

National Adoption Awareness Month

NAAM Facts, Information, and Resources

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Caption

As November is National Adoption Awareness Month (NAAM), we have compiled resources and information aimed to amplify adoptee voices! Asian-American adoption has a unique and diverse history, and it is important that we educate ourselves on the topic, listen to, and explore different stories to further support our peers.

This is a short compilation of facts, phrases we should avoid, discussion openers, and media/book recommendations. We hope this serves as a starting point to open up conversations. Additionally, AASU will send out more resources for those who are interested in more extensive information - a link will be available through our linktree in our bio.

A huge thanks to our Human Resources Chair, @joie_meyer, who worked to compile resources that highlighted adoptee perspectives, specifically on the Asian-American experience.

#adopteevoices #NAAM

General Information

Bold = recommended by organizations reached out to on IG

Facts about Asian-American Adoption

- Nearly one out of five adoptees living in the U.S. today was adopted internationally and about half of these were born in Asia.
- The top sending countries for children adopted by U.S. citizens were China, Ethiopia, India, South Korea, Ukraine, and Vietnam in 2003-2011.
- The total amount of international adoptions has decreased every year since 2004. This is due to a variety of social, economic and political factors.
- Each country has different eligibility requirements for prospective parents. There are age, health, income, education, and other conditions.

THE HAGUE CONVENTION

- The Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (otherwise known as the Hague Adoption Convention) is an international treaty that protects children and their families against the risks of illegal, irregular, premature, or ill-prepared adoptions abroad.
- The Hague Convention established safeguards to ensure that all intercountry adoptions are in the best interests of the child and respects their human rights. It also put a system in place of cooperation among countries to guarantee that these safeguards are respected and to prevent the abduction of, sale of, or traffic in children.
- The Hague Adoption Convention was made effective in the U.S. in 2008. Currently, the Convention has been ratified by 101 states.

CHINA

- In 1979, the Chinese government implemented a “One-Child Policy” in an effort to prevent overpopulation. (Specific regulations varied throughout the country.)
 - Due to Chinese cultural norms, sons were desired for labor, financial support, and because they would carry on the family name. Many baby girls were put up for adoption to be able to have a son instead.
 - Couples with multiple children would be fined heavily and even punished by the Chinese government.
- The One Child Policy was abolished in 2016, and all families in China are now allowed to have two children.
- The number of adoptions from China slowly increased until 2005 and has slowly decreased ever since, due both to falling birth rates and the related increase in demand for adoptions by Chinese parents themselves.

VIETNAM

- In 1975, over 2,000 Vietnamese and Cambodian children from orphanages in South Vietnam were airlifted out of Vietnam and adopted by families around the world at the end of the Vietnam War.
- Vietnamese adoption was blocked in 2008, then lifted in 2014.
 - In 2008, a U.S. State Department investigation of Vietnam’s adoption system uncovered the existence of fraud and baby-selling. As a result, the Vietnamese authorities announced that all adoptions to the U.S. would be stopped.
 - Three years after that investigation, Vietnam signed the Hague Convention on Protection of Children. It also changed its adoption laws. This led to an agreement between the United States and Vietnam to permit adoptions to begin again.

SOUTH KOREA

- The international adoption of South Korean children started as a result of a large number of orphaned mixed children from the Korean War after 1953. (Mixed children were considered taboo.)
 - 6,293 Koreans were adopted in the United States between 1955 and 1966, of whom about 46% were white and Korean mixed, 41% were fully Korean, and the rest were African-American and Korean mixed. The first wave of adopted people from Korea came from usually mixed-race children whose families lived in poverty; the children's parents were often American military men and Korean women.
- In 1955, Holt International began the process of intercountry adoption, and since that time, adoptions from South Korea have consistently continued. In 2017, the last year statistics were available, 276 adoptions were completed from South Korea to the United States.

INDIA

- Many orphans from India are not brought to a child care institution, leading to a very low rate of Indian adoption.
 - Absence of a uniform law in India and caste prejudices made inter-country adoption more popular than domestic adoption. Additionally, the majority of Indian children given up for adoption were female.
 - Though adoption by OCIs (Overseas Citizens of India) and NRIs (Non-Residents of India) was previously possible, beginning in 2006, non-NRI and non-OCI families became eligible to adopt. However, OCIs and NRIs are still given preference.
 - Adoption in India is regulated by the Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA)

General Mental Health

- Imposter's Syndrome
 - Some adoptees can have trouble developing a legitimate cultural identity. When trying to learn more about their heritage, they may feel as though they are "outsiders", and that they have a weaker claim to their birth country's culture than others.
 - For many Asian American adoptees, they may feel less like they don't belong with other people who share their cultural heritage. This general feeling of "in between", feeling as though they are too Asian when with non-Asians, and too non-Asian with Asians, can be difficult.
- All adopted adolescents were significantly more likely to have had contact with a mental health professional than nonadoptees.
- However, it's important to note that not everyone has the same adoptee experience or response. Some people have incredibly complex feelings/trauma surrounding their

adoption, while others do not see it playing a significant role in their life. Both of these are completely normal, as there is no universal adoptee experience.

DON'Ts: Phrases You Shouldn't Say

- **“Do you know your real parents?” / “Are you guys real siblings?”**
 - Adoptive parents can be just as “real” as biological parents, and the same goes for siblings. To insinuate that they’re not “real parents” just because they’re not blood related is extremely offensive and hurtful and implies that their family is not “normal” simply because it is not conventional.
 - An adoptee’s relationship with their birth/biological parents is a personal matter that they do not have to disclose.
 - Additionally, some adoptees may even struggle with their adoptive families and may not consider them as “family” at all. The idea of “real families/parents/siblings” may not be for everyone.
- **“Do you want to/wish you knew who your ‘real’ parents are?”**
 - This implies that an adoptee is inherently missing something in their life because they do not know their birth parents. Additionally, it is an extremely personal and sensitive question to ask.
 - Every adoptee is different - some may be interested while some may not be. For those not interested, this question can make them feel guilty for not wanting to search, and for those who do, it can bring up a lot of negative emotions as searching can often be difficult/infeasible.
- **“Do you remember anything from before you were adopted?”**
 - Many adoptees are adopted at a young age and are not likely to remember anything from their time at the orphanage.
 - Adoptees who were adopted at an older age may have some memories from before their adoption, and those memories may be good or bad. Asking that question has the potential to re-traumatize an individual.
- **“You should be grateful.”**
 - Adoptees often struggle with expressing their identities and feeling as if they belong. While they may question things, that does not mean that they are not grateful for their families and the lives they live.
- **“Bless your soul. / Your parents are real saints for adopting you.”**
 - Adoptees are individuals, not projects. They do not need your pity.
 - This phrase perpetuates a white savior complex and implies that without their adoptive parents, adoptees would have been hopeless.

- It is also important to recognize that being adopted might not be a huge part of every adoptee's identity. They may not have much to say about their cultural heritage because they do not see it as a "big thing." And that's okay.
- **KNOW YOUR IMPACT.**

DOs: How to Learn More From An Adoptee

- When an adoptee mentions that they are adopted, it's best to simply **acknowledge the fact** like you would any other statement and continue the conversation.
- If the adopted person wants to discuss the subject of their adoption more, be sure to **come in with an open mind** and allow them to steer the conversation.
- Let them disclose whatever they personally feel comfortable with because every adoptee's experience is different. **Avoid making assumptions or generalizations.**
- If you really want to ask, say **"If you're comfortable, would you mind telling me more?"** and keep it open ended.
- Close off by saying, **"Thank you so much for sharing."**

How to Educate

- Learn about adoption from adoptees
 - Lived experiences make them experts
 - Every adoptee is different - there is no uniform experience
- Look into resources and educate yourself
 - Do NOT think that an adoptee has the obligation to share everything about their life with you

Resources

How is adoption portrayed in the media? Oftentimes, adoptee characters are used to create an intriguing backstory or plot twists and family conflict. The complexities of being adopted are rarely ever fully acknowledged. Below are media recommendations that offer a more realistic look at adoption and the lives of adoptees.

Bold = recommended by others!

Media with Adoptee Storylines

Documentaries

- ***Somewhere Between*, 2011 (Linda Goldstein Knowlton)**

- Chronicles of four Chinese girls who were adopted by American families
- ***Twinsters*, 2015 (Samantha Futerman, Ryan Miyamoto)**
 - Chinese-French and -American adoptee twins reunited
- ***One Child Nation*, 2019 (Nanfu Wang and Lynn Zhang)**
 - History behind the One-Child Policy and its effects on an entire society and culture
- ***Calcutta Is My Mother*, 2019 (Reshma McClintock and Michael Hirtzel)**
 - A transracial Indian adoptee returns to her roots in Calcutta to connect to her heritage
- ***First Person Plural*, 2000 (Deann Borshay Liem)**
 - Personal documentary on South Korean adoption
- ***In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee*, 2010 (Deann Borshay Liem)**
 - Personal essay that chronicles a South Korean adoptee who was given a different identity before being adopted

Films

- ***Better Luck Tomorrow*, 2002 (Justin Lin)**
 - Crime, Drama
- ***Seoul Searching*, 2015 (Benson Lee)**
 - Drama, Teen

TV

- ***Modern Family***
 - S2E17: “Two Monkeys and a Panda,” in which Lily is less than two years old. The episode depicts Cam creating a storybook for Lily that talks about her origins and adoption story. Cam is adamant about removing the stigma from the word “adopted” and hopes this book will help Lily see her adoption in a positive light.
 - S4E19: “The Future Dunphys,” where Lily understands her heritage more but is ultimately not interested in Vietnamese culture. Mitch and Cam decide not to push it onto her.
 - Theme(s): Engaging with one’s birth culture/heritage/cultural identity
- ***Little Fires Everywhere***
 - Storyline centered around the custody battle over Mirabelle/May Ling, an infant born to an impoverished Chinese immigrant, surrendered at a fire station, adopted into an affluent white family
 - Theme(s): Color blindness, racial identity, white-saviorism and adoption, complex nature of adoption

Books

- NONFICTION

- *Wanting a Daughter, Needing a Son: Abandonment, Adoption, and Orphanage Care in China*, 2004 (Kay Ann Johnson)
 - The history about adoption in China, domestically and internationally, intended for those who have adopted from China
- *China's Hidden Children: Abandonment, Adoption, and the Human Costs of the One-Child Policy*, 2016 (Kay Ann Johnson)
- ***Palimpsest: Documents from a Korean Adoption*, 2016 (Lisa Wool-Rim Sjöblom)**
 - Graphic novel by South Korean-born Swedish cartoonist

- MEMOIR/(AUTO)BIOGRAPHY

- ***The Lost Daughters of China*, 2000 (Karin Evans)**
 - Perspective of an adoptive parent
- *Ten Thousand Sorrows*, 2000 (Elizabeth Kim)
 - Biography about South Korean adoptee who had been ostracized into adoption but returns as an adult
- *A Single Square Picture: A Korean Adoptee's Search For Her Roots*, 2002 (Katy Robinson)
 - South Korean adoptee who returns to Seoul to find her birth mother
- *Trail of Crumbs: Hunger, Love, and the Search for Home*, 2008 (Kim Sunée)
 - Autobiography following from Korea to New Orleans to Paris
- ***Lucky Girl: A Memoir*, 2009 (Mei-Ling Hopgood)**
 - Chinese adoptees autobiography
- *Little Princes: One Man's Promise to Bring Home the Lost Children of Nepal*, 2010 (Conor Grennan)
 - Nepalese adoptee autobiography
- ***Message from an Unknown Chinese Mother: Stories of Loss and Love*, 2010 (Xinran)**
 - POV of mothers who gave up their daughters for adoption
- *One Small Sacrifice: Lost Children of the Indian Adoption Projects*, 2010 (Trace DeMeyer)
 - Indian adoptee memoir, about the Indian Adoption Projects
- ***A Long Way Home*, 2013 (Larry Buttrose and Saroo Brierley)**
 - #1 New York Times Bestseller, Indian adoptee memoir
- ***All You Can Ever Know: A Memoir of Adoption*, 2018 (Nicole Chung)**
 - Korean adoptee
- ***Inconvenient Daughter*, 2020 (Lauren J. Sharkey)**
 - Korean adoptee, dispelling myths about adoption

- FICTION
 - ***The Leavers, 2017 (Lisa Ko)***
 - Finalist for the 2017 National Book Award
 - ***The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane: A Novel, 2017 (Lisa See)***
 - New York Times best seller
 - *Everyone Was Falling, 2020 (Jessica Sun Lee)*
 - Novel of friendship and violence on the verge of Trump's election

Podcasts

- Code Switch: [“Our Homeland is Each Other,”](#) NPR
- [Adoptee Thoughts](#), Melissa Guida-Richards
- [Somewhere Between Podcast](#), Maia, Aimee and Alia

Websites/Blogs

- [Harlow's Monkey](#) by Jae-Ran Kim
- [What Does Home Mean To You? FaceBook page](#) by CCI

Organizations

- [Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute](#) (CCAI)
- [China's Children International](#) (CCI)
- [Families with Children from China Greater New York](#) (FCCNY)
- [Also Known As](#)

Social Media Accounts

- #adopteevoices #NAAM
- Alyse Campbell ([@anadopteewriter](#))
- LA Yiling ([@layiling](#))
- Lilly Fei ([@adopteelilly](#))
- Adoptees Unite ([@adoptees.unite](#))
- In Between National ([@inbetweennational](#))
- Adoptees of China ([@adopteesofchina](#))
- Sisters of China ([@sistersofchina](#))

Articles

- “Reconciling Asian-American Identity Within Transracial Adoptions” by Sara Aridi

- <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/14/lens/asian-american-identity-transracial-adoptions.html>
- **“What It’s Like to Be an Asian Adoptee in a White Family and Town” by Nicole Clark**
 - <https://www.vice.com/en/article/kzjnx3/what-its-like-to-be-an-asian-adoptee-in-a-white-family-and-town>
- **“The Trauma of Transracial Adoption” by JS Lee**
 - <https://www.yesmagazine.org/opinion/2019/11/13/adoption-trauma-transracial/>
- **“Stories of Transracial Adoptions Must Be Heard-Even Uncomfortable Ones”**
 - <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/apr/04/transracial-adoption-listen-understand>