved in a village and these villages are aggregated into a zoning office. There is a ranking to how well these were completed. We needed to know our responsibility goals each year. The county first gives responsibility to the town, then the town gives responsibility to the village. There are standards at every level. If we didn't meet

this target, we would be punished. (Ms. Gan, Director of the Family Planning Office in Lanhe Town, IN180326)

As grassroots cadres in towns, they have to face the pressure of assessment while approaching villagers for family planning work:

When I first went to work in 2002, I was very busy at the township level. At that time, there was almost no rest time throughout the year. I was mainly busy with physical examinations for fertile women and implementing basic policies. The annual follow-up visits, going to the village to promote and implement the reward-and-punishment mechanism, were things to be done throughout the year. At that time, the rewards and punishments were very strict, and the standard of town-level assessments was high, so the town's work pressure was really high. At that time, the law-abidance of local residents were also not as strong. There were still people who wanted to have a boy or more children. As this also happened, the work pressure was even higher. (Ms. Gan, Director of the Family Planning Office in Lanhe Town, IN180326)

In Jiangli county, where male births were valued and the concept of continuing a clan was deeply rooted, having boys and more children became matters of life and death. Once township family planning office staff strictly implement policies, it would lead to conflicts between them and the villagers. While governing villagers'

fertility practices saw township cadres resorting to tough tactics and measures to complete the tasks assigned by their superiors and ensure they were not punished, especially from the 1990s to the beginning of the 21st century.

For the provincial government, family planning work in Jiangli county between 1988 and 1989 was less than satisfactory, with high birth rates, a large number of unplanned births, and many underreported cases. The birth rate increased year after year and up to 50% of births were underreported (S. Huang, 2009, p. 148). After repeated criticism from the provincial government, birth control in Jiangli was strictly enforced throughout the 1990s, resorting to illegal administration and violence.

During my fieldwork, all the village cadres interviewed shared about the time when the one-child policy was imposed:

In the 1990s, family planning was the most stringent, having joint as well as its own responsibilities. At that time, management was not standardized and officials in the family planning department did whatever they wanted. The town was in charge and so was the village. The town established an assessment policy and assessed village cadres. They always said that family planning work is a political lifeline, and no one dared to cross that tense line. When something went wrong, it was not a matter for one person. It was a matter for the leadership team. (Mr. Li, Former Secretary of Zhang Village, IN180319)

I have been involved in family planning since 1984. At that time, I worked in the township family planning office and went through all 48 villages in the town, going down to the villages and shouting at the doors. If I couldn't find someone, I would post a notice and let them get back to me within a time limit. Otherwise, we could pull down their homes and walls. If someone wanted to violate the policy by committing suicide, like drinking pesticide and hanging, we could provide pesticide and a rope for them to succeed. The family planning policy was strict. Most people, considering the interests of their family, didn't run away. Once they were caught, they suffered a forced abortion. There were several deaths in controlling births. They were so desperate they died fighting the policy, but it did not work. If they died, the government just gave some money and did not take responsibility. I'm the leader and secretary in the village. If there was one over-birth family in our village, I would be fired and expelled from the Party. (Mr. Wang, Current Secretary of Gao Village, IN180320)

I started working in 1991 and worked for 13 years. When I worked, population control was at its most intense. Officials in the town's family planning office were as terrible as tigers. Those who were pregnant with over births had to abort when they were caught. At that moment, the town gave birth quotas to villages according to their populations. When these quotas were used up, family planning

work in that village was not completed. (Mr. Zhou, Former Secretary of Meng

Village, IN170802)

Not only did village cadres carry out harsh birth controls during this period,

ordinary villagers also remembered it vividly:

In those days, family planning staff asked around, when they saw children or a

pregnant woman. We were all scared to hide. Inspectors of the Family Planning

Working Group went to our village from time to time and caught some unlucky

villagers. Those who had over births were fined and those who were pregnant

were arrested and had to get abortions. (Wanqing's parents, IN180415)

Family planning was strict back then. Like my peers, women of childbearing age

in our village all went for physical examinations every other month. I was really

scared before. It felt like women were treated as childbearing tools. There were

so many women caught and forced to get abortions. All these painful experiences

really happened, and we were so scared to go to the hospital. Whenever women

of childbearing age like us gathered, we talked about these things. The past

patriarchal thinking coupled with the strictness of family planning made me give

birth to a boy as soon as possible. If my first child was a son, I would not have to

suffer the many pains of having more children. (Biyao's mother, IN180902)

My biological father also mentioned that 1990 was a year of extreme strictness for the family planning policy. The People's Hospital was full of pregnant women who underwent forced abortions. As long as a family was caught with an over birth, the house would be stripped, and relatives and neighbors would also be arrested by the township family planning office. At that time, my father removed the windows and doors of the house and went to sleep in other people's vacant houses at night. For them, 1991 was the most severe. After my birth, my mother was pregnant again, and that time, she was arrested and forced to have an abortion. At the moment, because the county's quota had been reached, any further births would result in dismissal of the county Party Secretary, so any child—even a couple's first —was not allowed.

The experience of these villagers validated the intensity of population governance in Jiangli at that time. Once family planning was violated, the township government would use "local solutions" based on "one village, one solution." The "local solutions" may seem absurd and barbaric, but they were backed by formal systems and clear regulations. For example, the Provincial Family Planning Regulations (1988)[30] stipulated,

In rural areas, women who have unplanned pregnancies shall be persuaded and educated to voluntarily terminate the pregnancy. After persuasion and education

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[30] For detailed regulations, see https://www.chinacourt.org/law/detail/1988/07/id/60400.shtml

fails, if they still persist in their pregnancy, they shall be punished in accordance

with the standards for levying over-birth fees and regulations of punishment set

by the municipal and county people's governments. Over-birth fees shall be

levied by the township people's government and the family planning department

shall be responsible for management.

The ambiguity of these regulations led to the emergence of "one village, one

solution." These methods were largely arbitrary decisions and seemed inevitably

absurd. At the same time, in the absence of financial resources, the township

government showed characteristics of an "absorption-type" regime, creating a

survival strategy of "releasing water to nurture fish." That is, family planning work

became based on fiscal revenue considerations, having money and paying money to

give birth (Ouyang, 2011). Additionally, the township government assisted village

cadres and villagers to avoid inspections by higher-level government and even

cooperated with county-level government departments to deal with investigations

from higher-level government departments. These actions were to avoid

inconsistencies in demographic data, as some population data were falsified by the

county and town family planning departments.

Despite rigorous execution of the family planning policy by the township

government, customary adoption was still a common phenomenon in rural areas. As a

hidden group, children in customary adoption did not appear in official population

data, and they do not want to attract the attention of county and township governments. Although such foster care can be seen to have succumbed to population control, it is actually a way of fighting against these policies.

An important reason for the existence of customary adoption lies in its informal and hidden characteristics. As long as children are not discovered, there will be no scrutiny or punishment. To understand how customary adoption became so widespread, I interviewed staff from county and township government departments. They agreed that children in foster care were a blind spot for government management; and the family planning departments would not punish their parents until they were discovered during examination.[31] Compared with the strict enforcement of birth-control policies, local governments were not vigilant in controlling customary adoption in rural areas (W. Zhang, 2006a). Moreover, penalties for such adoption were based on the principle of territoriality. In order not to cause trouble for themselves beyond birth quotas, the local grassroots government generally notified the birthplace of the adopted child to deal with the situation. Under normal circumstances, local authorities do not conduct demographic statistics on short-term adopted children who do not have a legal *hukou* and assume that they were counted in

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[31] For pregnant women, there are two countermeasures at least to avoid physical examinations: a) her family member could falsely claim that she went out, not at home; b) if her family had a good relationship with the village cadres, she could be exempted from the physical examination. When the pregnant woman had a big belly, to avoid unnecessary troubles for herself and the village cadres, she usually hided in her natal or relatives in other places until the child was born. Among the interviewees, some adoptees were born at home instead of hospital. There were also children born in hospitals, but at that time, the database of hospital and the family planning system were not connected to each other. Children could be born without a birth permit or marriage certificate. After the birth of child, if the gender was ideal, the family would voluntarily accept economic punishment. If it was not ideal, the family would lie that the child died and hided the child secretly.

their birthplaces. Although the Provincial Family Planning Regulations clearly state that "adoption is regarded as an illegal childbirth," the HFPB in Jiangli did not enforce this provision:

We didn't create files for illegal adoptions because there was a blank period in national laws and regulations, and there were contradictions between them. If we built a dossier and recognized their legal status, we will become promoters of illegal adoptions. The direction of our legal department was not to build a dossier, even if provincial family planning regulations allowed us to do so. After dossiers were created, illegal adoption would become an illegal childbirth, and then we would have to force them to confirm and show a household registration certificate, which means we supported their illegal adoption. This was discussed by our department and we also had law students. After research, we did not support this approach. If someone adopted a child, the government simply fined them to get them on the household registration list. Therefore, we suggested that the cases of informal adoption should go through the civil affairs department. Once reported, the case will be posted in the newspaper. The authorities then go directly to the civil affairs department for confirmation and issue an adoption registration. Then, that illegal adoption will become legal. In the future, once DNA matches are found, the adopted child will be taken back. If the adopted children were not discovered, such as those given up for adoption, then they will

wait for future identification or discovery. Anyway, they still have a way back to their home. We have to proceed from the spirit of legislation and not just for money. Although the money is given to the city's finances and the government is wealthy, the damage to the family and the society is quite great. That is why this part was ignored. (Mr. Zhu, Deputy Director of the Policy and Regulations Office in HFPB, IN180423)

HFPB staff did not punish illegal adoption after realizing there was a strong relationship between illegal adoption and illegal childbirth. Still, they allowed informal adoption to occur and exist. For adoptions between strangers, adopting families generally did not let adopted children know their true identities. Despite adoption having been made public in a village, adoptive families and villagers still keep the children hidden. Therefore, no adopting family has voluntarily gone to the Civil Affairs Bureau for a legal adoption registration. As for adoptions between relatives, they are merely strategic transitions to regain birth quotas and they have to hide their reproductive intentions from the local government. Thus, in addition to the need for childbirth, this lack of management and supervision by family planning departments and civil affairs departments at the county and township levels created ripe conditions for customary adoptions.

Village Cadres in Customary Adoption

At some points in the 1980s and 1990s, government departments, especially township family planning departments, harshly enforced family planning policies. This was because the ranks and promotions of local cadres were evaluated based on their achievements in economic development and population control, with the latter being a top priority (Jiang, Li, & Feldman, 2013; Jiang & Liu, 2016; Whyte, Feng, & Cai, 2015). However, due to their participation in the implementation process and position at the intersection of political governance networks and rural acquaintances, village cadres became a buffer to the imposition of the family planning policy. This section looks at the logic behind village cadres' actions in practice and what role they played in customary adoption becoming an unintended consequence of population control.

Under the current institutional background, village cadres are given a dual role as both a state agent and a village head, making a rational choice between "being practical" and "offending people." Therefore, in practice, village cadres often have to selectively implement higher-level policy, and their actions will adopt contingency strategies based on different situations. In particular, when village cadres are faced with the dilemma of executing national policies and villager distress, they generally do not rigidly impose policy on each family. Village cadres may relax and

differentiate policy enforcement based on considerations such as fiscal revenue, community ethics, and local culture.

The ethics of reciprocity in villages are supported by its closed social networks. Villagers usually exert their agency to seek help from village cadres. Through giving gifts and money, villagers establish much stronger relationships with village cadres based on their relationships in an acquaintance society. Under the principle of reciprocity, if village cadres do not provide help, they will be condemned by villagers or other people in their social network (such as family members and neighbors). In these circumstances, village cadres favor villagers in family planning. Meanwhile, village cadres still have to conceal over-birth in the village because of the punishments such as wage deductions, fines, and official criticism. Thus, village cadres' actions are not only for self-protection, but also based on practical relations with villagers.

Of course, the informal social protection provided by village cadres to villagers is also driven by economic interests. In Jiangli county, village committees formulated village rules and regulations for family planning and imposed a penalty of RMB1,000 to RMB2,000 for illegal births depending on circumstances. Under this institutional arrangement, village cadres may overlook illegal births to collect more fines for the village finances or their own finances. For illegal childbirth families, in addition to concealing themselves then, they must also pay to get help from village cadres to

avoid being sterilized before having a son. Indeed, villagers often say, "As long as I can give birth, I would rather pay a fine to have a boy." It shows that many problems of over-birth families can be solved within the village and how the family planning policy strengthened villagers' reliance on village cadres in terms of childbirth.

Therefore, in light of higher-level assessments and inspections as well as specific targets and tasks dictated to villages, village cadres join forces with township family planning departments to prepare and inform villagers on how to cope with and hoodwink higher-level government:

If it's the town that comes to inspect, the village committee is not afraid. Nothing happens. If the county comes to inspect, we are not afraid either. The town will help us to conceal it. The most fearful thing is the grand inspection from a prefecture-level city. If problems are discovered, the county-level government will deal with them. In fact, they are helping themselves. Every time an inspection comes, we would inform villagers ahead of schedule. During my tenure, I simply rented a car and took all the over-birth households away to hide them. Not only did I ask them to leave, I gave them an allowance of 50 yuan per person per day. They had to hide from dawn to dusk—a whole day. We placed guards at every village intersection and patrols throughout the village to report the movements of the inspectors. Before the inspection team arrives, over-birthed children were hidden, or their parents would rush to lock their doors.

Any children's clothes hanging in the yard must be put away. If there were

newlyweds not registered and reported, they will quickly tear off their wedding

couplets. When it comes to family planning, these things are done all the time.

(Mr. Li, Former Secretary in Village Zhang, IN180319)

In addition to being peacemakers, village cadres mixed in personal emotions,

interests, and resentments into implementing policies. This resulted in deviations in

the implementation of policy:

Officials in township departments and villagers don't live together, and there are

few interpersonal relationships between them. In addition, they are unfamiliar

with each other, only relating because of the family planning policy. By contrast,

village cadres are different. They live with villagers in a society of acquaintances

and kinships. According to regulations, when village cadres find out a female

villager is pregnant without a birth quota, they must first persuade her to abort

the baby or they have to report the case to the town's family planning office.

However, some village cadres mix their emotions in when dealing with cases. If

a cadre had a grudge against a villager, they would bring the town's officials to

catch the villager. If they have a good relationship, or the household gives them

gifts and money, then the cadre can help conceal the family. (Mr. Jiang, Chief of

the Family Planning Office in HFPB, IN170803)

Due to such interest-vested relationships, village cadres do not take the initiative to expose villagers' illegal reproductive behaviors. One reason for the existence of customary adoption as a strategy against population control lies in the concealment and protection by village cadres. Individual experiences and family relationships in customary adoption are also affected by the way village cadres implement the policy. This is reflected in the relationship between village cadres and families in the customary adoption triangle. The nuances of this influence are evident in my comparison of the families in customary adoption that I encountered in Meng and Yang villages.

In Meng village, whether in an adoptive or birth family, hiding from inspections by the family planning office was a part of every adoptee's childhood. For adoptees, especially female ones, their birth did violate the 1.5-child policy in rural areas. Since their biological parents need to give birth to a boy, they have to be hidden from the law at birth. This experience is a part of their memories and is still recalled with sadness:

Since I lived with [my maternal] grandparents without a *hukou* registration, in case that family planning officials came to check, I had to hide occasionally. In the farmland, in the haystack, in the barn, in the alley, or under the bed… Almost any place a person could hide, I hid. Every time I came out, I would look like a kitten that has gone hungry for days. (Huanping, IN180511)

117

However, this experience appears to be less common for adoptees in later periods:

I avoided family planning inspection at my [maternal] aunt's home. I remember I often hid in the wheat-thrashing floor in my young age. When I was older, I went out to play to hide. After I was taken back by my birth family, I hid at home. If staff from the family planning office came to check, my parents locked the door outside, and I hid in the house. There was one time I hid in the field when I was in elementary school. Afterwards, this experience just disappeared. After my father registered a *hukou* for me, I didn't hide much. Besides, family planning inspections in recent years have not been as strict. (Xiuying, IN180903)

In contrast, Wanqing in Yang village seemed to have almost no experience in hiding from family planning inspections. The most important reason is that her great-grandfather was the Village Head and later her father also worked on the Village Committee. Wanqing was sent to her grandmother's home for foster care on the second day of her birth. She was originally the first child of her parents, which was legal. However, due to the small birth gap of the second child and the family's patrilineal values, Wanqing's parents asked her grandmother to raise her so they could have a son:

I don't remember escaping family planning. At that time, my great-grandfather was the Village Head, and the Village Committee also turned a blind eye. My parents used their personal connections to settle my *hukou* through treats and dinners. With the help of the Village Committee, my parents were approved to have a second child. At that time, village cadres did not make trouble for my family. So, I was picked up by my parents every week and my parents often visited my grandmother's home to look after me. (Wanqing, IN170826)

I worked in the Village Committee for many years, so it is easier to do what I do in the village, and easier to coordinate with other village cadres. Our village is the town government's residence, so I often have dinner and drinks with the family planning office staff, and we have a good relationship. Everyone knew about my daughters, but they didn't mention it. After all, in rural areas, the relationship between relatives and neighbors in an acquaintance society was still emphasized. Our *hukou* was easy to resolve, but for other families, it wasn't so easy. They have to spend money and seek connections for help. (Wanqing's father, IN180415)

Wanqing's father was correct in pointing out that attaining a hukou costs money for most families. According to Yage's Aunt, around 1993, providing 900 *yuan* to village cadres could settle a household registration. I did not have a *hukou* until 1997. It costed 500 or 600 *yuan* to settle my household registration, plus a cost of dinner for

less than 1,000 *yuan*. In 2006, the family with illegal birth for the first child needed to pay 1,000 *yuan* to the town family planning office, 2,000 *yuan* for the second child, 3,000 *yuan* for the third child to settle the *hukou*. In Xiuying's case, her parents spent a total of 4500 *yuan* to settle the *hukou* of her (second child) and her younger brother (third child) together.

Apart from people like Wanqing's parents, who had the right relationships to settle the *hukou* for their adopted children; there were also families who took advantage of policy loopholes to place adoptees' *hukou* with their adopters. Most adopters were lonely elderly people without children. For example, Qichen had his registered permanent residence attached to his childless grandmother. After his identity was legalized, he did not have to avoid family planning authorities.

For biological parents, it was tricky to obtain legalized status for their hidden children while acquiring the right to give birth again. In general, village cadres did not take risks assisting families to solve their issues unless they were well connected. Avoiding family planning inspection was only a feasible strategy for families in customary adoption because of the help of village cadres' advanced notice and villagers' colluding to conceal. To some extent, it is a rational and passive struggle, because it enables villagers to avoid conflict with county-level and township family planning departments while also allowing them to produce more children.

In sum, facing formal institutions and informal norms, the social network between village cadres and villagers solidified the principle of reciprocity and softened the rigidity of the family planning policy. However, due to the different roles that village cadres play, the family planning policy fell differently on different families.

Customary Adoption Practices in Reward Systems for Reporting

Due to the large amount of misrepresentation, misdescription, or non-disclosure in practice, local governments realized the need to establish a reward system for reporting to encourage villagers to report illegal childbirth. This reward system increased the risk of cooperation between village cadres and villagers and required any cooperation to be even more secretive to avoid inspection. Now, the grievances between villagers and other villagers as well as village cadres in their private spheres had an impact on a country's population governance. So, why and how did villagers expose customary adoptions to village and local governments? And what impact did these reports have on customary adoption practices? We will tackle these questions here.

In 1989, then-Premier Li Peng pointed out in the Government Work Report at the Second Session of the Seventh National People's Congress, "The total population of mainland China is about to reach 1.1 billion, and it is now at the peak of birth, so it

is impossible to relax the birth control measures."[32] To strictly execute the policy, the provincial family planning commission put forward the *Opinions on the Implementation of Family Planning Government Affairs and the Establishment of Reward System for Reporting*. Family planning departments and grassroots units at all levels were to set up reporting boxes and telephone numbers to encourage people to actively report through oral communication, telephone, written note, and petition.

In Jiangli, the local government implemented the reward system for reports. This system encouraged all citizens to report married women in childbearing age who violated the family planning policy to minimize unplanned pregnancies and births. The informants needed to provide accurate information and addresses of the unplanned pregnant person. Once the report was verified, the reporter would receive RMB1,000. In addition, the local government of Jiangli implemented a reward system against local cadres in 1996. This initiative was to strengthen the discipline, ensure the quality of investigations, and prevent falsification. Any violation could be reported, such as village cadres who concealed a new-born baby and collected a fee in private; investigators receiving bribes and accepting dinner invitations; persons under scrutiny sending souvenirs to investigators to curry favor; and investigators falsifying, covering up, and disclosing survey results.

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[32] For more details, see http://www.gov.cn/test/2006-02/16/content_200875.htm

During fieldwork, I found reporting materials from various towns and villages in the HFPB archives, spanning the years from 1994 to 2000. These archives included detailed official investigations and related penalties in relation to customary adoption under the 1.5-child policy. The report showed customary adoption being mainly achieved in two ways: either by adopting a child from a stranger's family, or by fostering a child with relatives or friends. As studies have found, in customary adoption, the number of female adoptees is more than males by about 2 to 1 (260 females over 107 males). Furthermore, these files vividly demonstrate how hidden girls or unreported female infants can be a part of the missing girls (Y. Shi & Kennedy, 2016). For example, some abandoned girls were declared dead, but they were actually hidden by relatives illegally. They did not have a *hukou* registration until they were discovered or had a younger brother in their birth family.

While revealing how ordinary villagers informally adopted and abandoned children, these reports also described how village cadres and party members took advantage of their positions to shield others from the 1.5-child policy. In practice, once they receive a report, the HFPB in Jiangli would ask the township level department to verify; in rare situations, the county office went to the village to investigate the case. If the case was confirmed, financial penalties ranging from RMB1,000 to RMB10,000 would be imposed on the birth family;[33] the unused

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[33] According to local regulations, the fees were collected based on the per capita income of rural-urban

second birth permit would be confiscated; and one of the married couples would be sterilized. After economic punishment, children without a registered *hukou* could be registered legally. If one family member is a Communist Party member, they could be placed back in probation, discharged from the party, or be dismissed from public employment. In this instance, village cadres may use their social connections to cover up the reported facts.

Villagers usually do not report illegal childbirth in their own village without thought since they are bound by the reciprocal ethics of the acquaintance society:

We have a big and traditional family. My parents wanted children and grandchildren. Otherwise, I won't put Wanqing in her grandmother's home. Although she was brought up by her grandmother, we went there to look after her. It was not a big deal when there were so many cases like us. If there were no enemies in the village, no one would report the situation. We also needed to handle all relationships well. If families got reported on, they would be fined afterwards, and had litigation issues. That was nothing to us. (Wanqing's father, IN180415)

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residents and the different types of illegal births. There are various situations in different historical periods, and there are also differences between rural and urban areas. According to my empirical data, in rural areas, the fine for undocumented childbirth in 1993 was 6,000 yuan, and in 2007, the fine was 8,000 yuan for one child. In 2016, the fine for having a second child exceeded 20,000. In 2018, when I was in the field site, it was two-child policy, and the fees were rarely collected; this condition lasted until the social maintenance fees were formally abolished in July 2021 by the central government.

Whether a family in customary adoption got reported on was tied to whether they had personal grievances in the village, in addition to being implicated when villagers targeted village cadres:

At that time, our next-door neighbors were looking for me because our family was rich in the village, and they were jealous and couldn't stand it. The village had given our family a piece of land, which they were particularly keen on, and wanted it for themselves. So, they wanted to bring family planning officials to punish our family. As soon as my mother heard someone coming, she would put me in the closet, hide me somewhere, or lock the door. Every time I went home, they would call on local officials to catch me. After I went to elementary school, I wasn't allowed to go home for fear of being reported. (Biyao, IN180323; IN180803)

Biyao got reported on once when she was about one year old. However, at the time, a neighbor in our village helped me and led the family planning officials away. She happened to hold her own child with a legal *hukou* and pretended to escape. When the family planning officials saw her running in fear with a baby, they went after her. We also had time to hide my child. But later, I was afraid that people would report her again, so I didn't dare to let Biyao return frequently. She came back secretly every time. (Biyao's mother, IN180902)

When a birth family doing customary adoption was reported, it had an immediate impact on the communication between adoptees and their biological parents. The fear of being reported again reduced the frequency of their interactions, or even prevented them from visiting each other for several years. The impact on my family was clear.

In the spring of 1998, the Provincial Family Planning Commission spent a year organizing and carrying out *Four Checks, Four Implementations* and *Five Checks and Five Visits* activities that focused on cleaning up concealed and underreported births from previous years. With self-reporting, reporting with rewards, selective examination and other methods, 219,953 children were found unregistered between 1990 to 1998, and 22,000 children were proved to have fake litigation, fake certificate, fake disabilities, or fake deaths where there was customary adoption (S. Huang, 2009, p. 209). It was because of this cleanup and inspection campaign that I, an 8-year-old girl, fake dead baby, was reported by a villager in the village where my original family was located. My biological father once said that the reporter had no personal grievance with them, it was just because of the RMB500 reward for a successful report.

The reward system added unannounced checks to routine ones, which increased the difficulty of hiding and increased the risk of being caught for adopted children. I clearly remembered that I was woken up in the middle of the night to hide, when the neighbors and uncles all helped us. However, in the end, because of the sudden

occurrence, I was found out by local officials after only hiding in a corner. Even though I already had a *hukou* at the time and the reported information was not inaccurate, the case had already developed. Both birth and adoptive families spent money separately and made connections with the staff of the family planning office. After that, I was able to continue studying and living with my adoptive family, while my biological mother was not punished even after being caught. Since the report, my biological parents rarely visited me and did not allow me to return to my birth home for a long time. When we met again, there was nothing to say and no close communication. Later, according to my biological father, it was because a letter of assurance was written at that time and a dozen neighbors were required to sign the guarantee that there was no second child before a birth certificate given. If I was found out and reported again, my parents' birth certificate would be confiscated, and they would not be allowed to give birth. From this point of view, in that era, even having a legal status did not guarantee a secure life for adoptees and their families.

Conclusion

The practice of population governance in China encompassed both "state governance" in the Weberian sense and "governmentality" in Foucauldian theory. This control mechanism is both repressive and bureaucratic as well as technical and strategic. It not only existed in the governance of grassroots societies, but also in Chinese factories (Siu, 2013). On one hand, the Central Government, through

bureaucracy, assigned population governance objectives to grassroots governments, where grassroots cadres implemented them. On the other hand, a large number of governance techniques related to reproduction was used, such as stipulating the age of marriage, number of children in a family, and time of female physical examination, in order to achieve state control over population quantity and over individual lives. According to system design expectations, grassroots cadres were carriers of state power and practitioners of state policies, or at least in between state power and reproductive subjects. In practice, however, grassroots cadres often become a key element in softening state power; often collaborating with villagers to adjust the fertility policy.

Although customary adoption resists the country's tough population policy, I found that grassroots government did not actively control and pay much attention to this phenomenon. This provided a breeding ground for customary adoption in rural areas. The contingency strategy adopted by grassroots cadres (mainly township and village cadres) in mediating the needs of state and society forced the state to compromise and loosen restrictions (Greenhalgh, 1993). For example, under the strong local preference to have sons, the selective implementation of the family planning policy by grassroots cadres led to the introduction of the 1.5-child policy in rural areas. However, the 1.5-child policy, in turn, disguisedly reinforced villagers' preference for male children, resulting in a variety of strategic actions on girls.

Village cadres played an irreplaceable role in customary adoption practiced in villages. On one hand, the resources and power possessed by village cadres conformed to reciprocal ethics in the moral economy and provided informal social protection for villagers in times of crisis. At the same time, with the reduction of fiscal revenue and autonomy, the material incentives for village cadres to carry out policy were limited. This meant that an important source of loyalty for village cadres to higher-level government was weakened (J. Wang, 2012), leading village cadres to act on their own interests when implementing higher-level policies. On the other hand, the relationship between village cadres and villagers and between villagers and villagers implied the logic of the "rational peasant." There is envy, friction and conflict in the village, so a reward system for reporting can be effectively used as a governing tool (Y. Guo, 2002).

In the process of policy practice, the informal interpersonal network of grassroots cadres was an important factor affecting the exercise of power. Village cadres were deeply influenced by village culture in the society of acquaintances and had their ways to interact with villagers. When higher-level policies representing the will of the state encounter roadblocks, village cadres often leaned on their social means and local resources to alleviate conflict. As a result, the implementation of policy conformed to the daily lives of local people to some extent.

For instance, in customary adoption practice, village cadres provided shelter for villagers based on their relations, in order to satisfy villagers' desire to bear children while avoiding conflict with national policies. Thus, even in the 1980s and 1990s when the family planning policy was strictly enforced, customary adoption did not disappear, but instead re-emerged as a resistance strategy. This also showed that, due to the rejection of policy by local society and the low commitment of grassroots cadres in implementing those policies, the social breakthroughs brought about by a new national policy in rural areas were rather diminished. The family planning policy was a special national policy with its own enforcement mechanisms, which made it far more enforced than other policies. Still, traditional fertility culture was deeply ingrained, so villagers, often in conjunction with village cadres, took advantage of informal relations and local resources to weaken state power in the process of policy practice.

In an essay on the "localization for Chinese sociology," F. Zhou (2018, pp. 52-53) argued that,

It is difficult to find a "society" composed of civil society and public spheres in the Western sense in China. But this does not mean that a political and social sphere different from the "state" does not exist in China. This sphere is composed of actors connected by relations. Such a "*guanxi* society" is not a field in

opposition to the state, but a "society" that is ubiquitous and can also be seen in government organizations and actions.

This analysis is enlightening. China's "*guanxi* society" is indeed diffuse and extended, to a point where even government organizations that are generally regarded as highly formal and rational, are embedded within it. Therefore, the impression of the authoritarian state firmly controlling its populace is oversimplified. The enforcement of policy is not a one-way process that is carried out by state on society. The implementation of specific policies still depends on policy executors to be viable. As policy executors, local cadres are not only dual agents of the state and society, but also actors with their own ideas, emotions, and interests. Although the country enacted technological governance and used task targets and assessment indicators to control the behavior of grassroots cadres, there will still be informal means for local cadres to fulfill their tasks, such as through facilitation and relations (Yun Peng et al., 2020).

In the village, the differentiated policy practices of families involved in customary adoption is due to differing relations between village cadres and families. As for how interactions between and within the two families affect and shape different forms of customary adoption, the next chapter focuses on this issue.

Chapter 5: Family Interactions, Daily Care and Dynamic Relations in Customary Adoption Practice

This chapter looks at the family level in practice. The focus is on the interaction and relationship between the two families and between the families and adoptees in customary adoption triangle. During my fieldwork, I interviewed the informants, especially adoptees, about their relationship with the two families in adoption triangles. After each inquiry, I gathered some complex stories with unexpected scenario as well as all-too-common experiences. These answers also prompted me to understand family relations in adoption triangle from a more complex perspective. How did the families decide to adopt? How did the two families provide daily care to the adoptees during the adoption period? How did different kinds of care affect the relationships between adoptees and the two families? How and to what extent did the relationship between the two families undergo changes in daily interactions? What kind of experiences and stories are behind these changes? We will be addressing these questions in this chapter.

Research in western context has proved that the kinds and frequency of interactions have strong influences on family relations in adoption (Howell, 2009; Jones & Hackett, 2012; Leon, 2002). Relations between adoptees and birth and adoptive families are not static but are changeable and dynamic. For example, the sending of gifts on special occasions from birth parents may be regarded as an

expression of concern and thus reinforce the relations between adoptees and birth family (Jones & Hackett, 2012). However, at the same time, the frequent contact or mere openness between adoptees and birth parents may pose a threat to adopters and leads to an instability of family relations.

As pointed out by existing studies, the family relation is open, fluid in customary adoption arranged among relatives in rural China (Johnson, 2016b; W. Zhang, 2006a). Birth families have been in touch with adoptees and adoptive families, and adoptees were basically raised and supported by the two families. Although some adoptees returned their birth families, they still maintained an ongoing contact with their adoptive families.

In addition, intergenerational relationships have shifted from a traditional feedback model to an exchange model in contemporary China, which constitutes an important context to understand relations between adoptees and their parents. Under the feedback model, parents bring up children, and adult children provide financial support and life care for their elderly parents to repay their parents' nurturing (Fei, 1983). By contrast, the exchange model implies a lasting reciprocity and exchange of material resources between parents and children, rather than an obligation to raise the children. Without subsequent intergenerational mutual assistance, intergenerational relations will be weakened (J. Chen, 1998; Y. Guo, 2001). Intergenerational

relationships are weakened when children are simply raised without an exchange relationship of mutual assistance and reciprocity (Y. Wang, 2008).

Kinship Relations in Customary Adoption Practice

Apart from the protection of village cadres and tacit silence of villagers, the existence of kinship also creates favorable conditions for customary adoption. In an anthropological sense, "kinship usually refers to the descent group," which "can be unilineal (patri-or matrilineal) or cognatic/bilateral" (Eriksen, 2017, pp. 105-106). Western society is usually based on the principle of bilateral succession, while in rural Chinese society, kinship is biased towards the patrilineal line (Fei, 1981). However, this situation is also changing as relations by marriage are playing an increasingly important role in rural China (Yan, 2003). From the patrilineal perspective, although relations by marriage are not connected by blood, they have a "strong reciprocal connection" (Eriksen, 2017, p. 104). Based on the study of Xia Village, Xiao (2010, p. 6) noted that the implementation of the family planning policy was an important factor for the transition towards bilateral kinship. The mandatory policy makes the geographically distant matrilineal families the best place to hide a child. Among the adoptees I interviewed, except for one case (i.e., Qichen), all of them were fostered in families with in-laws.

In the view of local culture, relatives are all differentiated; connections with a paternal aunt and maternal uncle are usually regarded as closer and more long-lasting than with a maternal aunt. This traditional understanding of kinship relations naturally affects a villager's preference order in choosing their adoption family. In families with in-laws, the maternal grandmother's family is often given priority, the paternal aunt's family second, and the maternal aunt's family last. Throughout the fieldwork, I contacted 14 children who were fostered in relatives' homes. Among them, 11 children were fostered in their maternal grandmother's family, 2 were in their paternal aunt's family, and only 1 child (Yage) was fostered in her maternal aunt's family. As the maternal aunt of Yage mentioned,

If you don't have relatives to rely on, then no family is willing to help you raise the child. But if a stranger's family raises the child, don't expect to get the child back. You can only put the child in a relative's family to hide them from the family planning policy. (Yage's aunt, IN180323)

Although some girls, like Wanqing, Biyao, Yanan, as the first child in their family, were born legally according to the 1.5-child policy, they were still fostered in a relative's family. The reason is that there were regulations on the timespan of births, and some parents wanted to have a boy as early as possible. In conditions where the couple already had a girl and were not willing to abandon their second daughter, the second daughter often became the one to be fostered in a relative's family:

My parents once told me about the episode. When I was just born, my paternal grandmother contacted a stranger's family [for adoption]. She probably didn't want me anymore. Later, my father decided to send me to my maternal grandmother's house. At that time, the neighbors barely knew of my existence. I was sent to my maternal grandmother's house since the time I was born. (Feifei, IN180903)

In other cases where children were fostered by their maternal grandmothers, the maternal grandmothers usually lived relatively far away from the children's birth family. Unlike them, Xiuying was raised by her paternal aunt because her maternal grandmother lived in the same village as her biological parents.

My own situation is similar to that of Xiuying's. My maternal grandmother also lived in the same village as my biological parents, and I was fostered by my paternal aunt's family. My father recalled that he and my mom knew that I was a girl before I was born. Considering it was quite common to hide children in a relative's home at the time, they sent me to my paternal aunt's home, after which they could have a third child. Although there were distant relatives who wanted to adopt me formally, my father did not agree because he still planned to take me home someday. My paternal aunt had a son and a daughter. My paternal aunt and uncle-in-law also initially felt like helping my parents raise me for a few years. They already had children, so they

had no intention of keeping me. In their view, I would return to my family when I had a younger brother.

Yage's experience was more complicated. Her maternal grandmother was too old to raise her, and her paternal aunt refused to take care of her. Finally, she was sent to her maternal aunt's family. As Yage's maternal aunt shared, Yage's parents had no other choice and asked her for help to raise Yage.

This forced choice affected the original kinship in the future. Compared to the maternal aunt, paternal aunts had more importance attached to them by locals. However, for Yage, the closest person was her maternal aunt:

Because her paternal aunt refused to raise the girl, Yage's parents did not have any connection to the paternal aunt's family anymore. Yage's cousin lived next to my son's house, but Yage never visited her cousin. She said, "I do not even recognize who they are." As the old saying goes, "Relations with a paternal aunt's family can last for generations, but a person will be cut off from the maternal aunt's family when the aunt dies." (姑表亲辈辈亲, 姨表亲不算亲, 死了姨娘断了亲) Yet, Yage is close to her maternal aunt. (Yage's aunt, IN180323)

For ordinary villagers, the concept of state and society were too grand and remote, and family interests are often placed above individual values. As Li (1993)

explains, "Chinese people struggle to have children usually for the sake of the whole family's interest" (p.123). Relations by marriage expand the boundary of the strictly defined family (X. Fei, 1946) and women often have to fulfill their obligations in continuing the patrilineal bloodline.

Family Interactions in the Adoption Triangle

Reciprocal Support During the Adoption Period

When the child was being adopted into a relative's family, the two families generally maintained good relations. The adoptive families usually had more moral capital because they were helping the birth families to raise their children temporarily, so the latter could achieve their ideal reproductive goals. As an act of gratitude, the birth families generally provided financial support for the child's care as well as other types of assistance for the adoptive families.

This mutual assistance can be seen in Yage and Biyao's cases. During Yage's foster care in her aunt home, apart from daily expenses for raising her, Yage's parents provided a temporary job for her uncle. This job allowed her uncle to earn RMB1,000 in forty days. With this help from Yage's parents, her aunt family were able to improve their living conditions. Also, Yage's father could help her aunt do farming work at the harvest time. For Biyao's birth family, they must be responsible for

Biyao's living expenses. Moreover, they felt that this kind of favor from adoptive family cannot be totally repaid no matter how much time has passed.

The frequent interactions and exchanges between the two families reminded the children to the fact that they were just living in another family temporarily and they clearly understood the original parent-child relationship. In other words, interactions between the two families not only affected the relationship between the two families, they also shaped the relationship between the children and those families. For example, Feifei's parents would often pick up Feifei and her grandmother to live with them, so that Feifei felt no obvious separation. In Biyao's view, the two families in adoption triangle are harmonious relatives. When important events occur, the two families also participate and support each other. These interactions make Biyao have similar attitudes towards both families and liked them both.

Family Interactions after the Adoption Period

In general, customary adoptees will get their legal household registration only after the birth of sons in their original families. After that time, they will be taken back to their birth families and live out a normal life. Due to the existing kinship between the two families, adoptees commonly maintain contact with their adoptive families even after they return to their birth families. During the post-adoption period, there may be subtle changes in interactions between the two families.

Under normal circumstances, the birth families will continue to have a relationship with the adoption families. Both families regard customary adoption as comprehensible or something that could even be taken for granted. When the relationship between the adoptee and the adoptive family is too intimate though, the latter may persuade the adoptee to be closer to their birth families. As Wanqing's maternal grandma said,

I often told Wanqing about her home. I told her, my child, you have seven paternal grandpas at home. That is your home for real. You cannot regard my place as your home. I always try to persuade her, don't come to my place first, you should go to find your parents; you should go to your home first. Otherwise, your parents will feel frustrated. (Wanqing's maternal grandmother, IN180906)

In many of other adoption triangles, the two families will continue having frequent interactions even after adoptees have returned to their birth families, making the relationship between the families even more close-knit. After Qichen returned to his birth family, his parents would often visit his grandma and help grandma buy food and daily necessities. They also celebrated festivals together with Qichen's grandma every year. Biyao's mother is also grateful to Grandma Li for raising Biyao and credits Grandma Li's education for Biyao's admission to university. Biyao's mother often reminded Biyao to have same responsibilities on both families. As

acknowledged by Biyao's mother, because of Biyao, the two families were much closer based on the originally relative relations.

Of course, in the post-adoption period, the relationship between the two families may also be shaped in other directions because of the adoptee's emotional tendencies. The pre-existing kinship may be disrupted after the end of the adoption. For example, according to Yage's memories, her parents were reluctant to let her go too close to her aunt's house after returning home because they provided the living expenses and other material compensation to the aunt's family during the adoption period, so they regarded it as a utilitarian exchange. Yage believed that her parents were worried that the excessive closeness between Yage and her aunt's family will alienate her relationship with the birth family. This is why Yage feels her parents are very selfish and she tends to handle relationships with the two families based on her emotions. Yage's relationships with the two families affected the interactions between the families and made the kinship less close. As Yage shared,

After I returned to my birth family, I could not contact my maternal aunt's family in the beginning. I occasionally used a fixed-line telephone to make calls and sometimes I did not dare to call. At that time, I secretly thought that I must live with my aunt when I grow up. After I went to middle school, I voluntarily went back to my aunt's home during vacations. Now when I go to my aunt's

home, my parents are not always happy. However, I just ignore their feelings.
(Yage, IN180326)

Unlike most customary adoptees, I did not return to my birth family when I was supposed to receive compulsory education. When my birth parents planned to take me home, I was already entering middle school and no longer willing to leave the family and village that I became accustomed to. My parents believed it was because my paternal aunt kept indulging me. However, from my perspective, my paternal aunt always knew I was going to leave her family and only showed their reluctance to leave me after I strongly expressed that I did not want to return to my birth family anymore.

The debates between the families over whether I should return to my birth family worsened the pre-existing relationship between them. For me, the parenting was more important than the blood relationship. The conflicting relationship between the families makes me emotionally inclined to be with my adoptive family, which worsened the relationship between the families. This led to disagreements between my two families at important points of my life. The disagreements were at their worst when I was getting married and almost ended with me severing my ties with my birth family.

In short, customary adoption reshapes the existing kinship between the two families in the adoption triangle in some way. Based on family interactions surrounding the adoptees, three types of relationships between the two families were formed: "staying the same," "strengthening kinship," or "worsening kinship." It can be seen that the relationship between families is different from that within families, and it no longer starts and ends with intimate relationships (F. Wu, 2010). Two families can continue to interact with each other, or they can cut contact. However, due to the fostered child as a bridge, even if two families fall out, there is still a relationship between the child and the two families. How adoptees interact with the families also influence relations between the two families.

Daily Care in Customary Adoption Triangles

In customary adoption triangles, the birth family does not abandon the child but puts the child in an adoptive family to avoid policy repercussions. Therefore, the biological parents still bear all the living and education expenses in the adoption period. This leads to a form of cooperative parenting where the birth family provides financial support (*da qian* 搭钱) while the adoptive family invests time and provides emotional and daily care (*da gong fu* 搭功夫). Of course, these two parenting styles are not separated and dispersed between the two families, but they are complementary. The functions of the two families may vary in this cooperation. Different types of cooperative caring exert influence on adoptees in varied ways; and adoptees also have

143

corresponding economic and emotional feedback. In addition, the dynamics between *da qian* (搭 钱) and *da gong fu* （搭 功 夫） also contribute to the fluidity of intergenerational relationships within a family and between the two families.

Daqian: Economic Interactions in Family Life

In customary adoption triangles, both two families and the adoptee admit the importance of financial support from birth families. This economic interaction not only guarantees the basic connection between the adoptee and birth family, but also shapes the closeness of their connection. As Wanqing explains,

Basically, all the expenses since I was born have been paid by my parents. My parents have always satisfied me as long as I requested it. For example, they respected my decision when I wanted to study in a middle school in the city and when I went abroad later. They spent money to support me. However, from my perspective, I think they should treat me well. They owe me a lot, so they invested in me with all their efforts. Perhaps they also wanted to make it up. My paternal grandma once told me, she paid all the money for my milk powder. I replied directly, if you did not give me milk powder money at that time, I would not call you grandma now. (Wanqing, IN180721)

Although most customary adoptees take it for granted that their birth parents would support them financially, the financial support compensates the lack of parental accompaniment to a certain extent. It reminds them that they were not cut off from their birth families. When Yage was young, she would not think about whoever gave more money being good. She would think that whoever accompanied her was well. Even though, Biyao could not deny that the money she needed was given by her birth parents. Unlike Yage, Biyao would think that her mother loved her, because her mother bought her a gift about 200 more expensive than her younger sister's gift.

Compared with the feedback model in general intergenerational relationship, the relationship between birth parents and adoptees in adoption triangles are more of an exchange model. The interaction between them follows an exchange principle despite it being generally gendered since parents regard financial support and care for male offspring as an obligation while financial support for female offspring is a financial investment to obtain future economic returns. This gendered difference can be seen from stories of Decheng, Wanqing and Yage:

The simplest and most obvious point is that, when I was a child, my parents gave my two sisters RMB100 each as red packet in Chinese New Year and gave me RMB200.This is not to mention the fact that they now spend all their savings to help me buy a house after I have grown up. The most important thing is that they

will protect the boy as much as they can and give all their resources to the boy.

(Decheng, IN180710)

Wanqing's mother also mentioned that the expenses for Wanqing's study abroad almost equal the price of her younger brother's house. She often asked Wanqing when she could earn back the money for her education. For Yage, whenever she needed money, such as tuition fees and buying a laptop, her parents would be reluctant or refuse. In contrast, it was easier for her younger brother to ask for money.

Facing such economic interactions, customary adoptees, especially female ones, usually repaid their birth families with material exchange. As I mentioned above, in the absence of emotional bonds at an early age, financial support from birth parents usually became the foundation for adoptees to interact with birth families when children grew up and become financially capable. In the view of some adoptees, the economic interaction with their birth families was without the meaning of emotion and responsibility. They simply repaid their parents for their past financial support.

By contrast, customary adoptees often feel grateful for their adoptive families' economic support and give more economic resources to their adoptive families when they have income. Customary adoptees also use financial return to show their gratitude for the adoptive family's energy and care:

[Yage] has not forgotten me. She gives me money and buys many things for me in festivals. She also bought me clothes. Since she started working, she has given me RMB3,000 to 4,000. Last time, she gave me RMB600 and her uncle-in-law RMB600. Over the Mid-autumn Festival, she gave RMB1,000 to both her cousin's families and celebrated the festival with us. Another time she put the money in the cupboard and called me when she left… She often left money secretly because I would not accept it if she gave it to me directly. Of course, her elder cousin also gave her money when she was in high school… Her mother did not know that Yage gave me money, I am guessing. (Yage's maternal aunt, IN180323)

Wanqing's grandmother also proudly recalled to me that Wanqing contacted her almost every day and often gave or transfer money to her. Through these behaviors, Wanqing's grandmother felt that she did not raise and love Wanqing in vain.

In general, adoptive families may spend the money again on the adoptees after receiving financial returns, such as using the money as expenses and gifts when the adoptees get married and have children. During these interactions, a benign family relationship is gradually formed.

Dagongfu: Emotional Interactions in Family Life

In individualization, interests and emotions directly related to individuals become increasingly important in family life, and emotional communication and intimacy in intergenerational relationships become more prominent (Shen, 2019; Yan, 2011). In customary adoption triangles, in addition to the measurable and repayable money, adoptees normally value the intangible efforts and emotions of the families more in the fostering process. In general, adoptive families often placed more effort into raising adoptees than they do in caring for their own children, as there is more responsibility involved in caring for other people's children. The children's relatives still have vivid memories of this even after many years:

Biyao was three years old when she came to our home… We should be responsible for her as long as we raise her. Since she entered elementary school, I have prepared water for her and carried the water with her every day. Since she came to our home, I celebrated her birthday every year. She never celebrated her birthday in her own family. In addition to her daily life, I always cared about her studies. When she reached the fifth and sixth grades, I told her that my education was limited and she had to study hard on her own. She rarely ran out to play. We dare not let her go out. After all, she was not our child.   (Biyao's grandmother, IN180321)

Most caregivers struggled to care for newborn adoptees while to maintain the normal family life, such as looking after their own (grand-)children, doing housework, and doing farm work. The time and energy invested in raising the children constituted the main reason for adoptees' gratitude and closeness to their adoptive families. As Biyao's mother shared in the interview, "The emotional bond with an adoptive mother is stronger than with a birth mother. If a child always sees the same person, she will become close with this person." (IN180902) This closeness may make adoptees identify with their adoptive families and accept the parental role played by their foster relatives. At the same time, some adoptees rarely saw their birth parents and returned to their birth families in their childhoods. They developed a strong attachment to their adoptive families regarded as their own families. Adoptees would be more likely to express their emotions directly and act like a spoiled child in front of their adoptive parents than did in front of their birth parents. When the children were temporarily fostered at their maternal grandmother's home, the relationship between the children and the maternal grandmother's family was especially close, because their original relationship would have been close in the local area. Under this condition, the adoptive family plays an especially important role in the growth of the children, and the culturally close connection between grandchildren and grandparents was largely strengthened through the practice of adoption:

Although there are structural reasons for the phenomenon of customary adoption, interactions between the two families and adoptees also contribute to the dynamic relationships in the triangle. For example, the lack of accompaniment from birth parents may make for a weak emotional bond between adoptees and birth families. This alienated relationship may not be easily improved even after the children return to their birth families. What complicates this situation is the adoptees' relationships with other members of the birth family.

Wanqing's father has always noted the close relationship between Wanqing and her maternal grandmother's family. However, another factor contributing to this situation is Wanqing's poor relationship with her paternal grandmother. Wanqing's father is aware of this but feels that he can do nothing to change this. In general, Wanqing's father just leans towards his mother instead of his daughter when there were conflicts, which disappointed Wanqing and made her more emotionally detached from her parents. Wanqing's relationship with her paternal grandmother also worsened when conflicts were not handled well. As Wanqing shares,

I never had a good relationship with my paternal grandparents since I was a child, especially with my grandma. My grandma is a very arbitrary person, and her patriarchal thoughts are very serious. Grandma is the kind of person who doesn't want to care for me after sending me out. When my dad planned to take me back from my maternal grandma's house, my paternal grandma was reluctant to let me

150

return. For example, when I returned home, if my grandma had something delicious, she hid it from me. (Wanqing, IN180810)

Until now, the relationship between Wanqing and her paternal grandmother is very tense. Wanqing's father believed it was due to the impoliteness of Wanqing and ignored her previous experiences. In Wanqing's view, her father did not realize that he usually took the side of her grandmother and he never understood how his mother hurt Wanqing. The adults only attributed this to the pressure of the family planning policy. Wanqing's parents tried their best to create a normal family life and to fulfill their responsibilities for Wanqing, such as letting Wanqing celebrate her birthday and Chinese New Year in their home and supporting her for education. Even though, Wanqing still could not integrate into the family emotionally. When Wanqing looked back now, there were often such pictures after she returned to my birth family: her parents and younger brother were talking and laughing, while she hid in the corner and watched them quietly or hid in the room to do her own things. She felt very estranged from them. For Wanqing, her parents did not want to involve her too much in family issues and she did not know how to participate in their lives.

Dynamics in Daqian and Dagongfu

Growing up, the relationship between adoptees and the two families is not fixed. As was initially stated in this section, financial support and emotional comfort can

overlap in the interactions between adoptees and the two families. Regardless of whether it is in the adoptive family or birth family, any change in these two dimensions could break the balance between adoptees and their families, thereby contributing to dynamic and uncertain family relationships.

In Yage's case, after realizing the financial contribution from her birth family, Yage showed appreciation to her parents and admitted the importance of a birth family. However, the way her parents provided economic support decreased her gratitude and made her emotionally alienated from her birth family:

As a child, I spent some money on cram school and such, and my mother would write it down in her notebook. She only recorded expenses on me, and I saw it one day. I realized that maternal love was not selfless. The so-called maternal love was based on longing for my ability to return it. Later, when I was in college, my family basically only gave me tuition fees and I paid for my own living expenses. My mother once gave me money, I transferred the money back, and she got angry. My thought was that if I took her money, I had to listen to her nagging; if I didn't use her money, she had no right to nag me. She has treated me better sometimes. and believed that those things could offset other negative details. My mother keeps saying that I'm not close with her and I don't deny it. (Yage, IN180326)

In contrast, in Biyao's case, there was an obvious change in the relationship between Biyao and her two families. Initially, she was highly dependent on her adoptive family and unwilling to return home. She often quarreled with her parents when she went back and did not want to meet her parents. However, after the birth of new children in the adoptive family, Biyao received less care from that family and gradually became closer to her birth parents. She was still grateful to her adoptive family and strives to balance her relationship with the two families:

After the baby's birth, only my grandma cared for me while my aunt and uncle-in-law's attitudes towards me changed. At that time, my uncle-in-law often took my cousin sister out for dinner and gave me the leftovers to eat. I was curious at that time. Why didn't he take me out to eat and only give me the leftovers? Later they didn't care about me very much and I rarely talked to them. I talked to my grandma about everything. Somebody asked me, you have the closest relationship with your paternal aunt, yet why do you have the best relationship with your uncle-in-law's mother? I didn't know how to answer. After I was in junior high school, I sometimes went to my aunt's house, but I felt that my uncle-in-law disliked me going to their house. He once said, "If you live here, where does your younger brother and sister live?" At that time, I thought, "Forget it, I'll stay in school." (Biyao, IN180803)

In cases where the children were temporarily fostered in their maternal grandparents' home, the death of a grandfather or grandmother usually marked an important transition in the children's relation with their birth families. Meimei had a good relationship with her maternal parents' family, including her uncle's family. However, since her grandparents passed away, she had less contact with her uncle's family. Now she often contacts her mother by WeChat video and the relationship between them has been improved.

Similarly, Wanqing's maternal grandma was also worried about Wanqing's relationship with her birth family, especially what would happen after her death. Because of this worry, she kept convincing Wanqing to learn to play the role of a daughter in her birth family, which does have an influence on Wanqing's behavior.

From the cases above, the relationships between adoptees and their families depend on the way the two families treat them. With different types of interactions in economic and emotional regards, the relationships between the children and the two families can be dynamic and changeable.

Conclusion

In practice, customary adoption occurs in the context of kinship relationships within the traditional differentiated modes of association. In the adoption triangle, the

interactions between the two families influence the relations between adoptees and families while the interactions between adoptees and the families also shape the relations between the families. Relationships in the adoption triangle are more than mere blood relations or kinship relations, but are relations formed based on economic and emotional exchanges. In these conditions, previous kinship can be constantly reconstructed. Kinship is no longer a structural force for the individual, but a choice from needs, including the emotional need to continue the relationship with the previous generation. Thus, in a way, kinship is not becoming less important, but a resource that can be used as an alternative to relationships (Shen, 2019).

As previous research had found, economic and emotional interactions are complementary and mixed in family relationships: economic exchange can be regarded as an expression of care and responsibility; and material support an important way to establish and maintain intimate relationships (Xiaohui Zhong & Ho, 2014). Zelizer (1997) arued that people attach meanings to different relationships through different ways of giving money and the varied amounts of money given. In her view "in all social settings, intimate and impersonal alike, social ties and economic transactions mingle, as human beings perform relational work by matching their personal ties and economic activity." (Zelizer, 2005, p. 288) This means that economic and emotional spheres are not separated but connected and mixed in family

relations. The economic and emotional interactions between the families and adoptees in the adoption triangle shows this idea of "connected lives" fully.

In the context of intergenerational relations from a feedback model to an exchange model, adoptees also construct their attitudes towards their birth and adoptive families based on the care style they received. Whether in the birth or adoptive families, if parents do not treat the offspring well or do their duties, the offspring will decrease their obligations to their parents. However, adoptees usually have different standards on the care they obtain from adoptive and birth families. In adoptive families, economic support is seen as an additional favor for adoptees; while in birth families, the lack of emotional interaction often undermines intergenerational relations, even where economic support is given. Therefore, Intergenerational relationships are not exclusively tangible or measurable material exchanges, but are relationships of mutual emotional communication and psychological perception.

In summary, the determination of family boundaries and family relations in the customary adoption triangle is a dynamic and interactive process. Individuals in the triangle choose family members and the relationships they prefer based on economic and emotional interactions, which reflects a reconstruction of family from personal needs (Shen, 2019). In the next chapter, I will explore how individual experiences and cognitions affect family relationships in the adoption triangle.

Chapter 6: Adoptees' Identities, Experience of Ambivalence, and Individual Strategies

The preceding chapters have discussed the social environment and family conditions of adoptees, but their life experiences have not yet been discussed. Their voices and experiences are often ignored and buried. One of the major goals in this work is to uncover their unheard voices and buried memories and experiences through collecting and recording their life stories. Yage once asked, "I wonder how people who went through this live now?" This was also the initial motivation for my research. From the start, I wanted to know people with similar experiences, and wanted to hear their stories and their relations with their families. As a sociological researcher, I wanted to explore how they understood their experiences and what identities they have now; how this experience and identity affected the relationship between adoptees and their families; how adoptees responded to their conditions; what strategies they adopted to cope with problems brought by their adoption experience. This chapter is devoted to exploring these questions.

Sociological attention to the question of identity can be traced back to the symbolic interactionist's discussion of the self. For example, according to Mead, the so-called self is formed in a process of repeatedly "placing ourselves in socially constructed places" (J. Scott, 2014, p. 493). This view denies the existence of an essential self. Many sociologists share this idea and argue that there is no inherently

defined self-identity; instead, identity is always "socially bestowed, socially sustained and socially transformed" ((Berger, 1966, p. 116). This research also holds a social constructionist perspective of identity formation. In my research, I define identity as a sense of self related to a social role or social group, which includes both the subjective and objective dimensions. I argue that an individual's identity construction is greatly influenced by his/her life experience. One individual's life experience not only limits his/her perception of self-identity to a certain extent, but also constitutes the materials and resources for him/her to actively construct identity. Since family identity is an important part of self-identity, the formation process of self-identity also affects family relations.

In this study, adoptees' positive construction of self-identity is largely reflected in their everyday life strategies and resistance. In *Weapons of the Weak*, J. C. Scott (1985) found that peasants in Malaysia tried their best to get avoid the direct confrontations with authority, but they would use strategies like foot-dragging, desertion, pilfering, sabotage and arson to maintain their interest and show their resistance in daily life. Customary adoption practice is also a "weapon of the weak" by employed by Chinese families or villagers to weaken the coercive birth control (Y. Chen et al., 2015; Johnson, 2016a; W. Zhang, 2006a). However, during their growth process, adoptive children also resist against their fixed life and construct their identities. In the process of everyday resistance, adoptees actually made their own

choices, maintaining or strengthening the family relationships they valued more, while becoming the individuals who they wanted to be.

Adoptees' Structural Positions and Identities

The term "adoptee" implies a particular identity and experience. Although every individual who experiences customary adoption has different experiences and identities, they do face some similar situations. These situations are brought about by the institutional-cultural background that leads to customary adoption, which was discussed in Chapter 1. These structural elements not only lead to the emergence of customary adoption as a phenomenon, it also places adoptees in the peculiar and significant role connecting two families in the adoption triangle. The macro institutional-cultural structure and meso family conditions jointly shape the structural position and identity of adoptees, giving them similar life experiences.

One key purpose of customary adoption is to circumvent the family planning policy. Thus, in the early stages of adoption, adoptees usually have no household registration (*hukou*) and become so-called "black children" (*heihaizi*) or "hidden children." Without a legitimate identity, they cannot be recognized by normal state and community institutions. In addition to avoiding inspections from family planning administrators, adoptees often cannot receive formal primary education like their peers:

When I was at the age of going to school, I watched other kids go to school but I couldn't go to school without a *hukou*. Later, my maternal grandmother and uncle had no choice but to bribe the village official to get me a *hukou*. When I finally got a *hukou*, I was 7 years old and it was time for me to go to school. From then on, I felt like a different person and I was happy for many days. Even in my dreams I would say, "I can go to school now, I am not a 'black child' anymore." (Huanping, IN180511)

I used to be a black child as well because I did not have a *hukou* for 7 years. My adoptive parents got me into a kindergarten in the village for three years with their personal connections. At that time, my birth parents believed that I would return to the birth family when I attended primary school. However, I did not return to my birth family because my birth mother did not give birth to a son when I was seven. So, my adoptive parents registered my *hukou* in the household of a childless grandfather. Since then, my surname and family relationship have had legally nothing to do with my biological parents.

Similarly, Huanping was registered in the household of her maternal uncle and legally became her uncle's "daughter." She now has her maternal uncle's family name and even after Huanping returned to her birth family at age 10, when her maternal grandma passed away and her younger sister was born, her *hukou* still remained with her maternal uncle.

Being labelled as "black children" before they had a *hukou* is a shared experience among adoptees. Usually after adoptees having been hidden in the birth family's records for some years when they needed to enter society with a legal identity, adults in the family would obtain a legal, yet not "real," identity for them to go to elementary school. As such, adoptees often faced having to awkwardly explaining the difference between their legal parents and their "real" parents.

Adoptees are also similarly positioned within the adoption triangle: they usually experience two different families one after the other or at the same time, and face two pairs of "parents." Adoptees are often told that they are only temporarily fostered with the adoptive family and will return to their own family eventually. This dual identity, as a child of two families, brings about ambivalent feelings because their closest daily caregivers are not their birth parents, and they are not living in their "real home". Meanwhile, scarcely have they seen their unfamiliar parents when they are told to anticipate returning to their birth families:

I grew up in my maternal mother's house since I was born. After I could talk, I called my maternal grandpa, maternal grandma, and maternal uncle as my paternal grandpa, paternal grandma, and dad; but I knew this was not my own home. The neighbors and children all bullied me and laughed at me, calling me "wild girl," and "picked up baby." They also taunted me to go back to my own homes since this is not my home. (Huanping, IN170702)

161

Every time someone asked me, what the relationship between my grandma and me was; I found it difficult to explain. I thought in my mind, "she is my grandma, what else can the relationship be?" (Biyao, IN180803)

In most cases, adoptive parents still have adoptees calling them the titles of their proper kinship, such as "uncle" and "aunt," rather than "dad" and "mum." Adoptive parents are also clearly aware that they are temporarily helping to raise the child, rather than completely adopting the child. As Yage's maternal aunt recalled, Yage called her "mum" a few times, but she stopped her, as "her parents did not give her to us" (Yage's aunt, IN180323).

For me, my adoptive parents always believed I would return to my own home for elementary school. They kept telling me that they were my paternal aunt and uncle-in-law and where my parents lived. When neighbors asked me to call my aunt "mum," my aunt told them that I had my own parents and they were just aunt and uncle. However, when they led me to the market or met acquaintances in a relative's family, they would also admit I was their youngest child.

For adoptees, how to call family members in their adoptive families often became puzzling, which reflects their tentative identity in adoptive families. Young children usually found it especially difficult to explain their roles in the family they were living in, as they can only call the adults according to the titles of their previous

kinship. In a closely connected village, the identity of adoptees can hardly be kept as a secret, and the news is often a topic shared by neighbors. The discussion of neighbors continues to remind adoptees of their particular identity.

Another prominent time for adoptees' identity development is when they return to their birth families. At this moment, the fact that they belong to two different families is presented to the adoptees in a specific way. There is usually a process of adaptation for adoptees as they move from a familiar family to an unfamiliar, but blood-related, family. In the beginning when they first return to the birth family, children accustomed to another family environment are likely to experience a feeling of incompatibility. It usually takes time for them to integrate into their "new" family. For example, Wanqing grew up with her maternal grandparents and did not return to her birth family until she was seven. Her experience of unfamiliarity and cautiousness when she returned to her birth family is typical:

When I returned home at the age of seven, felt I was a little bit "redundant." I don't know how to describe my experience of elementary school. When I look back, the picture I think about is me having my head lowered every day, rarely talking at home, and not wanting to return after I left the house. I was very cautious. I felt alert even when I sat at the table eating. I considered which dish I should eat and which I shouldn't. (Wanqing, IN180810)

What added to Wanqing's frustration was her paternal grandmother's attitudes in the birth family. She felt that her paternal grandmother did not welcome her and did not treat her as a family member. Wanqing's grandma often told her, "You don't have our surname—what you have is your maternal grandparents' surname." (Wanqing, IN180810) Actually, Wanqing has the surname of her father. This also reminded her that she belonged to another family.

This feeling of being blood-related but emotionally unfamiliar, or vice versa, come from the dual marginal status of adoptees between the two families. This marginality is highlighted on many occasions in family life, such as family portraits, weddings, and funerals. One adoptee, Feifei, once told me that she was unhappy about her absence in the family portrait:

Our family has a photo album with photos of my father, mother, elder sister, and younger brother. When I was a child, because of something that happened, I put a cross in the photos of each of them because I was not in it. (Feifei, IN180903)

Another adoptee, Yanwan, was fostered by her maternal grandparents. She also had similar thoughts on family photos. As one of Yanwan's relatives recalled:

Yanwan's elder sister often played with my son and daughter, so they have photos together. Once, I sent the photos to the WeChat family group. Yanwan

was very uncomfortable when she saw it. She cried and asked where her childhood was. Yanwan might have been upset because her older sister was in the photos but not her. (Yanwan's paternal aunt, IN180415)

The marginal identity of adoptees is also noted in important family rituals, such as funerals and weddings. For example, I once attended the funeral of grandparents in my adoptive family; they were the parents of my uncle-in-law. Although I attended the funeral as their granddaughter, my name did not appear in the obituaries and tombstone. I also attended the funeral of my grandparents in my birth family, my name was not mentioned either because I had a different surname from them. My own identity in the two funerals was rather awkward.

This feeling of marginality was especially prominent in the "transition period" when the adoptees first returned to the birth families. With time, the marginality felt by adoptees in their birth families may be reduced, but the cost is adoptees having to let go of the home they were familiar with. The adoptive family may become a new space producing another form of marginality. Xiuying, growing up in her paternal aunt's family, experienced the marginality when she returned to her birth family, and then experienced similar feelings when she returned to her aunt's home again. She said,

When I first returned to my birth family, I wasn't used to it. I didn't feel close to my parents. Sometimes I didn't have much to say with them. I talked even less with people in the village because I barely knew them. At that time, I would go to my paternal aunt's house as long as I was on vacation. Since my cousin brother in the house got married, it has been not so convenient to visit my aunt's family. Now I barely visited there anymore that is, once a year. If my aunt doesn't come to pick me up, I won't go to her house. In the past, I thought that I was a outsider in my family, and now I think that I am even more superfluous at my aunt's house. (Xiuying, IN170703)

Adoptees' Experience of Ambivalence

Personal experience is a particularly important part in the formation of family relationships. It can even be said that all policy practices and family interactions have their meanings articulated only through the mediation of personal experience. Similar policy implementations and family interactions can lead to distinct personal experiences, and different personal experiences provide key elements in forming multiple family relationships. In adoption triangle, adoptees are in a key position. Their personal experiences not only are reflected in the status of the relationship with their families, but further shape the quality of those relationships. In this way, individuals actively participate in the construction of adoption memory, self-identity, and family relationships.

For adoptees in this study, regardless of whether they were in their adoptive family, birth family, reached adulthood, or even created their own families, they all experienced feelings of ambivalence. The concept of ambivalence has two parts: structural location and individual experience. Ambivalence mainly refers to a set of conflicting expectations, roles or identities faced by individuals. Accompanying this is a contradictory and ambiguous feeling and attitude (Connidis, 2015; Lüscher, 2011). In a state of ambivalence, an individual does not know which behaviors and attitudes are the most appropriate and worthy of encouragement, so confusion arises. At the same time, this state can also cause individuals to be doubtful of their choices, and further increase the possibility of family relationships (K. Lü scher & Hoff, 2013).

In this research, the ambivalence of adoptees is derived from their structural position and special experience. Between two families, adoptees often have to face the confusion and entanglement brought about by their dual identities. Riggs, Augoustinos, and Delfabbro (2009) found that calling foster parents Mum and Dad can create a feeling of family and symbolize their emotional connection to the foster family. However, as mentioned, for the adoptees in China, they usually have to call their adoptive parents based on the pre-kinship relations, which symbolizes their marginal and temporary role in the adoptive family. In addition, shifting between two families brings about "traumatic changes of family life" (Hedin, Höjer, & Brunnberg, 2011) for the adoptees.

This sense of ambivalence often lasted even after adoptees reached adulthood. Adoptees needed to continue balancing their obligations to the two families. The local cultural tradition in customary adoption emphasizes both blood ties and gratitude to adoptive parents. This ambiguity in cultural values provides justification for different practices, at the same time it also creates more ambivalence for adoptees, making them "feel torn between two families" *(Van Holen, Clé, West, Gypen, & Vanderfaeillie, 2020, p. 2)*. However, this kind of ambivalence differs greatly among adoptees, and such varied ambivalences will also affect their relationship with both families.

Unforgettable Suffering

For some adoptees, adoption is considered an unforgettable suffering that they prefer not to remember. This painful memory is so closely linked to their own adoption experience that some adoptees could not control their emotions when sharing. Why has these experiences left such profound harm on them? As noted, many painful experiences were closely related to their structural position and specific identity.

Since adoption was always temporary, the adopted children usually called their family members based on pre-existing kinships. When their identity is not a secret in

the village community, they may be teased or bullied because of their identity. Huanping, who grew up with her maternal grandmother, recalled,

I was brought up by my grandparents. My grandparents and maternal uncle loved me very much, but my heart was full of darkness and self-hatred… When I was young, no one would play with me. They all bullied me and laughed at me, and called me "little black child" ... I remember one time when they didn't play marbles with me. After I went home and cried, my uncle bought me some. Who knew the others would come together to take my marbles! In a panic, I swallowed the marbles and some got stuck in my throat. I cried desperately and the children were scared and ran away. My uncle heard my cry and came for me. He turned me upside down and shook me for a while before the marbles came out... When it came time to go to school, I still had no *hukou*. I had to hide myself at home. Children of my age were going to school happily with their schoolbags. Every time I saw them, I would go home and cry a while. (Huanping, IN170702)

For some adoptees, the adoption experience not only made them feel abandoned by their birth families and lacking care and affection from their parents; it also reminded them of their identity in the adoptive family, making them feel like unimportant. Some adoptees, especially females, remembered that they were nearly abandoned by their parents before they were sent to a relative's family. Many

adoptees did not dare have a normal child's temper in their adoptive family for fear of being abandoned again[34].

In addition to the self-hatred and marginality in the adoptive family, the process of returning to the birth family constituted another challenge for adoptees. For some adoptees, it was a source of painful memories. The discomfort of returning to her birth family was clear in Huanping's case as it left a psychological mark on her:

After returning to my birth family, I was a pain in the ass for my mum. She thought I was wild, ignorant, lazy and disliked me crying all-day long. My elder and younger sisters disliked me more. I did not do well in my studies and just transferred there from an old school. The teacher taught me I could not learn. I remember my mother once asking my elder sister to teach me math and my sister twice said, "You are an idiot," then slapped the top of my head before leaving. I was full of hatred for them, and I didn't want to stay in that home. (Huanping, IN170702)

Another adoptee, Yage, shared that it was very bad thing for a child to experience two families growing up. From her perspective, the experience not only

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[34] Take me, for example. I still remember I used to cry a lot when I was a kid and the neighbors liked to tease me. I felt different from other children because I could not act like a child to my adoptive or birth parents. For a long time, I believed I was an abandoned child.

negatively affected a child's character development, but also undermined the individual's understanding of parents and close relationships. She reflected,

When I first returned to my birth family, I was afraid. I was not afraid of being abandoned, but afraid of who would get angry. I had split personalities sometimes…When I grow up, I want to leave that home as much as I can. I don't want to return or call home. If I can make avoid it, I will avoid it. This seems naive to adults, but I want to return the feelings that my parents gave me when I was young. I remember everything… Those childhood injuries were the most hurtful to me. They are different from other parents. They make me not want to get married or have children and believe that living alone is the best. (Yage, IN180326)

In Wanqing's case, although she lived happily at her maternal grandma's house, she suffered after returning to her birth family. From Wanqing's perspective, the suffering originated from the lack of affection with her parents and her paternal grandmother's disgust towards her. Because of this, Wanqing adopted an ignorant attitude with her birth family and her relationship with her paternal grandmother only deteriorated as she grew up. These painful experiences not only affected the relationship between Wanqing and her birth family, but also shaped her imagination of marriage and opinions on children:

If I have children in the future, I want a son. I don't hope for my daughter to have a fate similar as mine. That kind of life should not be borne by a girl. There is a kind of patriarchal idea in many families nowadays. I think no matter what they say about girls, they still want a boy in the end. If I have a son, I think I will feel more secure and make up for the lack of security before. (Wanqing, IN180810)

From cases above, the adoption experience brought a sense of marginalization and insecurity in some adoptees. They generally doubted their identities and even regard themselves as unimportant. This sense of ambivalence may turn into a dissatisfaction with their birth parents and affect their relationship. The trauma they experience could even affect adoptees' views of marriage and family and lead to a pessimistic personality.

Trivial Pasts

Some adoptees only have very slight ambivalent experiences. For them, adoption is considered a trivial past or even a pleasant memory. Those adoptees usually have a relatively pleasant life in adoptive families and maintained close contact with their birth families at the same time. They felt close to their adoptive and birth parents. For example, Yiyi grew up in her maternal grandmother's house and returned to her birth family at age seven. However, these experiences did not bring about ambivalence:

I lived at my maternal grandmother's house since birth. I have always known this from the beginning. My dad took me home every few months and my mum visited me several times a week. I didn't miss home much. My grandma is very nice. I was innocent and playful, and I didn't have any idea about family... There were just two of us in my grandma's house and she treated me very well. Perhaps because my parents were not by my side, she would spoil me more. (Yiyi, IN180722)

Yiyi lived happily in her grandmother's home and had frequent contact with her parents. That is perhaps why she quickly adapted to transitioning from one family to another without clear discomfort. For her, this period was just a "fun" time in childhood.

Another male adoptee, Qichen, was raised in his grandmother's home until he was 12. The grandmother's family was distant by blood, but they had the same surname as Qichen. In general, changing from one family to another was difficult, but he did not have strong ambivalence. He said,

My legal identity was registered in my grandmother's house at the time, so I didn't hide from the family planning policy. Because my grandmother and I have the same surname, there was not much identity confusion. I had many friends. They knew my identity and experience, but never teased me about it. The

environment of my childhood was quite nice and I didn't think much about my uniqueness. In addition, I had many opportunities to meet with my parents and siblings... I remember I might go home in two weeks, and I would go home for a while during winter and summer vacations... My grandma treated me very well. I was relatively simple and just felt that I lived happily at grandma's house. Before I had a concept of my parents, I always felt that my grandma was my parent and grandmother's home was my home. There was no difference. (Qichen, IN180816)

Similar to Yiyi, Qichen lived happily at the adoptive family and had frequent contact with his birth family. This provided a relaxed environment for the children's growth and helped them smoothly transition when they returned to their birth families. In addition, how adoptees understood their parents' behaviors was also very important. For example, Qichen's personal experience and his attitude towards biological parents were also affected by an incident at home. When he was in the fifth and sixth grades of elementary school, his parents needed to use all their savings to compensate an injured worker in their family workshop. At that time, out of kindness, no one told him about the family accident. Qichen saw his dad tearing up and felt the pressure on his parents. After this incident, he suddenly felt it was not easy for my parents.

This incident gave Qichen a chance to better understand his parents, and as a result, strengthened their relationship. Of course, not every family has this

opportunity for parents and children to strongly bond. For some adoptees, they have high acceptance of their birth parents because they regard customary adoption as commonplace. For example, Feifei, who lived at her maternal grandmother's house until her second grade in junior high school, felt this kind of experience was very common in the local area, so there was nothing to find strange. She shared,

> I think this phenomenon is really common in our area. As I grew up, I got used to seeing this phenomenon and thought it was not a big deal. It doesn't matter. I didn't eat or wear less, I just changed to another place to live... It's just that when you were a child, due to various reasons, you did not grow up in your own family, but in another environment and people still treated you well. Wherever you grow up is the same. (Feifei, IN180903)

For Feifei, this adoption experience is nothing special and it does not endow her with a different identity from others. At the same time, Feifei showed a high understanding of and identification with her birth parents. She did not blame her parents for their choices. As she grew up, her parents would take her to visit families she lived in before. From Feifei's perspective, her birth parents handled the relationship between Feifei and her adoptive family very well, and they supported her in showing gratitude to her adoptive family. She believes that her attitude must have something to do with her parents' gratitude.

Family relationships based on this kind of memory, evaluation, and identity are relatively close and harmonious. In these cases, adoptees did not experience too much confusion in their childhood; the experience of less ambivalence is often accompanied by closer relationships with biological parents. This is in contrast to the cases with painful memories and tense parent-child relationships.

Adoptees' Adjustments and Struggles in Daily Life

Adoptees live between their birth and adoptive families. Their identities are in the grey area between illegal and legal, which often becomes prominent when they register for a household, receive education, and get married. However, individual adoptees also make adjustments to or use coping strategies in their daily lives.

Negative Accommodations: Legitimation, Fate, and Acceptance

For some adoptees, although adoption was part of their life, they did not regard it as significant. Because their adoption experience influence is so limited, they did not think there was any difference between them and other peers:

I think this experience is a product of that era. Many children live with their maternal grandmothers like me. I don't think I will be different from the children who grew up next to their parents. (Yiyi, IN180722)

Feifei, who also thought this experience had little effect on her, felt that she "had nothing to struggle with":

In my maternal grandmother's house, the neighbors around me would also make fun of me, such as, "Go back to your own home!" I would feel sad when I was a child because I regarded it as my home. I let it go. In addition, I didn't have a deep feeling for the concept of mom and dad at the time. My grandma, maternal uncle, and aunt-in-law were all pretty good for me. The environment was not bad for me and I had nothing to struggle with… I don't have a so-called acceptance or rejection of it because I just think this experience was part of me. Just like other children, it was just a stage of life from one to ten years old. (Feifei, IN180903)

Even Huanping, who had a bad experience, such as being forced to bear all kinds of housework and being beaten and scolded, attributed her pain and hatred to the context of the times that led to the helplessness of her parents:

If the family planning policy was not so strict at the time, or patriarchal value was not so important for the Chinese, or if I was not born in 1990s; my parents would not be so heartless. They really had no choice, and there were a lot of hardships and helplessness. After all, they gave me life. (Huanping, IN180511)

Under the influence of the institutional background and local fertility culture, the adoptees were mainly women, but there were some male adoptees. These male adoptees tended to affirm their family by blood relationships. As two male adoptees said:

A girl may have a second life through marriage, but a man has no choice. Facing family, friends, children, spouse; you have to play qualified roles. You have to make your parents feel that you are filial, your wife that you are reliable, relatives that you are warm, and children that you are amiable. All this stems from the fact that I am a man and there is no way out. (Haoyang, IN180927)

In Haoyang's opinion, there is an essential difference between women and men. Women's identities are more flexible and can be reconstructed through marriage. By contrast, men's identities seem to be highly structural, inescapable and fateful. This view is clearly characterized by traditional patrilineal succession, in which male heirs play a central role and the importance of blood ties is extremely emphasized. This unquestioning acceptance of blood ties has made Haoyang clearly on the birth family. Although another male adoptee Decheng values emotional ties in foster care, his emphasis on blood ties is still obvious:

My experience of adoption has made me realize a different kind of love that is not directly related to blood, but it has not yet touched the root of my feelings for

my parents. This fundamental thing is impossible to change. My affections for my parents are not observed in ordinary times, just like how you can see the fiber only after the lotus is cut. In other words, when others hurt them, I can't bear to make it worse. I think there will be a sense of morality that is not based on law in a modern sense. This kind of thing has been determined ever since the moment of my birth and I can't give it up. (Decheng, IN180710)

This emphasis on blood relationship simplifies adoptees' choices to some extent, and makes it easier for them to accept their own experience: since the birth family is always important, and they finally return to birth family, then the life in the foster family becomes a small episode. The irreplaceable blood ties still is the main melody of their lives.

Active Struggles: Concealment, Betrayal, and Escape

According to Barendregt, Van der Laan, Bongers, and Van Nieuwenhuizen (2015), there are usually differences between active and passive coping for foster children and adolescents. Active and passive are relatively defined, and they constitute a continuum of individual strategies. Similar to findings in prior research by Sinclair, Wilson, and Gibbs (2001) and Madigan, Quayle, Cossar, and Paton (2013), hiding one's own experience in customary adoption is a strategy often used by adoptees. Some adoptees initially rejected interviews because they did not want to

recall their past. They rarely mention this memory to others, especially to peers when they were in schools. Among peers, their complex family relationships become an awkward topic that was difficult to explain clearly and they felt it needed to be kept private:

> In school, I didn't like telling others about our family affairs because I didn't know how to tell them. Unless they told me about their family. Under normal circumstances, I would not talk about this. If they asked about my childhood, I would say that I grew up at my paternal aunt's house. Some of my peers knew that I was raised by my aunts. (Xiuying, IN170703)

In my own case, I would not disclose my identity as an adoptee if not for this work. From elementary school to this research, few classmates knew about my adoption experience except students from the same village. Before this research, I rarely talked about my family in front of my classmates and friends. If I had no choice, I would just talk about my adoptive family and never mention my birth family. Even from this, I was ridiculed by some classmates as "a child abandoned by parents." Similarly, Yage learned to hide this part of life during her interactions in intimate relationships because she realized that some regarded it as abnormal.

From cases above, concealing one's past is an individual strategy for adoptees to protect themselves. It is also a strategy to normalize their family relationship and integrate into peer groups.

As adoptees grew up, they dealt with family relationships, especially relationships in birth families, in more active ways, such as by quarreling with their parents and behaving against their parents. As Yanwan recalled,

I went to boarding school after junior high school and went home once every two weeks. Almost every time I returned home, I quarreled with my dad. We quarreled so much that I didn't want to go to school. Sometimes my dad went too far and said, "Why don't you just die?" Because I wanted to be loved, coupled with rebellious thoughts, I had a boyfriend in junior high school. (Yanwan, IN170719)

Every time my parents asked me to go home or go to my paternal grandmother, I felt rebellious. I had a big temper and became impatient in front of my parents. Sometimes I wondered why I couldn't talk with them nicely. Every time they mentioned something unpleasant, I would lose my temper very easily. (Wanqing, IN180810)

These active struggles appear not only when adoptees return to their birth families but could also exist in adoptive families. For example, Biyao showed her rebellion against her birth parents to both families. As her mother recalled,

> When we sent Biyao [to the adoptive family], she cried and didn't want to leave until we promised to buy her toys and delicious foods. After she was sent to the family, I had to leave secretly. This kid had a bad temper. If I came late on Friday to pick her up, she would go crazy and smash many things. In the beginning, I picked her up and dropped her off every week. She cried and screamed every time. She would make trouble and showed dissatisfaction as well at home. She thinks that because we haven't taken care of her before, we should not discipline her now. (Biyao's mother, IN180902)

Many adoptees, especially females, often had the feeling that they were once abandoned by their birth families. Holding this belief, they may struggle to prove themselves, such as when receiving a better education or finding a decent job[35]:

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[35] Similar to the adoptees above, I always cherished the opportunity to receive education and prove my value. Although educational investment was a considerable expense for a rural family, my adoptive parents always supported me to go to school. They often told me, "We would support your education even if we smash our iron pots and pans into pieces and sell them as scrapped iron." In order not to let them down, I have to do my best to achieve better results. Moreover, like many female adoptees, I am also trying to prove to my value to my birth family and tell them that I am a child worthy of being "needed."

Sometimes I feel my heart is fragile and sometimes strong. I want to prove myself: you sent me to someone else's house, but I will definitely be better than the kids who grew up next to you! I must continue to prove myself and be better. (Biyao, IN180803)

My paternal grandma preferred boys over girls and didn't want me. At that time, my maternal grandma was determined to raise me well partially because of my paternal grandma's tough attitude. Affected by my maternal grandma, I have always been strong. I have to fight and show what I have achieved to my paternal grandma and birth family. When I go back now, they show me care. They think that I have promising prospects. (Wanqing, IN180721)

When some adoptees were not fortunate enough to rebuild their identity through education, they also get new identities through forming a family. Setting up one's own family is an opportunity to detach from the previous relationship, which means that the individual has to disidentify with the family they belonged to (Fang, 2008). The new family relationship and identity provide adoptees with resources to cope with their past:

When I was young, I just wanted to grow up quickly, get married early and leave this place. [My family] has become better in recent years because everyone has grown up. My sister got married, my other sister is in college, and my parents are

getting older. I also graduated, worked, and got married. I have a baby now. (Huanping, IN180511)

For adoptees who returned to their birth family early, their birth parents usually assumed the responsibility of holding wedding ceremonies or preparing the dowry, and the adoptive parents usually played a marginal role as kinship defined. After marriage, adoptees usually moved the focus of life to their own nuclear family. At the same time, the adoption memory continues to shape the new stage of life and be constantly reshaped:

Anyway, I don't want to mention it and there is nothing deserving to be recalled. Sometimes I can't help but feel angry or sad when thinking of these things. I remember one time when I woke up from a dream and cried, my husband joked that he would rescue me... The moment I gave birth to my child, I told my mother that it's not easy being a parent… I have my own babies now and they are two sons. Because of my experience, I love my babies very much. I don't want them to say that I don't love them when they grow up. (Yanwan, IN170719)

Now I attach great importance to my children, husband, and family. I will spare no effort to maintain my own family. Now, I believe that my own child must be brought up by myself within my abilities. For example, when I don't go to work, I personally accompany my child all the time. I will often tell my child that

"Mum loves you." I pay much attention to the emotional closeness. (Meimei, IN180610)

Adoptees who did not return to their birth families, me included, still have to face the choice between two families. Staying in the adoptive family is itself a struggle for me. When I was 13, my birth parents planned to take me home, but I chose to stay in the adoptive family. Since then, I have totally identified myself as a member of the adoptive family and my birth family became my "relatives." I also got married with the support of my adoptive family; my paternal aunt and uncle-in-law prepared a dowry for me and played the role of my biological parents in the wedding. Like many other female adoptees, I have also been reconstructing my own identity after marriage and having a child. I have finally gained a sense of belonging in my own nuclear family.

Conclusion

This chapter finds that ambivalence is an inherent attribute for family relationships with adoption triangles as individuals in the triangle generally experience complex and intertwined emotions. The "adoption triangle" constitutes a special structure, where an adoptee is at the center. Living in another family since childhood, adoptees usually lack the emotional bond with their birth family. At the same time, due to the lack of blood bonds and the promise that they will eventually

return to their birth family, adoptees also experience marginality in adoptive families. In addition, the ambiguous legal statuses of adoptees during their childhood contributed to the ambivalence. All these structural factors have resulted in an identity of marginality for adoptees and vagueness and uncertainty in their self-understanding. When the adoptive parents and the community keep reminding of adoptee's identity, the process is just like a form of "interpellation" depicted by Althusser (1971), which is a passive form of subjectivity implying how a person is being "interpellated" into particular structural position.

However, there is a large variety in adoptees' ambivalent experiences from their structural position. This variety is related to the individual's memory (whether they have a positive memory of their childhood), cognitive strategies (whether the experience was justified), and self-identification (whether they have a clearly positioned identity). Adoptees who have had less ambivalent experiences generally have harmonious relationships with both families. By contrast, those who experienced more ambivalence usually had more tense relationships with family members in the triangle, especially with their biological parents. More specifically, if an adoptee had an unpleasant childhood and they attributed this experience to a certain family or person, it would be less possible to have a good attitude towards this family or this person. If the adoptee's life in the adoptive family is relatively pleasant and there was no notable difficulty in returning to the birth family, the relationship formed later is

likely to be close. As the concept of ambivalence shows, adoptees often face a set of conflicting expectations, roles or identities (K Lü scher, 2004; Kurt Lü scher & Pillemer, 1998). From this starting point, they can have different choices. These choices are not only shaped by past experiences, but also constantly reshaped by their current "self."

Additionally, as Althusser was criticized by neo-Marxist and other anthropological and cultural studies theories for undermining the "active" side of agency to construct their subjectivity via their shared experiences, adoptees are not passive receivers of tradition. They use their own initiative and individual strategies to cope with what they are confronted with. This is in line with the research emphasizing the agency of children and adolescents in foster care arrangements (Hedin et al., 2011; Hedin, Höjer, & Brunnberg, 2012; Mason, 2008). For example, Van Holen et al. (2020, p. 4) found that some foster children chose not to contact their birth parents very often because they regarded the contact as a burden. Hedin et al. (2012) found that, in foster families, the foster children and adolescents often actively participate in daily life decisions and in communicating with adults. In the grey area of multiple marginalities, the adoptees in this research also adjust or use coping strategies in their daily lives.

Hiding one's own experience in customary adoption is a strategy often used by adoptees. In other words, unless they are facing people who are very close and

trustworthy, adoptees generally will not take the initiative to share their special experiences with others (Steenbakkers, Steen, & Grietens, 2016). The advantage of this strategy is obvious; by hiding the identity that makes one look special, one will become similar as the people around her. In this study, concealment is not only reflected by the fact that the adoptees rarely mentioned their family life to others, even when asked. They may also selectively present only parts of the whole picture, for example, only reveal the information of the family they are living in at the moment.

If hiding one's family story means "normalizing" oneself externally, then accepting one's identity and experience means "normalizing" oneself internally. This strategy of acceptance may work through two mechanisms. The first is trivializing the foster experience. In other words, some adoptees think that although this experience did exist, it is insignificant for their life and identity. For them, people all live in different families, and everyone experiences something special; being adopted is just as normal as the issues anybody else could have encountered. The other mechanism of acceptance is understanding the adoption experience. It means that some adoptees admit the profound impact of the adoption experience on their lives, but they feel that this experience is comprehensible, and they do not blame anyone for this, especially not their birth parents.

As opposed to concealment and acceptance, there can be more active coping for the adoptees. As the adoptees grow older, some of them are increasingly inclined to make their own choices in family life and show rebellious behaviours towards their parents. In exerting their agency, the adoptees keep reshaping and renegotiating their identities and family relations. Family relations between the adoptees and the two families may be challenged or even reconstructed through interactions, negotiations, and compromises. How the adoptees handle the relationship between the two families may even result in changes to the established relationships between the two families.

Overall, identity rebuilding is a key process for the adoptees in adoption triangles. In other words, some adoptees will try to transcend their past experience and redefine themselves with a new identity. In a sense, everyone has multiple identities, and different identities are activated in different life stages and interactive situations (Fang, 2008). For these adoptees once hidden in the relatives' families, they can "cover" their negative identity by adopting new identities, such as obtaining a recognized public identity through education and work; or acquiring a new identity by forming a new family. These new identities may reduce the negative influence of the past experiences and become a kind of therapy for the traumatized individuals. Whether passive accommodation or active resistance, the identity rebuilding will affect the relationship between the individual and family.

Chapter 7: Conclusion—Rethinking Family

In August 2018, a traditional wedding held for my husband and I uncovered one more family secrets I had tried to hide. For any couple, wedding day is the biggest moment in their lives; yet, for me, the ceremony was filled with so much struggle as I had to choose between my birth and adoptive families and meet both their expectations for me. According to local customs in my hometown, the marriage date needed to be scheduled based on the exact time when the bride and groom were born. In order to find out the precise moment of my birth, I had to ask my birth family and tell them about my marriage. But my birth parents did not know the answer, and instead became more concerned about whether they would be my parents in my wedding. In fact, they posed this question to me many times in my life. Will they be my parents when I entered university? When I graduated? When I started my PhD degree? When I got engaged? Although I lived with my adoptive family since I was born, my birth parents kept emphasizing the blood tie between us and even blamed my adoptive parents for my reluctance to return. When I was getting married, my birth parents finally insisted on clarifying the relationship, telling me that getting married without their support would mean a total denial of our blood ties. By contrast, my adoptive parents were more understanding and said they would respect my decisions.

Between the emotional and blood ties, I finally went with emotion. My attitude was that I would rather choose to get married in a hotel than in my birth family, if I was not allowed to get married in my adoptive family. In my heart, my birth parents were not actually my family, although I never denied they were my biological parents. Thus, my adoptive parents prepared a dowry and I got married with their presence while my birth parents only gave monetary blessings like other relatives. According to local customs, this meant that I formally became the daughter of my adoptive parents. After marriage, my dilemma between the two families subsided because I finally had my own family. Still, my affections were towards my adoptive family. For instance, when my daughter was born in 2020, I regarded my adoptive parents as her grandparents. In raising my daughter, I can better understand the hardship my adoptive parents had while raising me. In this way, I finally succeeded in defining my family.

When I first started this research, I just wanted to understand whether people with similar identities had similar lives. As the study concluded, I also transformed from a girl who was unsure about her family to a wife and mother with her own home. When I entered this new stage of life, I realized that my past experiences continued to impact my own family. For example, to avoid identity confusion for my daughter, I intentionally defined her grandparents for her. Underlying this behavior was a choice: my adoptive parents were my family while my birth parents my relatives. Obviously,

I exerted my own agency in making this choice, but I am not uninfluenced by traditional values of filial piety and blood relations. I still visit my birth parents during the Spring Festival with my husband and daughter. For me, my birth family and I just have a different relationship now rather than ending our relationship.

The experience of adoption not only shows its significance during big events such as weddings and funerals, but also in the daily lives of most adoptees. This identity as adoptees brought about distinct experiences and relationships with their families. In my introduction, I used Huanping's story as the starting point for the thesis. Although Huanping had similar experiences as other adoptees, her birth family's unfair treatment of her was still difficult for me to imagine. This surprise inspired the initial question of my research: why were there such different family relationships in adoption? Will there be more possibilities of family relations between other adoptees and their families? Existing research on customary adoption rarely touched the issue of family relationships in adoption triangles. My focus on family relationships provided a wealth of first-hand materials to fill the gaps in this area.

To provide context for discussing the issue of family relations in adoption triangles, I reviewed the theoretical perspectives of family relationship changes, empirical studies of intergenerational relationships, and case studies of Chinese families in Chapter 2. It is necessary to consider the adoption triangle as a whole and understand family relationships from individual perspectives at the same time. In

addition, to explain relations in Chinese families, we have had to not only focus on the macro structure and micro individual experience, but also emphasize mechanisms at the meso level. In Chapter 3, I have traced the social changes in Chinese customary adoption through different historical periods and examined the different forms of customary adoption and corresponding characteristics of family relationships. In Chapter 4, I have discussed the differentiated practices of relevant policies with the interactions between grassroots administrators, village cadres, and community neighbors, as well as the different effects on the adoption triangle. Chapter 5 has focused on the interactions between two families in the adoption triangle at the family level alongside the ways the two families fostered and interacted with adoptees. It was found that different types of family relationships were formed based on a mix of economic and emotional interactions. Chapter 6 has mainly reflected the perspective of adoptees. In that chapter, I have demonstrated the influence of an individual's life experiences, their self-identity and their family relationships, as well as the strategies they used to reconstruct their identity and determine their life course.

In this concluding chapter, I will start with the concept of "family," summarize the different definitions of family in the literature, and develop a new understanding of family. Then, based on findings in previous chapters, I will revisit the analytical framework that I have proposed to explain the diversity of family relationships in adoption triangles. I now turn to reflecting on the consequences of the mandatory

family planning policies based on the phenomenon of customary adoption, as well as gender inequality under family planning policy. I will also depict adoptees' lives at present and predict that they will receive more attention. Finally, I will look at the limitations of this research and the issues deserving further exploration.

A Comprehensive Perspective on Understanding Family and Family Relations

Explaining Family Relations at Multiple Levels: State-Society-Family-Individual

The main question in this research is, under similar institutional and cultural backgrounds, why are distinct family relationships formed in adoption triangles? To answer this question, I went through the breadth of literature in family studies and aimed to synthesize and develop an explanatory framework.

Modernization theory and individualization theory are the two theoretical paths that had huge impact in the field of family research. According to modernization theory, families modernize as societies undergo industrialization and urbanization. It predicts that nuclear families eventually become mainstream and family relationships are equalized. Individualization theory explains that individuals are becoming the center of families with individuals starting from their needs to shape family identities and build family structures and relationships. Although the emphases of the two theories are different, both approaches discuss macro trends, focusing on

commonality and similarity in families brought on by these changes rather than describing and explaining diversity and complexity of families. Therefore, these theoretical perspectives address the first half of this study's question: what is the so-called "similar institutional and cultural background." Neither of these theoretical perspectives give a satisfactory explanation for the second part, which is, why are different family relationships formed.

Although the modernization and individualization theories of families are different in many aspects, both perspectives emphasize the important role of the state in transforming contemporary Chinese families. D. Davis and Harrell (1993, p. 5) clearly pointed out that "in the People's Republic of China, state power and policies have been the creators, not the creations, of a transformed society". Yet, what role does the state play exactly?

Some scholars argued that the modern Chinese state played a proactive role in changing the traditional model of family relations, especially parent-child relations, especially in the socialist revolution. These studies focused on families in radical movements, such as in marriage reform, land reform, and Cultural Revolution. These reforms led by the party-state transferred individual loyalties from family to state and, finally, to party (Broyelle, 1977; Ono, 1989; J. H. Zhou, 2003). At the pinnacle of the Cultural Revolution, ancestor worship in Confucian ethics was replaced by Mao worship and, under the influence of the Red Guards, traditional ethics of filial piety

was condemned and destroyed (Chan, 1985; Teiwes, 2010; L. Xing, 1999; Zang, 2000).

Other studies saw the role of the state in reforming Chinese families was conflicting. For example, Parish and Whyte (1978) found that the Chinese Communist Party retained the traditional family structure while trying to change the traditional intergenerational power relationship. D. Davis and Harrell (1993, pp. 1-2) also pointed out that although the communist revolution "undercut the power and authority of patriarchs and destroyed the economic logic of the traditional Chinese family", it also "created demographic and material conditions conducive to large, multigenerational households with extensive economic and social to nearby kin" (pp. 1-2).

The discussions above highlighted the role of state power in shaping family life, but ignored the intermediary mechanisms between the state and families, such as the mediation role of local officials and village cadres. Greenhalgh (1993) used the implementation of Shaanxi's one-child policy to discuss how state policy was softened in the interactions between local cadres and rural communities. She believed that the strategies by local cadres' concession to the community eventually became national policies gradually changed to meet social needs. I have discussed the role of local cadres in the relationship between the state and rural families in Chapter 4.

In contrast to the research inspired by modernization and individualization theories, research on family intergenerational relationships focused on the classification of different intergenerational relationships. This typology of intergenerational relations highlighted the complexity and diversity of family relations and constituted the basis for classification of types of family relations in this study. However, literature in this field shows relatively static descriptions of family. Existing explanations either put forward heuristic concepts within the framework of modernization and individualization, or analyzed from the micro-level of individual characteristics. The social mechanism between the family and the macro context was not included. Neither the modernization and individualization theories emphasizing the historical process nor typological research on family intergenerational relations have adequately explained the diversity of family relations.

Addressing the shortcomings of previous research, scholars have begun to construct some more comprehensive analytical frameworks. For example, Yan (2003) put forward a three-level framework of "state-family-individual". This framework gives emphasis to "the rise of the individual and the role of the socialist state in transforming family life" (Yan, 2003, p. 217). As Yan mentioned, the state in this framework mainly embody at "state-sponsored social engineering programs and national policies" (Yan, 2003, p. 227). Inspired by Yan's work, Shen (2010, 2019) further highlighted the importance of the individual and proposed a framework of

"society-family-individual". This framework put the individual at its core to explore family structure, identity and relationships in urban China during social transformation. These studies are powerful integration of existing research and have greatly improved the explanatory power in family sociology. These multi-level frameworks also inspired theoretical thought in this research. The shortcoming of these analytical frameworks is that they do not include the social mechanisms between the state and families in rural China. Although state power is important in shaping family structure and relationships, it does not directly affect families and individuals and must be filtered through the intermediary society. For example, when the same family planning policy is implemented at the grassroots level, it is likely to have different impacts on different families due to the role of the village community, especially village cadres.

Based on the above considerations, this research has put forward a new comprehensive framework, with three levels of analysis: macro (national policies and cultural norms), meso (grassroot cadres and community neighborhoods), and micro (individuals and families in adoption triangles). It has aimed to provide a better explanation for a diversity of family relationships. Compared to the analytical framework of Yan (2003) and Shen (2010, 2019), the explanation in this study has two improvements. One is supplementing the previously neglected meso (i.e., social) level, thus making the entire framework more multi-dimensional. The other is taking

the "adoption triangle" as an important heuristic framework for analysis, which transcends the duality between family and individual, thus provide adequate explanation to types of family relations. The diverse family relationships in the practice of customary adoption in China conducted in this study thus has provided an empirical case for testing the explanatory power of this analytical framework.

Based on customary adoption in rural China, the empirical question of this research is, why are there different types of family relationships in customary adoption triangles under the same state policies and reproductive culture? In my fieldwork, I found four different types of relationships (see Table 7.1): namely "birth family is more important," "nurture is greater than birth," "both families are important," and "the individual is the most important." Starting from the analytical framework proposed, I have explored and analyzed how different types of family relationships in customary adoption triangles are formed from three aspects: policy practice, family interaction, and individual experience. First, the way in which state policies are concretely implemented on families shapes the way a family responds and experiences these policies. Second, in a customary adoption triangle, interactions between two families and interactions between adoptees and the two families affect the relationship between all parties. Third, the intensity of adoptees' ambivalent experiences can influence adoptees to identify with the two families in different ways.

Of course, these three levels of elements do not operate in a vacuum; they are intertwined and work together, making family relations more complicated.

Table 7.1 Different Types of Informants' Family Relations

Physiological (4)	Emotional (5)
Decheng; Muqing; Xiuying; Huanping	Wanqing; Qichen; Fanfan; Meimei; Yanwan
Independent (3)	**Harmonious (4)**
Haoyang; Yage; Wanru	Feifei; Biyao; Yanan; Yiyi

Those four types of family relationships may fluidly transform from one to another due to different family interactions or important events at different stages of an individual's life. For example, adoptees who were originally close to their adoptive families may gradually become closer to their birth families and try to balance the relationship between the two families (as in Biyao's case), or they may become isolated from both families (as in Yage's case).

Dynamic Construction of Family Relationships: Economy, Emotion, and Identity

Current scholarly discussions on Chinese family relationships mainly focus on the economic and emotional dimensions, and they have three different understandings of the relationship between the two dimensions.

The first is the corporate model in tradition. The Chinese family is an economic unit composed of completely rational family members, including three organizational elements: property, economy, and patrilineal community. At the same time, family members cooperate with each other to maximize the family's economic interests (Baker, 1979; Cohen, 1976). Family is a highly integrated community of interests in which individuals prefer to suppress their own desires or even sacrifice their own interests for the family's interests.

The second understanding is that the Chinese family relationship has an intimate dimension similar to that of Western families. Personal freedoms, desires and emotions have become increasingly important, and individuals seldom neglect their own needs for the benefit of the family as they once did (Evans, 2010; Yan, 2003). Family members no longer only value mutual economic support but place more emphasis on emotional bonds as a means of sustaining family relationships.

The third view opposes the two dichotomous understandings above. It believes that family relationships, economics and emotions are mutually exterior and interior, and they are all indispensable (Zelizer, 2005). Providing practical care and financial support among family members has become a fundamental way to maintain intimacy. Meanwhile, emotional comfort and intimate communication also play an important role in building intimate relationships.

In this study, I have found that the economic and the emotional are two equally important dimensions in the daily interaction of adoptees with their families. Economic interactions between individuals in the family did not replace intimate interactions. Economic and intimate exchanges simultaneously exist among family members. As discussed in Chapter 5, both interactions, economic support and emotional intimacy intertwine to reflect a sense of care and responsibility. In most of my interviewed cases, for both families in the adoption triangle, there is a distinction between financial support and emotional comfort for adoptees. During customary adoption, birth families provide financial support while adoptive families are responsible for emotional care. Birth families can only express their responsibilities and concerns by providing material support since they cannot raise the adoptee themselves. Adoptive families, on the other hand, give more special care and attention to adoptees. After adoptees returns to their birth families, financial support and emotional care is taken over by birth families. However, because of the customary

adoption experience, individual-family interactions based on these two dimensions will continue the patterns (e.g., adoptees have economic interactions with birth families and more closely emotional interactions with adoptive family) formed during adoption. The interactions and relationship between adoptees and the two families can also change over time and specific events.

Additionally, the dimension of family identity cannot be ignored in family relationships. This concept refers to the consciousness of the establishment of the family—a "definition of scope" of what is equated to family[36] (Ueno, 2004, p. 4). This identity not only determines the boundaries of the family, but also forms the basis of relationship among family members, which directly affects the interactions of family members and, in turn, affects their family relationship.

In a customary adoption triangle, adoptees are usually question their own identities and that of their families. "Family" is a kind of conscious choice for adoptees. They need to make choices and judgments to determine their own family and its members. The foundation of this identity is based on the economic and

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[36] This view sees the dimensions of what constitute a "family" as both reality and consciousness. Reality is expressed as the physical form of the family and consciousness is the core of the cohesion of the family's form and content. For instance, for some people, even if they feel that the other person is a stranger to them, they would still consider that person to be family if they have some blood relationship. However, the "entity" of the family does not exist if the person is unaware of it. Therefore, for individuals, "family" is more about an identity that exists in their consciousness (Shen, 2019, p. 148). See, Yifei Shen, *Who Lives in Your House? -Ifamily in China* (Shanghai: Shanghai Sumerian Press, 2019), pp.148.

emotional interactions in the daily life of family members. For many people, the family is a given fact at birth, and individuals are a part of the family. However, for adoptees, they have the opportunity to choose their family: return to their birth family or stay in their adoptive family—or even other alternatives, suggesting that adoptees perceive the "family" as unfixed and they can make choices that affect the existing family structure and relationship. Therefore, the family is both a constraint and resource for individuals.

Customary adoption，as a collective resistance to the harsh population control, has saved the lives of some baby daughters without making them become "missing girls " in its true sense. Adoptees could receive family resource, love and care from the two families and experience different growth ways in their life course. However, for some adoptees, this is a double pressure for their future lives. The experience of growing up between two families could be a constraint for adoptees as they lack identity and want to escape the family environment. At the same time, the relationship between the two families and the adoptees makes them unable to accept all the care and resources from both families. Because of their responsibilities and emotions, they give back to both families as adults while constantly seeking their own position and identity.

In this research, I discovered that family relationships in adoption triangles were not formed in accordance with norms and responsibilities, but in the interactions of

daily life. In Chapter 2, I summarized four different types of family relationships, of which the two major types were "blood is thicker than water" and "the favor of nourishing is greater than birth." The formation of these two relationships in this study is largely based on the interactions between adoptees and the two families. The examples of Haoyang and Wanqing illustrate the process of the formation of these relationships.

Haoyang was raised by adoptive parents who already had two daughters, and he was married with the support of his adoptive parents. Although he was clear about his own identity, he rarely contacted his biological parents. However, in an incident relating to home demolition, Haoyang grew dissatisfied with his adoptive family. In Haoyang's view, his adoptive parents were obviously closer with their two daughters because they gave the house and compensation to the sisters instead of him; he is not their son after all. Since then, Haoyang believed that "blood is thicker than water" and he is just a man with reproductive significance to his adoptive family. It was because of this recognition of a blood relationship that he began looking for his biological parents.

In contrast, Wanqing maintained frequent contact with her parents when she was fostered by her maternal grandparents. She was often picked up by her parents for important events such as birthdays and Chinese New Year. From this perspective, Wanqing's connection with her parents is not that different from ordinary children.

However, the patriarchal attitude of her paternal grandparents contrasted sharply with the care and love she received from her maternal grandparents. This difference made Wanqing lean towards her maternal grandparents. During the year, Wanqing would mainly live in her maternal grandmother's home. Even after growing up, she still chose to return to her maternal grandmother's house every time she went back. Wanqing has already regarded her maternal grandparents as the two most important people in her life and opted to let her estrangement with her parents continue.

For most adoptees, the emotional interaction matters most in whether they identify with a family. In the absence of emotional interaction, economic interaction will become an important determinant of whether adoptees want to maintain a relationship with a family. As Wanqing once said to her grandmother, "If you had not even given me money for milk powder at that time, I would not call you 'grandma' now." Yage also has an alienated relationship with her mother, because her mother only recorded her living and education expenses and not the expenses of her sister and brother. She believed her mother was simply seeing her as an investment for future returns.

As we have seen, family relationships based on interactions between family members are dynamic and changing. Relationships between adoptees and the two related families will not always stay the same. Those four types of family relationships may fluidly transform from one to another due to different family

interactions or important events at different stages of an individual's life course. For example, after return to birth family, with the increase of emotional investment from birth family, adoptees who were originally close to their adoptive families may gradually become closer to their birth families and try to balance the relationship between the two families (as in Biyao's case). Or, since adoptees become financially independent in adulthood, with the more emphasis on the individual and decreased interactions between them and the two families, they may become isolated from both families (as in Yage's case).

In short, this study reaffirms that family is not just composed of fixed relationships, it is also a web of relations chosen by individuals based on economic and emotional interactions. In this process, individuals construct family identity from their own standpoint. Moreover, the choices made by individuals are not spontaneous and arbitrary but arise from negotiation and compromise with related family members in a specific context.

Re-understanding Families

It is not an easy task to define what a family is. To start the discussion, it is perhaps useful to recall a classic definition. Based on cross-cultural comparative study of more than 250 societies, anthropologist (Murdock, 1949, p. 1) gave the following definition of family:

"The family is a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation, and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of who maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults."

This definition was put forward at a time "when the heterosexual breadwinner–homemaker family was at its peak" (Ciabattari, 2017, p. 39): it regards heterosexual marriage and blood relationship (or adoption, a recognized quasi-blood relationship) as the core components of the family and believes that families are the most basic components of society organized around relatively fixed role structures (X. Chen, 2008); in the family, men provide economic support and assume instrumental roles while women exert reproductive functions and assume emotional roles (Kingsbury & Scanzoni, 1993).

However, with the continued emergence of diversified family patterns, such as stepfamilies, blended families, and families of homosexual marriage, the classic definition of family faced many challenges. For example, feminist scholar Stacey (1996) put forward the concept of the "postmodern family" to adapt to the emergence of such family diversity. She believed that family was fluid, uncertain, and reorganizable; a family needed not be composed of heterosexual parents but could have alternatives. At the same time, some scholars went beyond the functions of families and defined family as an arrangement of kinship and gender relations, or

even a subjective meaning of intimate relationship (Leeder, 2003; Silva & Smart, 1999; Stacey, 1998). It seemed that only the concept of "intimacy" could be comprehensive enough to summarize the diversity of modern families.

Under the perspective that a family is a web of intimate relationships, some scholars believed that a family could be regarded as people connected in some way to each other; this connection could be based on commitment, love, and mutual trust, rather than law, birth, or blood (Settles, 1999). These relationships constituted a web of important connections, which can be called on when an individual needed it. Therefore, nowadays, people may use the term "family" to describe a group of people who focus on emotional intimacy and sharing, even if there is no blood, marriage or adoption relationship between them (Newman & Grauerholz, 2002). In a national survey in the United States, when asked about "what a family is," 75% of respondents said it was "a group of people who love and care for each other" (Scanzoni & Marsiglio, 1991).

In fact, partially as a natural response to the diversification of families, competing definitions also become increasingly prominent in the scholarship. In a comprehensive review of the definitions of families, Ciabattari (2017, pp. 38-45) summarizes four different ways to understand a family: first, the structural definitions emphasize the formal relations between family members, such as relations based on marriage, blood, and legalized adoption; second, the household-based definitions

regard a household consisting of members living together as the most important feature of a family; third, the role-based definitions highlight social roles and related scripts played by family members; fourth, interactionist definitions argue that families are created through shared activities and emotional investments.

To what extent can the customary adoption practice under China's birth control policy inform the investigation of family studies beyond China? Through the case of family relations in adoption triangle, this study found that the competing definitions of families exist not only in theory, but also in practice. In adoption triangles, individuals' understanding of families varied emphasizing from blood relations to intimate relationships, which can be chosen. As an adoptee holding "nurture is greater than birth," I personally have more empathy with the fourth understanding of a family, that is an interactionist and constructionist approach. I echo that family does not exist naturally but is partially constructed in the interactions between family members. In other words, for me, family is a choice to some extent, rather than a legal obligation or blood bond. However, just as other cases have illustrated, family members in real world, may strongly hold that the opposite is true: for them, blood, household, or social role is the essential part of what makes a family.

Notably, competing understandings of families are just like the same phenomenon of the diversity of family relations, just it is seen from a different angle. As Bourdieu (1996, p. 19) points out, definitions of families are realized categories

"which, while seeing to describe social reality, in fact construct it". To understand the meanings of family based on this perspective requires the expectation that there are various forms of families. Existing studies have also shown that family structure, roles, as well as relationships between family members will also change over time. Multiple meanings of the family coexist, and these meanings are continuously negotiated and renegotiated between individuals (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

More importantly, through the lens of adoption triangle at micro, meso, and macro levels, we can also see how various levels of political process influence and engender a diversity of meaning of family to different actors. At the micro-level, the constant negotiations between adoptees' family identities between birth and adoptive families illustrate the power dynamics, resources and care distribution among adoptee and two families. Just as my experience show, my birth parents' repeated requests for my returning to birth family and my reluctance to return illustrate the identity politics of inclusion and exclusion (us vs. them) and individual's resistance to parental authority. Similarly, my experience as well as other adoptee cases also demonstrate how economic and emotional exchanges between adoptees and the two families can give different types of substance and foundations to adoptees' perception to the relative importance of each family. As adoptee grew up and gradually had choice to select the family s/he belonged to, two families were undergoing a prolonged

contestation for "winning adoptee's heart". This is especially true for male adoptees under China's rural patriarchal context.

At the meso-level, as have been illustrated, from a village leader's standpoint, customary adoption practice can be seen as a way to create buffer to partially resolve the tension between strict birth control policy and villagers' need to fulfil piety responsibility under rural patriarchy. In this way, family means both opportunity and crisis for a village leader. On the one hand, failing to meet assigned birth quota not only means a career failure, but also means a village governing crisis as brutal abortion measures have to be enforced which curtail the village leader's trust and authority in his ruling village. On the other hand, by carefully giving discretion or leave some leeway for village families to exercise customary adoption, village leaders not only can meet birth quota, but also can cultivate trust and reciprocity (sometimes material return, like villagers' gifts) in the village to enhance his power and authority.

At the macro level, the hegemonic and authoritarian birth control policy as well as household registration policy (by dividing the population into rural and urban categories) altogether suggest a prevalent static, rigid, fixed, rational and developmentalist thinking in central government leaders' mind, aiming to apply such ideological rubrics in diverse rural and urban contexts. As this study shows, any attempt of these state-led population policy may prove frustratingly elusive and ultimately meets forms of resistances in local contexts. Customary adoption is exactly

one way of defiance to these state-led population policy. For one thing, customary adoption represents flexibility and transcendence of static and rigid categories and policies. For another, customary adoption also means the contestation between modern socialist planning and traditional Chinese customs and household planning—a competition between the modern and the traditional.

As such, different actors at different levels offer their own understanding to the problem of family planning and different approach to resolving it. Any coherence between these different perspectives is provisional. Thus, having a plural understanding of family is necessary. Certainly, plural understanding of families is not a new idea, but the multi-level explanation of this plurality as well as how such plurality manifest to challenge dominant rational and developmentalist paradigm in population and family studies constitutes the major contribution this research has achieved. Living in an era in which the diverse and fluid family forms coexist and the "power of stereotypes informed by ideals of the 'biological family'" (Giddens & Sutton, 2017, p. 235) continues, we need to re-understand families from multi-level and interactional ways. Explaining the diversity of family relations in customary adoption can be regarded as one new effort to understand what makes a family and what makes the distinct understandings possible.

Policy and Practical Implications

Unanticipated Consequences of Family Planning Policy on Ordinary People

According to Foucault (1990), the controlling of sexual activities is the key to controlling population; therefore, sexual issues that belong to the personal realm have become public issues of concern for countries. From this perspective, the family planning policy in China can be regarded as a kind of control over individuals through social institutes, discourses, and practices. The one-child policy that began in the early 1980s was abolished in 2015. This policy, which lasted more than 40 years, is one of China's most influential policies. It is not only a population policy but also a political arrangement. The fate of countless families and individuals is tied to the implementation of this policy. Although the one-child policy has been terminated, the state-led family planning policy still exists and the impact of this policy on society and individuals continues. Thus, to reflect upon the one-child policy requires we understand the ordinary people it affected (M. Fong, 2016; Greenhalgh, 2008; Johnson, 2016b).

The phenomenon of customary adoption and the existence of adoptees are two of many unanticipated consequences of the family planning policy. This study displayed the long-term influences of the family planning policy on the lives of adoptees and their families. Under reproductive pressure and strict population control, many

parents chose to hide their newborn babies in their relatives' families. When they made this choice, they did not foresee the impact of the arrangement on the children and the parent-child relationship. For example, Biyao's mother told me that they had no choice but send Biyao to another family due to the policy; while she regretted the decision because she did not fulfil her responsibility as a parent and accompanied Biyao's growth.

Although adoptees are affected differently by their experiences, it led to separation from their biological parents during a considerable period of childhood. For some adoptees, living apart from their parents not only made them feel abandoned and lacking parental care; and they may also feel ambivalent about their identity and think that they are unimportant. Even after returning to their original family, some adoptees still found it difficult to adapt to their new life. Coupled with the experience of being excluded from the neighborhood and the legal society, many adoptees lack a sense of belonging and security. This experience of adoption not only affected the parent-child relationship in adoption triangles, but also affects the development of adoptees' characters.

In the adoption triangle, adoptive parents or grandparents also need to spend extra time, energy and even money to care for adoptees. During the adoption period, some adoptive families were punished by the family planning policy because of extra children. At the same time, when adoptees were about to return to their birth family,

adoptive parents will also face separation from the children they raised and emotional reluctance. Because of the adoptees, the relationship between the two families may be affected and some adoptive families may face deteriorating relations with birth families.

In general, the mandatory family planning policy deeply affected the life course of individual adoptees and their families. Under this policy, some children had to be separated from their birth parents and faced the risk of losing their families. Many birth and adoptive parents also suffer as their relationships with each other and with their children may be twisted in long-term interactions.

The phenomenon of customary adoption is a combined effect of family planning policy and patriarchal culture. The impact from the policy is usually more direct than from culture. Although the one-child policy was abolished, its influence on individuals continues. The influence of national policies on the destiny of individuals would be better if policymakers considered them.

Gender Inequality under Family Planning Policy

Taking a multi-level and intersectional approach, this research has not emphasized the gender variable in explaining the varied family relations. Although we can also observe the different experiences of male and female adoptees in

empirical data, this difference becomes less visible when other factors are also included. For example, a son is perhaps more valued than a daughter in the birth family after the adoptee returns, but it (i.e., the gender of the adoptee) does not guarantee a good relation after a long-time separation. Thus, the impact of gender is mainly interpreted as the male preference "patriarchal culture" in this research, which is relatively stable and consistent in my cases.

What is more interesting to me is the issue of gender inequality in China, especially the condition under family planning policy. The customary adoption phenomenon cannot be separated from the gender inequality in China. The *2020 Global Gender Gap Report* found that China's gender inequality was worsening and the phenomenon of "preferring sons to daughters" continued (Forum, 2019). According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics, the number of girls corresponding to 100 boys dropped from 93.76 (1990-1995) to 84.47 (2000-2005) within ten years; if we only count the third child in a family, we will find that for every 100 boys, there were only 63.29 girls (China, 2020). It can be inferred that many Chinese families were still preferring to have boys than girls.

The statistics above depicts a disappointing picture of the gender inequality in contemporary China. This is a top-down angle. If we take a bottom-up perspective, how should we evaluate the impact of family planning policy on gender inequality? As is suggested by Santos and Harrell (2017, p. 18), this kind of discussion should be

based on the awareness of different women in distinct social positions, such as women in urban and rural areas. On one hand, for many families that have actually followed the family planning policy (mostly in urban areas), the traditional expectation of women in fertility practice has been partially reversed, and females have more time and energy to devote themselves to public life outside the family; on the other hand, however, in families that still center on having more children despite the policy constraints, women may suffer more pain due to the state's punishment (Zong, 2013). Most female informants in this study lived in rural areas, and their experience was closer to the second situation described above. That is, the family planning policy did not improve the social status or well-being of these women, but instead made them more trapped in their gender and fertility practice.

When it comes to the female adoptees in this research, whether the adoption experiences would affect their sense of gender? Especially, whether the adoptees could challenge the patriarchal culture and gender inequality in China? Based on this research, it depends. Among some female adoptees, the patriarchal values are also reproducing themselves (F. Yang, 2017). In interviews, I encountered several female adoptees who expressed their desire to have a boy or the pride of having a son successfully. For example, Huanping, who has elder and younger sisters but no brother in her birth family, had already given birth to three daughters, but she still plans to have a son in future. She told me that her husband is the only child in his

family, and she is willing to give birth to a son for him. She also said that she wants a boy because her daughters will have a parents' home if she has a boy.

Of course, there are also female adoptees who show their reflection, critique, and challenge to gender inequality. This group of informants usually have relatively good education and independent living ability. For them, a daughter can have similar or even better achievements than sons. They do not accept the traditional definition of woman's role in family life and try to prove their values in broader stages. In some cases, this standpoint becomes a rupture to their past and even kind of "revenge" to their birth parents. However, the education level and independent living ability do not necessarily lead to a critical attitude towards gender inequality but only constitutes one condition for the adoptees to hold this feminist standpoint. In my research, even some educated informants, who usually have lived in big cities for many years, still desired to have a son because they did not want their children have "devalued" life like them.

To summarize, for female adoptees in this research, higher education and independent living ability constitute the necessary but not sufficient conditions for them to challenge gender inequality. For most female adoptees who continue to live in rural communities or small counties, they seem to have neither the need nor the impetus to challenge this gender inequality. Like the facts shown by the macro data, we see more of the stability and reproduction of gender inequality from the bottom-up

perspective, although some small changes and resistances are also being made by individuals.

The Present and Future of Adoptees

I kept contact with many informants, especially adoptees, after the interviews. Some of them often shared their daily lives on social media and some may chat with me about their current lives voluntarily. There are some moments that left unforgettable impressions on me. For example, half a year later after being interviewed, Huanping took initiative to contact me and ask how to get along with her mother as she was trying to ease the relationship. In Yanwan's case, on one hand, she was still dissatisfied with her parents because she believes they favored her elder sister and sister's children; she once expressed those dissatisfactions in the family WeChat group and quarreled with them. Still, Yanwan's relationship with her parents eased after she got married and had her own children; when her father fell ill and was hospitalized, she was with him in the hospital. Wanqing, who has been estranged, was asked by her parents to use her personal credit to guarantee her brother's house loan. Wanqing was worried about the risk because her brother had no stable income, but her parents insisted. Wanqing believed her parents cared more for her brother than her, and their relationship worsened.

In addition to the cases I have been following, the phenomenon of customary adoption has also drawn attention from the media and general public in recent years. Similar topics have been discussed on internet. For example, on an internet forum, there was a topic entitled "What experiences have you had as a child who has to be hidden secretly under the family planning policy? What impact has the experience have on you as an adult?" Over 30 persons shared their personal stories under this topic.[37] Another topic is discussing the "psychological defects" of children who were fostered in a relatives' families under the family planning policy. Over 40 persons shared their experiences or gave comments, and the "psychological defects" they mentioned included inferiority, overly sensitive, insecure, and so on.[38] People also discussed the parent-child relationship after adoptees return from the relative's home. Many adoptees shared their personal memories, questions, and strategies.[39] From these discussions, it seems many adoptees under the family planning policy have begun to reflect on their experience and its influence on their lives. Moreover, with the gradual relaxation of the family planning policy, topics related to this policy are no longer politically sensitive.

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[37] Accessed at: https://www.zhihu.com/question/47572910

[38] Accessed at: https://www.zhihu.com/question/34201673

[39] Accessed at: http://bbs.tianya.cn/post-funinfo-5900434-1.shtml

In August 2020, a documentary called "Parents" was also published on Weibo. It recounted the life of two females who lived with their relatives' families because of the family planning policy. One of the adoptees, Yangyang, was raised by her maternal aunt and uncle-in-law, while her younger sister was fostered by their maternal grandmother. Although Yangyang returned to her birth family later, she told the camera that her "parents" were her maternal aunt and uncle-in-law. The documentary encouraged many netizens to share similar stories. At the end of October 2020, an article titled "Abandoned Daughter" went viral in WeChat. The main figure, Wuying, was abandoned by her parents in the 1990s. She was adopted by two families successively and had an unhappy childhood. In 2001, she was found by her biological parents and returned to her birth family, but her relationship with her birth family was not close as she was indifferent and rebellious to her parents. It was after she became a mother that her relationship with her parents became better and she supported her biological and adoptive parents at the same time. In the comments following this report, many netizens shared their experience of being abandoned and adopted, as well as the complex relationships with their birth families.

The adoptees under the family planning policy, especially females, have even drawn international media attention. In February 2018, the *Economist* wrote on the consequences of China's population policy with the adoption phenomenon as an example. It started with the story of Li Dongxia who was raised by her maternal

grandparents. Born in 1992, Dongxia was sent to her maternal grandparents' home when she was an infant. Before Dongxia, her parents had already given birth to a girl, and Dongxia was the second chance for them to have a son. When she was in elementary school, Dongxia realized that the nice uncle and aunt who often came to see her were actually her biological parents. She did not return to her birth home until she became a teenager.

The population policy has changed in China. Five years after the abolition of the one-child policy, some experts began discussing and proposing further relaxations of restrictions on childbearing. However, customary adoption continues to exist with the preference for sons. In Jiangli, under the conditions that a family has already had two daughters before having a son, the family may still choose to send the first or second girl to a relative's home. Although the policy pressure is less than before, some girls still have to grow up apart from their parents and become relatively neglected in the family. As a group affected by the family planning policy and patriarchal ideas, adoptees not only feel the impacts in their daily lives, but they also pass this influence on to the next generation. Therefore, attention to this group is still meaningful in future.

Limitations and Further Research

This research mainly uses in-depth interviews to show the diversity of family relationships in adoption triangles and explore the factors underpinning that diversity. The focus is especially on the perspective of adoptees. This analytical perspective and interview-based data provided abundant details in the process and highlighted vivid life experiences. In this sense, this research not only speaks for adoptees from different angles and emphasizes the complexity of their life stories, but also pays attention to the dynamics of the relationships in adoption triangles. Of course, due to empirical and time constraints, this research still has unresolved issues that have to be discussed.

First, there was limited attention to regional variations of policy practice and cultural norms in this research. Because my data collection was cantered on the relational network rather than villages, this study pays more attention to different types of adoption triangles; it relatively ignored some social factors, such as class, rural-urban, and different types of villages.

Second, this research did not pay enough attention to the change in family relations after adoptees got married. The focus of this research was on relations between adoptees and their families in the adoption triangle. Although I regarded marriage as a strategy for adoptees to form new identify, we did not fully discuss how

marriage changed relations in the adoption triangle. The influence is believed to be mutual between the newly established family and the adoption triangle, which makes the family relations even more dynamic.

Third, when discussing family relations in the adoption triangle, this research mainly focused on the parent-child relationship and ignored other aspects of family relationships, such as the relationship between siblings. Among all family relationships, the sibling relationship lasts relatively long, and studies have also pointed out that the development of a close sibling relationship is an important source of support for individuals throughout their life course (Bel, Kalmijn, & Duijn, 2019; Kalmijn & Leopold, 2019). Therefore, in the study on family relations, the importance of the relationship between siblings cannot be ignored. In the adoption triangle, how does the relationship between siblings affect the adoptees' attitudes towards the two families, especially towards the birth families, is an issue worthy of further study.

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