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Asian Adoptees and Post-Adoption Services in Massachusetts: Data from Providers and Reflections from Adult Adoptees

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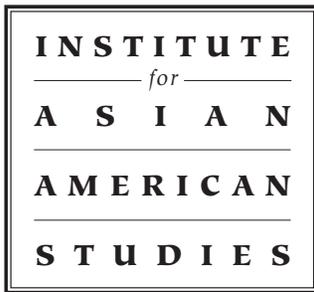
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Asian Adoptees and Post-Adoption

Data from Providers and

Services in

Reflections from Adult Adoptees

Massachusetts

by Nathan James Bae Kupel



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Asian Adoptees and Post-Adoption Services in Massachusetts

Data from Providers and Reflections from Adult Adoptees

Nathan James Bae Kupel, University of Massachusetts Boston

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2009, the Institute for Asian American Studies at the University of Massachusetts Boston in consultation with Boston Korean Adoptees, Inc. (BKA), commenced a project aimed at documenting post-adoption services and programs available to Asian adoptees, principally Korean, in Massachusetts and assessing their content and relevance.¹ In the first part of the project, a questionnaire was sent to providers of post-adoption services and program currently available requesting information about their services—number, content, clientele, resources, and staffing. In addition providers were asked to comment on the frequency of requests for services and on challenges faced in offering them. The project's second part focused on learning from adult adoptees about their personal experiences with post-adoption services. Discussion groups with adoptees gave them an opportunity to discuss the importance of these services during childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

This report presents the findings from the survey and discussions, after providing some brief background information about the history and magnitude of Asian adoptions in the United States. It concludes with recommendations on how service providers and other organizations can better address adoptees' interests through improving and expanding services and by working in collaboration with each other, the adult adoptee community, and the Asian American community at large.

¹ Boston Korean Adoptees, Inc., the only adult Asian adoptee-run non-profit in Massachusetts, has been in existence since 1998 and was incorporated in 2003. The organization provides social support for adult Korean adoptees in Greater Boston and the state.

BACKGROUND

War, politics, famine, and social upheaval have all contributed to the rise of intercountry adoptions which began in significant numbers in the 1950s. The United States has become one of the top destinations for intercountry adoptions. According to the U.S. State Department, between 1971 and 2001 Americans adopted more than 265,000 children internationally. Fifty-nine percent of intercountry adoptions during that period were from Asia (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute n.d.).

Korea and China are the top two Asian sending countries for intercountry adoption. Since the 1950s, roughly 160,000 children from Korea have been adopted internationally with about 100,000 of them placed in American families. Between 1991 and 2001, over 28,000 children from China were adopted by American families (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute n.d.). Peter Selman estimates that from 2002 to 2004 Americans adopted nearly 19,000 Chinese children with adoptions peaking at approximately 7,000 in 2004 (44). These figures suggest that most likely there are currently more than 50,000 Chinese adoptees in the United States.

Asian adoptees, most of whom have been adopted transracially by White parents, may struggle with a variety of issues while growing up. A report by the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute cites feelings of loss and abandonment, discrimination and racism, and overall confusion regarding identity as some of these issues (Freundlich & Lieberthal 2000). These challenges are often ones that transracial Asian adoptees deal with throughout their lives.

Effective and well-conceived post-adoption services can be vital in assisting Asian adoptees to address these challenges, but these services are often lacking for internationally adopted children. A majority of post-adoption services for children adopted from Asia are provided by adoption agencies at their discretion. In addition, a decrease in international adoptions has led to the closure of several international adoption programs in Massachusetts resulting in an overall loss of post-adoption services. These closures have left many adoptive families unaware of what post-adoption services exist and how to access them.

Furthermore, the scope of available post-adoption services may be inadequate. Programs and services such as counseling, culture camps, and mentor programs generally represent the extent of programming available while other needs that both transracial adoptees and families have voiced over the years are left unaddressed. Important issues such as understanding the prominent role of race in U.S. society and its implications for transracial adoptees have become more of an after-thought than an essential component of program content.

SURVEY RESULTS

A list of post-adoption service providers was compiled utilizing a report on post-adoption services produced by The Office of Foster Care and Adoption at the University of Massachusetts Medical School and the Department of Children and Families' website. An eleven-item questionnaire was sent to post-adoption service providers in Massachusetts. Providers were asked to describe their programs and services and whether these programs focused specifically on Asian adoptees. Out of twenty-three post-adoption service providers who were sent the questionnaire, seventeen responded either by mail or phone.

Post-adoption service provider respondents fall into four categories. Adoption agencies are the first post-adoption service provider category. These agencies are primarily responsible for adoption placements and facilitating adoptions through larger adoption agencies.

Adoptive family organizations are run by adoptive parents. These organizations can provide anything from education, post-adoption service referrals, play groups, and social activities. Most adoptive family groups are non-profits.

Mentor programs are generally run by adoptive parents or other adoption community members. They tend to be housed at universities or colleges drawing on students as mentors. More specifically, these mentor programs rely on the support of Asian American or Korean American student organizations.

The last post-adoption service provider category consists of those organizations with missions to serve the adoption community who are not agencies, family organizations or mentor programs primarily. These post-adoption service providers are non-profits with paid staff, some providing direct services such as counseling, and others who provide education, referrals and resources.

Table 1 identifies the providers who responded to the survey. A little over half of the post-adoption service provider respondents were also adoption agencies. The remaining respondents were adoptive family organizations, mentor programs and non-profits post-adoption service providers.

Seven of the seventeen providers are located in the Greater Boston area. Others are scattered across the state in cities and towns such as Wellesley, Norwood, Framingham, Waltham, Westborough, Needham, Fall River, Andover, Lowell and as far west as Northampton.

Table 1. Survey Respondents

Adoption Agencies Wide Horizons for Children Adoption Resource Associates China Adoption With Love A Red Thread Adoption Services Florence Crittenton League Full Circle Adoptions Alliance for Children Catholic Social Services Adoption Journeys	Adoptive Family Organizations Families with Children From China Korean Adoption Circle Adoptive Families @ MIT
	Mentor Programs Harvard Korean Adoptee Mentor Program Tufts KSA Big Brother Big Sister Program Andover Chinese/Korean Cultural Outreach
	Other Post-Adoption Service Providers Center for Family Connections Adoption Community of New England

Existing Post-Adoption Services

Respondents were asked to describe their current post-adoption services or programs. The results, Table 2, show that both mentor programs and organized outings are the most common type of post-adoption services offered.

Mentor Programs

Most of the mentor programs were concentrated in the Greater Boston area with four out of five mentor programs located there. Two mentor programs are specifically designed for Korean adoptees and Korean American children, and one program caters to the needs of all international adoptees. The Tufts Korean Big Brother Big Sister Program pairs Korean American students at Tufts University with local adoptees and Korean American children. Since, mentors are typically students, their monthly meetings for mentors and mentees occur during Tufts' academic year. There is no minimum age so mentees range in age from infants to those in their early teens. The program is generally self-sustaining since it is administered through the university, however, adoptive families are asked to pay a small fee to participate.

The only other mentor program that caters to Korean adoptees is the Harvard College Korean Adoptee Mentorship Program (HCKAMP). According to their website, each mentee is paired with a Harvard undergraduate mentor for the academic year and

Table 2. Existing Post-Adoption Services

	Culture Camp	Mentor/Mentee	Birth Search	Travel to Birth Country	Counseling	Outings	Language Classes
Programs Offered	2*	5	2	2	3	5	3
Ethnicity							
<i>Chinese</i>	1			1		3	2
<i>Korean</i>	1	2	1			1	1
<i>International</i>		1					
<i>All/General</i>		2	1	1	3	1	
Ages Served	3–15	2–early teens	Mostly adults	8–18	3–18	3–teens	4–12 and parents
Program Referrals Provided	1	2	2	3	5	1	2

* Both culture camps are provided by Wide Horizons for Children.

meet throughout the year (Harvard in the Community n.d.). In addition there are group activities scheduled every month for mentors and mentees to interact with each other.

Asian adoptees may also participate in the group Adoptive Families @ MIT. This mentor program is open to all international adoptees and their families. Similar to the previous mentor programs, this program relies on the institutional support of a school. They encourage adoptees over the age of four to participate, and typically accept up to fifteen adoptees per academic year. The program has served Vietnamese, Korean, Chinese and Cambodian adoptees since it first started in 2004.

The Center for Family Connections (CFFC) and Adoption Journeys, Child and Family Services (AJCFS) offer programs that are open to adoptees and families. CFFC provides mentors for its art therapy and parent groups, while AJCFS has a Young Adult Liaison Program and Parent Liaison Program where adopted persons in their 20s provide support to teen adoptees and their families. The program generally includes mentees who are between the ages of twelve and sixteen.

Organized Outings & Activities

Organized outings or activities are also common post-adoption services. Picnics, cultural holidays, and celebrations were most commonly noted in the questionnaire responses. However, there are a few providers that put together other types of outings

such as attending sporting events and visits to museums. Although one provider did cite activities designed for teens, other providers stated that there needed to be more programming aimed at teens, especially for Asian adoptees.

More often than not, organized outings and activities occur a few times per year. In some cases, organized outings are collaboratively coordinated. For instance, Families with Children From China (FCC) and A Red Thread Adoption Services, Inc., co-host an annual summer picnic for Chinese adoptees and their families. FCC also hosts an annual Chinese New Year Party. The Alliance for Children and the Florence Crittenton League both provide occasional outings with the former hosting an annual picnic in the summer.

Counseling

Three providers indicated that they offered counseling services. These services are not specifically targeted at Asian adoptees. Rather than providing their own counseling service, referrals are more common since not all providers have clinicians.

Birth Family Search & Birth Country Travel Programs

In comparison to other post-adoption services, birth family search programs and birth country travel programs are much less common. CFFC provides internet-based consulting for those who travel to their birth countries, but they do not provide a travel program. FCC offers its adoptive families and adoptees information sessions that discuss travel options and other related information. Only the Alliance for Children and Wide Horizons for Children provide organized trips to birth countries. Wide Horizons for Children helps set up birth country trips through programs such as “The Ties Program—Adoptive Family Homeland Journeys.” According to their website, The Ties Program organizes tours of Asian countries such as Korea, India, China, Philippines, Vietnam and Cambodia (Wide Horizons for Children n.d.). Tours are primarily for adoptive families and their children. Alliance for Children only provides tours of China.

Although there appear to be few birth family search services, it should be noted that in the case of international adoptions, searches are usually facilitated by the birth country adoption agency. For instance, Wide Horizons for Children assists adoptees and their families in searching for birth families through the adoption agency Holt International, Korea. In addition, adult adoptee organizations such as BKA have become referral networks for adult adoptees who are interested in searching but who are unsure how to proceed.

Culture Camps

Over the years, culture camps have become the most well known post-adoption service for Asian adoptees. Wide Horizons provides two culture camps for Asian adoptees: one for Korean adoptees and one for Chinese adoptees. These culture camp participants are typically between the ages of five and fifteen. When some of these adoptees become too old to be camp attendees they go on to become camp counselors.

The Asian Culture Society of Cape Cod² also hosts an Asian adoptee culture camp. Unfortunately, they did not return a questionnaire in time for this report. Their website states that their camp reaches out to young children, older children, teens, and even adults through arts, crafts, and other educational activities (Powers n.d.).

The Andover Chinese and Korean Cultural Outreach programs housed at Phillips Academy in Andover both provide one-on-one mentoring and cultural programming.³ The two programs draw on Chinese and Korean students to mentor adopted children and families through language instruction and cultural celebrations. They also offer parenting workshops which focus on issues such as race, family and culture. On average, each program works with 25 Phillips Academy students at one time. Their website states that adoptee participants in the Chinese cultural program are between the ages of three and six (Phillips Academy Andover n.d.). The Korean cultural program works with children up until middle school. Adoptive families must pay a \$75 membership fee per child.

Other Programs and Services

The Adoption Community of New England provides an annual conference on topics related to adoption, maintains an adoption lending library, and offers a mental health services directory. They also provide a writing workshop for adoptive parents and adopted individuals.

Finally, The Alliance for Children stated that it occasionally provides Chinese language classes. Two other organizations refer adoptees and families to outside language programs.

Challenges for Post-Adoption Service Providers

Post-adoption service providers face a number of complex challenges as non-profits, unincorporated family organizations, university-based mentor programs, and adoption

² <http://www.asiancamp.org/index.htm>

³ <http://www.andover.edu/StudentLife/CommunityService/ProjectsAndPrograms/Pages/RegularProjects.aspx>

agencies. Several organizations have been forced to discontinue some services and programs.

Respondents overwhelmingly stated that a lack of funding prohibits them from improving and creating new programs and services for Asian adoptees. The Korean Adoption Circle which is primarily an adoptive family organization said that previous activities and services such as “culture classes, [Korean] cooking classes, Korean drumming classes, and Korean language classes” all had to be canceled due to decreasing participation and a lack of instructors. When asked to comment on programming and services for Asian adoptees that have been discontinued, Wide Horizons said, “We would certain[sic] welcome an expansion of services offered but are keeping our options limited due to funding.”

Clearly, a lack of staff and program leaders—related to insufficient funding—has taken its toll on many post-adoption service providers. Volunteer-run post-adoption service providers rely heavily on unpaid staff in order to sustain their organizations. One organizational leader said, “We are all volunteers which means we are quite constrained by volunteer labor. So if we had a part-time staff person we could do much more.” Two other leaders voiced similar concerns such as, “I am the only worker here so we cannot provide extra services . . .” And one other respondent said that there is, “Not enough time in the day.” Faced with these realities, the recruitment of leadership, therefore, is critical to the survival of these organizations.

Another program leader suggested that there isn’t enough communication between post-adoption service providers regarding their events and programs. Most organizations communicate regularly with their members through e-mail listservs, but are not always in communication with other services providers. This person suggested the creation of a “resource network so groups can collaborate to send out resources and events.”

One organizational representative pointed to the scarcity of teen mentoring programs. The absence of programs and services aimed at teens was echoed by another respondent who concluded that there needs to be “more mentoring opportunities for teens, and support groups for parents.” In addition, current mentor programs tend to be for adoptee children rather than for teenagers who could benefit from an adult adoptee mentor. Despite the presence of adult adoptee organizations such as BKA and a small group of Boston Filipino adoptees from FAN, mentor programs heavily recruit non-adopted Asian American college students to serve as mentors.

Respondents also discussed the importance of developing new programming that focuses specifically on the needs of Asian adoptees. In fact, three out of the five responses collected in this particular section acknowledged the importance of developing programs with a focus on Asian adoptees. One respondent stated that

Table 3. Top Post-Adoption Service and Program Requests

Mentor Programs	8
Counseling	8
Travel to Birth Country	7
Book Recommendations	7
Culture Camp	5
Asian Language Class	5
Birth Search	4
Outings	4
Other	5

they would like to develop “programs for adoptees to learn about culture, counseling, activities revolving around Chinese culture.”

Post-adoption service providers were also asked to talk about their most common requests for services. Mentor programs and counseling services were the most requested programs and services, followed by travel to birth countries and adoption related books (Table 3). Korean and Chinese language classes were also requested. However, requests for Chinese language programs were more frequent than Korean language programs.

Other requests included referrals for Korean grocery stores, Korean restaurants, recipes, and stores that sell traditional Korean clothing such as *hanboks*.⁴ Some requests, however, were more complicated. For instance, some individuals wished to hear more about the experiences of adult adoptees and their reflections on childhood.

Post-adoption service providers were also asked which kinds of organizations they would be most interested in working with (Table 4). The most frequent responses were adult adoptee organizations and adoptive family groups. However, many providers expressed an interest in working with higher education institutions, particularly with Asian American student groups. They also showed a willingness to work with Asian American community organizations. Collaborating with other adoption agencies was one of the least popular answers. Finally, three stated a preference to work with foundations/funders, therapists and finding other relevant organizations.

When asked whether respondents currently work with other organizations, five of the seventeen respondents said that they currently work in collaboration with other organizations in the delivery of post-adoption services or programming. Two additional respondents stated that they referred families and adoptees to organizations

⁴ *Hanboks* are traditional Korean garments worn for festivals, celebrations and many formal events.

Table 4. Interest in Working with Other Types of Organizations

Adult Adoptee Organizations	12
Adoptive Family Groups	12
Asian American Student Groups	10
Colleges or Universities	9
Asian American Community Organizations	8
Adoption Agencies	6
Other	3

such as Adoption Associates of Newton, or to providers that are part of the Adoption Professionals Association of Massachusetts (APAM).

Out of the five post-adoption service providers that did work with other organizations, very few worked with Asian American community organizations. One adoptive family group said that they worked with the Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center and the Organization for Chinese Americans, while other providers stated that they partnered with other adoption agencies, Korean American Student groups, and various other organizations.

Additional Comments

At the conclusion of the survey, participants were given the opportunity to add additional comments, which are quoted below.

- “Post-adoption services just don’t exist.” “After placement, agencies just drop off the face of the earth.” —Adoptive family organization
- “It is hard to know how long the China adoptions program will continue. We are a very small agency.”⁵ —Adoption agency
- “We have only been doing home studies and providing post-adoption services for internationally born children since approximately 1995; the adoptees are still quite young. Unfortunately, due to staffing restrictions our agency has done very little in post-adoption services. But we do provide referrals to other resources.” —Adoption agency

⁵ This agency noted at one point in the survey that as they have not placed a child from China in several years, they may be forced to discontinue their adoption program there and focus on other existing adoption programs.

- “We also do work specifically with LGBT adopted, gay adolescence.” —Adoption agency

Survey Results Summary

In summary, the survey responses revealed five major themes. 1) Post-adoption services are more commonly provided by adoption agencies, 2) Organized outings and mentor programs are the two most common post-adoption services currently available, 3) Post-adoption service providers face diverse challenges that are a result of their type of organization, 4) Counseling and mentor programs are the two most commonly requested post-adoption services, and 5) Post-adoption service providers are interested in working in collaboration with adult adoptee organizations, adoptive family groups, and Asian American student groups.

Although the information collected from the questionnaires is a sample of post-adoption service providers, the high ratio of adoption agencies to other organizations may accurately reflect the types of organizations that are providing post-adoption services. Historically, adoption agencies have fulfilled the roles of providing post-adoption services to adoptees. However, there are a variety of limitations accompanying these agencies and other small post-adoption service providers that complicate issues of access for adoptees and their families.

Adoption agencies' post-adoption services are often understaffed and underfunded. These programs and services are vulnerable and are often first to be placed on the chopping block when cuts need to be made. Therefore, adoption agencies adamantly stated that funding continues to put their post-adoption services and programs in jeopardy.

Smaller unincorporated post-adoption service providers continue to struggle with finding volunteers to help make their organizations and services sustainable. In addition, most of their activities and services are free, making it hard to find volunteer instructors. These same groups say that there tends to be a lack of communication between other providers making it difficult to coordinate programming.

There are also geographical barriers for adoptees and their families. A large number of post-adoption service providers and programs are clustered in the Greater Boston area making it difficult for adoptees and their families outside the Boston area to participate. The closure of several prominent adoption agencies in Western Massachusetts has placed additional strains on existing providers and on the adoptees in that region.

Overall, post-adoption service providers are struggling to retain the services and programs they provide to adoptive families and adoptees. Thus, sustainability is critical

to their future success. Surprisingly, there weren't many providers working together to operate programs jointly. They all, however, expressed interest in working with other organizations to improve the quality of their programming.

When comparing actual post-adoption services available to those most commonly requested, there appear to be some discrepancies. Counseling services and travel options to birth countries had the largest gaps between the number of requests and the actual existing programs or services fulfilling these needs.

Providers stated a willingness to work with Asian American community organizations, adult adoptee organizations such as BKA, adoptive family groups and Asian American student groups. Guided by the perspectives of adult adoptees, it is clear that services for Asian adoptees can be strengthened by forging new working relationships with the Asian American community at large.

DISCUSSION GROUPS

In the discussion groups, participants were asked about post-adoption services and programs that they took part in as children and as adults. They evaluated these programs and services and offered recommendations for improvement. These participants also discussed issues that were challenging for them while growing up and presented ideas for new post-adoption services to address these challenges. Table 5 summarizes the post-adoption services that these adoptee participants utilized as children and adolescents.

Sixteen adult Asian adoptees participated in two discussion groups. Both groups had eight participants each. Pseudonyms were used in this report to protect the identities of the discussion participants. Most were members of Boston Korean Adoptees, Inc.; however, there were four members of the Filipino Adoptee Network (FAN), as well as one Vietnamese adoptee. In both discussions, participants were asked about post-adoption services and programs that they took part in as children and as adults. Those who did not take part in programs or services were asked to discuss whether or not they thought they would have been helpful. In addition they evaluated these programs and services and offered recommendations for improvements.

The average age of the participants was 30.6. Half of the participants were between the ages of 21 and 30 and the other half were 31 years of age and older. Four participants were male and 12 participants were female. Nine adoptee participants grew up in Massachusetts, two grew up in Connecticut, two in the Midwest, one in Maine, one in Pennsylvania, and one participant grew up outside of the United States.

Child and Adolescent Participation in Post-Adoption Services and Activities

Participants were asked to describe the post-adoption services and programs that they took part in as children and adolescents. Most participants said that they attended organized or informal outings as a child or adolescent. Three individuals stated that they had attended picnics, dinners or get-togethers organized by their adoption agencies. Another three said that they participated in formal or informal play groups, outings or other get-togethers for Filipino or Korean adoptee children. Two other individuals said that their families had get-togethers with other adoptive families, and finally one individual said that her family routinely had dinner with a Korean American family.

Some adoptees recall the presence of educational or cultural programs in their lives as children and adolescents. Two adoptees stated that their parents subscribed to Korean American magazines for them. One adoptee said that her parents took her to Korean culture shows at local colleges and another participated in a Korean dance group.

Culture camps also played a role in the lives of some adoptees. Three adoptees participated in culture camps as children or adolescents. One of these adoptees was a camp counselor as a teenager, while the other two were camp attendees as children.

There were also a few miscellaneous activities that were mentioned. One adoptee said that she had a Korean adoptee pen pal as a child. Another adoptee who was adopted at an older age remarked on how helpful it was to have an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) instructor in her school.

Despite these programs and services, six other adoptee participants frustratingly expressed that there was an absence of helpful post-adoption services or programs available to them as children and adolescents. Many felt isolated, residing in suburban, predominantly White communities removed from other people of color. Adoptees that came to the United States prior to the 1980s discussed an absence of basic post-

Table 5. Post-Adoption Services and Activities Participated in as Children and Adolescents

Organized/Informal Outings	9
None/Very Few Services	6
Educational/Cultural Activities	4
Culture Camp	3
Mentor Programs	1
Counseling	1
Misc.	2

adoption services or programs pointing to a generational divide between the first generation of transnational adoptions and subsequent generations.

Adoptees were asked to discuss how they felt at the time when they participated in these post-adoption services or programs. Most pointed to the tensions of being raised in predominantly White communities as an Asian American and person of color, yet not having the language or ability to understand how these factors were negatively affecting them as children. As children, many felt pushed too hard to identify as Korean or Asian in ways that may not have been helpful to begin with.

One woman named Jill, commented on the difficulties that adoptive parents face when deciding whether they should force their children to participate in particular programs:

I think it's a fine line between providing services for your kid and making it available, and pushing too hard. I think it's hard for parents to know where that line is . . . I don't think my parents pushed too hard . . . And now . . . I wish I had learned the [Korean] language. I wish I had gone to language school and picked up when it was a little easier.

Jill perceives post-adoption services as being challenging for parents as they attempt to understand their child's comfort levels yet also acknowledges the importance of such programs and services as an adult. For her, participation in such programs and services was less about her own comfort levels, and more about what her participation represented: "Basically my entire childhood and adolescence I just wanted to be like everybody else and I really hated having to go to anything that emphasized that I was different. Even though I can look back now and appreciate it."

Like Jill, others felt compelled to distance themselves from their Asian American identity as a result of living in a predominantly White community. An adoptee named Erin felt that it was particularly hard for her to feel pride in her identity when she was constantly being teased for it. Others echoed this statement explaining their unwillingness to participate in activities that focused on their identity because of the negative and often racist behavior they experienced from their peers.

One woman, Carolyn, who grew up mostly abroad, said that she became acutely aware that she was Asian when she returned to the United States later in her life: "I remember coming back to the United States, and waking up Asian so to speak."

What Carolyn and Jill discussed became consistent themes throughout the discussions. Many adoptees struggled with notions of race as it related to their identities and their inability to understand racism which their parents seemed ill-equipped to understand and explain to them.

Several adoptees also discussed how uncomfortable they felt around other Asians or Koreans as children. A Korean adoptee named Helen who frequently had dinner at other Korean families' homes felt uneasy: ". . . I saw all these Korean children," she stated, "I was really uncomfortable, I didn't want to be here . . . I found it uncomfortable, I didn't know how to talk about it."

Similarly, another adoptee described feeling discomfort around other Asian Americans: "When I was really little, if I saw another Asian I would start to cry. I didn't want anything to do with them."

Mary, a Korean adoptee, described her anxiety being Asian when she was in public with her family. Mostly, her discomfort came when she was around other Asians. She describes feeling embarrassed by her White family and sometimes would be reprimanded at Chinese restaurants for not knowing Chinese. These particular feelings of isolation and cultural confusion illustrate the potentially destructive nature of growing up in a predominantly White community as an Asian American and how most adoptive parents were unable to address these issues for their children.

Many adoptees vividly remember the racial slurs they were called as children and the racial taunting. One adoptee recalls being called "Chinkerbell," by her peers and another said that her peers would often make "Ching Chong noises," at her.

Mary felt that her parents had insisted on teaching her the importance of being color blind. A few adoptees discussed how confusing this concept was for them since they felt that they would still be treated differently despite the idea that people should not see their "color."

Christina, a Korean adoptee, expressed enormous frustration over how she was unable to cope with racism as a child. She believes that she struggled more with her racial identity than she did with her adoptee identity. She describes how she feels that the intersectionality or ways in which these distinct identities collide were complex and her inability to understand these issues was frustrating:

So many of the issues I feel like I dealt with and deal with now weren't even related to being adopted it was being a minority in a White community . . . But the race, and culture and adoption thing I think they're very—it's like a Venn diagram.

John, a Filipino adoptee, said that now he can appreciate the services his adoption agency provided him as a child but he wishes there had been more of an effort made to keep them in communication with each other as they got older.

There were others who believe that adoption agencies should improve their adoptive parents' education in other areas besides understanding racial differences. Liz,

a Korean adoptee, said that she had problems accessing health care: “I was sick, I had a high fever . . . The insurance company said, ‘She’s adopted so we’re not covering her because she’s not your *real* daughter.’”

Helen discussed a vital post-adoption service which benefitted her greatly. She was adopted when she was older, so her post-adoption service needs as a child were different than other adoptees in the discussion groups. Helen was assigned an ESOL aid when she started school in the United States. She says that being adopted as an older child meant that she needed more transitional support which is something that adoption agencies need to take into consideration.

All of the adoptees in the discussions were affiliated with adult adoptee organizations (Table 6), and it was clear that their involvement with these organizations was very important to them.

Adult Participation in Post-Adoption Services and Activities

Most participants said that having organizations such as BKA in college would have been very helpful. Many said that BKA and FAN should start doing more outreach to colleges in the Boston area. Eric said he wishes there were more student adoptee groups such as the Transracial Adoptee Network at Mount Holyoke College in Western Massachusetts. Overall, this period as a young adult in college and in graduate school turned out to be tremendously transformative for the adoptees in both discussion groups. This period of young adulthood was what eventually led most of these adoptees to participate in the adult adoptee community.

The Filipino Adoptee Network, although small, acts as both a social network for Filipino adoptees online, but also as a referral network for participation in culture camps such as the Filipino Heritage camp in Colorado. For Vietnamese adoptees there is the Vietnamese Adoptee Network (VAN) which is also small and primarily exists as a virtual online community. However, since VAN started, several other virtual online Vietnamese adoptee communities have sprung up such as Operation Reunite and Adopted Vietnamese International (AVI). Korean adoptees discussed how important the adult Korean adoptee community and, more specifically, BKA has been in their own lives.

In both discussion groups, many of the Korean adoptees who had been back to Korea had gone to the Gathering, a worldwide conference for Korean adoptees, in either 2004 or 2007.⁶ In addition, a few other participants planned to attend the next Gathering

⁶ The evolution of the adult Korean adoptee community took place over the past several decades, as Korean adoptees formed associations and organizations throughout the world. Eventually, the International Korean Adoptee Association was formed, and conferences known as the Gathering and Mini-Gatherings were held. Over the course of the past several years, Mini-Gatherings have become

Table 6. Post-Adoption Services and Activities Participated in as Adults

Adoptee Organization Participation	15
Birth Country Visit	11
Birth Family Search	7
Asian American Community Involvement	6
Adoptee Advocacy	6
Language Acquisition	5
Academic Exploration	4
Book Club	3
Culture Camp Staff	3
Counseling	2
Served as Mentor	2
Other	1

in Seoul, South Korea. All but one the Korean adoptee participants had been to a Mini-Gathering, a smaller conference held in the United States or Europe.

Participants underscored the importance of visiting their birth countries as adults. In fact, eleven participants had visited their birth countries at least once. Of those who had visited their birth countries, almost all of them have been back at least twice. Two Korean adoptees moved and lived in Korea for an extended period of time. There were only three adoptees who had not visited his or her birth country.

Although many adoptee participants had visited their birth countries, fewer had conducted searches for their birth families. Seven adoptees from the discussion groups had conducted searches for their birth families and six of them had been reunited with their birth families.⁷

A little less than half of the adoptees in the discussion groups also cited the importance of participation and involvement in Asian American communities. Some joined Asian American student organizations in college such as Korean Student Associations, some made friends in the Filipino American community, and others

biannual conferences with one usually taking place in the United States and one in Europe. The Gathering, has become the largest Korean adoptee conference in the world. Dating back to 1999, these conferences bring together adult Korean adoptees from around the globe. And since the 2004 Gathering, these conferences have occurred every three years in Seoul, South Korea. Following in the footsteps of these gatherings, the Vietnamese adoptee community formed its first “gathering” of sorts in Vietnam in April of 2010.

⁷ Although this suggests that family reunification is common, there is no evidence to support the notion that a majority of adoptees who search for birth family, are reunited with them.

joined groups such as Asian Sisters in Action (ASIA), Vietnam Women's Forum, and Asian American religious organizations.

Many adoptees participated in adoptee advocacy. Several adoptees as adults, for example, presented at conferences and provided trainings to adoption professionals. For many of these adoptees, their participation was as much about providing services to others as it was a learning experience for them.

Participants also struggled with their inability to understand and speak their mother tongue and many sought out language classes. Several described an aversion or hesitancy to participate in language programs as children. However, as adults, the desire for language acquisition became heightened as they contacted or considered contacting their birth families. The methods for learning languages varied. A few Korean adoptee participants took Korean language classes at MIT where graduate students voluntarily offer free language classes every semester. One participant unsuccessfully tried Rosetta Stone, and a few others moved to Korea where they immersed themselves in the language. There was also one Filipino adoptee participant who said she was learning Tagalog by herself.

The language barrier prevented some participants from contacting their birth families. Christina said that despite conducting a search for her family, she's just not ready to contact or meet them: "I know a lot of information about them . . . I'm just not ready because I don't feel that I can communicate with them . . . It's just such a block."

Several participants also described the importance of exploring their identities as transracial adoptees and as Asian Americans through academia. Three Korean adoptees took courses in Asian American Studies programs as undergraduates. There were two other Korean adoptees who conducted research projects on adoption through their masters programs. For adoptees like Eric, learning and discussing what it meant to be an Asian American was not only revelatory, but a first step to understanding his identity as a transracial adoptee. He described how his decision to transfer to a more diverse college in Boston allowed him to acknowledge and explore his Asian American and adoptee identity.

Eric's brother Jeff, who is also a Korean adoptee, said that initially he took an Asian American studies course only because it fit his schedule. But, over time he became increasingly interested and empowered by the discussions that took place in the Asian American studies program. He went on to describe how this prepared him to explore his identity as an adoptee and how his brother pushed him to join BKA.

For Jill it was a combination of different programs and activities that pushed her to acknowledge her identity as both a transracial adoptee and Asian American. She describes the importance of the Korean adoptee mentor program that she participated in during college and to some degree the Asian Students Union and Korean Students

Association. She eventually became an Asian American Studies major and decided that through her program, she wanted to think more about her identity as an adoptee.

It is interesting to note that many of the adoptee participants discussed coming to terms with their Asian American identities as a precursor to exploring their identities as transracial adoptees. One partial explanation for this may be related to the racism and discrimination these adoptees faced during their childhood due to the fact that they were Asian. Most participants reported feeling singled-out or teased for being Asian and less due to their adoptee identity. Asian American Studies programs, therefore, may empower Asian adoptees to understand these experiences in relation to their identities as Asian Americans.

As a final note, for these adoptees, many of the programs and services they utilized as adults came from sources other than their adoption agencies, adoptive parent groups and even adoption related non-profits. Post-adoption service providers indicated that they generally provide more services to adoptee children and to some degree adolescents but very rarely to adults. Furthermore, some of the needs of adoptees have not been met by traditional post-adoption services. The fact that adult adoptees sought out programs and services related to their identities as Asian Americans or as adoptees, for example, illustrates the need for the range of post-adoption services to be expanded and extended into adulthood.

Prevalent Themes and Implications for Programming and Services

In the final section of the discussion groups, participants focused on problematic themes and issues from their childhood, adolescence, and adulthood then offered several post-adoption service suggestions to address these concerns.

Overall the participants' suggestions reflected a lack of services available during childhood, adolescence and adulthood. In both discussion groups, adoptee participants said that the toughest obstacles and challenges that they encountered occurred while they were teenagers. Racism and discrimination stood out as the most pronounced obstacles that adoptee participants grappled with during their adolescent years in both discussion groups.

Participants vividly recall experiencing instances of racism and discrimination. And perhaps as a result, confusion over racial identity came up as one of the most cited examples of how adoption agencies had failed to educate and prepare adoptive parents.

With only one exception, each adoptee described growing up in predominantly White communities. The lack of diversity made adoptees feel ashamed of their Asian identity. As Jill had said earlier, "Basically my entire childhood and adolescence I just wanted to be like everybody else and I really hated having to go to anything that emphasized that I was different."

Grace said that she remembers the discomfort she felt around other Asian American women and how it therefore affected her self-esteem:

I do remember growing up that I did not feel comfortable around Asian women, especially women who were Chinese—fair-skinned Chinese and Japanese—because that’s what I saw in society as considered Asian and I did not see that in myself. And so I did not think I could relate to them at all so I felt very uncomfortable around them. Which was very, very strange. And I also remember growing up seeing these other girls in my classroom who people thought were very beautiful and everyone was attracted to them. I tried to like mimic my face to be like theirs. Because for some reason they were gorgeous or they were beautiful for some reason and I didn’t see that for myself. So I would try and mimic the way their eyes were, the way they smiled, the way that they did all these things. So it really had an impact on my physical identity.

Next, participants turned to post-adoption services for adults. Adoptee participants had quite a bit to say about improving services for adult adoptees. Their suggestions also indicated that lumping all adult Asian adoptees together may not necessarily be helpful. In fact, the diversity in ages of the participants also provided a glimpse into how post-adoption service needs differ at various ages in life.

One participant described how important post-adoption services are for adults in their early 20s and 30s. She believes that post-adoption service providers need to take a closer look at the complex needs of transracial Asian adoptees at different stages of adulthood. This may also be an opportunity for organizations such as BKA to develop new programs or collaborate with other post-adoption service providers. As he stated:

A lot of times we’re not able to deal with our issues until we are like late 20s early 30s or something like that I’ve seen that across the board, or mid 20s. What services are available to them? I love BKA but we are a social group . . . I want there to be thoughtful speakers, I want there to be thoughtful discussions, like this. *This*, is powerful.

There were other adoptee participants who believed that discussion groups such as the discussions conducted for this report were new and important post-adoption service ideas that may allow adult adoptees to explore the complexities of transracial adoption together. The attendance of both discussion groups provided proof that adult adoptees wanted opportunities to talk about complex issues in the comfort of an adoptee only setting.

Participants also felt frustrated by the lack of sensitivity from the general public regarding transracial adoption. General day-to-day interactions with strangers became uncomfortable when they were asked about being adopted and the seemingly never ending question about their last names.

Several participants also discussed the challenges of starting families, and how programs and services directed at the needs of adoptees as parents have gone largely unnoticed. One adoptee talked at length about how there was no real guide when she decided to become a parent. Parenting multiracial children she believes, peels back a whole new layer in the process of understanding yourself as an adoptee and ultimately, as a parent. Further complicating matters, adoptees are often faced with the challenging decision of whether they should adopt or have biological children.

Participants commented on how post-adoption services should continue to help adoptive parents prepare for the challenges of parenting transracially. One adoptee discussed how the siblings of adoptees are often ignored in the dynamics of an adoptee's family, especially those who are biological to the adoptive parents. Others said that they wanted to see better quality of pre-placement trainings for adoptive parents plus family members, more post-adoption services and programming for adoptive parents, and education on significant issues such as the experiences of adoptees growing up in monoracial or predominantly White communities.

Other particularly important suggestions included organized birth country travel options, increased support for birth family searches, and birth family reunion. One adoptee said that she would like to see an informational packet created for those who have never visited their birth country before. Another Korean adoptee said he would like for there to be more formalized support for birth family searches which would address questions such as "Where do I start?" and "What can I expect?" In a similar vein, another adoptee suggested that there needed to be a "Family Search FAQ Book."

Adoptees who had been reunited with their birth families in the discussions said that their continued relationships with their birth families have been challenging at times. John said that he has felt compelled to financially support his birth family. In fact, he sends money to his family in the Philippines on a regular basis. Laura, another Filipino adoptee, said that she was asked by her birth family to find her biological brother a job in the United States.

Depending on the adoption agency they were adopted through, some adoptees had more access to translation services than others. Eric and Jeff who are brothers, said that when they first received a letter from their birth family, it was sent by his agency in Korean with no translation. Eric had to ask a Korean co-worker to help translate the letter. John, a Filipino adoptee, says that there have been a number of occasions when

he has called on his Filipino American friends to help translate letters between he and his birth mother. These post-reunion issues and concerns reflect a growing need for new post-adoption services that address the complexities of interacting and communicating with birth families after reunification.

Christina vocalized her frustration over her adoption paperwork which has been an ongoing fight for access and accountability for many adult adoptees. A majority of the adoption paperwork is housed at the adoption agency in an adoptee's birth country. The American agency often does not have access to these records, and it ends up being hard to obtain them. However, Christina says that her American agency had records that were very different from her Korean adoption agency. She says the records from both agencies were like "night and day." She says that had she not asked for a copy of her records in Korea, she would have never known about her birth family.

There were also a few other post-adoption service ideas which were more artistic or creative in nature. One adoptee said that she would like to see a class for those who want to learn how to cook various Korean dishes. Finally, another adoptee said that she would have benefited from programming as a child that utilized the arts and creative expression to explore various aspects of identity and adoption.

CONCLUSION

The information supplied by service providers and the perspectives gained from discussions with adult adoptees all reflect the importance and complexity of meeting the diverse needs of adoptees. The services that several providers have made available are welcome, but clearly their number and scope are inadequate. The thoughtful comments of adult adoptees are instructive not only in identifying needs but in shaping appropriate organizational responses.

The recommendations outlined below are not intended to be exhaustive. They acknowledge that service providers and other organizations can play important roles in improving the lives of adoptees but their influence is only a part of broad universe of actors and institutions. These recommendations, therefore, are an attempt to commence rather than settle a much-needed conversation that in the end will it is hoped contribute to healthier, happier lives for Asian adoptees and those who care about them.

I. Transform Cultural Programming Paradigm

It is clear from both discussion groups that race has been and continues to be one of the most defining issues for Asian adoptees as children, adolescents, and adults. Participants' comments suggest that the current cultural paradigm for post-adoption

services may be irrelevant and outdated. Thus, a paradigm shift is needed to thoroughly address and understand the needs of Asian adoptees in cultural programming.

Growing up in predominantly White communities, adoptees confronted racism and discrimination with relatively no tools to interpret the meaning of their experiences and no ways to cope with the psychological aftermath.

The presence of cultural content in post-adoption services is not enough by itself. In fact, adoptees suggested a potential flaw in the present paradigm of cultural programming such as culture camps. Cultural programming often downplays the importance of understanding Asian American culture or identity in favor of simplistic and sometimes dated representations of Asian cultures.

The fact that adult adoptees reported that participation in Asian American clubs in college, Asian American Studies courses and post-graduate work on adoption was educational and empowering suggests that adoptee children and teens might benefit from services or programming that focus on Asian American identity and interactions with adult Asian adoptees or Asian American youth through services such as mentor programs.

For instance, the presence of youth programs in the Asian American community offers the potential to include Asian adoptees or perhaps for the development of new youth programs and mentor opportunities for Asian adoptees. Inclusion of Asian adoptees in educational, cultural and language classes, are all possible opportunities for collaboration between Asian American organizations and Asian adoptees.

II. Provide More Post-Adoption Services for Adolescents and Adults

Asian adoptee teenagers are an overlooked group. Adoptee children often age out of programming such as mentor programs and culture camps in their teens and take on mentor and counselor roles despite their own distinct needs as teenagers. In fact, adoptees in the discussion groups defined their most challenging years as their adolescence and teenage years.

Furthermore, programs and services that target Asian adoptees are often family-based, and adult adoptees in this report believe there should be more programming developed by and for Asian adoptees. BKA remains the only Asian adult adoptee non-profit in the state, and could play a role in the development and operation of programs for Asian adoptees if opportunities arise.

Ultimately, post-adoption service providers continue to define their target age groups as adopted children and sometimes teenagers with virtually no services or programming aimed at adult Asian adoptees.

III. Improve and Expand Educational Preparation for Adoptive Families

There was a shared belief from discussion participants that pre-/post-adoption educational preparation for adoptive parents and families needs to be improved. This also included non-adopted and adopted siblings. But in particular, they believe that adoption agencies need to provide more educational content on what it means to parent transracially and the implications for their Asian American children.

They talked at length and painfully at times, about their experiences growing up in all White communities where they experienced racism and discrimination. Several adoptee women explained how growing up in mostly White communities had had a crippling effect on their self-confidence.

Therefore, participants suggested that adoptive parents consider living in more diverse communities or neighborhoods. They believe this would offer adoptees opportunities to interact with other children of color, find adult role models, and allow them to feel more confident with their identities as Asian Americans.

IV. Increase Counseling Support Services

There are few clinicians or counselors who specialize in adoption and who are themselves adopted. One Korean adoptee therapist was mentioned by several post-adoption service providers; however, she may be the only therapist who is an Asian adoptee herself. Regardless, the need for these services is evident. According to post-adoption service providers, this ranks among one of the most requested services from adoptive parents.

In addition, the behavior of those seeking counseling reflects a trend of families being crisis driven rather than proactively addressing particular concerns. This may be due to a lack of alternative clinical interventions or program options that are available.

Adoptees said that discussion groups could fulfill some of these needs. While not all agreed on the nature of these discussion groups, all agreed that they could be extremely helpful and should be considered by post-adoption service providers.

V. Provide Birth Country Travel Options

There were very few travel options for Asian adoptees. In fact, only two providers who answered the questionnaire offer their own travel programs. For the most part, these programs are designed for families which may not necessarily be appropriate or helpful to teenage adoptees. None of the providers surveyed indicated that they had any travel programs geared towards adoptees only.

Korean, Vietnamese and Filipino adult adoptees are on their own for birth country travel. Korean adoptees now have more resources than before, however,

teenagers could benefit immensely from adult adoptees as mentors on birth country trips if given the opportunity. Filipino adoptees are able to travel to the Philippines through their adoption agencies but organized tours for both Vietnamese and Filipino adoptees are still rare in comparison to the options available to Korean adoptees.

VI. Increase Support for Birth Family Search, Reunion and Post-Reunion

Conducting a birth family search can be unusually difficult depending on the year you were born, and the agency you were adopted through. Adoptees frustratingly discussed how difficult it can be to request and obtain copies of their adoption paperwork. Based on these experiences, the American adoption agencies and adoption agencies abroad don't always have the same information related to an adoptee's birth family or adoption records.

Adoptees called for resource guides to help manage expectations during the search process as well as "FAQ" style information for those just starting their search for family. Additional resources include translation support for adoptees as they attempt to make initial contact with birth parents. This includes translations for adoptees who meet birth family and translation support for future communications.

There are many post-adoption service needs for adult adoptees during the search process. The search process can be incredibly stressful both emotionally and psychologically. Post-reunion relationships with birth families can also get complicated. One adoptee discussed the familial obligation he felt to financially support his birth family. These issues are complex, and a continuum of emotional and psychological support for adoptees throughout the birth family search process should be considered.

Participants emphasized the significance of being able to communicate in their "mother tongue." Asian language classes seem to be offered sporadically yet continue to be a common request for post-adoption service providers as well.

Adult adoptees stressed the importance of learning their own language as it pertained to connecting with birth family. Those who had connected with birth family members rely heavily on translators for communication and in-person meetings. Furthermore, the language barrier may also hinder an adoptee from searching for their birth parents in the first place. While some adoptees suggested that language programs be mandatory, language programs are not widely available.

In summary, this report recommends expanding the availability and scope of post-adoption services. Most importantly, issues related to race and identity continue to define many Asian adoptees' hardships as children, adolescents and adults. Post-adoption service providers should listen to the voices of adult adoptees in designing programs and services. This is especially relevant as the Chinese adoptee generation matures, posing new challenges for post-adoption service providers in the years ahead.

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