

我愛你



Wo Ai Ni (I Love You) Mommy

A film by Stephanie Wang-Breal



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LETTER FROM THE FILMMAKER

NEW YORK, AUGUST 2010

I am a first-generation Chinese-American. My parents immigrated to Youngstown, Ohio the year I was born. I am one of three girls. My parents had four children because they desperately wanted to have a boy. They always used to remind my sisters and me how lucky we were to be growing up in the United States and how different our lives would have been had they stayed in China. I did not fully comprehend this idea until I got my degree in Chinese history at Northwestern University.

During my studies, I started to peel back the layers of meaning of my parents' words and see just how distinct Chinese and Chinese-American cultures are from each other. If my parents had stayed in China, I would have led a completely different existence. Growing up in a white, blue-collar town made me extremely self-conscious about my race. I was the only Chinese girl in my class of 450, and all I wanted was to be like every other Caucasian girl around me. I thought I was American, and that being Chinese would have meant I was a person who wore a pointed straw hat and spoke English with an accent. I bought into the Asian stereotype perpetuated by the media and the predominantly white community surrounding me.

I became interested in making a documentary about adoption from China in 1999. My best friend, Heather Loeffler, was teaching Chinese to adopted girls at the China Institute. After hearing her talk about these amazing girls, I began to wonder what it was like for them to grow up Chinese in the United States. They had been born in China, yet every day they were living and breathing a completely "white" experience. After interviewing over 100 families with children from China, I decided I wanted to make a documentary that provided insight into the child's experience, because that was a perspective that was notably absent.

I'm determined to make films that shed light on the real voices and faces behind the Chinese-American experience, which often goes undocumented. I hope to help people of other cultures and races understand that being people of color plays a prominent role in our lives, and that being Chinese does not necessarily mean we understand or represent the entire Chinese experience.

I hope this documentary gives people a real taste of what it feels like to be Chinese and adopted into an American family. Every step Faith takes into her new life, culture and language is a step away from her past life, culture and language. Identity is a fluid and nuanced thing. I hope **Wo Ai Ni (I Love You) Mommy** is a catalyst for conversations about the complexities of family and the American experience.

I hope this discussion guide will help children, students, adults, educators, adoptees and adopting parents acknowledge and confront the complicated layers of race and culture that are an inherent aspect of the international adoption process.

Stephanie Wang-Breal

Director/Producer/Cinematographer



Filmmaker Stephanie Wang-Breal.
Photo courtesy of Martin Hochman



TABLE OF CONTENTS

CREDITS, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

4	Introduction
5	Potential Partners
5	Key Issues
6	Using This Guide
7	Background Information
7	A Brief Overview of International Adoption
8	The Hague Convention
10	Adoption from China
11	Transracial Adoption
15	Development of Racial Identity
16	Adjustment Outcomes of Transracial Adoption
17	Adopting Special Needs Children from China
17	Child Welfare and Foster Care in China
19	Selected People Featured in Wo Ai Ni (I Love You) Mommy
20	General Discussion Questions
21	Discussion Prompts
24	Taking Action
25	Resources
30	How to Buy the Film

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Overview of International Adoption
and Transracial Adoption sections
excerpted from **POV's First Person Plural** website

INTRODUCTION



Faith with her foster parents.
Photo courtesy of Martin Hochman

Wo Ai Ni (I Love You) Mommy, a feature-length (76-minute) documentary, follows the Sadowskys, a Jewish family from Long Island, New York, as they journey to China to adopt 8-year-old Fang Sui Yong. Sui Yong's is not an entirely unique story. There are now approximately 70,000 Chinese adoptees being raised in the United States. What is unusual here, however, is that viewers witness Sui Yong's first encounters with her new parents and her sometimes unsettling shift from being Chinese to identifying herself as an American.

This film is an honest and intimate portrait of loss and gain. As an outreach tool it raises important questions about cul-

tural preservation, transracial and international adoption, parenting, family and what it means to be an American, what it means to be Chinese and what it means to be white.

**POTENTIAL PARTNERS**

Wo Ai Ni (I Love You) Mommy is well suited for use in a variety of settings and is especially recommended for use with:

- **Academic departments or student groups at colleges, universities and high schools**
 - **Adoption agencies handling pre- and post-adoption services**
 - **Civic, fraternal and community groups**
 - **Chapters of Families With Children From China and other international adoption groups (support groups for adoptees from Vietnam, Korea, Guatemala, Ethiopia and so on)**
 - **Community organizations with a mission to promote education and learning, such as local libraries**
 - **Cultural, art and historical organizations, institutions and museums**
 - **Faith-based organizations and institutions**
 - **Governmental policy makers/the U.S. Department of State**
 - **Groups that have discussed previous PBS and POV films relating to intercultural adoption, including *In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee*, *First Person Plural*, *Discovering Dominga*, *The Double Life of Ernesto Gomez Gomez* and *Off and Running***
- Groups focused on any of the issues listed in the Key Issues section

High school students

Social welfare and child welfare organizations

Local PBS stations

KEY ISSUES

Wo Ai Ni (I Love You) Mommy is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of special interest to people interested in the following topics:

- **Adoption**
- **Bilingualism**
- **Chinese-American culture**
- **Child development**
- **China**
- **Diversity**
- **Family dynamics**
- **Foster care**
- **Identity**
- **International, intercultural or transracial adoption**
- **Jewish-American culture**
- **Parenting/child rearing**
- **Psychology**
- **Race**
- **Stereotyping**

USING THIS GUIDE

This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection, designed for people who want to use **Wo Ai Ni (I Love You) Mommy** to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues and communities. In contrast to initiatives that foster debates in which participants try to convince others that they are right, this document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively.

The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a very wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues in the film. Rather than attempting to address them all, choose one or two that best meet your needs and interests. And be sure to leave time to consider taking action. Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips, visit www.pbs.org/pov/outreach/



Faith at the orphanage.
Photo courtesy of Martin Hochman

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Donna, Faith, Faith's foster mom and sister
looking at photos together.

Photo courtesy of Martin Hochman

A Brief Overview of International Adoption

The practice of adopting children from abroad began in the 1940s, just after World War II, when large numbers of children had been orphaned, abandoned or separated from their parents as a result of the war in Europe. Americans were moved by the plight of innocent children affected by the war and, in an effort to provide humanitarian assistance, opened their homes to children in need.

It was the Korean War (1950-1953), however, that was the impetus for the largest wave of international adoptions to take place worldwide. Since the war, South Korea has facili-

tated the adoptions of approximately 200,000 Korean children (about 150,000 to the United States, and 50,000 to Europe, Canada and Australia). Though South Korea continues to send children overseas today, in 1976 the country enacted a Five Year Plan for Adoption and Foster Care to encourage domestic adoption. The number of international adoptions from South Korea has since decreased. In a 2008 interview with *The New York Times*, Kim Dong-won, who oversees

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

adoptions at South Korea's Ministry of Health, stated that South Korea is now an advanced nation and wants to shed itself of its image as a "baby-exporting country." South Korea's stated goal is to eliminate international adoption by 2012.

In the 1970s, the Vietnam War further precipitated increased international adoptions by American families. Operation Baby Lift in 1975 was a series of highly publicized "humanitarian" rescue operations that brought at least 2,000 Vietnamese and mixed-raced children (many fathered by American soldiers) to the United States for eventual adoption. Approximately 1,300 children were also flown to Canada, Europe and Australia. The hasty evacuation in the final days of the war led to a public debate over whether these actions had been in the best interest of the children and whether the children would have been better served by remaining in Vietnam. Some critics asserted that Operation Baby Lift represented another form of American cultural imperialism. The circumstances that led to the relinquishment of the Operation Baby Lift children were much discussed, and controversy arose over the question of whether these children were technically orphans who qualified for adoption. Lost and inaccurate records were the norm, and in several cases birth parents or other relatives later arrived in the United States and demanded custody of children who had previously been adopted by American families. Over time, the U.S. has increased safeguards and developed regulations and policy to ensure children are "orphaned" prior to an adoption process being started.

One of the most recent significant developments in international adoption policy has been the recognition of foreign adoption decrees. As part of the efforts to ensure that adopted children have the same rights as those born in the U.S., the Child Citizenship Act was passed in 2000, which automatically conferred U.S. citizenship of foreign born children adopted by U.S. citizens, upon the issuing of a U.S. Visa. Tallies of international adoptions differ slightly according to various sources but one set of statistics from the U.S. government shows that the number of international adoptions has fallen from 22,990 in 2004 to 12,753 in 2009. This is likely due to changes in U.S. policy and country standards and requirements.



Donna greets Faith.
Photo courtesy of Martin Hochman

The Hague Convention

The most widespread changes to international adoption procedures were introduced by the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Inter-Country Adoption (or Hague Adoption Convention), an international agreement drafted to regulate and safeguard international adoptions. Completed in 1993 and implemented by the United States in 2008, the convention has done much to simplify and improve international proceedings, including creating a central authority for adoption in each participating country. In the United States, the Department of State plays that role.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Donna and Faith buying Chinese New Year decorations.
Photo courtesy of Martin Hochman

Primarily, the convention seeks to: avoid human trafficking and protect children's safety; promote transparency in the process by requiring agencies to disclose fees and expenses in writing; and provide adoptive parents with adoption certificates and other paperwork that eases children's entry into their new homelands.

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Donna and Faith at the Guangzhou Civil Affairs office.

Photo courtesy of Martin Hochman

Adoption from China

China, like the United States, is party to the Hague Adoption Convention, so all its adoptions are regulated under the convention's guidelines. Overall adoption numbers from China peaked in 2005, with close to 8,000 Chinese adoptees brought to the United States. According to statistics from the U.S. Department of State's annual report on intercountry adoptions, in 2009 mainland China issued 3001 adoption visas (the most of any country) to children entering the U.S. and South Korea issued the 4th largest number of adoption visas (1077) to children entering the U.S..

The existence of a large number of infant girls available for adoption in China is often attributed to the country's one-child policy. However, there are other social, economic and political reasons for infant abandonment, as documented by Kay Ann Johnson in her book *Wanting a Daughter, Needing a Son*.

China's controversial one-child measure, introduced in 1979, ceased to be voluntary on September 25, 1980. The measure,



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

conceived to combat hunger and poverty in the world's most populous nation, set a limit of one child per family; families found to have two or more children were subject to costly fines (although exceptions were frequently made for rural families, which were often allowed two children if their eldest children were female). Due to long-standing Confucian ideals and a lack of a government social security system, boys were expected to take care of aging parents, whereas girls were expected to care for their husband's aging parents. As a result, many families abandoned baby girls. Although abandoning a child is against the law in China, that law is difficult to enforce, and birth parents who have abandoned children are not easy to find. As a result, gathering information about child abandonment has been difficult. However, as fieldwork for her book, Johnson interviewed 287 abandoning families, the vast majority of which (88 percent) were from rural villages. Johnson found that the most common determining factors for abandonment were gender and birth order. Not surprisingly, almost 90 percent of the abandoned children were girls and approximately 87 percent of those abandoned were second, third or fourth daughters. Birth parents who already had one daughter were abandoning additional daughters in order to have a chance to conceive a son.

After China introduced the one-child policy, girls began to fill Chinese orphanages. In 1992, the government implemented a law that allowed foreigners to adopt these orphans. Adoptions steadily increased, and in 2005 approximately 14,500 Chinese adoptees went abroad. China is now said to have placed more than 70,000 children with families in the United States, as well as in France, the Netherlands, England, Canada and other countries.

As a result of China's one-child policy, the country's work-force-age population has shrunk in proportion to its elderly population. In an effort to rebalance the population, one-child restrictions have been loosened in some urban areas, such as Shanghai. The government is now actively encouraging people who were, themselves, single children born during the one-child policy era, to have two children. The number of orphans is expected to decrease.

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Transracial Adoption

Transracial adoption — most often white families adopting children of color — has a charged history in the United States.

The practice flourished in the aftermath of major conflicts such as World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War, when widespread death and destruction left thousands of children without parents or adequate resources. It was in the 1940s when American families first became aware of the plights of such children and began adopting from abroad. Specific programs developed that sought to facilitate international adoption. One such program, Operation Babylift, brought more than 2,000 children from Vietnam to the United States. Such adoptions marked a shift in U.S. prac-

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

tices, which historically had aimed to place children with parents of similar races.

Gradually, children of color began to be placed in white homes, with mixed results: While some families suffered harassment and even violence, others had few issues. Between 1968 and 1972, approximately 50,000 black and biracial children were adopted by white parents. At the time, the adoption of black children by white families was motivated largely by the increasing number of black children in foster care and the seeming lack of black adoptive families. In the early 1970s, the number of transracial adoptions rose as white in-

Stephanie translating for Donna and Faith in front of the White Swan Hotel.

Photo courtesy of Martin Hochman

fants became less available and the number of prospective adoptive parents continued to grow.

The adoption of black children by white families has long generated controversy in the United States, sparking criticism from both blacks and whites, as well as from some adoption professionals. In 1972, the practice of transracial adoption was publicly challenged. At the national confer-

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

ence of the North American Council on Adoptable Children, the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) issued a formal statement opposing transracial adoption, citing concerns that such placements compromised children's racial and cultural identities and amounted to a form of cultural genocide. The NABSW worried that black children raised in white homes would fail to develop effective coping strategies to deal with racism and discrimination and would experience identity conflicts as they grew older. The NABSW also challenged traditional adoption practices, raising questions about institutionalized racism within the adoption profession. The organization pointed to existing evaluation criteria for prospective adoptive couples that routinely prevented black families from qualifying and claimed that agencies were failing to recruit prospective black adoptive families and were, in fact, even passing them over in favor of white couples. By 1994, however, the NABSW released a new statement supporting transracial adoption in the case of a documented failure to find a home with black parents.

In the same year, Senator Howard Metzenbaum authored The Multi-Ethnic Placement Act of 1994 (MEPA), which mandated that adoption agencies receiving federal funds could not deny or delay adoptions based solely on racial difference. This was written partly in response to the growing number of children in foster care. Because the language of that first act was open to interpretation, in 1996 Congress enacted the Inter-Ethnic Adoption Provisions (IEP), which specifically prohibited federally funded agencies from denying or delaying adoptions solely on the basis of race or national origin. These laws are designed both to decrease the length of time a child has to wait before being adopted and to eliminate racial discrimination. These laws have been controversial, however, and the debate surrounding transracial adoption has not diminished. Many people feel that transracial adoptees are emotionally scarred by their experience; others strongly disagree and suggest that the long-term outcome for transracial adoptees is very positive. Some suggest that the number of children in a particular racial group in need of foster care or adoption will always exceed the number of available families in that racial group. Others believe that current adoption practices are rife with racial discrimination and other barriers, and that greater efforts should be



Faith and Donna.
Photo courtesy of Martin Hochman

made to remove them. Still others advocate for more systemic support of economically and socially disadvantaged families in order to keep these families together and decrease the need for foster and adoptive placements. And finally, there are those who think that for children, of color adoption into a white family is preferable to the impermanence and instability of foster care.

A report issued in 2008 by the nonprofit Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute and endorsed by the Child Welfare League of America, the Adoption Exchange Association, the NABSW, Voice for Adoption and the Foster Care Alumni of America (among others) stated, however, that the act downplays race and culture too much.

The report stated that although transracial adoption itself does not produce psychological or other social problems in children, multicultural adoptive families do face some special challenges. Some public agencies have become hesitant to discuss race at all with adopting couples, however, for fear of being sued for discrimination. As a result, many new families go without the counseling and preparation they need to help them navigate the realities of living in a race-conscious society.

In its position statement on transracial adoptions, the North American Council on Adoptable Children, a group repre-

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

senting more than 400 American and Canadian child advocacy organizations, contends that adoptive parents of the same race as the child are best equipped to provide him or her with the skills and strength to combat racism. The council also states, though, that if an appropriate family of the same race cannot be found, transracial adoption is a better alternative for a child than long-term foster care.

One provision of MEPA calls for the diligent recruitment of adoptive parents of color. However, the 2008 report found that the provision has not been well implemented and is not being enforced adequately. The report called for better enforcement of the provision through greater resources and funding for recruitment.

Many studies show that about three quarters of transracially adopted children adjust well to their new homes, but experts agree that there are steps multicultural families can and should take to promote children's well-being, self-esteem and sense of cultural identity, including celebrating cultures of all kinds, forming friendships with other interracial families, talking about cultural issues and adopting a no-tolerance policy on bias.

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Faith holding a flag.
 Photo courtesy of Martin Hochman

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Faith with her foster parents and sister.
Photo courtesy of Martin Hochman

Development of Racial Identity

Racial identity might be defined as one's self-perception and sense of belonging to a particular group including not only how one describes oneself, but also how one distinguishes one's self from other ethnic groups. Racial identity in children develops in two stages: First, a child distinguishes race at a conceptual level, and second, he or she begins to assess his or her own membership in a racial group. This second stage usually occurs between the ages of 3 and 7. Children's attitudes toward their own races are greatly influenced by their interactions with and observations of the attitudes of those around them. As adolescents, all children begin to establish separate identities from those of their parents. When

children are of a different race than their parents, they may magnify the physical differences between them, and feel especially isolated as a result.

Beverly Daniel Tatum, psychology professor and president of Spelman College in Atlanta, found that one reason young people of color tend to build their identities around their racial backgrounds is that they see themselves as differing from the dominant images in American society. And the white majority, which tends to see itself as colorless, encourages

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

this further with questions and observations about those perceived differences. White adolescents, in contrast, are more likely to see themselves as “normal” in terms of ethnic background.

There are conflicting thoughts about how explicit race conversations should be between parents and young children. On the one hand, in families where the issue of race is not addressed, children get the message that it is inappropriate to express their feelings and that the topic is taboo and perhaps even shameful or embarrassing. On the other hand, in homes where parents dwell on the issue extensively, children may attach too much significance to it, causing self-consciousness and anxiety.

Adjustment Outcomes of Transracial Adoption

Considerable research has been conducted around the outcomes of transracial adoptions. A 12-year longitudinal study of 204 families and 366 children whose families included transracially adopted children, adopted white children and white birth children found that the transracial adoptees were as integrated into their families as the biological children. No significant difference in self-esteem was evident. After 12 years, with approximately half of the families still in the study, 18 adoptees had serious problems. However, in only one case was race a significant factor. All of the other problems could be traced to the children having been adopted at an older age (4 or older), learning disabilities, developmental delays or abuse before the adoption. Another review study found that the majority of transracially adopted children (75 to 80 percent) functioned well and demonstrated no more behavioral or educational problems at home or school than non-adopted children.

A Canadian study tracking families from Ontario, British Columbia and Quebec who had adopted internationally found that the self-esteem of inter-country adoptees when they reached adolescence was higher than that of the general population but lower than that of their siblings. A large majority of the adoptees reported being comfortable with their ethnic backgrounds, although 10 percent identified them-

selves as white, despite coming from Korea, Bangladesh and Haiti.

In 2009, the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute published an extensive examination of adult adoptive identity based on input from 468 adults who were adopted as children. Specifically, the study compared the experiences of white adoptees to those of adoptees from South Korea. The resulting 112-page report is entitled “Beyond Culture Camp: Promoting Healthy Identity Formation in Adoption.” Central findings in that report include the following:

While the majority of Korean-born survey respondents reported experiencing race-based discrimination from strangers and classmates (and 39 percent from teachers), white respondents were more likely to feel discriminated against simply for being adopted, particularly within their extended families.

A significant majority of transracially adopted adults reported considering themselves to be, or wanting to be, white as children. By adulthood, however, the majority had reconciled their racial identities, whether through increased interaction with a “like” community, reconsidering their roots after experiences with discrimination or simply maturing.

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Adopting Special Needs Children From China

In the past few years, China has created a new, more comprehensive system for placing children with special needs, also known as "waiting children." These include children who are older or who have developmental or medical issues ranging from the minor (cleft palates, orthopedic issues) to the more serious (congenital heart disease, deafness or blindness). Parents who choose to work through the Waiting Child Program may not wait as long and are not subject to the stringent restrictions placed on families looking to adopt healthy children.

According to the Chinese government, the number of children born with birth defects increased nearly 50 percent between 2001 and 2006. These children, who are often abandoned, now make up a majority of China's orphan population. Currently, roughly 60 percent of children adopted from China are classified as having special needs.

The Joint Council on International Children's Services, a U.S. organization of adoption agencies, found that 27 percent of all the international adoptions organized by its members last year involved special-needs cases and 29 percent involved children 3 or older.

The biggest challenge, President Tom DeFilipo told the Associated Press, is not finding families willing to take on special-needs children, but helping those families by ensuring they have adequate resources to attend to their children's physical and psychological needs. Families who adopt special-needs children may be eligible for additional support from both private and public sources and may pay reduced adoption fees.

Such funding is also available for adoptions of children with special needs within the United States. However, in the

United States the definition of the term differs from state to state. Children with special needs may include not only older children and those with medical or developmental conditions, but also sets of siblings and children of color.

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Child Welfare and Foster Care in China

In 2005, China's Ministry of Civil Affairs released the results of a national survey that found there were 573,000 orphans in the country under 18 years of age.

UNICEF, however, has arrived at a different figure: 21 million. This number obviously differs greatly from China's official statement, but seems feasible given the republic's one-child policy and its massive population, last estimated at 1.32 billion. The number of orphans would be about 1.6 percent of the population.

The discrepancy may also result from differing definitions of "orphan." When the Chinese government opened its borders for international adoption in 1992, it also issued a definition of an orphan as a child under 14 who had lost both of his parents due to death. In 2006, China broadened the category to include children who had lost their parents due either to death or abandonment and were not supported by anyone else. This classification distinguished two types of orphans: "actual orphans," whose parents have died or have been

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

missing for more than four years, and “form orphans,” who have one or two living parents, but the parents’ social and cultural milieu prevents them from caring for their children.

Exactly who qualifies as an orphan is still a matter of some confusion, but those who do meet the definition are provided some support from the Chinese government. The 2005 survey found that 53,000 children were receiving an urban living allowance; 125,000 were receiving a “rural five protection allowance” (a stipend, given to the elderly, impoverished and those without children, that covers five basic needs: fuel, shelter, clothing, food and funeral); and 116,000 were given a rural poverty allowance. An estimated 200,000 orphans did not receive anything.

In recent decades, China has made strides in caring for its abandoned and orphaned children. In the early 1990s, when China first made international adoption possible, it also began to place children in foster care as an alternative to housing them in state-run, institutional settings. It is estimated that half of all orphanages in China currently offer some kind of foster care program, whether that means placing children with families outside of the orphanage, as is done in the United States and elsewhere, or creating family-like groupings within the orphanage itself. Foster situations, some of which allow children to develop close bonds with adults, are believed to promote greater health and well-being in children, though foster care is sometimes criticized for being inconsistent in quality or, in the case of placement with foster families, for not providing the level of education available in orphanages.

Some Chinese orphans are also beginning to find new homes inside China. Historically, informal domestic adoption has been quite common in China. During periods of war, parents who could not care for all of their children often would ask a brother, cousin or other family member to care for the child. However, little research has been done to provide exact statistics behind the numbers of “informal” adoptions that have taken place in China. In recent years, domestic adoption has become more accepted in Chinese society. Ministry of Civil Affairs statistics indicate that in 2000 there were a total of 10,700 registered domestic adoptions, as compared to 6,700 international adoptions that year.

Adoption professionals credit several factors for the upswing, saying that some children are going to couples who married later and have been unable to conceive, some to wealthier families willing to pay the fines for having more than one child, some to single parents and some to couples who have lost children. After the Sichuan earthquake, Chinese families expressed an enormous amount of interest in adopting children orphaned by the disaster.

September 25, 2010 marks the 30th anniversary of the government’s one-child policy. As more Chinese families are experiencing the growing pains of the country’s economic prosperity, many couples are choosing to have only one child. As a result, the number of children filling China’s orphanages has decreased dramatically. At the same time, China’s welfare institutions have improved dramatically due to the amount of funding they have received over the past 15 years from international adoption fees. Also, at the behest of international adopting families, the central government has improved care and conditions in orphanages and invested more money in the development of foster care programs. In 1993, the Ministry of Civil Affairs considered foster care a last resort, preferring to expand and improve institutional care facilities. Today, however, the Ministry of Civil Affairs aims to place half of the children under the ministry’s care in some form of foster care.

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Selected People Featured in **Wo Ai Ni (I Love You) Mommy**



Fang Sui Yong/Faith



Donna Sadowsky and Jeff Sadowsky, Faith's adoptive parents



Jason (15), Jared (12), Darah (3), Faith's siblings



Tian Li Jing, Faith's Guangzhou sister



Amanda Baden, psychologist

GENERAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen. If the mood seems tense, you can pose a general question and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion.

Unless you think participants are so uncomfortable that they can't engage until they have had a break, don't encourage people to leave the room between the film and the discussion. If you save your break for an appropriate moment during the discussion, you won't lose the feeling of the film as you begin your dialogue.

One way to get a discussion going is to pose a general question such as:

- **If you could ask anyone in the film a single question, who would you ask and what would you ask him or her?**
- **Is there any particular person in the film with whom you identify? What is the connection?**
- **What did you learn from this film? What insights did it provide?**
- **Describe a moment or scene in the film that you found particularly disturbing or moving. What was it about that scene that was especially compelling for you?**



Jared, Darah, Jason and Faith.
Photo courtesy of Martin Hochman

DISCUSSION PROMPTS**Adoption Policies**

- The Chinese adoption official instructs Faith not to call her foster parents, but the Sadowskys facilitate contact between their daughter and her former foster family. In your view, does the continued contact make things easier or more difficult for Faith? Should ties be cleanly severed to help her move on, or does an ongoing relationship ease the transition?
- Donna sees the orphanage fee of \$3,000 as reasonable. In your view, what role does or should money play in the adoption process?
- Donna objects when people suggest that she is selfless or has “saved” the children she adopted. She explains that she adopted her daughters because “they filled a part of me

Jeff, Darah and Jason Sadowsky greet Donna and Faith Sadowsky and Marty Hochman at the airport.

Photo courtesy of Martin Hochman

that I needed to feel filled.” Assuming that they are otherwise qualified, should the motives of adoptive parents matter to an adoption agency? Why or why not?

- What evidence did you see in the film that could be used to support the position of those who oppose transracial or transcultural adoption? What did you see that would undermine their position?
- Given what you saw in the film, if you were in a position to adopt, would you adopt a child from a different race, nation, religion or culture? Why or why not?

**DISCUSSION PROMPTS**

- Given what you saw in the film, if you were in a position to become a foster parent, would you foster a child from a race, religion or culture different from your own? Why or why not?
- Taking into account all of the cultural, political and economic realities of both the United States and China, do you think that the governments of these two countries should continue to allow (or encourage) adoptions from China in the United States? Why or why not?
- Faith's foster father observes that her physical disabilities would make it difficult for her to succeed as an adult in China. What role does disability or illness play in adoption? What support systems could be instituted to encourage and support families who adopt children with health issues? Who should pay for those services?

Crossing Cultures

- List the things that the Sadowskys do to help to encourage their adopted daughters to appreciate their Chinese heritage. What do you learn from their efforts about what it takes to preserve cultural identity? In your view, which of their efforts seemed to be most helpful in maintaining Faith's Chinese identity and why? What cultural practices define you and your family?
- Faith's adoptive family recognizes important Chinese holidays, such as Chinese New Year, but they are Jewish, and observance of those holidays is not a part of their family practice. Similarly, Faith's parents send Faith to Chinese school in an effort to preserve her mastery of the language, but they do not speak Chinese themselves, nor do they attend Chinese school. What are the effects of these mixed messages about the value of Chinese culture?
- As Jews, the Sadowskys are part of a minority in American culture. What challenges does this pose for Faith as she tries to become American?
- What role do support organizations like Families With Chinese Children play in helping families like the Sadowskys? What difference does it make to Faith or her parents to know that there are other families who have adopted children from China?

- What did you learn from the film about the role of race in the United States? How did the experiences of the people in the film compare or contrast with your own experiences of race?
- Jeff notes that media portrayals of martial arts interested him in China. What are your sources of information on China? How would you characterize typical news reporting on China (e.g., positive, negative, stereotyped, confusing)? In your view, what are likely to be the sources for the most credible and accurate information about China?
- Do you and your family speak another language? If so, how do you feel about speaking that language in front of your friends? Do you prefer to speak English to your parents in front of your friends?
- In a conversation with psychologist Amanda Baden, Donna Sadowsky says that she has tried to answer Faith's questions about why they adopted someone so different from themselves by explaining, "I wanted a daughter and you needed a family. And we didn't see you as being Chinese. We saw you as a beautiful girl who needed a family." Baden points out that this makes sense to them, but not necessarily to Faith. Why wouldn't it make sense to Faith? How would it feel for your parents to say that they didn't really see you as _____ (fill in your cultural, religious or racial identity)?
- Baden makes a distinction between cultural practices (e.g., Bruce Lee movies, martial arts, food) and race. She notes that white parents often don't have a history of talking about race because they haven't had to, so they have a hard time helping adopted children who are not white deal with living in a culture where race matters. What kinds of things could transracially adoptive families do to deepen their understanding of race?

Family Dynamics

- Assess the Sadowskys strengths and weaknesses as parents. What do they do to differentiate between misbehavior and miscommunication? How do they communicate compassion and empathy to their children while also setting standards for acceptable (and unacceptable) behavior?

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- As you watched Faith make the transition from China to the United States, what did you learn about the things that most concern an 8-year-old? How do these concerns compare with the things that concern her older brothers or that might concern a younger child?
- How does the availability of computer technologies that allow face-to-face international conversations influence the process of adoption and adjustment?
- In an effort to improve their ability to, as they put it, “help Faith understand the adoption,” Donna Sadowsky and Jeff Sadowsky consult psychologist Amanda Baden. How would you help Faith (and her siblings) understand the adoption and the cultural transitions?
- How do you make a child feel part of a family when he or she doesn’t physically resemble the other members of that family? How does having a sibling who is also adopted from China change Faith’s situation?
- In the film, we see Faith during some very vulnerable moments. In your view, what are the ethics of filming children who are too young to give their own consent? How would you balance the value of showing the joys and frustrations of international adoption with the value of a child’s right to privacy?

Additional media literacy analysis questions are available on POV’s website:
pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php



Stephanie showing Faith footage from the camera.
 Photo courtesy of Martin Hochman

TAKING ACTION

Donna and Faith.

Photo courtesy of Martin Hochman

- Conduct an adoption needs assessment, investigating which communities, both inside and outside of the United States, have orphans in urgent need of homes. Share your assessment with your community and facilitate contact with appropriate adoption agencies for those interested in adopting.
- Provide a public forum for adoptive families to share their stories, perhaps as a way of interesting other families in adoption or helping prospective adoptive families realistically prepare for the challenges of international, interracial or intercultural adoption.
- Publicize the efforts of support groups for members of families that have adopted across national, racial or cultural lines. Encourage adoptive parents and their children to share with their peers the unique successes and frustrations that arise from adopting children whose cultural or racial identities differ from their own identities.



RESOURCES

FILM-RELATED WEB SITES

**Original Online Content on
POV Interactive (www.pbs.org/pov)**

POV's *Wo Ai Ni (I Love You) Mommy* companion website
www.pbs.org/pov/woainimommy

The **Wo Ai Ni Mommy** companion website, www.pbs.org/pov/woainimommy, offers a streaming video trailer of the film, an extended interview with filmmaker Stephanie Wang-Breal; a list of related websites, partner organizations and books, downloadable discussion and facilitator guides, classroom activities, a full update on all the characters in the film and the following special features:

This is My Family: For most of us, the classic family photo with matching sweaters and look-alike smiles doesn't quite capture our family. As part of POV's Adoption Stories project, we want to hear real stories about your family. Upload your photos and videos to our user-generated family album, and you may receive an iPad or iTouch!

Exclusive film update video with Faith and Donna;

Adoption timeline: The history of adoption in America.

Additional video

What's Your POV?

Share your thoughts about

Wo Ai Ni (I Love You) Mommy

by posting a comment on the POV Blog

www.pbs.org/pov/blog or send an email to pbs@pov.org.

Film-Related Links

WO AI NI (I LOVE YOU) MOMMY

<http://woainimommy.com>

Visit the film's website to learn more about the film, the filmmaker, cast and crew and upcoming screening events.

Adoption

**ADOPTION NATION: HOW THE ADOPTION
REVOLUTION IS TRANSFORMING AMERICA**
 (NEW YORK: BASIC BOOKS, 2000)

This book, centered on a Pulitzer Prize-nominated series of articles author Adam Pertman wrote for *The Boston Globe*, explores the history of adoption in the United States, from the orphanages of the 19th century to the wider acceptance today of adoption by single, gay and older parents and by parents of different races than their children.

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES.
"CHILD WELFARE INFORMATION GATEWAY."**

www.childwelfare.gov/adoption

This site, administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, offers a great deal of information about both domestic and international adoption. Included are sections on laws governing adoption, how to put a child up for adoption, how to adopt, post-adoption services and reuniting families.

RESOURCES

International Adoption**ADOPTION.COM. "GETTING STARTED WITH INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION."****<http://international.adoption.com>**

This site offers information about the important considerations specific to international adoption. With links to country programs, types of international adoption and financial and legal considerations, this site aims to equip potential adopters with resources in order to help them make informed decisions.

ADOPTION ACROSS BORDERS

(LANHAM, MD.: ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD, 2000)

Rita J. Simon, a professor of justice, law and society, and Howard Altstein, a professor of social work, draw on 30 years of studying transracial and intercountry adoption to examine changing attitudes toward the practice and its positive effects.

BEYOND GOOD INTENTIONS: A MOTHER REFLECTS ON RAISING INTERNATIONALLY ADOPTED CHILDREN

(ST. PAUL: YEONG & YEONG, 2005)

Cheri Register, a mother of two adopted Korean girls, reflects with candor on the difficulties she faced and on her own quest to stamp out (sometimes unintentional) derogatory or offensive behavior toward multiracial families.

INSIDE TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION

(INDIANAPOLIS: PERSPECTIVES PRESS, 2000)

Using a blend of academic research and personal experience, authors Gail Steinberg and Beth Hall, founders and co-directors of Pact, An Adoption Alliance and each the adoptive mother of several foreign-born children, offer guidance for families dealing with the challenges of transracial adoption.

IN THEIR OWN VOICES: TRANSRACIAL ADOPTEEES TELL THEIR STORIES

(NEW YORK: COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2000)

This multifaceted book by Rita J. Simon and Rhonda M. Roroda combines information about policy surrounding tran-

sracial adoption with the real-life stories of two dozen adoptees.

OUTSIDERS WITHIN: WRITING ON TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION (CAMBRIDGE: SOUTH END PRESS, 2006)

In this unusual collection, edited by Jane Jeong Trenka, Julia Chinyere Oparah and Sun Yung Shin, transracial adoptees from around the world share their experiences in essays, fiction, poetry and art. In the process, they tackle questions of racism, family, belonging, human rights and social justice.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE. "WHAT IS INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION?"**<http://adoption.state.gov>**

This website provides information on regulations that govern intercountry adoption. The site offers valuable information on adoption news and statistics, country-specific adoption information and an overview of the implications of the recently passed Hague Convention agreement, which established important standards and safeguards to protect children adopted internationally.

China**CHINA CENTER OF ADOPTION AFFAIRS.****www.china-ccaa.org**

The China Center of Adoption Affairs (CCAA), the central authority overseeing all international adoptions from China, determines eligibility requirements for adoptive parents. Prospective parents who meet the CCAA's requirements are matched with children based upon their personal and family characteristics.

CHINESE CHILDREN ADOPTION INTERNATIONAL.**<http://www.chinesechildren.org>**

This Colorado-based adoption agency, one of the most active agencies for adopting from China, provides information for prospective parents, facilitates adoptions and offers cultural programs to local families.

RESOURCES

GREAT WALL CHINA ADOPTION.**<http://www.gwca.org/>**

Based in Austin, Texas, but with regional offices throughout the United States, Great Wall China Adoption educates prospective parents, facilitates adoptions from China, aggregates related news stories and gathers resources such as lists of relevant books, links to Chinese consulates and other government agencies and information about financial assistance.

Support for Adoptive Families**THE ADOPTION GUIDE. “ADOPTIVE PARENT SUPPORT GROUPS.”****www.theadoptionguide.com**

The Adoption Guide website offers a search function that allows parents to find support groups based on their own geographical location or a child's country of origin. These groups offer support and guidance in person, online and over the telephone; newsletters highlighting local issues and activities; “adopt chats,” featuring living-room dialogue with other parents and professionals; educational workshops on topics for prospective and experienced adoptive parents; information and referrals regarding agencies, attorneys and one-on-one support; and social activities.

BENEATH THE MASK: UNDERSTANDING ADOPTED TEENS (SILVER SPRINGS: C.A.S.E. PUBLICATIONS, 2005)

In this book, Debbie Riley, a therapist and mother of adopted children, writes about six issues she believes both parents and teens must deal with, including loyalty to adoptive parents, abandonment issues and personal identity. Riley also outlines how therapists can help teens grieve over their losses and work through these issues.

CENTER FOR ADOPTION STUDIES. “CURRENT PROJECTS.”**<http://adoptionresearch.illinoisstate.edu>**

The Center for Adoption Studies at the School of Social Work at Illinois State University aims to promote the adoption of children from the child welfare system and improve adoption policy and practice by conducting research. Current research topics include stress and coping in struggling

adoptive families and promoting healthy marriages in adoptive families.

HOLT INTERNATIONAL. “POST ADOPTION SERVICES.”**www.holtinternational.org**

Holt International, a children's services organization, seeks to respond to the needs of all three groups involved in adoption — birth parents, adoptees and adoptive parents — throughout their lives, regardless of agency affiliation. Services include camps for adoptees, tours to countries of origin and adult adoptee outreach. The website provides post-adoption FAQs and reading lists.

AMETZ ADOPTION PROGRAM/ JEWISH CHILD CARE ASSOCIATION**www.jccany.org/ametz**

Ametz Adoption Program of JCCA offers pre and post-adoption counseling, support groups, adoptive family programs, educational workshops, adoption homestudies and post placement supervision to singles and couples of all religious and cultural backgrounds, in every stage of *domestic, international, step and second parent adoptions*. Ametz also offers a professional training institute regarding adoption. JCCA is a not-for-profit, comprehensive, multicultural agency serving children and families since 1822. JCCA's programs include: group and family day care, mental health and preventive services, education programs, a residential diagnostic center, foster homes, group homes and residential services for children and adolescents, preventive services, independent living skills training, adoption programs, and services to the Jewish community.

STARS OF DAVID INTERNATIONAL**www.starsofdavid.org**

Stars of David International, Inc. is a nonprofit information and support network for Jewish and interfaith adoptive families of all sizes, ages, and origins. Stars of David serves every stream of Judaism through its local chapter activities, international mailings, and the Internet. It provides help for all members of the triad including Jewish birth parents, adoptees, adoptive parents, prospective parents, single parents, grandparents, interfaith couples, transracial and transcultural families, and those with children by birth and adoption.

RESOURCES

Support for Adoptees**THE BARKER FOUNDATION.****www.barkerfoundation.org**

An agency turned comprehensive adoption center, the Maryland-based Barker Foundation offers pregnancy services, domestic and international adoption services, counseling and education. For adoptees, it offers support groups, lists of helpful books and other resources and opportunities to discuss feelings and concerns.

BEING ADOPTED: THE LIFELONG SEARCH FOR SELF**(NEW YORK: DOUBLEDAY, 1992)**

Building on Erik Erikson's stages of development, this book, written by David M. Brodzinsky, Marshall D. Schechter, and Robin Marantz Henig, outlines the development of adopted persons and the feelings of loss that many of them experience, from mourning their original caretakers as children to feeling an absence of family history as they start their own families.

LOST AND FOUND: THE ADOPTION EXPERIENCE**(NEW YORK: DIAL PRESS, 1979)**

Author Betty Jean Lifton speaks from her own experience as an adopted person who has worked with adoptive families to explore the harm that can come from keeping secrets about children's birth families and the liberation that can result from openness.

THE FAMILY OF ADOPTION**(BOSTON: BEACON PRESS, 1998)**

Author Joyce Maguire Pavao, an adoptee and an adoption therapist with three decades of experience, describes the developmental stages and challenges adopted people and their families can expect, using real-life examples to illustrate them.

THE ADOPTION LIFE CYCLE: THE CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES THROUGH THE YEARS**(NEW YORK: FREE PRESS, 1992)**

Elinor B. Rosenberg, a professor of clinical psychiatry, examines the experiences of the different members of the adoption triad — the birth and adoptive parents and the child — candidly addressing seldom-discussed issues.

TWENTY LIFE TRANSFORMING CHOICES ADOPTEES NEED TO MAKE**(COLORADO SPRINGS: PIÑON PRESS, 2003)**

This practically oriented book by Sherrie Eldridge addresses some of the questions that plague adoptees: Does my birth mother still think about me? Was I unworthy for some reason? It then frames these questions as opportunities for growth. Eldridge, herself an adoptee, bases her insights on interviews with dozens of adoptees.

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES.
“IMPACT OF ADOPTION ON ADOPTED PERSONS.”****www.childwelfare.gov**

This fact sheet examines the impact of adoption on adult adoptees. It addresses feelings of loss, the development of identity and self-esteem and the issue of awareness of genetic information and provides information on related books, support groups and other resources.

RESOURCES

Searching and Reconnecting

ADOPTION.COM. "ADOPTION REUNION REGISTRY."**<http://registry.adoption.com>**

Adoption.com's reunion registry is an online adoption reunion registry with approximately 400,000 records. Visitors can complete profiles with adoptee information to find birth and adoption records.

ADOPTION REGISTRY CONNECT.**www.adopteeconnect.com**

Adoption Registry Connect is a worldwide adoptee and birth-parent search registry designed to reunite adoptees with their birth parents and siblings. The site is part of a network of sites seeking to maximize access and provides its services free of charge.

BIRTHRIGHT: THE GUIDE TO SEARCH AND REUNION FOR ADOPTEES, BIRTHPARENTS AND ADOPTIVE PARENTS
(NEW YORK: PENGUIN, 1994)

Jean A.S. Strauss, who sought out her own birth parents, recounts her experience in this practically oriented guide to conducting a similar search. Included are tips, lists of resources, true stories from other searches and advice about dealing with the emotional turbulence that may result.

FINDME.ORG.**<http://findme.org>**

FindMe is a free, mutual-consent reunion registry for those seeking birth parents or siblings or children given up for adoption.

THE OTHER MOTHER: A TRUE STORY

(NEW YORK: SOHO PRESS, 1991)

Carol Schaefer writes about putting her son up for adoption, her search for him later in life and their eventual reunion.

POV Adoption Stories

www.pbs.org/pov/adoption***FIRST PERSON PLURAL*****www.pbs.org/pov/firstpersonplural**

In 1966, Deann Borshay Liem was adopted by an American family and sent from Korea to her new home in California. There the memory of her birth family was nearly obliterated, until recurring dreams led her to investigate her own past, and she discovered that her Korean mother was very much alive. Bravely uniting her biological and adoptive families, Borshay Liem embarks on a heartfelt journey in the acclaimed 2000 film **First Person Plural**, a poignant essay on family, loss and the reconciling of two identities. (December 18, 2000)

IN THE MATTER OF CHA JUNG HEE**www.pbs.org/pov/chajunghee**

Her passport said she was Cha Jung Hee. She knew she was not. So began a 40-year deception for a Korean adoptee who came to the United States in 1966. Told to keep her true identity secret from her new American family, the 8-year-old girl quickly forgot she had ever been anyone else. But why had her identity been switched? And who was the real Cha Jung Hee? **In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee** is the search to find the answers, as acclaimed filmmaker Deann Borshay Liem returns to her native Korea to find her "double," the mysterious girl whose place she took in America. (September 14, 2010)

OFF AND RUNNING**www.pbs.org/pov/offandrunning**

Off and Running tells the story of Brooklyn teenager Avery, a track star with a bright future. She is the adopted African-American child of white Jewish lesbians. Her older brother is black and Puerto Rican and her younger brother is Korean. Though it may not look typical, Avery's household is like most American homes — until Avery writes to her birth mother and the response throws her into crisis. She struggles over her "true" identity, the circumstances of her adoption and her estrangement from black culture. Just when it seems as if her life is unraveling, Avery decides to pick up the pieces and make sense of her identity, with inspiring results. (September 7, 2010)

HOW TO BUY THE FILM

To order **Wo Ai Ni (I Love You) Mommy**, go to www.woainimommy.com



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and beginning its 23rd season on PBS in 2010, the award-winning POV series is the longest-running showcase on American television to feature the work of today's best independent documentary filmmakers. Airing June through September, with primetime specials during the year, POV has brought more than 300 acclaimed documentaries to millions nationwide and has a Webby Award-winning online series, *POV's Borders*. Since 1988, POV has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. More information is available at www.pbs.org/pov.

POV Interactive www.pbs.org/pov

POV's award-winning Web department produces special features for every POV presentation, extending the life of our films through filmmaker interviews, story updates, podcasts, streaming video and community-based and educational content that involves viewers in activities and feedback. POV Interactive also produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, *POV's Borders*. In addition, the *POV Blog* is a gathering place for documentary fans and filmmakers to discuss and debate their favorite films, get the latest news and link to further resources. The POV website, blog and film archives form a unique and extensive online resource for documentary storytelling.

POV Community Engagement and Education

POV works with local PBS stations, educators and community organizations to present free screenings and discussion events to inspire and engage communities in vital conversations about our world. As a leading provider of quality nonfiction programming for use in public life, POV offers an extensive menu of resources, including free discussion guides and curriculum-based lesson plans. In addition, *POV's Youth Views* works with youth organizers and students to provide them with resources and training so they may use independent documentaries as a catalyst for social change.

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American Documentary, Inc. www.amdoc.org

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation. *Simon Kilmurry is executive director of American Documentary | POV; Cynthia Lopez is executive vice president.*

Front cover: Donna greets Faith for the very first time.
Photo courtesy of Martin Hochman



CENTER FOR
ASIAN AMERICAN MEDIA

