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Mismatched: Adoption Agencies, Parental Desire, and the Economy of Transnational Adoption

By

Sarah Dunbrook Macdonald

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Sociology

in the

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of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Marion Fourcade, Chair
Professor Irene Bloemraad
Professor Catherine Ceniza Choy

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Mismatched: Adoption Agencies, Parental Desire, and the Economy of Transnational Adoption
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Abstract

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The United States has historically been the top receiving country for children adopted from abroad. Since 2004, though, massive changes in sending countries have led to a significant reduction in the supply of adoptable children, and a corresponding decline in transnational adoptions. Not only are there fewer children legally available for transnational adoption, but the types of children available today are markedly different from those that were adopted during the international adoption boom of the 1990s. This shift has created a mismatch between the desires of adoptive parents and the types of children that are most readily available for international adoption. Managing this mismatch becomes particularly challenging without a pricing mechanism—one of the central legitimating factors of adoption is that parents do not pay a price to adopt a child, but instead pay a fee tied to professional services. This dissertation asks: when there is no pricing mechanism to restore the balance between supply and demand, how do organizations and individuals manage parental desire and the shortage of certain types of children? How do the children available for adoption come to be emotionally valuable to the parents who eventually adopt them?

To answer these questions, I draw on government reports, in-depth interviews with adoption agency professionals and adoptive parents, participant observation in an adoption agency, and textual analysis of agency promotional materials. I show that perceptions of permanency, racial boundaries, and certainty of placement affect parents' decisions to pursue transnational adoption over other types of adoption. I then trace the origins of the mismatch between supply and desire to massive changes in policy that constrain the supply of children and the eligibility of certain types of parents. I argue that when confronted with this mismatch, adoption agencies, and the parents they serve, engage in a process of (re)evaluation that recasts previously less desirable types of children as sentimentally valuable. In a transnational adoption economy characterized by shortage, parents must make compromises about the children they are willing to bring into their families, and the shape of these compromises reveals a hierarchy of socially constructed desire. By considering the work of adoption agencies and the experiences of adoptive parents, I show how classificatory schemes, boundary making, morality and emotions operate within this economy. Through the emotional connections that they forge with parents, agency staff carefully frame parental preferences for different types of children, while helping parents feel that their decisions are supported and legitimate.

For Selby, Ilyas, and Mekan

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 | Introduction: Morals, Markets, and the Economy of Transnational Adoption 1

Chapter 2 | Dwindling Options: Parallel Adoption Economies and The Decline of Transnational Adoption 18

Chapter 3 | In the Best Interests of Children *and* Prospective Parents: Maintaining the Sentimental Value of the Adoptable Child 45

Chapter 4 | Facing the Decline: Managing Shortage in the Transnational Adoption Economy 65

Chapter 5 | Placing China's Waiting Children: Matching Parents and Children through Special Needs Adoption 87

Chapter 6 | Conclusion: Regulation and the Future of Transnational Adoption 110

References 118

Methodological Appendix 126

Interview Guides 130

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Chapter 1 | Introduction:
Morals, Markets, and the Economy of Transnational Adoption

I met Catherine[1] on a warm summer day; I interviewed her while her daughter slept in the next room. Catherine spoke confidently and in a relaxed manner about the process of adopting her two children, even when she described some of the difficulties she encountered along the way. She told me that when she was in her mid 30s she and Dave, her husband who was approaching 40, began to try to have a child. They tried for a few years to get pregnant, Catherine even tried some fertility treatments, but frustrated at how long it was taking them to have a child, they decided to pursue adoption instead. Catherine had previously worked with children in a preschool, and she felt that her experience developing relationships with her students contributed to her comfort pursuing adoption instead of biological parenthood. When she and her husband decided to stop fertility treatment, Catherine did an internet search for adoption agencies in her area and found International Adoption Together; one day she and her husband stopped in to see the agency. Catherine told me that she talked a bit with the director that day and that what ultimately made her choose the agency was the vibe she felt—a vibe that was "welcoming, friendly, not stressful. And very much 'you can do this.'" This kind of encouragement felt important to Catherine.

At the beginning, Catherine and Dave were open to adopting from many countries, but they knew that they didn't want to adopt from within the United States. To them, transnational adoption[2] just seemed easier because there wouldn't be any ties to a biological family like there would be in a domestic adoption. There were times in the adoption process that Catherine and Dave considered adopting from a variety of countries. At first, they met with an agency staff member, Donna, who helped them to choose a country where they were eligible to adopt based on their age, income, and other background characteristics. Catherine told me that she and Dave had friends in Colombia, so they thought that might be a potential option, but after meeting with Donna it seemed that there were far too many complications involved, Colombian international adoptions weren't moving smoothly. Next, they considered China, Taiwan, and Russia. They attended a class on adoption that was offered at the agency and they met with Donna again. Catherine told me:

> We were like, 'okay. well, what's easy?' That's kind of how we move through life in general. We didn't want to go too far down doing...all that [fertility] stuff. I was like, 'that's not easy.' International [adoption] seems easier.

---

[1] All names and identifying information has been changed to ensure confidentiality of my informants. I have changed the names of adoption agencies and used aliases to refer to all interviewees and individuals observed during the course of my research. Additionally, in many cases specific countries that an interviewee considered, and any information about their personal lives or adoption experiences has also been changed to render them unidentifiable. In the cases of agencies, the names of specific country programs have been changed in some cases to protect the confidentiality of the agency.

[2] I use the terms international, intercountry (or inter-country) and transnational interchangeably when referring to the adoption of a child from a country other than the country in which the adoptive parents reside. Among adoption agencies international is the preferred term used to refer to this type of adoption. intercountry (or inter-country) is a term that is used by the Office of Children's Issues, US Department of State, in Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (Hague Convention or HCIA), and by a small number of adoption agencies. Scholars of adoption use both international and intercountry to refer to adoptions, but most commonly refer to the adoption of a child from another country as transnational adoption.

They considered adopting from Russia, but it still didn't seem easy in Catherine's and Dave's eyes. Adopting a child from there would require two trips, and that seemed more complicated and time consuming than processes in other countries.

After speaking with Donna, Catherine and Dave settled on either adopting from China or Taiwan, both programs were predictable and running well. They also wanted to adopt a child under two, preferably a girl, and these programs seemed most likely to fulfill their desires as adoptive parents. Again, from these two choices they chose what seemed to be fastest and easiest to them. As Catherine explained:

> For [Taiwan], since International Adoption Together didn't have a direct program, you have to work with [another agency]. So, to me, again, that was like an extra added step of something I didn't want to deal with. I just wanted to make it easy. So, we went with China special needs.

Though they didn't initially intend to adopt a child with a special needs diagnosis, when they found out that there were children available with a range of minor physical or medical issues, that they could reject a referral of a child that didn't seem like the right fit, and that the process would be faster than almost any other option, they decided to pursue an adoption of a child from China. After working with Donna and several other adoption specialists, Catherine and Dave brought home a little girl from China who had been diagnosed with a heart defect that wasn't expected to require any surgeries. Their experience of adoption was so positive that a few years later they adopted their second child, who had abnormal laboratory test results that were expected to normalize over time.

Catherine and Dave's very personal experience of infertility, deciding to pursue adoption, finding an agency, determining their own preferences for a child, and then working with an agency staff member to choose the most suitable adoption program is a typical one for most adoptive parents entering a system in which it has become increasingly difficult, slower, more bureaucratic, and more frustrating to adopt children from outside of the United States. When prospective parents, like Catherine and Dave, enter the field of international adoption with very personal dreams for their future family, they are faced with massive and sometimes unpredictable shifts in the political economy of adoption. In this way, their personal biographies and desires confront historical changes in international adoption, to use the language of C. Wright Mills ([1959] 2000). Prospective adoptive parents' desires are constrained by the policies of sending countries that transform the supply of available children and render certain types of parents ineligible for adoption. Most parents who come to international adoption, especially those who have experienced years of infertility, want to adopt a child as healthy, young, and as quickly as possible. Adopting a child quickly, though, requires parents to rethink their desire, a process of (re)evaluation that they navigate with the assistance of adoption agencies.

Transnational adoption, and adoption in general, are important routes towards family building in the United States. While parents have varying motivations for pursuing adoption, broad demographic shifts in childbearing have influenced the popularity of transnational adoption for many American families. Data from the National Vital Statistics System shows that "in 2012 there were more than 9 times as many first births to women aged 35 years and older than there were 4 decades earlier" (Mathews and Hamilton 2014:6). The rate of first births for

women ages 40-44 has also increased substantially, these rates were "essentially stable during the 1970s and early 1980s, but increased more than four-fold from 1985-2012" (Mathews and Hamilton 2014:2). As women have tended to bear children later in life, experiences of infertility have become more widespread, and as a result over the last decade the use of assisted reproductive technology (ART) has doubled; "1.6% of all infants born in the United States every year are conceived using ART" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2016). Women who have experienced infertility often also pursue surrogacy (the use of a gestational carrier) as an option, data on all ART cycles from 1999-2013 shows that "the number of gestational carrier cycles increased from 727 (1.0%) in 1999 to 3,432 (2.5%) in 2013" (Perkins, Boulet, Jamieson, and Kissin 2016:435). Alongside surrogacy in the U.S., transnational surrogacy has also emerged as an option that many Americans access for building their families.[3] Adoption, then, exists as one route, among many, for family building for those who have experienced infertility. Of course, not all parents who pursue adoption have experienced difficulty with childbearing, but the vast majority in this study saw transnational adoption, or private domestic adoption, as alternatives to or next steps after pursuing fertility treatments.

Transnational adoption has been particularly popular among American parents. The National Survey of Adoptive Parents estimated that of all adopted children living in the United States in 2007, 444,000 or 25% were adopted internationally (Vandivere, Malm, and Radel 2009: 9). Americans adopt more children transnationally than any other country in the world; for example, in 2010 Americans adopted 12,149 children, or around 42% of all children adopted internationally that year (Selman 2012). In contrast, Italy, which had the second highest number of transnational adoptions, had 4,130 adoptions in the same year (Selman 2012). Though parents from the United States adopt more children transnationally than any other country, other countries do have higher standardized rates. As Peter Selman (2012) explains, "some other countries have a higher rate per 100,000 members of the population. In 2004, the highest rates were found in Norway (15.4), Spain (13.0), and Sweden (12.3). The lowest rates were in Australia (1.9), Germany (0.8), and the UK (0.6)" (4).

Though overall rates of transnational adoption to the United States are quite high, they have plummeted significantly in recent years. At the peak of international adoption in 2004 Americans adopted 22,991 children from abroad, since then the number of international adoptions to the United States has dropped by 75.4% to only 5,648 in fiscal year 2015 (Bureau of Consular Affairs 2016). Predictions for the future suggest that the number of children adopted from abroad by American parents will continue to fall. Adoption agencies report, though, that prospective parents' interest has not significantly shifted. Instead, the steady and dramatic reduction in the number of children adopted from abroad is the result of complex social, economic, and political changes in sending countries that have altered the supply of available children.

A web of factors has combined to create an international adoption economy characterized by the shortage of young, healthy children who can be adopted quickly; effectively creating a mismatch between the desires of prospective parents and the types of children available for adoption. Shannon, the director of Christian Home Adoptions (CHA) explained that economic hardship and interest from prospective families were not important factors in the decline; rather, she said, "the most significant factor in measuring ebbs and flows in adoption is government policy." The enactment of the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in

[3] See Rudrappa and Collins (2015) for a discussion of the moral framing of transnational surrogacy in India.

Respect of Intercountry Adoption (Hague Convention or HCIA) in the United States in 2008 and changes in sending country policies (particularly in top sending countries like Russia, China, and Guatemala) have resulted in significant changes in the transnational adoption economy.

Of course, it is not that worldwide there are not enough orphaned, abandoned, and relinquished children to match with the number of families who are interested in adoption; rather there are fewer children who are able to be quickly and reliably placed than in the 1990s and early 2000s, and the types of children that are available are different than those who were adopted in earlier decades. International adoption agencies that were once sure of the waiting time to adopt a child, and could depend on the sustainable availability of young, healthy children are now faced with the reality of increased regulations, long waiting times, stricter eligibility criteria for parents, countries closing entirely to adoption, and a shift to availability of older children and those with special needs. In contrast to the transnational adoption economy of the early 1990s when there was a neat alignment between parental desires and available children, international adoption agencies now struggle with a mismatch between supply and demand. International adoption has become uncertain for both parents wishing to adopt and the organizations that assist them in the adoption process. While some agencies have closed their doors in the last several years, many agencies are holding on despite the growing uncertainty of the transnational adoption economy.

Using government reports, an analysis of transnational adoption agency websites, interviews with adoptive parents and staff members at four adoption agencies in California, and observations at a variety of adoption events and consultations at an agency I call Helping through Adoption, this dissertation investigates the ways in which adoption agencies navigate the uncertainty of an increasingly competitive transnational adoption economy.[4] First, I ask how do policy changes create a mismatch between the desires of adoptive parents on the one hand and the availability of certain types of children on the other? I view the agency as the nexus where socially constructed preferences and market forces collide and ask how do agency staff reconcile the desires of adoptive parents, the dwindling options available to these parents, and the realities of an economy characterized by shortage? Through an analysis of in-depth conversations with both parents and adoption agency staff, I tease out what kinds of options become more or less acceptable to agencies and parents, and why. How and why do some children become valuable while others are left behind? In answering these questions, I draw on literature in the area of morals and markets that demonstrates the interrelated nature of market activity and moral calculations, and shows how people navigate and relationally create meaning in contested markets (Almeling 2007, 2011; Anteby 2010; Fourcade & Healy 2007; Healy 2006; Livne 2014; Quinn 2008; Zelizer 1979, [1985] 1994, 1994, 2007, 2011). As a case, the transnational adoption economy brings another dimension to our understandings of morality and markets—that of how actors navigate an intimate economy characterized by shortage that is devoid of a pricing mechanism. I show that without the possibility or inclination to adjust the fees for less desirable children, adoption agencies, together with the parents they serve, engage in a process of (re)evaluation, a process whereby certain types of children become sentimentally valuable to the parents that eventually adopt them. The question is not: how do children come to be worth a fee of $30,000 and up; but, rather, how do children become sentimentally valuable, regardless of the cost of their adoption?

[4] See Methodological Appendix for a description of data sources and data collection.

To explain how adoption agencies and parents work together to reconcile the mismatch between supply and desire in the transnational adoption economy, I begin by showing how domestic, public agency, and transnational adoption economies overlap. I draw on my own research and existing literature on race in adoption choices (Dorow 2006, 2006b; Kubo 2010; Ortiz and Briggs 2003; Quiroz 2007) to show that perceptions of permanency, racial boundaries, and certainty of placement affect parents' decisions to pursue transnational adoption over other types of adoption. I then show how changes in law and policy, particularly in top sending countries like China, Russia, and Guatemala, constrain the supply of children and the eligibility of certain types of parents. As a result of these changes, the shortage of adoptable children is then balanced and navigated by adoption agencies. Though we might predict that, like in traditional free markets, agencies could adjust fees to recalibrate the market—thus drawing some parents to adopt less expensive, and less desirable babies, while others would shell out more money for the perfect child—at the organizational level this is an unthinkable option for producing equilibrium in an economy that is saturated with sentimentality and emotion, and that seeks to protect the innocence of childhood from the perceived cold calculation of the market. I draw on research on institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Glynn and Abzug 2002; Meyer and Rowan 1977) to show how agencies create a homogenous cultural account, what Kieran Healy describes as "a coherent body of reasons and evaluations that can be used to explain and legitimate some practice or activity," that produces children as innocent, with individual rights to a family, and therefore protects them from a rationalized, market-based price tag (Healy 2006:23). This cultural account then informs the way in which agencies navigate the shortage that is produced by the larger political economy of transnational adoption. I argue that the emotional connection between parents and adoption agencies, and the emotional labor of adoption agency staff, serve to maintain a delicate balance between the sentimental pricelessness of the adopted child and the reality of a shortage of the most desirable babies in this very intimate economy. I apply an economic model of shortage in centrally planned economies (Kornai 1980; Kornai and Weibull 1978), economies that also have no pricing mechanism, to show how decisions about substitution and queuing become morally and emotionally charged in a transnational adoption economy characterized by shortage. Finally, I use the rise in the adoption of Chinese children with special needs as a case study to show how substitution operates in the transnational adoption economy.

Morals and Markets

In the summer of 2010 when I had just begun the research for this project, Scott Simon, journalist and host of NPR's Weekend Edition Saturday, published a book about adoption that interweaves his own experience of adopting two girls from China with the experiences of other adoptive parents. In the introduction of the book he reflects on his own family's experience of being questioned about their motives for adopting. He explains:

> Jokes are sometimes the only sensible answer to some of the astoundingly impertinent questions people can ask, right in your children's faces. 'How much did they cost? Are they healthy? You know, you hear stories. So why did you go overseas? Not enough kids here?' But we cannot imagine anything more remarkable and marvelous than having a

> stranger put into your arms who becomes, in minutes, your flesh, your blood: your life. (Simon 2010:3-4).

In a very straightforward manner this quote shows both the pricelessness of a child, who becomes sentimentally valuable to their adoptive parents through adoption, and the questions that sometimes get asked about an economy that circulates children against large sums of money and favors the adoption of some types of children over others.

Viviana Zelizer's (2011) description of the separate spheres/hostile worlds view explains why some may have a knee jerk—"how much did they cost?"—reaction to learning about the "risky exchange" of adoption where the price of adopting a foreign-born child can run into the tens of thousands of dollars. In this view the cultural construction of childhood innocence might suggest that acquiring a child in exchange for a fee of $30,000+ is morally reprehensible, regardless of how that payment is marked and legitimated. The "separate spheres" or "hostile worlds" approach suggests that there are two different realms of social life: "one oriented toward rational effectiveness, the other toward sentiment and solidarity" (2011:5). The assumption underlying the "hostile worlds" approach is that there will be "mutual contamination" if the two spheres intermingle (5). Indeed, we can see this view reflected strongly in conversations about baby markets where some argue that any level of payment for a child is pure, and dangerous, commodification.

An example of this kind of separate spheres or hostile worlds view can be found in Titmuss' (1971) study of blood donation. He compares the voluntary system of blood donation in England to the market and money based system in the United States concluding that the system in England was superior in quality and efficiency. For Titmuss, the market-driven nature of United States blood donation is a slippery slope, "If blood is considered in theory, in law, and is treated in practice as a trading commodity then human hearts, kidneys, eyes, and other organs of the body may also come to be treated as commodities to be bought and sold in the marketplace" (158). In his study of the market for human blood and organs, Kieran Healy (2006) summarizes how Titmuss' conclusions fit into the hostile worlds view, calling Titmuss' work an "exemplary case of the 'boundless model' of markets," where "the market is a voracious entity liable to eat up whatever it can get its hands on" (90). In other words, if blood can be sold on a commodity market, everything sacred in society risks being commodified—children, too—and the only possible solution is to protect that which is sacred from the encroaching market, as Healy says, in this view "some things—blood, for instance—should be kept sacred" (2006:90).

Zelizer ([1985] 1994) shows that this same type of argument has been historically applied to the commodification of children—that children are sacred, should not be commodified, and that adoption should be instead driven entirely by altruism and exist separate from the market. She quotes Margaret Radin's (1996) similar questions about cultural constructions of commodification and the type of slippery slope argument suggested by Titmuss, where "any monetary compensation pushes the transaction down a slippery slope toward corruption" (Zelizer 2011:289). If there was a free-market in children, Radin asks, might we then measure the monetary value of our own children, might our children measure their own value? These questions suggest that "this measurement makes our discourse about ourselves (when we are children) and about our children (when we are parents) like our discourse about cars" (1996:138). That is, a free market in babies risks the destruction of social relationships as the market encroaches on the family.

In her work tracing the transformation of the social value of children from economically useful to sentimentally valuable, Zelizer shows this same type of argument—that the market corrupts—in the case of conversations about adoption in the mid to late 1970s. Zelizer ([1985] 1994) shows how during the 1975 hearings with the Senate Subcommittee on Child and Youth on black-markets in children, ideological rejection of the market came from various players who suggested that money ought never be exchanged for children. In this view, any type of payment, even if as a payment for agency services, was morally reprehensible. Zelizer explains,

> In testimony presented to the Congressional Subcommittee, the director of an organization of adopted adults rejected the claim that "monies collected by agencies are respectable while monies collected by independent agents[5] are not." "It…doesn't matter to the people involved…whether the fee was $5,000 or $25,000 and whether it was paid to an agency or to an independent agent…No rationale of fees will relieve adoptive parents of the certain knowledge that they have bought a human being…" ([1985] 1994:202).

This idea, that money always corrupts, suggests a complete ideological rejection of the market.

In contrast to the complete rejection of the market in adoption, Landes and Posner (1978) published their famous piece arguing for a free market in children. This piece, quoted in Zelizer ([1985] 1994; 2011), continues to be a topic of conversation among adoption scholars.[6] Landes and Posner's argument is an example of what Zelizer (2011) calls "an economistic, nothing-but belief: all social relations ultimately reduce to expressions of rational self-interest mediated by one sort of market or another" (289). The economy of domestic adoption in the United States at the time of Landes and Posner's publication in the late 1970s will sound familiar to my earlier discussion of the transnational economy of adoption today:

> Restrictive regulations governing nonagency adoption have given agencies a monopoly (though not a complete one) of the supply of children for adoption. However, while agencies charge fees for adoption, usually based on the income of the adoptive parents, they do not charge a market-clearing (let alone a monopoly-profit-maximizing) price. This is shown by the fact that prospective adoptive parents applying to an agency face waiting periods of three to seven years…some demanders in this market must wait for years to obtain a baby, others never obtain one, and still others are discouraged by knowledge of the queue from even trying (1978:326).

Landes and Posner describe the adoption market of the 1970s as one in disequilibrium, where "there is a shortage of white babies for adoption…[and] there is a glut of black babies, and of children who are no longer babies (particularly if they are physically or mentally handicapped), for adoption" (324-325). The solution to this disequilibrium, they argue, is a free-market in adoption where a price system can more efficiently match adoptive parents with available children.

Zelizer's work, and the work of many others in the field of economic sociology, departs

[5] The testimony here distinguishes between independent agents that might be paid to procure a child on the black market in contrast to professional agencies that charge adoption fees.
[6] See, for example, Goodwin (2006).

from the separate spheres/hostile worlds views and nothing-but arguments to show that the economic and moral intermingle in social life. Zelizer shows the ties between economics and morality in her studies of life insurance markets (1979), the valuation of children (1985), the social meaning of money (1994), and the use of money in intimate relationships (2007). A body of recent work in sociology has also demonstrated the interrelated nature of market activity and moral calculations, and contributed to an understanding of the ways that people navigate and relationally create meaning in contested markets (Almeling 2007, 2011; Anteby 2010; Fourcade & Healy 2007; Healy 2006; Livne 2014; Quinn 2008).

Healy (2006) and Almeling (2007; 2011) both expand on Zelizer's work to show the role that organizations play in structuring markets for bodily goods. Healy (2006) demonstrates how within the market for organ donation, organizations play an important role in constructing the contexts in which people decide to donate organs and differing procurement rates across contexts. He shows that the literature on organ donation puts little emphasis on how organizations affect rates of organ procurement and argues that "to understand this world of goods we must get away from the character and motives of individual donors and look instead to the cultural contexts and organizational mechanisms that provide people with reasons and opportunities to give" (Healy 2006:2). In the case of organ donation, Healy shows that organizations' successful construction of a cultural account of that emphasizes altruism creates moral opposition to a market that would commodify organs. Healy argues for a theoretical model that moves away from the idea of rational agents in our understanding of donation of bodily goods, and subscribes to a view that has slowly developed out of economic sociology which "both develops Polanyi's idea that the economy is an "instituted process" and relaxes the claim that money and markets inevitably corrupt and undermine human relationships" (121).

Almeling (2007; 2011) furthers this move away from a hostile worlds view by showing the important relational role that organizations play in structuring the terms under which people donate bodily goods. Adding to Zelizer and Healy's work, she shows how "organizational staff construct the meaning of donation in interaction with those who provide human goods" in egg donation agencies and sperm banks (2007:322). Most importantly, she shows the ways in which donation is gendered: men are encouraged to think of donation as a job, whereas women are taught to understand donation as a gift (2007; 2011). Almeling's work demonstrates that in a market characterized by what Zelizer calls "risky exchanges," it is not that the exchange of money for bodily goods inherently corrupts, but that "commodification can have various and multiple effects on those who participate in such markets" and that meanings in these markets are negotiated relationally (2011:7).

This observation, that meanings are variable and created relationally in moral markets, is an important contribution of this literature on the intersections of morality and markets. Roi Livne (2014) brings another dimension to the way in which we understand the overlap of moral commitments and market forces by showing how scarcity can become moralized as a positive feature in markets. In his study of hospice, he shows that financial decisions to limit spending in end of life care took on a morally positive character. The historical underpinnings and present-day cultural understandings of what Livne calls the hospice ethic, "endows the dying process with new meanings and emphasizes the virtues of reaching acceptance and limiting treatment" (2014:906). Limiting treatment is both economically useful and morally positive. Livne shows that "the hospice movement outlined a new morality of dying: it redefined what a "good death" means and consequently re-moralized scarcity around the end of life as positive" (2014:907).

Taken together and applied to the case of transnational adoption, literature on the interrelated nature of morals and markets suggests that just like in the markets for organ donation (Healy 2006), donated sperm and eggs (Almeling 2007; 2011), and end-of-life care (Livne 2014), morality and economic forces intermingle, meaning is relationally created, and that the effects of meaning can be variable and contested by individuals operating in this economy. Almeling (2007; 2011) and Healy (2006) both offer examples of what Zelizer (2011) calls "risky exchanges," exchanges where objections are raised over a market in goods that some feel ought to remain sacred. These kind of risky exchanges produce a moral conundrum—how can an exchange of bodily goods, or organs, or of children happen in a way that doesn't corrupt the motives of the suppliers? Each of these cases finds a different answer to this moral quandary. In the case of a market in organs, exchange is framed as an altruistic gift and donors are provided with a set of reasons for giving (Healy 2006). In the case of sperm and eggs, donors are paid a carefully managed payment, but how their donation is understood varies across gendered lines. Organizations view the payment for sperm as a payment for a job, while the payment for eggs is framed as a gift (Almeling 2011). In both cases, in organ donation and in the donation of sperm and eggs, organizations serve the important purpose of managing the risky exchange to guarantee against corruption.

In the case of transnational adoption, the procurement of children is carefully managed by adoption agencies that provide professional services in exchange for a fee, not a price. The value of children cannot fluctuate on the market, as Posner and Landes suggest, because the cultural construction of childhood innocence suggests that children ought to be protected from being evaluated on the basis of their characteristics. This kind of market in children would reveal an implicit appreciation of certain kinds of people, while others would be rendered visibly less worthy. Though there is no market price for different types of children, this does not mean that children do not go through a process of valuation in the adoption economy. Since children are so intensely protected from a market price, shortage in the economy becomes a particularly difficult challenge for organizations. In this case, organizations must both relationally maintain the pricelessness of the adoptable child, while also simultaneously managing the shortage of the most desirable types of children. As a case, transnational adoption brings another dimension to our understanding of the morality of markets—that of how actors navigate an economy that is devoid of a pricing mechanism, and how multiple meanings are produced and contested in the process of evaluating children and producing them as sentimentally valuable.

The Priceless Child in Adoption

Maintaining the adoptable child as sentimentally valuable and priceless (Zelizer [1985] 1994), while rejecting the notion that she might also sometimes be treated as a commodity produces discomfort for actors in the transnational adoption economy. Like Susan, the Director of Loving Family Adoption told me, sometimes parents may come in looking for a particular type of child, "And, you know, some may say oh I saw that little China girl that so-and-so had and I want one just like that. I mean not like shopping for a car, but…" In describing some of her clients, Susan quickly backpedaled from suggesting that they might be shopping for children in the same way that they might buy a car. Though it conflicts with adoption agency's shared understanding that all children, regardless of their characteristics, deserve a family, the process of adoption requires the evaluation of desirable children by adoptive parents. Even if adoptive

parents are not outright purchasing children, still children are evaluated, differentiated, and assigned value based on their characteristics. As Margaret Radin (1996) explains, "Our status quo 'official' social regime—and the 'official' regime is the one that has the most symbolic cultural significance—bans the exchange of children for money." Though, as we know, people pay upwards of $30,000 to adopt children from abroad and the demand for healthy, young, adoptable children far outpaces the supply. Few observers of the adoption economy would deny the importance of supply and demand in determining what types of children are and are not placed. But, how are supply and demand managed, and matched, in an economy that doesn't allow for the purchase of children and therefore precludes price manipulation as a strategy for creating equilibrium?

In transnational adoption, and adoption more generally, fixed fees tied to professional services are both a necessary and problematic characteristic of an economy in children. On the one hand, fixed fees legitimate the adoption economy by protecting the sentimental value of children from a rationalized price tag, but on the other hand these fees make managing shortage a particularly difficult organizational challenge. The economy of international adoption is peculiar, and different from the traditional view of a market, in that it is structured in a way that prevents price manipulation. There is a significant shortage of the most desirable (young, healthy, white and Asian) children, but fees are relatively fixed, at least in terms of agencies' ability to change them[7].

As Viviana Zelizer's ([1985] 1994) *Pricing the Priceless Child* shows, the adoption market has long had the distinctive feature of a fixed fee based on remuneration for professional services—until the 1940s adoptive parents were only allowed to provide donations in exchange for children, and when fees were initially introduced the adoption agencies differentiated fees from a price paid for a child by tying fees to the provision of professional services. Between 1949 and 1954, Zelizer explains, the number of agencies charging fees for services rose from 18 to 105, and that despite fears that agencies would become "efficient profit-maximizing firms," "the adoption market retained its distinctive structure" ([1985] 1994:204). This setup remains in today's adoption market—agencies are non-profit organizations and are only allowed to charge for services, not children.

Similar to Zelizer, Herman (2008) shows the professionalization of adoption agencies. In her descriptions of the historical background of modern-day adoption agencies, she explains that the first adoptions in the United States were either entirely commercial, e.g. arranged through ads for profit, or sentimental, e.g. based on the idea that adoption is a loving and altruistic act that does not involve profit. In response to the lack of oversight in both of these types of adoption, the professional adoption agency was fashioned out of amateur sentimental adoption agencies around 1930 (Herman 2008:45). "Money and sentiment were equally unacceptable as modes of family formation because they were equally biased, prioritizing adult desires over children's needs…Professionalism would yield better as well as safer and more ethical adoptions" (45). This new "kinship by design" sought to reorganize adoption practices to include more

[7] Interestingly, though not widespread, there is some evidence of price manipulation in private domestic markets where white babies may be priced higher than black children, as Goodwin (2010) explains, "adoption agencies attempt to clarify this discrepancy by explaining that black children are more difficult to place than white children, and therefore the costs associated with placing white children are higher" (6). Elsewhere, Goodwin (2006) has argued that adoption in the United States currently operates as an "unregulated marketplace."

professional oversight and to "control the uncertainties of family making" (45). This historical trajectory explains the move from a black-market price for a baby, or the altruistic adoption of an unwanted child, to a system in which prices legitimate the economy of adoption through their ties to professional services.

In transnational adoption, fees for adoption programs are fixed by sending countries, and not adoption agencies. Even so fees are still, in theory, tied to the cost of the services involved in the process of adoption. This fee, though, cannot be manipulated by adoption agencies. Agencies additionally charge clients for the cost various professional services, most notably the completing an adoption homestudy, a process of interviews by a social worker and the resulting document that officially approves a parent or parents to adopt. Competition among agencies, though, prevents fee manipulation in this area. As Alexis from Helping through Adoption told me, "Yeah, we could raise our China fee, but then why would someone hire us over [another agency]? China's always the same. If [our competitor] doesn't raise their fees and we don't raise ... It's like who's going to be the first one to? ... We compare notes all the time…not all the time, but every couple years [another agency] will call us and say, "Hey, can you fax over your fee schedule?" Then we will. We'll say, "Yeah, if you do the same." Agencies, then, are prevented from manipulating fees in three ways: first, they lack the power to determine program fees; second, competition prevents them from raising fees for the most desirable children or the most labor-heavy adoptions; third, because the fees are tied to specific professional services that are ostensibly the same across all transnational adoptions, they must remain fixed.

If fixed fees are a defining characteristic of an economy in adoption, how is shortage managed in such an economy? Though adoption agencies operate as non-profit organizations, they still compete with each other to attract business and stay afloat in a tumultuous time for the industry. In a typical shortage market, the result is that price goes up—the most desirable products become the most expensive, but in adoption you can't simply charge more for young, healthy, babies and less for the alternative—older, physically or developmentally challenged children. Academic literature on markets in which pricing mechanisms do exist and where processes of economic valuation take place show us that pricing and valuation are social constructions, and that these processes can be contentious and debated. Velthuis' (2003) research on pricing in the art market shows us that in cases where there is a price mechanism, pricing is a signifying act within a symbolic system (Velthuis 2003). Fourcade's (2011) work on the economic valuation of nature demonstrates that economic valuation is a process of social construction "which incorporates all kinds of assumptions about social order and socially structured imaginaries about worth" (1769). Worth, though, need not only be expressed in terms of money or price, and understandings of worth may vary significantly across different spheres of social life (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006).

Though adoption has no pricing mechanism, this does not preclude actors in the economy from differentiating and evaluating the worth, in sentimental not economic terms, of adoptable children. As Zelizer ([1985] 1994) shows us, once valued for their economic contributions through labor, children became valued instead for their emotional worth. This transformation in the social value of children between the 1870s and 1930s is pertinent to our understanding of childhood today. According to Zelizer, "the emergence of this economically 'worthless' but emotionally 'priceless' child has created an essential condition of contemporary childhood." Zelizer traces this transformation of valuation across several realms of social life, from children's insurance to the changing legal evaluation of children. In her work on baby markets, adoption,

and the changing value of children, from economically valued to sentimentally valued, we see a striking resemblance between the sentimental adoption of the 1920s and early 1930s and that of today. Zelizer explains that the earlier need for an economically useful child made older, male, strong boys more desirable to parents because of the value they held in the work they could perform. After the shift to sentimental adoption, though, "the priceless child was judged by new criteria, its physical appeal and personality replaced earlier economic yardsticks" ([1985] 1994:193). The highest demand was for little girls, and Zelizer shows that periodicals from that time period specified demand for young, blue-eyed girls to the detriment of boys.

In the transnational adoption market of today, the demand remains high for little girls, mostly white or Asian, that are young and healthy. As I've already suggested, though, the economy of transnational adoption is marked by a shortage of exactly these kinds of children. The best "fit" is no longer constrained, and can no longer be constrained, by trying to match parents with children that are most likely to seem to be biologically a part of the family, as matching was done in earlier times (Herman 2008). In this context, parental desires for certain types of children reflect, at their core, how a particular parent or couple can imagine a particular type of child becoming priceless and sentimentally valuable within their own family. The desire for a certain type of child, and therefore overall demand, is not individual, though, it is culturally and socially constructed. As Appadurai (1988) explains, demand "emerges as a function of a variety of social practices and classifications, rather than a mysterious emanation of human needs, a mechanical response to social manipulation (as in one model of the effects of advertising in our own society), or the narrowing down of a universal and voracious desire for objects to whatever happens to be available" (29). Applying this conception of demand, and desire, as being the result of relational processes of classification suggests that matching in adoption reflects much more than what certain parents want or need, it reveals important inequalities and valuations in our society.

Looking at the ways in which the mismatch between parental desires and available children is solved, we learn that adoption is an economy that feels the strong effects of forces of supply and demand, but is saturated with emotional meaning, intimate ties, and sentimental valuation. Though we may see parents as consumers seeking the best product they can get, this rational-actor view misses the fact that choices about adoption are made relationally with adoption agencies, and parents are emotionally invested in choosing a child that for them is priceless and sentimentally valuable. Agency staff, on the other hand, may be at once businesspeople who are juggling the needs of their clients with the realities of the highly competitive economy in which they are embedded, but they too are emotionally invested, for both personal and professional reasons, in determining exactly which kind of child will "fit" and become sentimentally valuable within a particular family.

Transnational Adoption and Adoption Agencies

Despite the fact that the majority of transnational adoptions to the United States are completed with the assistance of adoption agencies, there is a marked absence of attention to agencies within the existing literature on international adoption. The existing literature on transnational adoption in the social sciences, and particularly in psychology, has focused most heavily on individual level issues related to ethnic identity, cultural differences, and the adaptation of adoptees (Engel, Phillips, and Dellacava 2007). Rather than focusing on research

concerned with the experiences of individual adoptees and best practices for raising internationally adopted children, in what follows I synthesize existing scholarship that considers the importance of inequality for understanding international adoption as a socially structured practice. After synthesizing some existing literature on the topic of transnational adoption, I show that very little existing research has systematically considered the importance of international adoption agencies as organizational actors that are both affected by and reciprocally affect the transnational adoption economy.

While most transnational adoption literature can be categorized as empirically and theoretically concerned with individual experience, there is a significant body of literature that considers "social structure and the national and international factors influencing adoption" (Engel et al. 2007:257).[8] Topics within this broader field of transnational adoption literature include ethical and social justice issues, and the influence of globalization on transnational adoption. Many theoretical discussions of transnational adoption point to the uneven relationship between sending and receiving countries (Briggs 2012; Coutin, Maurer, Yngvesson 2002; Dorow 2006; Dubinsky 2008; Herman 2008; Högbacka 2008; Hollingsworth 2003; Howell 2006; Smolin 2006). In their work on the legitimization work of globalization Coutin, Maurer, and Yngvesson (2002) argue that transnational adoption is dependent on globalization. They conceive of legitimation work as the "practices which produce, define and preclude both movement and connection" one such act of legitimation work is "denying the histories and policies that allow some parents to 'choose' babies while others must abandon them" (Coutin et al. 2002: 801). Suggesting that globalization allows for the sending and receiving of children from countries and parents that are grossly unequal. Hollingsworth (2003) similarly argues that we cannot consider the practice of transnational adoption separate from issues of social justice. She explains that while international adoption does provide assistance to many children in need, it "exploits unjust social structures in the 'sending' countries from which children are adopted, where they and their biological families have not had access to the freedoms and resources enjoyed by more advantaged children and families in both the sending and 'receiving' countries" (Hollingsworth 2003:209).

In *The Kinning of Foreigners* (2006) Signe Howell investigates how global inequalities structure not only the transfer of children, but also of discourses and values across national borders. Through an in-depth look at transnational adoption practices in Norway, and to some extent in other countries, Howell describes a "two-way, asymmetrical movement of substances and concepts" (Howell 2006:8). Children (substances) move from the global South to the North, while "concepts, in the form of moral values and psychological discourses (expressed most clearly in international treaties) move from the North to the South" (Howell 2006:8). While the broad scope of Howell's research adds much to our understanding of global processes that influence transnational adoption, she spends little time specifically addressing adoption agencies as organizational actors within the transnational adoption market. This is, in part, due to the fact that Howell's research focuses predominantly on Norway as a receiving country. Norway has only three state-licensed transnational adoption agencies that are under strict control by the Ministry of Children and Family (Howell 2006:29). In contrast, the U.S. has hundreds of private agencies that Howell suggests are subject to much looser regulations.

Literature on sending and receiving countries suggests that globalization and global

[8] For an extensive list of existing studies of transnational adoption (including some key works on domestic adoption) in the fields of sociology and anthropology see Macdonald (2010).

inequalities are necessary conditions for the migration of children from across the globe to the United States and Western Europe. Once these conditions are met, literature on parental motivations suggests that individual choices to create families through international adoption are structured by a racialized cultural logic that creates desire for certain types of children while simultaneously making other children less desirable (I address this literature in Chapter 2). While both of these bodies of literature go far beyond individual-level explanations for adoption trends by suggesting that parents' choices are socially and culturally structured, neither body of literature systematically considers the organizational mechanisms that make the practice of international adoption possible. In fact, most research on parental motivations for adopting from abroad and for deciding which countries to adopt from largely ignores the organizational context in which parents make these decisions. This view sees the supply of children as constraining individual-level choices, but still assumes that, while influenced by many social factors, the desire of certain types of parents for certain types of children is largely unmediated. For example, in her research on adoptive Finnish parents Högbacka (2008) explains, "while the supply of 'adoptable' children sets the limits, adoptive parents are the actors whose decisions, which are rooted in very private hopes and anxieties, determine the number and direction of adoptions" (55). Again, like Howell's (2006) work, Högbacka's conclusions may differ because her research was done in Finland, a country that has state-supported adoption agencies.

The problem with explaining the larger economy of transnational adoption through a focus on macro-level determinants of supply and micro-level desires that drive demand is that meso-level organizations are largely ignored.[9] This is not to suggest that the economy for adopting foreign-born children is not reciprocally structured by international, national, and individual level determinants; rather, in order to fully understand this economy, we must also look to the adoption agencies as organizations that ultimately allow for the sending and receiving of children on a global scale. As argued above, most literature on transnational adoption largely leaves adoption agencies out of the story of this transnational economy; however, there are a few important studies that provide some information on these organizations and their practices.

Sara Dorow's (2006) *Transnational Adoption: A Cultural Economy of Race, Gender and Kinship*, provides the most thorough treatment of transnational adoption from the perspective of China/U.S. adoption. Dorow's work mentions several issues related to agencies such as agency advertising and recruitment of parents, the role of agencies in matching parents with children, competition between agencies and the ways in which agencies construct the value of children and parents. Her groundbreaking work considers "the ways in which meaning, identity, and value are constructed around adoptees by the actors and institutions that participate in adoption migration" in both the United States and China, but her focus is on the entirety of the economy of adoption from China, and thus she does not focus on agency practices (Dorow 2006:2). Cartwright (2003) considers the role of agencies in advertising children. By looking at the commodification of children through agency distributed images,[10] she (2003) shows that pictures of waiting children on the internet and in adoption brochures "functioned initially as lures, drawing prospective clients into the adoption market, helping them to imagine 'their' child or

[9] See Kristel Acacio (2011) for an example of the importance of meso-level organizations in market construction. Acacio demonstrates the important role organizations play in constructing an international market for Phillipine-educated nurses.

[10] For a similar study of the commodification of women and children through images distributed by humanitarian aid organizations see Briggs, 2003.

themselves as parents of children 'like these'"(83). Milovidov and Treitler (2014) provide a more recent look at the role of adoption advertisements and photolistings, arguing that transnational adoption contributes to a new sort of racial imperialism that can be seen through an analysis of internet use in adoption.

Most recently, Elizabeth Raleigh (2014) has studied the role of adoption agencies in sorting children and matching parents through special needs adoption. Raleigh's dissertation (2011) uses observations at adoption agency orientation sessions and interviews with adoption agency staff to show how domestic and transnational adoption agencies engage in a process she calls "transracial assortative adoption" where "parents are stratified by family structure and children are stratified by health, race, and age, creating a pattern where 'first tier' White heterosexual couples have the most access to adopting 'first tier' White healthy infants" (26). I expand on this finding and incorporate interviews with parents and observations of interactions between parents and agencies to show how emotional labor, connection, and morality play an important role in this matching process.

Outline of the Dissertation

This dissertation uses insights gained from sociological research on markets and morals to show how adoption agency staff and parents work together to both produce and maintain the sentimental value of the adoptable child. Together these actors navigate the pressures of shortage and changing legal contexts to build families that contain the best possible match between the desires of adoptive parents and the availability of adoptable children. I argue that the presence of shortage in this economy makes this process of sentimental valuation even more visible as agencies assist parents in substituting available children for the most desirable children. Dorow (2006b) argues that "in both domestic and transnational adoption, the desirability of children is constructed through a complex interplay of consumptive and protective impulses toward childhoods both commoditized and sacralized" (362). I take this observation into the adoption agency and show how this process takes place in the interactions between adoption agencies and adoptive parents across adoption from various countries. I find that adoption agency staff expend necessary emotional labor (Hochschild [1983] 2003) in their interactions with parents that maintains a delicate balance between pricelessness and a price, between market forces and morality, in the process of evaluating adoptable children. This process of valuation, whereby certain children become more sentimentally valuable than others, is a process that not only reflects the desires of parents, but which strongly reflects the makeup of the social world and the hierarchies within it.

In what follows, I trace the typical trajectory of adoptive parents through the process of adoption. In Chapter 2, *Dwindling Options: Parallel Adoption Economies and the Decline of Transnational Adoption*, I both situate transnational adoption within a broader adoption economy that includes domestic private adoption and adoption from public agencies, and then trace the origins of the mismatch between parental desire and the supply of adoptable children. I show how the opening of countries for adoption, and the neat alignment between demand and supply in the early 1990s led to a fast rise in the number of adoptions of children from outside of the United States. This period of growth was followed by a sudden precipitous fall of adoptions from abroad that stems largely from significant changes in the frequency with which children were sent to the United States from China, Russia, and Guatemala. I briefly discuss the political,

social, and economic causes of a decrease in adoptions from each of these three countries. Next, I show how, though not directly tied to the rapid decline of transnational placements, the institution of the Hague Convention in the United States in 2008 led to an increase in processing times, therefore waiting times, and bureaucracy for those parents wishing to adopt from convention member countries. This shift, I argue, caused extreme stress for adoption agency staff who took on increased responsibilities in the wake of new regulations. Paired with a decrease in available children from top sending countries, this created a perfect storm of uncertainty within the transnational adoption economy.

Chapter 3, *In the Best Interests of Children* and *Prospective Parents: Maintaining the Sentimental Value of the Adoptable Child* introduces a cultural account of adoption practice. This cultural account, reflected in adoption agency mission statements, legitimates the transnational adoption economy, and thus separates it from the perception of a hostile market by suggesting that the main purpose of adoption is to support children—framed as innocent, with inalienable rights. Despite the fact that transnational adoption agencies vary significantly in terms of size, location, and countries serviced, their online promotional materials present a fairly homogenous mission. Following Sara Dorow's (2006) understanding of dual clients in adoption—parents and children—this chapter shows how agencies and parents create a mutual understanding of adoption as a project in the best interests of children. Parents choose agencies based on their ability to present adoption as an emotional process rather than an economic transaction. I argue that emotional bonds between parents and agencies serve the purpose of both creating and maintaining a mutual understanding of the sentimental value of the adoptable child. By showing times when this mutual understanding breaks down, I demonstrate the tenuous balance between emotions and market pressures.

In Chapter 4, *Facing the Decline: Managing Shortage in the Transnational Adoption Economy*, I use an economic model of shortage based on centrally planned Soviet economies (Kornai and Weibull 1978) and adapt it for the particular economy of transnational adoption. The application of this model elucidates how parents and agencies make decisions about whether to queue for adoptions with long waiting periods or to substitute the next best option. I show that though the decision not to queue for an adoption that may take several years has inevitable financial benefits for agencies, agency staff explain their reasons for not encouraging parents to queuing in moral terms. For agency staff, queuing is undesirable because it is not in parents' best interests because it may lead to disappointment and is less likely to result in a successful placement. Agencies frame substitution, on the other hand, as an attractive choice for parents because it allows them to receive a faster placement. I show how instead of framing choices beyond queuing as forced substitutions, agencies empower parents to have broader preferences and to have individual agency in making adoption choices. The possible substitutions available to parents are often structured by the opportunities and choices available to them within a particular agency and by requirements for parents implemented in the sending country. Finally, insofar as substitution takes on a moral dimension as an adoption choice, there are limits to the appropriate boundaries of how far substitution can be pushed, to demonstrate this I explore the ways in which substitution on the basis of race is navigated by the adoption agency.

Chapter 5, *Placing China's Waiting Children: Matching Parents and Children through Special Needs Adoption* extends the model of shortage from Chapter 4 to the specific case of the adoption of children with special needs from China. Though there has been a significant reduction in the number of children adopted from China in recent years, even more telling is the

shift of the type of children that are now most available and most likely to be adopted from China. In this chapter, I investigate two parallel processes of valuation: I show how parents are classified and differentially valued as more or less worthy by the Chinese government, and then demonstrate how children with special medical needs and physical disabilities have become the objects of parental desire. Since they are more quickly available than children in many other countries, and because parents are able to specify the limits of the type of child they are able to adopt, the special needs program has taken off, creating a new hierarchy of desire in which children with the most minor special needs are in the highest demand.

In Chapter 6, *Conclusion: Regulation and the Future of Transnational Adoption,* I revisit the central findings of this dissertation, outline the contributions this study has made to existing literature, and suggest some limitations and avenues for future research. Finally, I consider how the story presented here fits into widespread debates about international adoption and specifically about the extent to which adoption practice can, or should, be regulated.

Chapter 2 | Dwindling Options:
Parallel Adoption Economies and The Decline of Transnational Adoption

Christy married when she was in her mid 30s; she told me that she'd always dreamed of having a big family. A few years after marrying she and her husband decided to try to get pregnant, Christy knew that sometimes people encounter challenges trying to conceive in their late 30s, but she said, "I just, of course, didn't think it would be me," she laughed, "I watched a lot of my friends struggle, and I was like of course that just won't be a problem." Since Christy had felt interested in adoption from a young age, she wanted to pursue the kind of adoption that was most likely to help a child in need, she considered adopting a child with HIV from Africa, but her husband felt apprehensive and that this was a lot to take on with their first child. When she looked into it, Christy felt unsure for other reasons,

> So I looked around at other organizations quickly just online, but it just wasn't that clear to me where everyone stood. It was very hard to like—the amount information in these sites was like four or five lines. You can't be fat, or you can't be forty, you know this real like nothing information. Just like, okay. I meet that criteria, but the chance of it shutting down, is it—what's been the auditing of its history in terms of fraud and stuff related to adoption and manipulation of families? I felt really scared of later feeling like there was a possibility our child was obtained inappropriately. It just felt, like I think with all of the uncertainty of everything else, too uncertain.

The unpredictable nature of transnational adoption, paired with stories of child trafficking[11], made Christy quickly decide against adopting from Africa, or any other country. Though Christy and her husband fit many of the criteria that sending countries use to characterize parents as healthy and worthy of parenting an adopted child—they were young enough, financially stable enough, and fit various health criteria—Christy was too worried about the uncertainty of transnational adoption. Instead, Christy and her husband proceeded with adopting from foster care by enrolling in an extensive course. During the course, though, they realized that it was important to them to adopt an infant, and it seemed a domestic private adoption was the best way to fulfill that wish.

Christy had a close friend who was in the middle of the adoption process and had recommended Helping through Adoption to her earlier in the process, so she decided to contact them. At Helping through Adoption, Christy and her husband expressed their desire to adopt an African-American child, but because the agency places mostly white, Latinx, and some Asian or mixed-race children through domestic adoption, they recommended that Christy contact an adoption agency that specialized in the adoption of children of color. Christy and her husband engaged in a set of classes at the new agency to educate themselves about transracial adoption, since they were a white couple hoping to adopt a child of color. By the end of the sessions the agency told them that they didn't think that Christy should adopt a Black child because of her lack of connections to Black culture and communities in her area. Feeling a bit defeated, Christy returned to Helping through Adoption where Alexis told her about a new adoption program opening in the Philippines, but still, domestic adoption seemed less uncertain and more likely to

[11] For an extensive discussion of child trafficking, or what David Smolin calls "child laundering," in international adoption, see Smolin (2006).

lead her to adopting an infant. "I signed up with [the agency], basically, because I was like, 'I want to raise an infant first.' And ultimately, I want to do fost-adopt, but I just want to be sure that we can have an infant," she told me.

Christy's process of deciding which type of adoption to pursue was typical among the parents that I interviewed. Like Christy, most parents made their decisions in the wake of unsuccessful fertility treatments, heavily considered the age, race, and health status of the child they would adopt, and weighed the uncertainty of the international adoption economy against domestic private adoption. Christy's exploration of adoption from the foster care system was less typical, though some parents did consider fost-adopt in the range of choices that were available to them. Christy's story suggests that in order to understand the ways in which certain types of children become valuable within the transnational adoption economy, we must understand how the uncertainty of international adoption compares to domestic adoption and foster adoption—economies that coexist alongside that of transnational adoption.

This chapter serves two interrelated purposes with the goal of familiarizing readers with the overall field of adoption in the United States: the first purpose is to situate transnational adoption as one adoption economy that overlaps with economies of domestic private adoption and adoption from foster care; the second purpose is to demonstrate the legal and policy underpinnings of shortage and uncertainty in transnational adoption. Using secondary data, paired with my interviews with adoptive parents, I begin by exploring how perceptions of permanency, racialized evaluations of children available through different types of adoption, and the uncertainty and shortage characteristic of transnational adoption come together to determine the flow of different types of parents to different types of adoption. Second, I shift my focus to transnational adoption to demonstrate the making of a mismatch between supply and desire within this particular economy. I briefly trace the dramatic rise of transnational adoption in the 1990s and early 2000s, and then point to two interrelated causes of decline post 2004. First, I show how country-specific policies in China, Russia, and Guatemala lead to a rapid decline in the number of available children for transnational adoption, and therefore the number of adoptions completed. Second, I show how the implementation of the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (Hague Convention or HCIA) in the United States, though not the direct cause of decline in transnational adoption, has contributed to longer waiting times for adoption, increased bureaucratic procedures, and additional stress for adoption agency staff. Taken together, the two parts of this chapter create a backdrop from which we can understand processes of valuation in the interactions between agencies and adoptive parents that I investigate in the chapters that follow.

Adoption Choices: Domestic, Transnational, and Foster Adoption in the United States

While there are several types of legal adoption in the United States—in addition to transnational adoption, there is tribal adoption, stepparent adoption, second parent adoption, adoption within a family, independent adoption, private agency adoption, facilitated adoption, public agency adoption, etc.—most parents I interviewed or observed were considering either transnational adoption or an agency domestic adoption, though some also considered foster adoption through public agencies. Transnational adoption, also called international or intercountry adoption, is an adoption where an individual or couple become the legal parent(s) of a child who is from a country outside of the United States. In contrast, domestic private adoption

happens when an adoption agency assists an individual or couple in finding a pregnant birth mother or a baby that has recently been born, and then facilitates a relationship between the adoptive parents and the birth mother (or parents) whereby the birth parent(s) eventually legally consent to the adoption of the child by the adoptive parents. The third kind of adoption that was less frequently considered by the adoptive parents in my research was adoption from foster care, specifically fost-adopt in the State of California. In this type of adoption, parents are matched with a child through a public agency, or a private agency that contracts with public agencies, and the child is then placed in the prospective adoptive parents' home with the expectation that the child eventually becomes eligible for adoption, though in some cases the child may be reunified with their birth family.

Though difficult to gather, United States adoption statistics tell part of the story of how the adoption economies of private domestic, transnational, and public agency domestic adoption overlap. Nationwide adoption statistics are notoriously difficult to find, as there is no government agency responsible for compiling data for adoptions in the United States; and, as noted in a report from the Child Welfare Information Gateway[12] (2016), even when relying on multiple sources of data on adoptions, it is difficult to estimate overall adoption statistics in an uncomplicated manner. Even so, available statistics uncover important trends in adoption by American parents.

The most recent data available from the Child Welfare Information Gateway's report "Trends in U.S. Adoptions 2008-2012" (2016) shows that in 2012, 119,514 children were adopted in the United States (30). Of these adoptions, 7,253 took place in California, making California the state with the most adoptions, followed by Florida at 6,847 adoptions (3). This report includes estimates for children adopted from public agencies, through intercountry adoption, and through other types of adoption, including domestic private adoption. The Children's Bureau defines public agency adoptions as "an adoption with public agency involvement, either directly through a public agency or through a private agency that is contracted by a public agency" (27). Statistics for international adoptions are tracked by the federal government, and the intercountry adoption figures in this report are defined as the "adoption of a child who is a citizen of one country by parents who are citizens of a different country" (27). The category for other types of adoptions includes all adoptions that were not intercountry or conducted through a public agency.

In 2012 58,882 adoptions, or 49% of the total adoptions in the United States, fell into the "other" category of adoption (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2016:36). This figure makes it difficult to estimate the number of domestic private adoptions, like the adoptions offered through three of the agencies I visited (all but International Adoption Together offered domestic private adoption) and through numerous other agencies in California and across the United States, because it includes many legal types like stepparent adoption, tribal adoption, and independent adoptions. From this same compiled data, the Child Welfare Information Gateway estimates that roughly 52,042 adoptions, or 44% of all adoptions nationwide, were adoptions of children through public agencies, such as foster-adoption placements (32). The "Child Welfare Outcomes 2009-2012: Report to Congress," gives additional information on the number of children currently in foster care; the report estimates that "nationally, there were approximately 397,000 children in foster care on the last day of 2012. During that year, an estimated 252,000 children

[12] The Child Welfare Information Gateway is a government service that is part of the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

entered foster care, and 241,000 children exited foster care" (Children's Bureau 2014:i). It's important to note that these figures do not represent the number of children available for adoption, and the number of children that exited foster care may have exited because they were reunified with birth families or because they were formally adopted.

Returning to the data from "Trends in U.S. Adoptions 2008-2012," there were 8,650 intercountry adoptions during 2012, accounting for the remaining 7% of adoptions in the United States in that particular dataset (Children's Welfare Information Gateway 2016:34). The frequency of international adoptions seems quite small in comparison with other adoptions and public agency adoptions, but this is largely because of an overall decline in international adoptions prior to 2012, I consider this decline in detail later in this chapter. For example, Vandivere, Malm, and Radel (2009) estimate that of all adopted children living in the United States in 2007, 25% were adopted internationally (444,000), 38% were adopted through a private domestic adoption (677,000), and 37% were adopted from foster care (661,000) (3). This suggests that though international adoptions have significantly declined, they are still an important part of the overall story of how adoption affects family building in the United States.

Statistical reports give useful estimates for the frequency of different kinds of adoption in the United States, but don't offer insight into why certain types of adoption are more popular than others, or the characteristics of parents who choose these different types of adoption. The National Survey of Adoptive Parents (NSAP), an addition to the 2007 National Survey of Children's Health, offers data about the types of parents that choose intercountry, foster adoption, and private domestic adoption. This survey included interviews with the parents of 2,089 adopted children between 2007 and 2008 (Vandivere et al. 2009:1). The NSAP shows that overall only 24% of parents who adopt have no prior connection to adoption, while 35% have friends who have adopted, and the remaining 41% have a connection to adoption through another relative, sibling, or they themselves were adopted (30). Interestingly, 48% of parents who adopted internationally reported having friends who had adopted, in comparison to only 30% of those who completed private domestic adoptions (30).

The NSAP also collected information on the motivations for parents to pursue different types of adoption (Vandivere et al. 2009). A large number of parents in all three groups reported wanting to provide a permanent home for a child: 86% of those who adopted from foster care, 70% of those with a private domestic adoption, and 90% of those who adopted internationally (41). Among those who cited wanting to expand their family as a reason for adopting, most were parents who had adopted internationally (90%), compared with 60% of those that adopted through private domestic, and 61% for those who adopted through foster care (41). Not surprisingly, infertility was a common reason that parents decided to adopt; those who adopted internationally were most likely to cite infertility at 72%, while 52% of private domestic adopters and 39% of adopters from foster care cited the same reason (41).

Perceptions of Permanency: Rejecting Adoption through Foster Care

While these statistics provide a window into the prevalence of certain types of adoption and the motivations behind adopting for some parents, there is more to the story of why some parents are more drawn to one type of adoption over another. The families that I encountered in my work at Helping through Adoption, at various adoption events I attended, and through my interviews, were most likely to be choosing between a domestic private adoption and an

international adoption, though a few had first explored adopting from the California foster care system. Agency staff perceived lack of permanency as one potential reason why prospective adoptive parents pursued domestic private or transnational adoption, but were not interested in foster adoption. Indeed, this was a motivator for some parents, Christy, for example, ultimately decided on a private domestic adoption rather than foster adopt (or transnational adoption) because it felt the most certain to her, "it felt inevitable," she told me, "you'll get a baby. It might be four years it might be five but you will get one…so it was just this desire for like, a definite end."

Shannon, from Christian Home Adoptions, explained how this type of thinking was reflected among her clients:

> I think the types of people are very different from each other. Our agency's mission statement is to find permanency for children, that's why we don't do foster care... [foster care is] a good thing, it's just that our agency has started without it because we serve clients who are looking for permanency. Other agencies have clients who don't need that. So I just think that there's-- most of our clients have long ago decided they're not going to foster. They've heard about it, they're ruled it out, they're not interested.

Shannon felt that at the point that parents walked into her agency and considered using CHA to complete an adoption, they had already decided that foster adoption was not the route they wanted to take to build their families. Most of the parents that I interviewed had never seriously considered foster care—to the point of attending orientation sessions or classes—and the few that did quickly ruled it out because it seemed too uncertain, or because they were not open to adopting a Black or biracial child, which they perceived as being the most likely placements through foster care.

Elaina at International Adoption Together, agreed with Shannon that the lack of permanency and risk of having a child reunited with a birth family prevented adoptive families from pursuing foster adoption. Elaina had a negative view of the time that it took to terminate a parent's rights to make a child legally free for adoption in the foster care system.

> Their priority in the United States is reunification at all costs. It doesn't matter if the parents relapse 400 times, they're in rehab now, this time it'll work. At some point, you know, for the kid's sake, you know what, no. Mom can't visit, maybe. We're done.

Elaina went on to describe her own experience with international adoption years before.

> I mean, with domestic adoption or foster care, we just couldn't go through that, you know, just – it would kill me. Especially if you – I mean, the good families, the ones that really bond and nurture and care for this child, I can't – my hat goes off to the families who can do it. It would just tear me apart every time.

For Elaina, adoption from foster care introduced a level of uncertainty that was not something she felt she could handle at the time she and her husband were pursuing adoption. Her experience mirrors that of many of the adoptive parents that I interviewed, where parents heavily consider the level of uncertainty in terms of time to adoption, but also the chances that the

placement will become permanent. Though often uncertain during the process of adoption, transnational adoptions are immediately permanent after a parent brings a child into the home, whereas with foster adoption there is a prolonged period where reunification with a birth family is possible because of California's commitment to concurrent planning[13], and with domestic private adoption some parents lived with the fear, and occasional reality[14], that a birth mother could change her mind early in the process.

It is not just preferences for certainty that divide public agency adopters from private and transnational adopters, but also their ability to exercise these preferences because of access to economic capital. Existing research by Christine Gailey (2010) shows that those who adopt from foster care share characteristics that are different than those of domestic and international adopters in her sample, particularly in regards to race and class. She points to the long socioeconomic divide between public agency (more likely to be working and lower middle class) and private adopters in explaining that public agency adopters tend to be more racially diverse and much less economically well off than those who pursue other types of adoption. To put this observation in context in the State of California, even when a foster adoption is completed using a private adoption agency that contracts with public agencies, the adoption is free of charge and, in fact, the adoptive parents receive state subsidies to support the child both before and after adoption.[15] In contrast, a domestic private adoption or transnational adoption can range widely in cost from around $20,000 to $40,000 and up. For those with increased available funds or economic capital in the form of ability to secure adoption loans, there exist more possible paths to adoption.

Race and Parental Preferences for Transnational Adoption

While perceptions of permanency, level of uncertainty, and affordability exist as motivating factors for choosing a particular type of adoption, racial preference is a strong predictor for what type of adoption a family will ultimately pursue. Though Susan, at Loving Family Adoptions didn't directly connect perceptions of race to the undesirability of foster adoption, she did explain that race was a major motivating factor in the decisions that parents made about which type of adoption to pursue. She said,

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[13] "Concurrent planning is an approach that seeks to eliminate delays in attaining permanent families for children in the foster care system. Concurrent planning involves considering all reasonable options for permanency at the earliest possible point following a child's entry into foster care and concurrently pursuing those options that will best serve the child's needs. Typically the primary plan is reunification with the child's family of origin. In concurrent planning, an alternative permanency goal (e.g., adoption) is pursued at the same time rather than being pursued sequentially after reunification has been ruled out" (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2012:1). For more information on concurrent planning and its efficacy, see "Concurrent Planning: What the Evidence Shows" at https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/concurrent_evidence.pdf.

[14] In an adoption orientation, Laurie (from Helping through Adoption) suggested that these decisions were quite rare, happening less than 3-5% of the time in their domestic placements. Alexis also told me that when birth mothers did decide to parent a child there was often some indication that it was going in that direction even before the baby was born, and that, in such cases they would alert the prospective adoptive parents about the possibility that the birth mother might change her mind.

[15] For example, in the State of California the Adoption Assistance Program provides a monthly financial subsidy, payment for adoption expenses, and medical insurance for the child through Medi-Cal, see http://www.childsworld.ca.gov/PG1874.htm for more information.

> People view African Americans differently in this country. There's a lot of prejudice, and there's a lot of people who say to me, they put it in this term… I just couldn't do credit to an African child, African American child. Now I could adopt a Hispanic, I'm going to be ok about Hispanic culture I guess… Asian I could do. Even Native American, not so bad. But I don't think I could -- I just couldn't do an African American child.

Susan's clients, who were primarily white, were willing to be "open" in terms of race and ethnicity to some extent, but this openness hit a limit when they considered the possibility of adopting an African American child. She further explained to me the way that these perceptions overlapped with judgments about the health of children adopted from foster care in comparison to those adopted from abroad. Susan suggested that dominant perceptions of foster children as damaged prevented parents from pursuing this type of adoption.

> Well a lot of people are afraid of foster kids, you know, in domestic adoption, and the California children because of the drugs and alcohol… Well look at…the success rate of the Chinese adoptions is pretty big. I would say that most the kids, from what I could see, did not appear like they were drug or alcohol exposed.

Susan compared foster adoption to Chinese adoptions in the early 1990s and suggested that the quality of the children, in terms of health, was more reliable than that of children adopted through foster care.

This racialized evaluation of children, which parents and agency staff often framed as parents' lack of comfort and familiarity with African American culture, is reflected in existing research that shows the relationship between the popularity of transnational adoption and judgments about the type of children available from foster care. For example, in their research on parental motivations for adopting, Zhang and Lee (2011) show that differences between parents and children from other countries "are often perceived in terms of interesting cultural differences that parents must learn and pass on to their children, whereas characteristics of minority children available for adoption in the United States are phrased in terms of social problems such as possible parental drug addiction and adverse neighborhood influences on child development" (93-94). Zhang and Lee (2011) suggest that in parental motivations for adoption we can see the racial color-line, where boundaries are more rigid between White and Black, and less so for Asians and Latinos (groups that fall in between). Quiroz (2007), drawing on Bonilla-Silva (2003), similarly argues that adoption choices reflect a larger pattern of racial hierarchy in our social world where people are divided into "those who are labeled white, honorary white, and the collective black" (5). In the case of international adoption, Zhang and Lee (2011) argue that the rigidity of boundaries between whites and Blacks suggests that "potential White adoptive parents may be more comfortable adopting children from Asian and South American countries than adopting Black children from the United States" (Zhang and Lee 2011:78).

Ortiz and Briggs (2003) similarly show how racial preferences in adoption are socially and culturally constructed. Though most popular accounts explain the rise in international adoption as a result of a shortage of healthy, adoptable infants in the United States, citing Berebitsky (2001), Ortiz and Briggs (2003) explain that "the perception of a shortage of adoptable infants has been more the rule than the exception in the United States, and in earlier periods, it did not result in adoption from outside of the United States" (52). To explain the sharp

rise of adoptions of white children from Romania in 1991, they argue that the rise in transnational adoptions overall cannot be explained on the basis of individual level choices; rather, the phenomenon of transnational adoption is structured by an underlying cultural logic that steers parents away from adopting children from the U.S. foster care system by suggesting that children from abroad are "both in need of rescue and characterologically untainted," while children in domestic foster care are constructed as members of a quasi-biological "underclass" and are "intrinsically pathological and completely irredeemable" (Ortiz and Briggs 2003:52, 40). Ortiz and Briggs demonstrate how the paradigm of a culture of poverty in the United States, the unfounded moral panic over crack babies, and welfare and adoption reform in the early 90s come together to produce "one of the cultural contexts in which institutional and parental preferences for transnational, rather than (cheaper, easier) adoption from the public system in the United States, were born" (2003:52).

Dorow (2006b) and Kubo (2010) show how this cultural logic plays out in individual adoption choices. Kubo's interviews with adoptive parents show how the decision to adopt from abroad rather than from the United States is structured by the assumption that children from the foster care system come from a culture of poverty that is difficult to overcome. In discussing why they chose to adopt from outside of the United States, "there was a tendency for the parents to attach negative racial stereotypes, particularly of African-Americans, on characteristics of birthmothers who give up their children for adoption in the United States, then stretch that reasoning to explain why they did not adopt domestically" (Kubo 2010:272). Dorow (2006b) similarly shows how Asian children become desirable through a process of racial triangulation, whereby parents understand Asian racial flexibility in contrast to blackness. She describes "three themes that contribute to the relative desirability of adopting Chinese children: they are seemingly unfettered by attachments, racially "flexible," and readily constructed as rescuable" against the "white noise" of blackness (357, 360). Children adopted from abroad are valued for their disconnection from birth families, and their perceived racial flexibility against what Sara Dorow calls the "white noise of blackness" (2006b). Blackness, as embodied by the U.S. foster care system, emerges as a comparison point against which "Asianness became flexible in the white American imaginary" (2006b:360).

Among the parents that I interviewed, the racial triangulation that Dorow (2006b) demonstrates extended to both those who choose to adopt internationally and those who selected private domestic adoption. In contrast to Kubo's (2010) findings, though, the parents in my sample were more likely to express their hesitance to adopt a Black child by pointing to their own inability to properly parent a Black child. This may be because the parents I spoke with were more race-conscious than those in Kubo's sample, potentially a result of the education on transracial adoption that is required by many California adoption agencies, or because they were simply not as forthcoming about how their prejudices drove their adoption choices. With the exception of Christy and one other parent, none of the parents in my sample had considered adopting an African American child, for most of them their preferences could be described as "anything but." Vickie, who identified as being of mixed racial/ethnic background, described for me the process of deciding which type of adoption to pursue:

> The first thing, I felt like-- the first question that we had to ask ourselves is, "Do we want to adopt a black kid?" So we could adopt locally and there were some really great…foster adopt programs. So you have to think, do you want to be in a visibly interracial family?

> And I just feel, mixed like I am, I felt like people disregard the importance of race when they're considering—everybody—people are like, "Oh, who cares if they're black, or white, or Asian? I'm going to love them and they're unique." That's so dismissive.

Vickie's own experience of her identity made her question her ability to raise an African American child, and she found the purported colorblindness of parents in choosing children particularly dangerous. Vickie eventually adopted a child from abroad.

Other parents I interviewed who described their desire to adopt a child from any racial/ethnic category besides Black, suggested, like Susan said of her clients, that they couldn't "do justice" to an African American child. As Leslie told me,

> I didn't feel like we would be doing justice to an African-American child, or a Black child, to raise a Black child in a white world. We just didn't think that we would ever be able to understand what they would go through and it wouldn't be fair to them. So, that was that.

Hannah similarly told me that she just didn't feel like where she lived she could raise an African American child, but for her, she made this decision after attending some of the classes at Helping Though Adoption. Hannah explained:

> I was nervous about African American, because we live in a really white place, and I felt like, adoption might be challenging already, we don't know, and I didn't know how much harder it would be to be an African American in this area. And candidly, I felt like I don't have a good understanding of African American heritage and culture here, and I knew from [the] pre-interviews and some trainings, some seminars we went to, it's really important to connect with the community. And I didn't know that I could make the bridge very well. And I don't know why African American felt that way to me when Chinese American didn't, I don't know. Because I feel like, we've traveled in Africa, I felt like if it'd been an African baby, I wouldn't have had the same reservations. It was an African-American thing, so I'm not sure why, but that's how I felt.

Hannah and her husband David eventually adopted a Latino child through a private domestic adoption. Hannah's comment brings forth two important points about how race plays into the decisions people make about what type of adoption they will pursue. First, following existing research, white adoptive parents are likely to prefer white, or desirably different (Asian, Latino, mixed race or biracial) babies over Black children. Though some parents express racialized preferences before interfacing with the adoption agency, for some the experience of educational seminars at the agency, or conversations in homestudy interviews, cause them to change from an initial interest in, or at least not rejection of, adopting an African American child, to a desire for a child that is "anything but" Black. This is not surprising given the fact that particularly at Helping through Adoption, parents were asked in seminars on transracial adoption to imagine their links to African Americans and to think about how they would forge ties with the communities that would be important to their children's development of identity while being raised in a white family. Adoption professionals are very aware of the long debate on transracial adoptions in the field, particularly of Black children into white families, and the National

Association of Black Social Workers position statement[16] against transracial adoptions of Black children in 1972 has had lasting effects. Though not against transracial placements[17] of Black children, agency staff at Helping through Adoption were careful to ensure that those parents who were interested in a transracial placement of a Black or biracial child went through extensive training on the implications of transracial adoption for adopted children.

Hannah's comment also shows an important exception to Quiroz's (2007) argument, and to data from both Kubo (2010) and Ortiz and Briggs (2003). Though none of the agencies I studied had particularly active African adoption programs at the time of my research, since the downturn in transnational adoption around 2004, there has been a significant rise in transnational adoptions of children from Africa overall. For example, adoptions from Ethiopia alone jumped from 165 in 2003 to 2,511 in 2010 (Bureau of Consular Affairs 2016). This suggests an exception to and extension of Ortiz and Briggs' (2003), Kubo's (2010), and Dorow's (2006b) theories about how race operates in adoption. Children available for adoption from Africa become desirable in contrast to African American children in the United States because they are free from any presumed attachments to a "culture of poverty" and are more easily constructed as rescuable, despite their race.

Choosing Between Transnational and Domestic Private Adoption

If race is one of the most prominent predictors of how white adoptive parents navigate the overlapping economies of adoption—choosing transnational or domestic private adoption in favor of foster adoption—then once parents have chosen not to pursue foster adoption, potential connections to birth families, and the perceived reliability of a program become two of the most salient determinations for who will adopt internationally versus domestically. Table 1 shows some of the differences in the characteristics of domestic private adoption and transnational adoption. While adoptive parents may choose one type of adoption or the other by comparing across any of the characteristics in this chart, the selection process—and the perceived certainty of that process, paired with parental preferences for or against open adoption tended to be the most important factors in determining what type of adoption a family would decide to pursue.

Adoptive parents more likely to choose international adoptions often did so because of the perceived lack of ties between adopted children and their families and countries of origin. In adoption literature, this is referred to as a "clean break" (Dorow 2006, Yngvesson 2000). Whereby children adopted from abroad are not only legally free for adoption, but are also free of any social ties that may connect them to their birth family. In fact, one of the draws of transnational adoption for parents is often the fact that there is little information about adopted children's origins. In the Chinese case, as Dorow (2006) explains,

Chinese birth mothers…become a racialized medium for the baggage-free child. They are

[16] The National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) has since relaxed their position on transracial placements. The 1972 position statement reads "The National Association of Black Social Workers has taken vehement stand against the placement of Black Children in white homes for any reason. We affirm the inviolable position of Black children in Black families where they belong physically, psychologically and culturally in order that they receive the total sense of themselves and develop a sound projection of their future" (NABSW 1972).

[17] See Fenster's (2002) survey of social worker attitudes of transracial placements of Black children in white families. Fenster finds that white social workers on average have a favorable view of transracial placements, while Black social workers have a less than favorable view.

> not only the right kind of mother because as marginalized "Third World" women, they cannot touch their children, but also because in contrast to some other countries and to the United States, women in China can be constructed as giving up babies for reasons other than being young, unfit, and unhealthy social deviants (60).

In contrast with the "baggage-free" child who has a "clean break" from any social ties to a birth family or country, domestically adopted infants have no clean break from their family of origins. In fact, in California birth mothers must be counseled about their options for setting up an open adoption, and though open adoptions take many forms, at Helping through Adoption adoptive parents in most cases had at least some contact with the family of birth origin.

Table 1.
Comparison of California Domestic Private Adoption and International Adoption

	California Domestic Private Adoption	**International Adoption**
Selection Process	Chosen by birth mothers	Queue
Sex of Child	No option to choose sex	Sex can oftentimes be indicated
Age of Child	Infants	Typically over 6 months of age
Information on Child's Biological Origins	Variable level of information about child's birth parents	Little to no information about child's birth parents
Level of Contact with Birth Family	Potential lifelong contact with birth family	Clean break
Certainty of Adoption after Taking Custody of Child	Less certain	More certain
Waiting Time	Variable, highly dependent on being chosen by birth mothers	Variable, highly dependent on country waiting time

Parents who are averse to ties to a birth family, then, are more likely to choose international adoption. For example, Catherine explained:

> And so we were thinking about adoption, and international just seemed more appealing because it seemed easier and there were less ties to the biological families and it seemed like there was a little bit less of issues that you might have to deal with. So adopting a child whose birth parents are unknown just seemed easier for us. I didn't necessarily

> want-- oh, and I [knew someone] at the time who was adopted domestically and they had a relationship with the birth parents, and it just seemed like too much for me.

This preference for a "clean break" and "baggage-free" child has historically structured preferences for transnational adoption. Though most adoptive parents still understand international adoption as having more of a guarantee of a "clean break," this perceived disconnect has been challenged by as older adoptees have begun to search for, and often locate, birth families and have reconnected with their countries of origin (see Howell 2009; Jones 2015; Volkman 2009; Wang, Ponte, and Ollen 2015).

While the certainty of international adoption in the 1990s and early 2000s, paired with the desire for racially flexible children with no ties to families of origin, led to the rapid growth of international adoption. In the late 2000s with the increase in scrutiny of international adoption in the media and the reality of shortage within the economy, many parents decided to pursue domestic private adoption instead. Parents that I interviewed that chose domestic adoption over transnational adoption most often felt that international adoption as a whole was too uncertain and that having already experienced so much uncertainty through fertility treatments, the uncertainty of an international was too much to add on to that. For example, Mark explained how the combination of wanting an infant, the potentially long waiting times, and the uncertainty of international adoption made it an unattractive choice for him and his wife Melanie. He explained:

> I researched international and we thought about that, but we really want an infant the first time around and, you know, international is typically not. We also just heard, one of my [friends] adopted from [abroad] and just had a horrendous story from it, it was just really difficult. And the government was asking for like $10,000 and they said they could make it go quicker if they got that money. And it took two years and the kid's just sitting in this orphanage and it's just so frustrating. We are already emotionally on the rocks, let's not go through that.

Mark said that he and Melanie would consider a more uncertain international adoption later on, but not for their first child. For their first child they wanted something that would be more secure.

The choice to adopt internationally is made within the context of other types of adoption available to adoptive parents. Though some parents may decide not to adopt from abroad because of an uncertain economy, adoption agencies report that, on average, overall interest in transnational adoption has not declined significantly. Instead, the decline in availability of healthy, young, and quickly adoptable babies has created a mismatch between desire and demand in transnational adoption. In the section that follows, I move from assessing parents' motivations for picking certain types of adoption to showing the causes of uncertainty and shortage in transnational adoption. These characteristics of the transnational economy have far reaching impacts on both agencies and adoptive parents.

Trends in Transnational Adoption: Growth and Decline

In this section, I point to two significant changes in law and policy that are related causes of the decline in international adoption, and the corresponding mismatch between available children and the desires of American parents: the United States' institution of the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (henceforth Hague Convention or HCIA) and changes in sending country regulations. Though positive in its intentions to create international norms and regulation of international adoption, the Hague Convention broadly affected the process for adopting from convention countries and led to an overall increase in waiting times for adoption, significantly impacting agencies and parents. The mismatch between desire and supply in transnational adoption, though, is more clearly linked to changing regulations in sending countries where rapidly changing political, economic, and social factors affect the supply of children, both in terms of number of available children and the characteristics of those children. Taken together the Hague Convention and changes in sending countries offer historical and legal context for the current challenges faced by adoption agencies and adoptive parents.

The United States has consistently been the top receiving country for children adopted abroad; Americans have adopted a total of 261,779 children from other countries between 1999 and 2015 (Bureau of Consular Affairs 2016). Each year the number of children who immigrate to the United States as international adoptees far surpasses the number of those who are adopted in other top receiving countries. In 2004, for example, one estimate suggests that American parents completed 22,884 international adoptions, while in Spain—the second ranked receiving country at that time—only 5,541 children were internationally adopted in the same year (Selman 2009:33). The United States and other top receiving countries experienced a significant increase in the number of adoptions completed between 1998 and 2004 when international adoption was gaining in popularity; Selman (2009) reports an increase of 42% across 20 receiving countries, with a total of at least 45,000 transnational adoptions recorded in these countries by 2004 (32). In the United States alone there was an overall 46.2 % increase in the number of completed transnational adoptions from fiscal year 1999-2004 (from 15,717 adoptions in 1999 to 22,989 adoptions in 2004) (Bureau of Consular Affairs 2016). Overall during the 1990s as a whole, the number of children adopted from abroad nearly doubled (Tarmann 2002). This increase in transnational adoption was the result of changing social factors in the United States, and the opening up of countries to adoption abroad.

In a section of a 2002 Population Reference Bureau report called "What Drives U.S. Population Growth?," Alison Tarmann (2002) argues that a significant factor in the growth of international adoptions in the 1990s was the reduction in the supply of children available for domestic private adoption. This is ironic given that the current situation in 2016 is quite the opposite—couples who may have previously pursued international adoption are now considering domestic private adoption instead, despite the fact that domestic private adoption is also a competitive economy where supply does not meet the demand of adoptive parents. Tarmann (2002) argues that one convincing reason for the rise of transnational adoption prior to 2002 was that "increased access to contraception, the availability of legal abortion, decreases in the teen birth rate, and reduced social stigma surrounding unmarried parenting are among the reasons that there are fewer U.S.-born children available for adoption" (22). Tarmann also suggests that

reasons for the popularization of adoption at that time also had to do with a shift in the time at which women bear children. She explains,

> Some demographers also point to the postponement of marriage and childbearing as fueling the demand for adopted children. Women in their 30s or 40s are more likely to encounter problems getting pregnant and carrying a pregnancy to term than younger women, and some turn to adoption to have the child they want (23).

This explanation shows how demand was created in the 1990s for transnational adoptions, rather than domestic private adoptions, but the larger story of the availability of children for adoption from abroad is closely tied to political, economic, and cultural shifts in popular sending countries.

The history of transnational adoption to the United States begins long before the significant rise in transnational adoptions of the 1990s. Most scholars trace the beginning of adoption of large numbers of children from abroad to the 1950s when Americans adopted Japanese and Korean war orphans, and then the mixed raced progeny of American servicemen. As Catherine Ceniza Choy (2013) explains, "the post-World War II U.S. occupation of Japan (1945-1952) and U.S. Cold War involvement in the Korean War (1950-1953) created a population of mixed-race children produced by American servicemen and Japanese and Korean women" (15-16). Briggs and Marre (2009) trace the beginning of transnational adoption in Europe to even before this time, suggesting that "Europeans met the human rights disasters of the 1930s and forties by fostering and adopting children in trouble, including those victimized by the Nazis and by Franco"(3). In parallel with the growth of transnational adoption, the 1950s and 60s in the United States also saw the advent of child welfare programs that removed children from Native families in an effort to alleviate poverty, "the result was what Canadians called the "Sixties Scoop" and Australians called the "Stolen Generation," but most non-Native people in the United States have still not grappled with: Native children were taken from their families and placed with white families in considerable numbers" (Briggs and Marre 2009:9).

The Cold War brought the use of adoption as a "significant propaganda tool" in conflicts in Latin America, including efforts to rescue children from Cuba to bring them to the United States (Briggs and Marre 2009:10). As Briggs and Marre explain, the efforts to place children abroad also became a tool of Latin American countries during the "Dirty War" and civil wars in Latin America. "During the Cold War, many Latin American countries began to organize systems to make significant numbers of children available for transnational adoption, based on a model that combined the earlier goal of rescuing refugee children from war zones with the concerns that became prominent in subsequent decades, matching impoverished children with childless couples in other countries" (Briggs and Marre 2009:11). The close of the Cold War, though, brought a fast close to many of these programs, "transnational adoption, under a cloud of allegations of exploitation, kidnapping, commercialization, and even the adoption of children for organ theft, was gradually reduced to a trickle in most countries by the end of the 1990s in favor of in-country adoptions" (Briggs and Marre 2009:12).

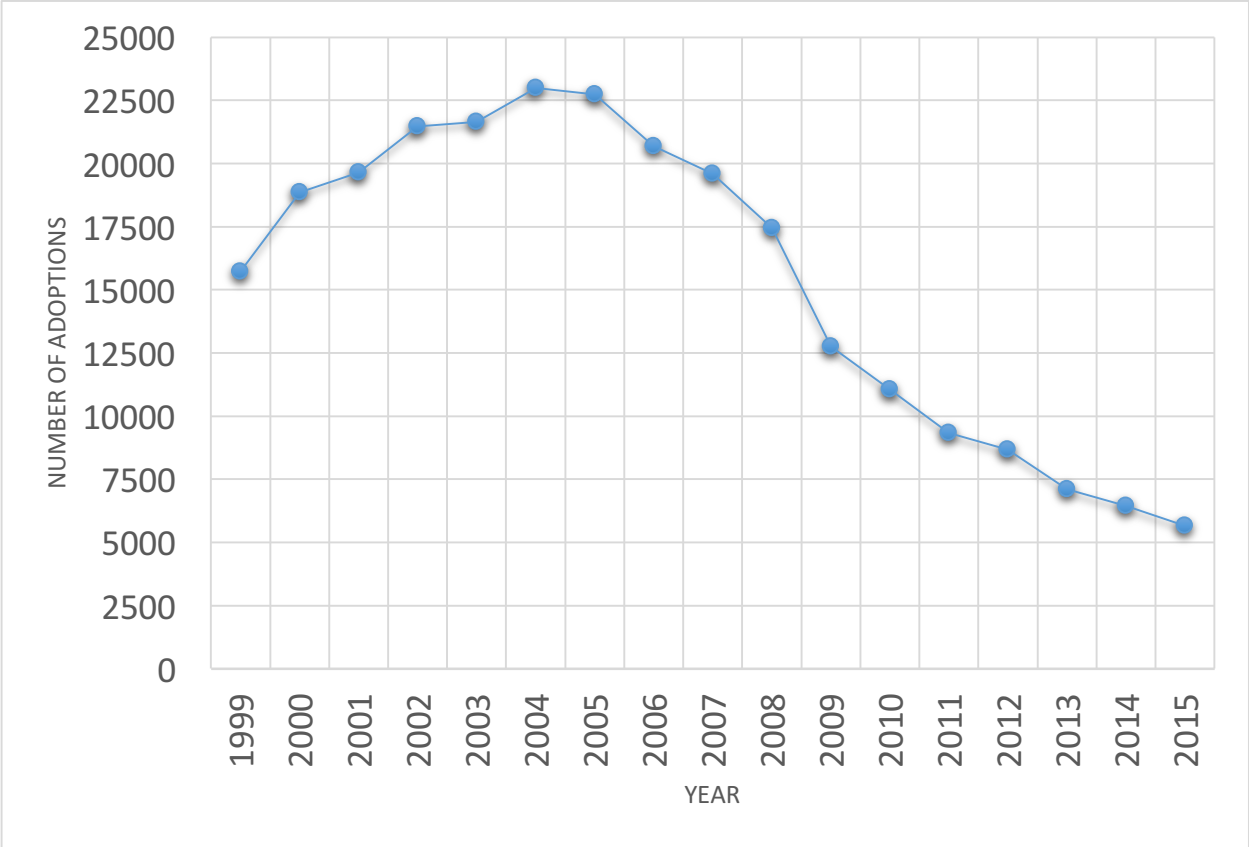
The one significant exception to the reduction of transnational adoptions from Latin American sending countries, Briggs and Marre (2009) point out, was Guatemala, whose transnational adoption program continued to grow until it abruptly stopped in 2007. "After Guatemala's long civil war ended with a peace treaty and new laws in 1996, adoptions to other

countries began to increase each year" (Schuster Institute 2012). The numbers increased dramatically from 731 transnational adoptions completed to other countries from Guatemala in 1997, to 3,833 in 2004 and 5,557 adoptions in 2007 before Guatemala closed permanently to international adoption (Schuster Institute 2012). I describe the circumstances surrounding Guatemala's closure later in this chapter.

The early 1990s brought a new kind of adoption—the adoption of white children from the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and the massive growth of transnational adoption from China. Famously, the fall of Nicolae Ceausescu's regime in Romania in 1989 led to an international press circus that disclosed that thousands of Romanian children were languishing in public institutions. In an article in the New York Times, Kathleen Hunt (1991) described the resulting "Baby Bazaar" where the fast growth of adoption (roughly 3,000 children were adopted out of Romania in 1990) led to increasing competition among parents hoping to bargain for the best baby. The Romanian adoption program closed abruptly in 2001 (Sullivan 2013). Post-soviet adoptions also rose dramatically with the fall of the Soviet Union. International adoptions from Russia, for example, began a few years after the opening of Romania, in 1991 during the period of perestroika (Khabibullina 2009:174). Khabibullina (2009) suggests that increasing numbers of children were abandoned as a result of poor economic conditions in the country at the time. In 1991-1992, 578 children were transnationally adopted from Russia, this number jumped to 5,647 in 1998 and 9,419 in 2004 (175).

While the rate of transnational adoptions from the post-Soviet bloc grew dramatically through the 1990s, the rise in adoptions from China was even more significant. The institution of the one-child policy in 1980, which limited each family to a single child, paired with a cultural preference for boys led to the availability of thousands of healthy baby girls that were adopted to the United States throughout the 1990s. Wang (2016) shows how the story of healthy baby girls available in Chinese orphanages is part of a larger story of the disappearance of Chinese girls as a result of the one-child policy, "in what has been labeled a "gendercide," parents have turned to sex-selective abortion, abandonment, hiding, or even killing of tens of millions of daughters to protect the possibility of having a son. Of these "missing girls"—so-called because their names are missing from official records—a small fraction have been abandoned to state orphanages" (6). Dorow (2006) explains that those children who are "abandoned" are left because "there is no legal avenue in China by which birth parents can place their children for adoption; and so they leave their children in public places, usually with vague or no clues about who the birth families are" (15). The availability of Chinese children for international adoption aligned well with desires of adoptive parents and, as Dorow argues, parental motivations for adopting from China both "echo and challenge a central theme of the history of China/U.S. migration: the American construction of the Asian Other as both strange and familiar, as insider and outsider, and as variably suited to incorporation into national products of citizenship" (2006:41). Selman (2009) shows the rapid growth of adoptions from China lasted into the late 1990s and early 2000s. In 1998, 6,115 children were adopted from China to the top 16 receiving countries, that number jumped to 13,408 in 2004 (44). China's position as the country housing what is the largest transnational adoption program in the world has meant that the majority of adoption research has focused on both the experiences of Chinese adoptive parents and adopted children, and on the economic, cultural, and political circumstances that have produced such a robust transnational adoption program.

Figure 1. International Adoptions to the United States 1999-2015
Data from Bureau of Consular Affairs (2016)
available at https://travel.state.gov/content/adoptionsabroad/en/about-us/statistics.html



The sharp decline in international adoptions to the United States from 1999-2015 can be seen in Figure 1 above. International adoptions peaked in 2004 with 43,848 transnational adoptions completed worldwide in the top 14 receiving countries (Selman 2009:33). Despite the staggering rates of transnational adoption in the United States over the past decade, statistics reveal an overall trend of decline beginning in 2005. Since 2004, rates of international adoption across the globe have decreased at a steady pace. At the peak of international adoption in 2004 Americans adopted 22,991 children from abroad, since then the number of international adoptions to the United States has dropped by 75.4% to only 5,648 in fiscal year 2015 (Bureau of Consular Affairs 2016).[18]

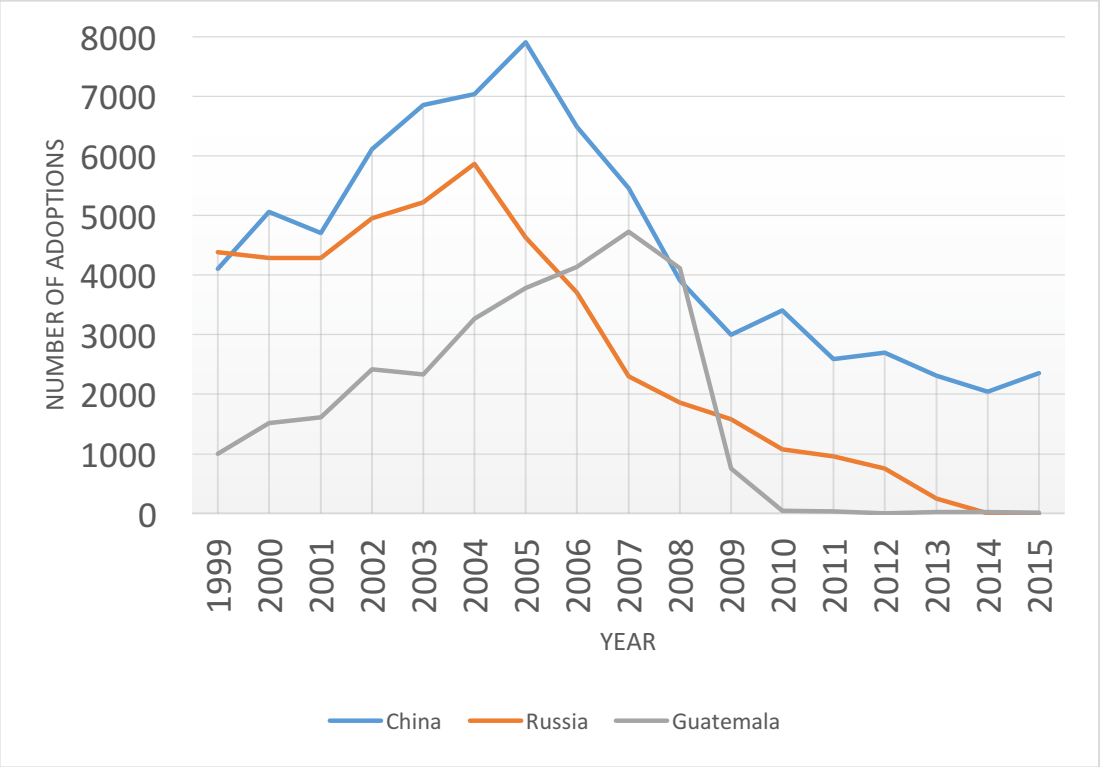
The rise of transnational adoption in the 1990s to early 2000s and the subsequent decline involves many countries besides Russia, China, and Guatemala, but I focus here on these three countries to explain the decline in international adoption for two reasons. First, as reported by the Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, in the "2015 Annual Report on

[18] Statistics for international adoption cited in this dissertation from the Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State are available at (and updated annually) https://travel.state.gov/content/adoptionsabroad/en/about-us/statistics.html.

Intercountry Adoptions Narrative," "80 percent of the reduction in intercountry adoptions comes directly from three countries: China, Russia, and Guatemala" (2016b: 2). Figure 2 below shows the rise and decline of transnational adoptions from these three countries. The second reason that I focus on these three countries is that these stories show how the overall decline in international adoption worldwide is the result of a mix of causes. The dramatic reduction of adoptions from Russia can largely be traced to a political decision to cease all international adoptions to the United States, while the closing of adoptions from Guatemala was the result of accusations of corruption and illegal child trafficking, and the reduction of and change in adoptions from China is a complicated mix of child trafficking allegations and increased efforts to place children domestically with the coinciding increase in availability of children with special needs (a topic that I take up in-depth in Chapter 5).

Figure 2. International Adoptions to the United States from China, Russia, and Guatemala, 1999-2015

Data from Bureau of Consular Affairs (2016)
available at https://travel.state.gov/content/adoptionsabroad/en/about-us/statistics.html



China

China has historically been a top sending country for international adoptions to the United States; from 1999-2015 Americans adopted 76,026 children from China (Bureau of Consular Affairs 2016). Despite the decline of placements from China since 2005, China remained the top sending country for children placed in the United States in 2015 with 2,354 total adoptions completed; nearly 42% of all international adoptions to the United States in 2015

were from China (Bureau of Consular Affairs 2016). In 2015 the number of adoptions from China to the United States increased for the first time since 2010; in 2015 China was the only sending country of 89 sending countries to experience an increase in adoptions by American parents (Bureau of Consular Affairs 2016b). China's position as a top sending country to the United States, even in the face of a decline in adoptions since 2005, is due in large part to the rise of adoptions of children designated as having "special needs." Many prospective parents come to adoption with knowledge of the thousands of adoptions of healthy baby girls from China in the 1990s and early 2000s. Largely as a result of the strict one-child policy enacted in 1979, many healthy, young girls were available for adoption in the early years of Chinese international adoption. Kay Johnson (2002) suggests that adoption laws in China made domestic adoption difficult for Chinese couples and favored international adoption since it was bound to be more lucrative for Chinese adoption organizations. For American parents, the China adoption program became increasingly popular during the 1990s. The availability of infant girls who were healthy, had no clear ties to birth parents in China, and who were adoptable through a predictably fast and uncomplicated process fit well with the desires of American adoptive parents and led to the explosion of international adoptions from China in the 1990s.

Figure 2 uses data from the Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State (2016) to show the fast expansion and subsequent decline in the number of children adopted by American parents between 1999 and 2015. By 2000 the number of adoptions from China was at 5,058, but dropped to 4,705 in 2001 because of changes in regulations. The high volume of adoptions and inability of the Chinese government to keep up with a rise in demand led to a change in the criteria for adoptive parents in August of 2001. This state classification of which parents were and were not worthy of adopting Chinese children was the first of several changes in criteria for adoptive parents.[19] As of 2001, prospective parents had to be between the ages of 30 and 55, multiple children could not be adopted simultaneously (parents needed to wait for one year between adoptions), and homosexual parents were banned from adopting (Families with Children from China 2001). While these changes in regulations regarding prospective parents led to a slight immediate decline in adoptions, the number of adoptions continued to grow in subsequent years. Although they did not significantly impact the number of adoptions from China, 2001 brought quota regulations to reduce the number of new adoptions while older adoption applications were processed (Families with Children from China 2001). The first of the two quotas limited the number of international adoptions from China to the average number from 1998, 1999, and 2000. Additionally, the number of adoptions by single parents was reduced from 30% to 5% with the second quota (Families with Children from China 2001).

The numbers for 2005 reflect a peak in the number of adoptions from China with 7,903 completed adoptions. This peak is followed by a significant downturn in 2006 due to the temporary closure of adoptions from parts of the Hunan province because of baby-trafficking allegations (LaFraniere 2011; Mong 2011). In 2006 there was a further decline of adoptions due to an increase in processing times, which the American Embassy in China attributed to extra precautionary measures, and the shortage of children compared to the large number prospective parents interested in adoption (Adoptive Families 2006). As a result of a mismatch between the supply of adoptable Chinese children and the demand of parents for international adoption, the Chinese government has continued to tighten policies in an effort to narrow the pool of prospective parents. The most significant revisions to Chinese adoption policies were enacted in 2007, this set of regulations

[19] I discuss the implementation of new criteria for adoptive parents in 2007 in Chapter 5.

made adoption impossible for those "who are single, obese, older than 50 or who fail to meet certain benchmarks in financial, physical or psychological health" (Belluck and Yardley 2006). I show later how these restrictions are framed as qualifications of overall health and financial stability that the Chinese government suggests will effect the future ability of prospective parents to provide a long-term, stable home for adopted children. Brian Stuy, an adoptive parent and founder of the China Research blog[20] has done extensive analysis of statistical trends of adoption from China to demonstrate that the significant drop in adoptions from China was the direct result of the Hunan province scandal. He argues that though "answers have been thrown out to explain the increased wait time, running the gamut from the 2008 Olympics to a decrease in abandonments due to increased economic affluence and access to abortion," statistical analysis suggests that the slowing down of adoptions from China is linked to the decreased supply of babies after child trafficking came under increased control following the Hunan scandal (Stuy [2012] 2015).

In addition to a decrease in the supply of babies, there has been an increase in domestic placements of Chinese children since 2005. As Leslie Wang (2016) notes, "although strict fertility regulations and rampant son preference have heavily disadvantaged female children in China, the demand created by transnational adoption has transformed them into highly desirable Western daughters who are now also increasingly popular for domestic placements" (23). As domestic placements have increased, criteria for adoptive parents from abroad have tightened as a way of balancing supply and demand. The shift from high levels of transnational adoption to encouraging an increase in domestic adoption in China, Wang (2016) suggests, "arguably demonstrate[s] the country's enhanced ability to assert itself on the global stage through the symbolic circulation of its children" (50). Kay Ann Johnson (2016) has also found that in one of the small towns that she visited, outright abandonment was quite rare by 2005 and this, paired with a system for registering legal domestic adoptions meant that the orphanage in that area "saw the numbers of healthy infants steadily decline to a handful a year by 2005, although the numbers of "special needs" children remained high," while locals now "absorbed more of the declining number of healthy "abandoned" children that might be found in the city and surrounding counties" (131). Though there has been an overall decrease in the number of transnational adoptions from China, the number of special needs placements has increased substantially, this is a topic I take up in depth in Chapter 5.

Russia

Figure 2 demonstrates that adoptions from Russia, like those from China, steeply rose through the nineties and then dropped off significantly after 2004. At the same time that China was in the process of altering the requirements for potential adopters around 2007, significant changes were also happening in Russia. During the period from 2004-2008 Russian adoptions decreased by 68.3% (from 5865 adoptions in 2004 to 1861 adoptions in 2008) (Bureau of Consular Affairs 2016). This significant drop in the number of children adopted from Russia was due to changes in the Russian Ministry of Education's procedures for accrediting foreign adoption agencies and the general slowing of Russian adoptions in response to the deaths of several Russian-adopted children in the United States. The wide publicity over the deaths of Russian adopted children in the United States led to increased scrutiny of adoptions from Russia, Barry (2009) reported 14 abuse-related deaths of Russian adopted children in the United States

[20] Stuy's blog was created for the purpose of providing adoptive families and children with research on adoptions from China.

between 1996 and 2009. Khabibullina (2009) explains that heated debates around transnational adoption appeared in Russian media during that time,

> Between 2000 and 2005, two or three murders of adopted children were discussed in the media each year, involving eight boys and four girls ranging in age from one to eight years. Small children were beaten, thrown, or dropped, or adoptive parents claimed that they died accidentally; the parents were convicted only of negligent homicide or involuntary manslaughter (179).

Khabibullina suggests that media conversations about these murders, and conversations about international adoption in general, reflect an ongoing debate in Russia about international as damaging to national pride and an example of "losing genofund," while domestic adoption has been unpopular because of perceptions of adoptable children as "bad inheritance" (2009:185). In this way, "two different genetic discourses are used for the same children in two different contexts" (185).

The effects of public conversations about the murders of Russian children in 2003 and 2005 led to increased scrutiny of the Ministry of Education by the Russian Duma. In November of 2006, the Ministry of Education released new, stricter policies for providing adoption agencies with permits for adoption activity in Russia (Family Helper 2007). During 2006-2007, the Russian accreditation for many adoption agencies expired (Clemetson 2007). It was not until mid-2007 that the Russian Ministry of Education began reissuing permits to American adoption agencies (Family Helper 2007); this lead to a significant drop in the number of adoptions in 2006 and 2007 (from 3702 in 2006 to to 2303 in 2007) (Bureau of Consular Affairs 2016). Despite the reduction in Russian adoptions over the last decade, 1,586 children were adopted from Russia by Americans in 2009, making Russia the third ranked sending country for that year, though the effects of the earlier slowing of Russian adoptions continued (Bureau of Consular Affairs 2016).

In April 2010, seven-year-old Artyom Savelyev walked off a plane in Moscow carrying a note from his adoptive mother from Tennessee who had adopted him the year before, it read: "After giving my best to this child, I am sorry to say that for the safety of my family, friends and myself, I no longer wish to parent this child" (Levy 2010). Challenged by the behavior of her adopted child, who she had named Justin, Torry Ann Hansen disrupted her adoption without going through any formal process and created a media firestorm both in the U.S. and in Russia. Russia immediately replied to this event with a temporary ban on all outgoing adoptions. The biggest blow to adoptions from Russia, though, did not come until 2012 when in a sudden political move Russia stopped all transnational adoptions to the United States.

In December 2012, Vladimir Putin signed a bill banning all adoptions of Russian children by American citizens (Herszenhorn). Though the bill was signed with the backdrop of the many years of contentious issues surrounding transnational adoption from Russia to the United States, the move seems to have been largely unrelated. Though some have suggested that the ban on adoptions from Russia by US citizens was part of a nationalistic effort to keep children in Russia, most popular accounts in the press have tied the ban to the passage of the Magnitsky Act. In a December 2012 article in the New York Times, Herszenhorn explores some of the potential reasons for the ban, including a nationalist desire to protect Russia's youngest citizens from a

corrupt market in children.[21] Herszenhorn (2012) shows evidence of this with an account from Yekaterina F. Lakhova, a Russian Parliament member who "said that years of working on child welfare issues led her to conclude that the international adoption process is overly profit-driven, and she said Russians should take care of their own." Herszenhorn cites a direct quote from Lakhova from a secondary source, "No normal, economically developed country gives away their children. I am a patriot of Russia." This view echoes the earlier work of Khabibullina (2009) that suggests a longstanding debate about the national value of children living without parents.

Though the 2012 ban on adoptions by American parents may have been partially motivated by nationalism, the timing of the bill suggests that it was most directly connected to the Magnitsky Act, a bill passed by U.S. Congress and signed into law by President Obama in mid December 2012 (Herszenhorn and Eckholm 2012). The Magnitsky Act sought to bar Russian citizens accused of human rights violations from visiting or holding any assets, including real estate, in the United States (Herszenhorn and Eckholm 2012). This act was passed following the 2009 death of Sergei Magnitsky, a lawyer involved in exposing government embezzlement from the Russian Treasury, in a Russian prison (Barry 2009). Since the passage of the 2012 ban on transnational adoptions from Russia to the United States, any remaining adoptions that were processed were those that had been initiated prior to the ban.

Guatemala

From 2004-2007 adoptions from Guatemala rose dramatically, making up for some of the reduction in adoptions from China and Russia during that same period. The story of the closing of Guatemala to adoptions by Americans is long and complicated involving multiple players over a number of years and has been well-documented by a number of scholars in the field. At its core, the end of adoptions from Guatemala was the result of the uncovering of a scandal that rocked the international adoption community—there were widespread practices of fraud, corruption, and a market in children where birth mothers were often paid to place their children for international adoption. As early as the 1990s reports of unethical practices created concern about the realities of child procurement on the ground in Guatemala; in response to this "in 1998 the U.S. Embassy began requiring DNA testing of a birthparent and the relinquished child, to determine whether the person signing the child away was in fact the child's mother" (Schuster Institute 2012). Eventually, amid rumors of a market in children, "in 2000, UNICEF commissioned the Latin American Institute for Education and Communication (ILPEC) to conduct a study of Adoption and the Rights of the Child in Guatemala. The ILPEC report concluded that these direct and private adoptions were what they called a "labor market" conducted for financial gain, not for the child's best interests" (Schuster Institute 2012). Despite this report, Americans continued to adopt large numbers of children from Guatemala through 2007.

[21] It's difficult to measure whether the ban on adoption from Russia to the United States has had a significant effect on domestic adoptions within the country. Anecdotally, though, during a personal trip to St. Petersburg, Russia in summer 2013 after the ban had gone into effect, a major advertising campaign on billboards across the city proclaimed "When you adopt, you give a child a childhood" (усыновляя вы дарите ребенку детство).

Bunkers, Groza, and Lauer (2009) have documented the issues on the ground in Guatemala that led to a highly corrupt system. They argue that "with limited options for alternative care for families at risk, adoption practices with limited transparency and little or no ethical standards have flourished and made vulnerable women and children victims" (Bunkers et al. 653). And that the lack of social support services in the country led women to believe that international adoption was the only option for their children. They report that "in 2005, 98 percent of adoptions were intercountry and 2 percent were domestic adoptions by Guatemalans" despite the fact that public opinion data suggested that most Guatemalans supported domestic adoption (Bunkers et al. 2009:653). Bunkers et al. describe a system in which outright kidnapping was common and poor birth mothers were often coerced, bribed, and paid to relinquish their children for international adoption. The final closing of adoptions from Guatemala came in January 2008, the result of what many adoption agencies feel was undue pressure from UNICEF along with the U.S. Department of State (O'Grady 2014). The abrupt closing of Guatemala happened, in part, so that the country could enact rules and regulations in line with the Hague Convention. Transnational adoptions from Guatemala ceased so quickly that thousands of adoptions were left open, all adoptions processed since 2008 have been a portion of those open adoptions, which have been subject to additional scrutiny before proceeding.

The Hague Convention on Inter-Country Adoption

Though China, Russia, and Guatemala are only three countries among many that have contributed to the overall drop in international adoptions from abroad, these countries account for the vast majority of decrease since 2004. The decrease in available children, though, tells only part of the story of the major changes that have affected international adoption in the last several years. In addition to a decrease in the number of children legally available for transnational adoption worldwide, there has been a significant increase in waiting times for the children that remain available. Though there are myriad causes of increased waiting times, including the shortage of available children, the United States institution of the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Inter-Country Adoption (henceforth Hague Convention), according to many adoption agency staff, has increased waiting times for parents who adopt from Hague member countries. Additionally, and more importantly, as a significant example of international governance over intercountry adoption, the Convention introduces new levels of regulation over adoption agencies and has contributed to the uncertain nature of the transnational adoption economy more generally.

On April 1, 2008 the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Inter-Country Adoption (Hague Convention) took force in the United States and prompted significant changes in accreditation procedures and adoption practices within U.S. transnational adoption agencies (Bureau of Consular Affairs 2016c).[22] An example of the diffusion of world cultural norms related to human rights,[23] the Hague Convention had been ratified by over 70 member countries at the time of the United States enactment in 2008 (Gross 2007). The Hague Convention is an international treaty that was written with the purpose of establishing safeguards to protect the children in international adoption, to prevent child

[22] For an extensive discussion of the Hague Convention see "Understanding the Hague Convention" at https://travel.state.gov/content/adoptionsabroad/en/hague-convention/understanding-the-hague-convention.html
[23] See Meyer, Boli, Thomas, and Ramirez (1997) on diffusion and world culture.

trafficking, and to form an agreement between member states regarding the proper procedures for international adoptions from one member state to another. In addition, the convention:

> "...recognizes intercountry adoption as a means of offering the advantage of a permanent home to a child when a suitable family has not been found in the child's country of origin. It enables intercountry adoption to take place when: 1. The child has been deemed eligible for adoption by the child's country of birth; and 2. Proper effort has been given to the child's adoption in its country of origin" (Bureau of Consular Affairs 2016c).

While the Convention was concluded on May 29, 1993 and was signed by the United States in 1994, it took several years for the United States to ratify the Convention and to put it into practice. As of April 1, 2008, all procedures and guidelines outlined in the convention applied to adoptions between the United States and all other Convention countries. In practice, the ratification of the Hague Convention has meant that the United States has appointed the Department of State as the Central Authority for international adoption and has significantly changed the accreditation procedures for transnational adoption agencies who conduct adoptions from Convention countries. Between early 2008 and July 2014 it was possible for unaccredited agencies to continue to assist in transnational adoptions from the many countries that, at the time, were not member countries. In 2012, though, the Intercountry Adoption Universal Accreditation Act of 2012 (UAA) extended the requirement of accreditation to all adoption service providers regardless of whether they contract with Hague or non-Hague member countries (Bureau of Consular Affairs 2013). In the section that follows I explain the major changes that have happened at the state and agency level in the United States and outline the role of adoption agencies in the process of transnational adoptions originating in both Convention and non-Convention countries.

Agency Accreditation

The Hague Convention requires that all countries that are "...party to the Convention establish a Central Authority to be the authoritative source of information and point of contact in that country" (Bureau of Consular Affairs 2016c). In the United States the Department of State is the Central Authority and the Office of Children's Issues maintains a website at adoption.state.gov that provides information on the Hague Convention and inter-country adoption for prospective parents, agencies and other interested individuals.[24] The United States Department of State designated two agencies to perform all accreditation services—the Council on Accreditation in New York, New York and the Colorado Department of Human Services. The new accreditation of all U.S. adoption agencies that conduct transnational adoptions from Convention countries, and the subsequent requirement of accreditation for all transnational adoption agencies after the enactment of the UAA has been the most significant changes since the Convention was ratified by the United States.

[24] The United States Department of State was named as the Central Authority on inter-country adoption in the October 2000 Intercountry Adoption Act. This act also stipulated that it was the responsibility of the Department of State to determine an accreditation entity that would conduct accreditation for adoption service providers. (See Intercountry Adoption Act 2000).

Since the Hague Convention was enacted in 2008 all non-profit agencies must apply for Hague accreditation through one of the two accrediting organizations in the United States. While non-profit agencies who conduct adoptions from Convention countries must be Hague accredited, for-profit organizations or individuals must receive approval to be eligible to provide adoption services. In practice, the distinction between accredited agencies and approved persons is minor and in the United States, as of 2010, there were only eight for-profit organizations or individuals that had received Hague accreditation.[25] In contrast, there were 235[26] non-profit agencies that were Hague accredited in the United States after the first push of accreditation as of May 2010.

For the agencies that are Hague accredited the process of accreditation has been time consuming, expensive and has often required a significant overhaul of agency practices and documents. In order for an agency to be accredited it must first have the capacity to perform the six key adoption services as outlined in the 2000 Intercountry Adoption Act (IAA):

> "Identifying a child for adoption and arranging an adoption; Securing the necessary consent to termination of parental rights to adoption; Performing a home study and reporting on prospective adoptive parents or a background study and report on a child; Making a non-judicial determination of a child's best interests and of the appropriateness of an adoptive placement; Monitoring a case after a child has been placed with prospective adoptive parents until final adoption; and Assuming custody of a child and providing childcare or any other social service, when necessary, because of a disruption pending alternate placement."

As part of the accreditation process agencies must put all of their practices and procedures into writing and they must ensure that their adoption services contract contains information about their practices, history, relationships with other agencies, and a full itemized list of adoption-related costs. This process is extremely long and arduous, particularly for small agencies with a small number of staff. Additionally, according to the agency staff I interviewed, agencies are required to undergo a full, private financial audit and to pay up to $25,000 in accreditation-related fees.

The oftentimes prohibitive costs and time involved in becoming a Hague accredited agency have caused many agencies to refrain from seeking accreditation. Before July 2014 non-accredited agencies still had the option of providing adoption services for prospective parents who wished to adopt from non-Convention countries and since there are several top sending countries that had not yet ratified the Convention at that time, it was possible for an agency to stay in business without working with Convention countries. In 2009, for example, three of the five top sending countries were not yet members of the Convention—of the top five sending countries in 2009, only China and Guatemala were Convention countries, while Russia, Ethiopia and South Korea are all non-Convention countries. For those agencies that wish to conduct services for adoptions from Convention countries but are unable to or prefer not to receive Hague accreditation, they can also operate as supervised providers. Supervised providers are agencies or persons that do not have accreditation, but who work along with an accredited

[25] Authors own calculations from list of approved entities obtained at adoption.state.gov, 2010.
[26] Authors own calculations from list of accredited agencies obtained at adoption.state.gov, 2010.

primary provider that must make certain that all six adoption services are provided to the adopting parents (Bureau of Consular Affairs 2016c).

While the accreditation process can be difficult for adoption agencies, parents will notice few differences between the processes for Hague adoptions and those for non-Hague adoptions, especially following the implementation of the Universal Accreditation Act. The most significant differences are in the transparency and clarity of adoption agency policies and procedures. For example, if a parent chooses to adopt from a Hague Convention country they are guaranteed by law to receive a full disclosure of all costs associated with their adoption in the text of their adoption contract. The other significant difference for prospective parents between the two types of adoption is that Hague adoptions require a minimum of ten hours of parental education on adoption-related topics prior to the adoption. In addition to these policies, the only other differences are in matters of procedure and document completion (See the State Department's description of the differences in Table 2 below).

Table 2.
Differences in Adoptions in Convention and Non-Convention Countries
(This table is an exact reproduction of the table available at https://travel.state.gov/content/adoptionsabroad/en/hague-convention/hague-vs-non-hague-adoption-process.html, accessed May 2012).

	Convention Countries	**Non-Convention Countries**
Your Adoption Service Provider	Licensed in U.S. state of residence + Accredited or approved by one of the Department of State's designated Accrediting Entities	Licensed in U.S. State of residence
Adoption Services Contract	Adoption services contract contains information about agency's policies, fees, history, relationships with supervised providers, etc.	Though many ASPs disclose policies, fees and relationships with supervised providers, they are not required by most state laws to do so.
Home Study	Must meet both State and Federal requirements; Prepared by an accredited agency, supervised provider or exempted provider	Must meet State level and USCIS federal requirements
Adoption Fees	Itemized in adoption services contract	
Parent Education	10 Hours of parent education	Parent education only if mandated by U.S. State of residence or voluntarily provided by agency
Adoptive Parent's Eligibility	Form I-800-A; Must be filed *before* being matched with a child (and before Form I-800)	Form 1-600-A; Can be filed at the same time as the Form I-600.

The enactment of the Hague Convention in the United States along with changes in sending countries has created a challenging environment for adoption agencies. Over the past several years many countries have tightened their regulations and have started to put significant effort into placing orphans in their country of birth. The development of procedures that underscore the importance of giving children the best possible chance to find homes in their own countries is a growing trend in both Hague Convention countries and in non-Convention countries, signaling an international change in culture around transnational adoption. This trend, along with the United States' enactment of the Hague Convention, has caused difficulties for agencies and for parents wishing to adopt from abroad. The subsidiarity principle[27], which suggests that preference should be for placing children in their birth countries before considering international adoption[28], has led to the implementation of longer waiting periods for children to become available for adoption by American parents. While parents tend to wait longer for adoptive placements, agencies, on the other hand, have been challenged by the process and cost related to Hague accreditation. There has also been a significant increase in competition between agencies as the demand for transnationally adopted children exceeds the supply. Taken together, changes in international and country-specific laws have created an uncertain environment in which agencies must operate if they are to continue to provide transnational adoption services.

Conclusion

This chapter serves the purpose of providing contextual information on the field in which adoption agencies and prospective adoptive parents operate. First, I demonstrated how parents perceptions of permanency, racialized evaluation, time to adoption, and certainty of placement have a strong effect on how parents choose between public agency, domestic private, and transnational adoption. Showing the variation in motivations to adopt gives a framework for understanding the choice to adopt internationally, and elucidates the ways in which parallel economies of foster, domestic private, and transnational adoption overlap and interact. Though some parents are discouraged from adopting transnationally because of the high level of uncertainty within the economy, adoption agencies report stable levels of interest in international adoption. When parents enter the transnational adoption economy with the intent to adopt a child, they are often faced with a mismatch between the type of child they most desire (generally as young as possible, healthy, and quickly adoptable) and the types of children that are most readily available. In the second part of this chapter I look to the causes of an initial boom in international adoption in the 1990s followed by a sharp decline in U.S. placements of transnationally adopted children. In explaining the mismatch between parental desire and available children, I focus on the reduction in adoptions from China, Russia, and Guatemala, which make up the majority of the overall decrease in available children. I end the chapter with a brief overview of the implementation of the *Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption* in the United States. Though the Hague

[27] See Bartholet and Smolin 2012 for a debate on how we should understand the subsidiarity principle.
[28] The HCIA reads: "An adoption within the scope of the Convention shall take place only if the competent authorities of the State of origin -*a)* have established that the child is adoptable; *b)* have determined, after possibilities for placement of the child within the State of origin have been given due consideration, that an intercountry adoption is in the child's best interests" (Hague Conference 1993).

Convention is not a direct cause of the decline in adoptions, it is a meaningful example of international governance over intercountry adoption that has contributed to longer waiting times for adoption, increased bureaucratic procedures, and additional stress for adoption agency staff. Taken together, the parallel economies of adoption, the rise and fall of international adoption, and the institution of the Hague Convention, create a contextual picture of the world in which adoption agencies and adoptive parents negotiate the transnational adoption economy.

Chapter 3 | In the Best Interests of Children *and* Prospective Parents: Maintaining the Sentimental Value of the Adoptable Child

Unlike some of the other agency directors I contacted, Vivian, the director of International Adoption Together was very willing to speak candidly with me about the challenges facing her agency. The agency was doing relatively well, especially as the new China special needs program grew, but after over 20 years working in the field, Vivian had noticed a change in the type of clients that were coming to her agency. I asked Vivian to tell me a little bit about her agency and its mission. She told me:

> Our mission is to find homes for children who need them. And to support the families who are in the process. That hasn't changed since the day we opened the doors. And I really do feel that we try very hard to balance the needs of the clients and the demands of the clients with the types of children who need homes. So it's a real fine line and it's hard sometimes to walk that. We have families that really test your patience. And, um, you know, the type of families that we tend to get these days have changed, certainly since I started, certainly since the 80s.

Vivian described her current clients as more demanding, more educated about their options, and less driven by altruism than clients she encountered in the 1990s. She told me

> The typical client that comes in these days, highly educated, usually two-parent couples with two salaries. Very successful in all areas of their life except this. Therefore, very much um entitled, very much feeling like look at us, we're great, we deserve a child.

For Vivian, and the other agency staff members I interviewed, the context of uncertainty and shortage in the adoption economy made balancing a moral commitment to finding homes for children with the pressures of parent clients a day-to-day challenge requiring emotional labor on the part of agency staff.

Since transnational adoption agencies serve dual clients—both parents and children—these agencies offer a particularly compelling case for understanding how the balance between market and morality, a price and the pricelessness of children, is relationally maintained. As Dorow (2006) explains, in adoption the child "is produced for adoptive kinship in a contradictory location between 'primary client' and object of desire" (85). That is to say that the project of transnational adoption agencies is not simply to place needy children into homes, but to satisfy the desires of parent clients who want children. Children are at once the primary client of adoption agencies who are engaged in an altruistic project of caring for needy children, and also objects of parental desire. The relationship that agencies have with these two clients, parents and children, is quite asymmetrical, though. Children are an abstract client, removed from the transaction of adoption and imagined in the minds of parents and agencies. Parents, on the other hand, are known intimately through frequent contact with agency staff. In their work, agency staff slip back and forth between their understandings of whom they are serving; as dual clients, parents and children are always linked. That is to say that agencies understand helping parents find children as an extension of their goal of placing children in loving homes. This chapter draws on a close examination of mission statements and about us sections from agency websites,

along with observational and interview data, to show the complex relational negotiation of meaning for parent clients and agency staff.

First, using data from 157 non-profit, Hague accredited, United States transnational adoption agency websites, I demonstrate homogeneity in agency mission statements. I use these mission statements as a way of accessing a cultural account, "a coherent body of reasons and evaluations that can be used to explain and legitimate some practice or activity" of adoption that is prevalent in the field and presumed to be shared between both adoptive parents and agency staff (Healy 2006:23). Operating as a sort of sentimental economy of worth that bridges the market and the domestic worlds, this cultural account, and the emotional labor used to sustain it, maintains agreement about the purpose of adoption among parents and agency staff (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006). Despite variation in size, location, and countries serviced, transnational adoption agencies' online promotional materials present a fairly homogenous mission that draws heavily on an already legitimate cultural account of the practice of adoption that references normative conceptions of the rights of children, and defines children as the primary beneficiaries of adoption. The bulk of agency online promotional materials, though, focus not on *why* transnational adoption is a legitimate practice, but rather *how* agencies assist prospective parent clients. This focus on assisting clients does not negate an understanding of adoption rooted in child welfare, though; rather it is closely connected to "the best interests of the child" and becomes a source of legitimacy for the transnational adoption economy. In recruiting prospective parent clients, transnational adoption agencies stress the importance of professional service, personalized communication, personal experience as professional qualification, and most importantly emotional support for parents.

Next, I draw on ethnographic and interview data to argue that offering emotional support is not just lip service to attract business, rather emotional bonds between parents and agencies serve a fundamental purpose in creating and sustaining a mutual understanding of the sentimental value of adoptable children. Within adoption agencies, the emotional labor it takes to sustain close connections with parent clients serves two vital purposes: on the one hand it legitimates the process of adoption as one that is focused on family building, rather than child buying, and on the other it serves as an important bond that supports parents in voicing their adoptive preferences, (a topic I consider further in Chapters 4 and 5). I show that when misunderstandings occur we can even more clearly see the delicate balance between the rationality of the market on the one hand, and the sentimental value of children on the other. When both agencies and parents share a mutual understanding of adoption as serving the best interests of the child, together they maintain the sentimental value of the child as the driving force behind their actions. In contrast, when either agency staff or parents act in a way that suggests an understanding of adoption as an economic transaction, the mutual understanding of the child's pricelessness, and thus the emotional bond between adoption agency staff and parents is broken.

Defining the Rights of the Priceless Child

Using insights from DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) theory of institutional isomorphism, I

show how non-profit, Hague accredited[29] transnational adoption agencies market their services and frame their involvement in international adoption to prospective parents. Agency websites universally draw on a normative understanding of the individual child's right to a loving family to legitimize their involvement in international adoption services. Framing their work with reference to normative conceptions of childhood and family, and then tying this cultural account to professional services legitimizes agencies within the field. Despite significant differences in agency location, countries served, and size, international adoption agencies make similar rhetorical claims about *why* they facilitate adoptive placements.

Institutional isomorphism and its benefits explain why we would expect to see broad similarity in the cultural account of adoption that agencies provide in public facing materials. Theories of institutional isomorphism, namely those of DiMaggio and Powell (1983) and Meyer and Rowan (1977), arose as reactions to an existing tradition of rational theories of organizations that suggested that organizational similarity existed because of its rational nature. That is, organizations strive to be increasingly efficient and over time adopt the most efficient characteristics, therefore becoming similar to other organizations within the field. Meyer and Rowan (1977) argued that organizational structures are isomorphic with their institutional environments. Formal organizational structures arise not because organizations adopt policies and practices that are most efficient, but rather because they adopt and reflect institutional myths or socially constructed, rationalized institutional rules. It follows that the reason that organizations tend to adopt these institutional myths is because it offers them increased legitimacy within the field and therefore stability, access to resources, and a higher chance of success.

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) similarly seek to explain why—if not because of organizational desire for increased efficiency—organizations tend to become similar in structure, organizational culture, and in output. They build on Meyer and Rowan's (1977) work by identifying the forces within an organizational field that cause widespread isomorphism. While DiMaggio and Powell's understanding of an organizational field includes not only competing agencies within a field, but also all other "organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products," their theory suggests that as a part of a larger organizational field, competing agencies will become more similar over time (1983:148). DiMaggio and Powell outline three forces or mechanisms that cause institutional isomorphism: coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism. Coercive isomorphism happens when organizations (often legal organizations) within a field exert either direct or sometimes more subtle pressure on other organizations to gain legitimacy by becoming more similar. Mimetic isomorphism happens when, often in the context of uncertainty, organizations model their own structure and culture on other successful organizations within the field. Finally, normative isomorphism is a result of increasing professionalization within a field leading to overall organizational similarity.

While many empirical tests have demonstrated the efficacy of DiMaggio and Powell's theory of isomorphic change in profit-driven businesses, some scholars have also applied this theory to non-profit organizations. Studies of non-profit social service organizations have

[29] Hague accredited agencies are agencies that have received national-level accreditation under the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption to offer adoption services for parents adopting from other Hague member countries.

demonstrated isomorphism in culture, structure and practice in organizations such as community mediation centers (Morrill and McKee, 1993), hospice (Paradis and Cummings, 1986), and community-based rape prevention programs (Townsend and Campbell, 2007). These empirical tests of institutional isomorphism have been heavily focused on organizational structure and practice and rarely consider the importance of symbolic language and the role that it plays in communicating organizational identity and establishing organizational legitimacy. Such a line of inquiry, however, fits well with DiMaggio and Powell's theoretical framework. Since their goal in theorizing isomorphic change is to identify the general forces that create organizational similarity, they do not specifically discuss examples of isomorphism in organizational language, they do however suggest that organizational isomorphic change does encompass not only changes in structure, but also changes in "organizational culture, and goals, program, or mission (149)."

Research by Glynn and Abzug (2002) seeks to fill this gap in the literature by shifting the focus to symbolism within organizations. They propose that symbolic isomorphism, or "the resemblance of an organization's symbolic attributes to those of other organizations within its institutional field" can increase an organization's legitimacy in the same way that isomorphic structures, strategies, and practices can. In order to understand the potential of symbolism for increased legitimacy, they study firm name changes from 1982-1987. They demonstrate that firms that change their names are likely to adopt new names that reflect existing naming practices within their institutional field. Then, to demonstrate how the symbolic isomorphism of naming practices contributes to legitimacy, they show that symbolic conformity of firm names leads to increased understandability and therefore legitimacy of firms. Firm names, like mission statements, convey legitimacy to both actors within an institutional field and to those who interact with organizations from a position outside of the institutional field.

Though difficult to identify the initial cause of isomorphism in adoption agencies' cultural account of adoption practice, looking at agency isomorphism at a specific end point provides some indication of the reasons for similarity across mission statements. Studies of isomorphism typically demonstrate change over time, showing the mechanisms that create legitimacy-granting similarity, but absent data over time, it is still possible to surmise the causes of isomorphism and then to demonstrate the effect of an isomorphic mission on agency practice. In explaining their missions, adoption agency websites present a normative, Western-centric definition of childhood that not only defines children as emotionally priceless, but emphasizes that the child is a vulnerable individual who has the right to be taken care of in a family. For example, drawn from the mission statements of adoption agencies, the statements below demonstrate this type of isomorphic claim regarding the rights of adoptive children:

> [Our agency] exists to assist the waiting children of the world into permanent, loving families.
>
> It is this agency's firm belief that every child has a right to grow up in a family where he or she is loved, nurtured, protected and appreciated for his or her unique individuality.
>
> It is our belief that every child is entitled to have a safe, stable, and nurturing family.

> [Our agency] firmly believes that children have greater opportunities to develop their potential when raised in a nurturing family life.
>
> [Our agency] is dedicated to breaking down the barriers and obstacles of adoption and helping every child to find a permanent, loving family.

Framed as organizational beliefs, though they are agreed upon symbolic meanings that exist across the field, these statements most often use words like needy and waiting to describe the orphaned, abandoned or relinquished child, who is deprived of their right to grow up with a family who cares for them and therefore ensures that they can develop their individual potential. While children are described as in need of families, families are, in turn, described most frequently as nurturing, loving and permanent. It is not enough for a child to be a part of any family; the family must be a "forever" family that truly cares for the child. In this way, the child is defined as sentimentally valuable in the context of a particular type of family. Families and children are defined in relation to one another—a sentimentally priceless child is one that can be loved by a forever family. These sorts of claims that appear to be universal truths reflect Dorow's (2006) findings that "the recruitment practices of adoption agencies operate with *universal* visions of the needs of children and families who must nonetheless be made *uniquely* for each other" (86).

It is not surprising that agencies explain their mission in terms of normative definitions of childhood and family; the use of Western conceptions of children and individual rights are used prolifically in the adoption world and particularly in adoption legislation. In fact, the use of a seemingly universal language of rights and needs in agencies' descriptions of their work echoes almost identical statements in the Hague Convention. The Convention begins with the following statement:

> The States signatory to the present Convention, Recognising that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding…(Hague Conference 1993).

This introductory phrase simultaneously invokes the child as an emotionally priceless individual with a personality, the connection between personal growth and the family environment, and the importance of happiness, love and understanding within the family. The Hague Convention was designed to be applicable to all sending and receiving countries and thus describes children and families in over-generalized ways. In her work on the Hague Convention and another related treaty on international adoption, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Howell (2006) argues that there is no overt disagreement regarding the ideology of rights or best interests in either of these conventions because from the perspective of these "globalising agencies…the purpose is to alleviate the pain and distress of children in poor countries. Consideration of the variety in sociocultural values and practices regarding family, kin and adoption is irrelevant" (175).

While we might assume that the relationship between the content of the Hague Convention and the ways in which agencies describe their purpose is a causal one, the relationship is more likely reciprocal. Data over time may demonstrate that this is, in fact, an

example of coercive isomorphism, where the legal definitions in the Hague exert pressure on agencies to conform. This kind of straight coercive isomorphism, however, would lose sight of the fact that the Hague Convention, in many ways, not only prescribes, but reflects a generalized cultural account of adoption that has long existed within the field, and that is part of a larger trend toward human rights in world society (Meyer et al. 1997). The language of the Hague suggests that adoptions of any type serve the purpose of the best interests of the child by finding nurturing homes for children who do not have a family to care for them. This account can be traced back to the early days of formalized adoption. While the discourse of child's rights did not come until much later, the first United States adoption law, passed in 1851, required that adoption transactions be done only in the best interests of the child even though adoptions at that time were largely motivated by economic, rather than sentimental, considerations (Hollinger in Howell 2006: 144). Similarly, the emphasis on the importance of nurturing families in helping children to develop their full potential can be seen beginning in the early to mid 20th century. As Herman (2008) explains, "outcome research both reflected and promoted the significant trend toward understanding emotional interactions as the heart and soul of family life" (183) and "the move from (children's) nature to (parental) nurture was apparent in outcome studies from the 1930s through the 1960s" (184).

Both agency descriptions and the Hague Convention draw on a larger cultural account of adoption, one that suggests that children have the right to be raised in a nurturing family environment where they can develop as individuals. This account, in the case of transnational adoption, taps into an existing ideological framework that legitimizes adoption by drawing on culturally resonant normative statements about children and families. Indeed, in Adam Pertman's recent book *Adoption Nation: How the Adoption Revolution is Changing America* (2011), he argues that the United States has become a nation in which the "public image [of adoption] is…exponentially better than it has ever been" and "stunningly, marvelously, for the first time in its history adoption has come into vogue" (6). This is to say that the American cultural account of adoption is so institutionalized that agencies draw on it as a way of legitimizing the practice of international adoption by defining the adoptive child as emotionally valuable within a loving family.

While most agencies drew on this shared cultural account of adoption, there was a significant difference between the ways in which Christian adoption agencies and secular agencies framed their involvement in adoption practice. Though Christian agencies also emphasized the individual rights of children to grow up in nurturing, permanent families, they also added an additional layer that related adoption practice to a calling from God. For example, one agency explained:

> [Our agency] believes that God calls us, as parents, to care for and nurture His children because they are His greatest creation, but sometimes they are born unto unfortunate circumstances in which their country of origin faces poverty and famine, which in turn fills orphanages and foster homes with beautiful, parentless babies and toddlers. We are committed to providing assistance to these wonderful children. We work endlessly to find loving families who have always hoped and dreamed to share permanent and loving homes for these children of God, which ultimately makes this our highest calling.

This agency simultaneously invokes the importance of permanent and loving families, in the same way that secular agencies did, while also drawing on the notion of a calling to serve needy children affected by poverty and famine.

While a few Christian agencies had mission statements that referenced scripture and repeatedly asserted a commitment to Christ, others had statements that were quite similar to those of secular agencies, with only brief mentions of their religious affiliation. For example, one agency's mission statement reads:

> [Our agency] is committed to helping children have the benefit of a "forever family" and nurturing home environment. Every child deserves a safe, stable and happy home. International adoption is a solution when permanency cannot be found in a child's native country.

This statement is indistinguishable from those of secular agencies, but the slogan on the agency's webpage read "Called by God, We Enable People to Reach their Full Potential," both referring to the notion of a calling and signaling the agency's religious affiliation. Religious agencies were also slightly more likely to refer to children as homeless, orphaned, or using other terms that suggest their need for loving homes. For example, one agency explained, "God has called us to passionately serve the world's forgotten children through life-changing ministries." Though religious agencies were different in their emphasis on a calling by God to serve children through adoption, their about us sections and mission statements still had many similarities with secular agencies. They equally emphasized professional services for serving parent clients.

Serving Parent Clients

Although agencies may describe children as the ultimate beneficiaries of adoption, their websites focus heavily on meeting the needs of parent clients. Available children are not only in need of families, but are also the objects of parent client desire. That is to say that the project of transnational adoption agencies is not simply to place needy children into homes, but to satisfy the desires of parent clients who want children. Children are at once the primary client of adoption agencies who are engaged in an altruistic project of caring for "unwanted" children, and also objects of parental desire. As Barbara Yngvesson explains, "the interplay of value and the child's capacity to be thrown away is the central paradox of adoptability" (Yngvesson 2002:233). This value is created within a transnational "economy of [parental] desire" (Yngvesson 2000, 2002). So, if agencies are to fulfill their purpose of granting the inalienable right to a loving family to children who are denied that right, they must serve parent clients who have expectations and desires for their own adoptions.

I argue that agencies' focus on assisting parent clients does not disrupt the cultural account of adoption as a project of finding homes for children. Rather, providing professional services to parent clients is closely connected to a cultural understanding of the child's best interests and becomes a source of legitimacy for the transnational adoption economy. As I suggested above, children worthy of adoption, and families worthy of adopting, are defined in relation to each other. If the dominant cultural account of adoption suggests that emotionally priceless children are worthy of love and individual growth within a family structure, those families are then deemed worthy by their ability to love, nurture, and recognize the emotional

value of an adoptable child. This balance between parent clients and children's best interests can at times be precarious, though. In Sara Dorow's (2006) interviews with adoption professionals she finds that agency staff members are troubled by the disconnect between their mission of finding homes for children and the reality that parents are paying clients whose desires must be taken into account. As one adoption professional explained "it's a constant juggling of what's the best needs of the family, and the best needs of the child. We do want to find homes for children. I mean, that is our goal. But you do find yourself sometimes feeling like you're following the market as opposed to being the trailblazers out there" (Dorow 85). If children are the "primary client, but a kind of phantom ideal client," then "parents, by contrast, are "secondary client" *and* active subject of desire…[and] agencies compete to *recruit* or at least attract parents" (85).

Professionalism in adoption, then, becomes a source of legitimacy and a way of bridging and balancing the priceless child versus market divide, and the division between parents and children as clients. Specifically, in the field of adoption, Herman (2008), demonstrates that a professional "kinship by design" historically developed as a way of ensuring ethical placement of adoptable children in contrast to previous ways of matching that relied too heavily on sentiment or money. In a more general sense, we can understand the appeal to professionalism as a way that organizations that serve families create a bridge between different economies of worth—between the domestic common world and the market (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006). In Boltanski and Thévenot's "On Justification: Economies of Worth," (2006), they show how agreements are often the result of actors drawing on shared principles, while disagreements happen when actors suggest classifications that diverge from shared principles of worth. Adoption is a transaction that involves what Boltanski and Thévenot would call a "composite arrangement," an association of beings from the domestic world (children), with an object from the market world (money). These composite arrangements "that include persons and things capable of being identified in different worlds are not fatally undone by disputes," but are rather held together by compromises between different economies of worth (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006:277). Professionalized service is one way that this composite arrangement is held together. "The term 'service,' understood as an extension of the goods attached to the market world, entails a compromise with the domestic world from the outset, since it includes a personal relation that is difficult to separate from specific, durable ties, as we see particularly clearly when the service is said to be "personalized" (313). In this way, professional service paired with emotional support, creates a mutually agreed upon set of principles that maintain the status of the priceless child despite the child's association with market forces. In what follows I analyze the ways in which agencies advertise their services to prospective parent clients and argue that agencies stress their ability to offer both highly professional and emotionally caring services to adoptive parents. I find that offering professional services and creating emotional connections with clients both serve to maintain the definition of the child as priceless, while simultaneously providing legitimacy for agencies.

As evidenced by the following excerpts from agency websites, agencies not only communicate their commitment to children's needs and rights, but their dedication to parents and families.

> We are dedicated to the orphaned and abandoned children of the world and the families that love and adopt them.

> We believe that every child deserves a loving family and every family deserves a loving child.
>
> Committed to adoptive parents and dedicated to orphaned and abandoned kids.

While agencies may describe their mission as serving children, their professional services are ultimately geared toward assisting parents with the often confusing and emotionally trying experience of adopting a child from abroad. As one agency website noted, "[this agency] was created to assist adopting individuals in the journey to find their hearts desire -- a child to love." Websites not only serve the purpose of communicating the goal of agencies to place needy children in loving homes, but to attract parent clients by advertising agency professionalism and services.

Professionalism as a legitimating characteristic can be seen in agency descriptions of their staff as experienced and dedicated. They do not tend to describe the specific professional qualifications of staff members in their general descriptions, but instead demonstrate the overall professional nature of their work on the basis of the number of placements they have made, the number of years the agency has been in operation, and the reputation of the agency within the field of transnational adoption. For example, one agency states that "Our Board of Directors and professional staff includes adoptive parents and adult adoptees with over 50 years combined experience in the adoption field," another explains that, "We have the experience, expertise, and the network to handle all aspects of an international adoption." A third agency draws on the number of placements and time in the field: "Since 1976, we've placed over 10,000 children with loving adoptive parents and provided food, medical care and education to more than 200,000 children worldwide."

In addition to establishing the agency's history and reputation within the field, transnational adoption agency websites make general claims about the nature of the services that they offer. Services are most often described as meeting high standards or being of high quality and being personal in nature. This emphasis on standards and quality is seen in the following excerpts from agency websites:

> [We have] a professional team that offers integrity, quality service, high standards, and personal attention.
>
> Quality, professionalism, and customer service are the foundations of our agency.
>
> Our staff is committed to providing professional, comprehensive services with an emphasis on meeting and responding to the needs of our culturally diverse community while reflecting the changing adoption environment and providing continuous quality improvement.
>
> We are committed to providing more affordable, quality adoption services in the warmest and most professional fashion, thereby emphasizing quality instead of quantity.

While few agencies mention fees in their mission statements or about us sections, those that do tend to emphasize the fact that their fees are affordable and reasonable, but still allow them to

offer high quality services. For example, one website explains that it is the agency's belief that they have the "responsibility to provide extremely reliable and very high quality adoption services to families at the lowest possible cost." Similarly another agency claims, "We strive to keep our fees as competitive and affordable as possible, while providing highly professional adoption services." The message here is that reasonable fees are an important characteristic of agencies, but that they should never be so low that they compromise the professional and quality nature of adoption services.

Differentiation

For theorists of institutional isomorphism, organizational homogeneity signals organizational legitimacy, and this coupling of isomorphism with legitimacy is confirmed by numerous empirical tests of institutional theory. How can we reconcile this theory with the empirical observation that although organizations often seek similarity, they are also likely to emphasize difference? Pedersen and Dobbin (2006) suggest that organizations are constituted through dual processes of conformity and differentiation. They point out that the neo-institutionalist focus on isomorphism need not be in conflict with accounts from organizational culture theorists who suggest that organizations seek to differentiate themselves as a part of identity formation. Instead, they suggest that "formation of identity through uniqueness and construction of legitimacy through uniformity are two sides of the same coin" and that organizations can simultaneously claim difference and similarity.

Agencies tend to talk in general terms about the fact that they offer quality services, but with the exception of a strong focus on the importance of communication between agency staff and families, they rarely refer to specific services in their about us sections. This is likely because most agencies offer identical services such as: helping parents to choose a country program, dossier preparation, homestudy services, providing parents with the referral of a specific child, parent education, and post-placement required paperwork[30]. It is interesting, then, that agencies place such strong emphasis on the nature of communication with parents. Claims about communication are one point on which agencies attempt to differentiate themselves or to claim uniqueness in a field of other similar agencies. However, despite their attempts to differentiate their services, most agencies make similar claims about how they communicate. This finding aligns with Martin, Feldman, Hatch and Sitkin's (1983) theory of the uniqueness paradox. Organizations tend to make claims that they are unlike other organizations, that they serve a purpose that other organizations do not, that they are unique. Paradoxically, however, despite claims of uniqueness, organizational stories of how they differ are not actually unique. Agencies most commonly suggest that communication is key to a successful adoption and that

[30] The services that adoption agencies describe as high quality and professional are largely administrative. The Hague Convention requires all accredited agencies to provide parents with a fee schedule in their adoption contract; fees must be clearly itemized and linked to the specific services that are rendered by agencies. The most basic fees paid to the agency are for administrative tasks and for the required homestudy. It is important to note that agency fees do not vary substantially and most of the variation in cost for transnational adoption is linked to differences in country administrative fees and travel expenses. The most typical agency services covered under standard agency administrative fees (these fees are charged to all adoptive parents regardless of country choice) cover services such as assistance with documentation and paperwork, support while dealing with CIS and immigration, help with security clearances, and consultations with agency staff regarding country choice and during the adoption process.

their agency offers personalized, direct, efficient communication with agency staff. For example, one agency states that "We return phone calls, know our clients by name, and understand that adoption can, at times, be emotionally-trying." In many cases they implicitly compare their communication style with the communication style of unspecified agencies that do not offer the type of personal attention that they are committed to—agencies where clients are just a number and are ignored by agency staff. One agency quite overtly explains why parents should choose to work with them by stating that they are the best choice:

> BECAUSE we believe in direct communication, whether it is in person, over the phone, or by email. By the way, a live person answers the phone, the old-fashioned way. No need to remember the last four letters of anyone's name!
>
> BECAUSE we are a mid-sized agency: large enough to provide a full range of adoption services; small enough to know who you are when you call. Indeed, we treat you as if you were our only client.
>
> BECAUSE we are available; Our offices open at 8 A.M. and close at 6 P.M. This is especially advantageous to clients who want to contact us either before or after their work day. We close on six major holidays-- New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas. Otherwise, we are here to serve you.

In the example above the agency stresses the importance of direct communication with staff members in a world where much telephone communication is directed through computer-operated systems. They also stress the importance of the agency size in offering this type of personalized communication in saying that they are "small enough to know who you are when you call." This was seen across many agency descriptions where self-described small or mid-sized agencies used large agencies as a straw man to compare their personalized, available style of communication with the more impersonal style of larger agencies. While this type of comparison was often implied, as in the above example, in some agency descriptions it was much more overt. The example below exemplifies, in a quite exaggerated tone, the difference between the agency in question and the nation's largest adoption agencies.

> Big things lack agility. You can get an eighteen-wheeler truck to go 100 mph, but have it turn on a dime at that speed and the result you get is predictable, yet far from good. That very same concept applies to companies across the globe, and international adoption agencies in particular. Intercountry relations change, laws, rules and regulations governing international adoption change, and we have to change yet faster to stay on top of everything, to make sure you don't get hit with a broadside of a slow-turning agency, don't get left behind in the shadow of a giant.
>
> We are working on cutting out the excess and making sure we keep or add what's needed, and right now we have one thing we want to assure we do better than anyone - communication.

> One primary goal is to reduce the number of people between you, the adoptive parent, and me, the decision maker in the agency. The ideal number of intermediary people is ZERO.

By likening larger agencies to "big things [that] lack agility" this agency suggests that prospective parents will not only have difficulty communicating with large agencies, but also risk the potential of being "left behind in the shadow of a giant" in the ever-changing world of transnational adoption. The agency describes one of their goals as "reducing the number of people between you, the adoptive parent, and me, the decision maker in the agency," suggesting that in larger agencies parents will be separated from the agency decision makers by several intermediaries that will prevent direct communication. By working with this agency, then, parents can expect a more personalized style of communication that strives toward fewer intermediaries, indeed they suggest that "the ideal number of intermediary people is ZERO."

Self-described smaller agencies not only compare themselves to larger agencies in terms of the quality of services that they offer, but they also explain their size as a conscious choice rather than the result of limited business. The following examples show how agencies describe their size as a choice that is associated with higher quality services.

> We purposely maintain a small, family-oriented atmosphere providing quality, personalized service.

> We choose to remain a small agency with a large amount of love for what we do. We believe in a quality adoption experience.

> Our agency is small and our philosophy does not include ambitions for much growth.

Small agencies equate size with quality services. The first two examples demonstrate how these agencies are able to associate size with value in the same statement and express that the decision to "remain a small agency" is, in fact, a choice. The third example shows an overt link between this decision and overall agency philosophy. These agencies wish to communicate to parents that it is not a lack of ability that keeps agencies small, but rather a philosophical choice to maintain loving, quality services for prospective parents.

Using data from 157 non-profit, Hague accredited adoption agencies, I have shown that despite attempts at differentiation, adoption agency websites reflect a homogenous cultural account of adoption that is paired with an emphasis on professional services for parents. I use these mission statements as a way of accessing the cultural account that legitimates adoption as a project of finding loving homes for emotionally priceless children. The emphasis on professionalization and serving parent clients does not, I argue, challenge the cultural account of children as the primary beneficiaries of adoption. Rather, claims of professional service offer a bridge or compromise between the market and the domestic worlds and, maintain agreement about the purpose of adoption choices among parents and agency staff (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006).

Emotional Connections

If a cultural account of adoption that emphasizes the child's best interests and a focus on professional service in adoption agency rhetoric maintain a compromise between the market and the family, and uphold the child as sentimentally valuable, then emotional connections provide the ties that bind actors in this common understanding of the worthiness of the adoptable child. In the section that follows, I draw on both agency websites and ethnographic and interview data to argue that offering emotional support as a feature of professional service serves a particular purpose in adoption agencies. Emotional bonds between parents and agencies serve to maintain a particular economy of worth and definition of adoption as sentimental. I show that when misunderstandings occur we can even more clearly see the delicate balance between the market on the one hand, and the sentimental value of children on the other. When both agencies and parents share a mutual understanding of adoption as serving the best interests of the child, together they maintain the sentimental value of the child as the driving force behind their actions. In contrast, when either agency staff or parents act in a way that suggests an understanding of adoption as an economic transaction, the mutual understanding of the child's emotional value, and thus the emotional bond between adoption agency staff and parents is broken.

Agency websites frequently describe their work as compassionate and note that they have compassion not only for children, but also for parents. There is a strong emphasis on support and "being there" during every step of the adoption process, or to "walk hand in hand with you every step of the way." Although the services rendered may be largely administrative in terms of the fees paid, agencies explain the importance of truly caring for adoptive parents. As one agency explained: "We try to bring kindness, support, and understanding to every aspect of our work with adopting parents. Our mission is to help parents adopt with as little hassle, and as much care and nurturing, as possible." It is not only children that must be nurtured by families, parents must also be cared for and nurtured during what can be a difficult process. Another agency describes itself as "…committed to providing extensive support, security, and empathy to adoptive families on a personal level of compassion and understanding." Agencies stress that they will meet the expectations and needs of parents: "[our goal is to] understand your needs by listening and to provide you with competent, compassionate, and caring services."

Emotional bonds between parents and agency staff were not just a point of advertising to recruit parent clients, but they served a fundamental purpose in creating and sustaining a mutual understanding of the sentimental value of children. I return here to Boltanski and Thévenot's theory that agreements come from shared definitions of worth, while disagreements happen when actors suggest classifications that diverge from shared principles of worth (2006). In interviews with agency staff and adoptive parents, I found that emotional connections were forged on the basis of a shared understanding of the sentimental value of the child, whereas claims that felt too transactional resulted in disagreement, or feelings of disconnection.

In their initial contacts with adoption agencies, both domestic and transnational, parents sought out emotional connections with agency staff, and these connections often became the deciding factor for which agency a parent would choose. Parents that I spoke to most frequently said that their initial contact with an adoption agency or adoption attorney was based on personal recommendation from an acquaintance, friend, or colleague. Out of the families that I interviewed, only a handful found agencies by searching the web, attending various orientation sessions, and choosing an agency based on the best fit. This is an important distinction—by

finding agencies through trusted confidants, parents locate agency staff that are more likely to share to their social position, and therefore shared habitus, which "causes practices and works to be immediately intelligible and foreseeable, and hence taken for granted" (Bourdieu 1977:80). Parents describe their recognition of this congruence with agency staff as a feeling they get when they first encounter individuals at the agency—they describe them as warm, feeling like home, honest, and welcoming. This feeling of emotional connection, or rather the experience of confronting one's own dispositions in another person, gave parents confidence in selecting a particular adoption professional to work with. There was a gendered component to these emotional connections as well—most adoption agency staff were women, and women were most likely to be the clients to seek out adoption services. These personal connections were not only important because they made parents feel secure in an otherwise emotionally trying journey to parenthood, but also because they confirmed for parents a feeling that the agency was committed to family welfare and not financial gain.

Barbara, for example, described feeling warmth and care from the agency that she had chosen for pursuing a private domestic adoption. Though she had been waiting for two years for an adoptive placement and was about to give up on her adoption agency, when I asked her if she would refer her friends there even though she hadn't yet received a child, she told me that:

> I would, because they are very nice. And the woman who answers the phone, it's sort of like calling your grandma up, "hello, how are you?" And you feel like good, she's always pleased to hear from me…so you get that lovely feeling from her, she's really warm. In fact I read someone's review as to why they chose my agency and it was for the same reason. Whereas when I called the other agency they weren't like that at all.

This initial feeling of warmth made Barbara decide to choose the particular agency that she did, a decision she made largely on the feeling she got from interacting with agency staff. Later on in the adoption process, this feeling helped her to maintain a positive view of the agency despite not yet being placed with a child. Parents often cited a kind of feeling they got as something that made them choose a particular agency. I found that this feeling of emotional bonding, of warmth, of friendliness, was one that suggested to parents that the adoption agency was motivated to place children for the right reasons—concern for parents translated to a perception that agencies really cared about children and not about financial gain.

Gwen, who adopted a daughter from abroad, found her feelings about the adoption agency staff to be indicative of the agency's commitment to children and parents. As she explained when describing meeting the staff at Helping through Adoption for the first time,

> They both just exude this warmth and enthusiasm for what they do. And there is nothing about it that's a business. This is all about people and making families. And knowing that every family is going to get the baby that they are supposed to have.

Bobbie had a similar feeling about Helping through Adoption, she had considered pursuing a domestic adoption through an adoption lawyer, but explained:

> A lawyer was too lawyerly. I wanted to go where there was a social worker, I wanted to go where there was real talent for interpersonal…I wanted a human relationship, not a

> transactional relationship, because I didn't know what I was doing. And I didn't think a lawyer was going to hold my hand and listen to me cry…It was a very unpretentious place, I felt welcomed the second I walked in, and I knew within an hour that not only are they going to take care of me, but they're going to be honest with me.

Jillian, who adopted two children from China, similarly described that when she found the right agency, "It felt very soulful to us. It didn't feel like a transactional kind of place." For Gwen, Bobbie, and Jillian, choosing an adoption agency meant forging an emotional connection with an individual that would help them build a family, and they wanted that process of building a family to feel sentimental and emotional, not transactional.

Agencies also intentionally elicit these emotional feelings in parents, and though it is an effective way of recruiting clients, they do it more as a way of recruiting the right type of clients, clients that share their understanding of adoption as a highly emotional and morally grounded process. For example, at International Adoption Together, Vivian told me, and I later saw in person, that their orientation session features a "wonderful video that we show that really hooks people in, and it was specifically designed to do that." In the orientation session, the adoption agency staff member lowers the lights and begins the film, music is combined with the faces of smiling children before features of parents talking about their adoptions are presented. The video shows interviews with adoptive families and encourages parents to imagine themselves parenting adopted children. It serves the dual purpose of both forging an emotional connection to the agency, and of weeding out clients that don't connect with a shared understanding of the value of an emotionally priceless adopted child. At Helping through Adoption, these kinds of emotional connections are also encouraged during the adoption process. At the beginning of an adoption training session, Laurie looked around the room at the group of parents assembled at the table and told them in a nurturing and loving voice, "If you have faith, it will happen—you will move from infertility to parenting." She said that she knew that the time waiting to parent a child can be difficult, but suggested to the parents that if they were patient, no matter what, they would get the chance to have their own child to parent through either international or domestic adoption. Laurie spoke not only as the Director, but also as an adoptive parent who had also waited for a child to love. The sentimental overtone in the room was palpable as the prospective parents sat silently and one woman took out a tissue to dry her eyes.

The emotional connections felt by adoptive parents are the result of emotional labor on the part of agency staff. This emotional labor is different, though, than the standardized corporate emotional labor of flight attendants that Arlie Hochschild has famously documented ([1983] 2003). Stemming from a personal calling to adoption work, adoption agency staff see their emotional labor as authentic, not contrived or forced. This view, potentially, protects them from some of the exhaustion associated with jobs that require high levels of emotional labor. In fact, in the adoption agency, a culture of authenticity, like that which exists among medical workers, may protect from burnout (Grandney, Foo, Groth, and Goodwin 2012). The ability to provide support and care for parents in the adoption agency comes not from professional training, but from a personal devotion to the moral project of adoption, which some agencies describe as a lifelong, unwavering commitment. The message to parents is that the professional staff at transnational adoption agencies really care about parents' well being. In my survey of agency websites, one agency nicely summarizes this sentiment in a few short phrases: "Our professional staff provides the highest quality programs with kindness and respect. They are here because

they care." This communicates the notion that staff members work in this field not for purely economic reasons, but because they truly care about parents and the children they adopt.

In my fieldwork, even agency staff who did not have personal connections to adoption described their work as meaningful and something they were passionate about. For example, Brynn, who did not have any children or direct personal relations to adoption explained that,

> It was almost like the path for me to work in adoption just kind of laid itself out. It was just something that kind of worked out naturally. And I'm passionate about the work, too. When I was in grad school I remember using a lot of my experiences from this internship, and nobody else in my classes studied, or they were studying adoption, so they were all really fascinated by it, and the birth parent work and the home studies and what families go through, and so they could tell that I was talking about it in class, that they're like, "You really are passionate about this. This sounds like it would be something like your calling."

Though some of the staff at Helping through Adoption were not adoptive parents, they still, like Brynn, found a meaningful passion in working in adoption. In other agencies, most staff members were adoptive parents. With the exception of some larger social service agencies that offer many services in addition to international adoption assistance, transnational adoption agency staff in the United States is largely composed of parents who adopted from abroad before deciding to pursue a career in the adoption field. In fact, adoptive parents founded many U.S. agencies, including Holt International—the first private transnational adoption agency.

Adoption agencies that have staff members who are also adoptive parents explain that they are not only able to offer emotional support to parents during the adoption process, but that they have a better understanding of what it is like to experience the process because they have been through it themselves. Returning to my data from agency websites, one agency explains, "as adoptive parents ourselves, we understand your concerns on a personal level. We support and educate families as they negotiate the adoption process." Personal understanding becomes necessary for parents to negotiate what is often described as a stressful or emotionally difficult process. The same agency goes on to say, "We acknowledge that adoption is stressful, therefore we work to link prospective parents with others who have gone or are going through the process to insure the availability of social and emotional support if desired." Personal experience with adoption becomes a professional qualification that is framed as an important characteristic of agency service. True understanding of the emotional weight of the adoption process can only be found with those who have gone through the process themselves. The presence of adoptive parents on agency staff becomes a notable, positive aspect of agency service as is seen in the description below.

> [This agency] is a team of dedicated professionals to help you through your adoption journey. What makes us different is that many of us who are helping you have adopted personally. We personally know what it takes to make the journey of international adoption successful. It's not easy- it's not for those faint of heart because it will stretch your very essence. But it is so worth the journey. We know what all international adoptive parents know; we'd do it again in a heartbeat because the gift of a child is a true miracle.

This statement suggests that international adoption is a difficult and emotionally-trying process, so difficult that it will "stretch your very essence," but at the same time ensures parents that with the right support from people who have gone through the process it will be "so worth the journey." By communicating that the agency staff "know[s] what all international adoptive parents know" the agency invites prospective parents to become part of a special group of people who understand what it is like to endure a trying journey that is "not for those faint of heart," but that results in the "gift of a child…a true miracle." Indeed, the adoption agency and adoptive parents enter into emotional bonds that look much more like those of friends or family, in some cases, than those of professionals and clients. At Helping through Adoption, staff members often maintained close ties with certain clients long after their adoptions had been completed.

If the sensitive bonds forged between adoption staff and adoptive parents serve the purpose of maintaining the pricelessness of children and valuing them on an emotional—not economic—basis, then we can most clearly see the usefulness of these bonds at times when they break down. For parents, the meaning of adoption as a sentimental process of finding an emotionally valuable child broke down at times when they felt that adoption was reduced to an economic transaction. For Vickie, who adopted transnationally, though she first liked the agency that she picked, she felt that the further she got into the process, the more it felt like an economic transaction:

> Well, one of the frustrations was, they kind of sell you on the idea that these children really need homes and you're doing—which is kind of what every adoptive parent's like, "Oh, we're just going to help a child in need." I think when you get further down the line and you've paid a lot of money already it's clear that there are a lot more people that want children than there are babies that need to be adopted [chuckles] - the healthy babies. There's a real dearth of babies and the consumer aspect of it became—and the fact that they kind of have you over a rope. It's like, "Okay, you can quit, we're not going to refund your money or anything but you're out $40,000 or whatever [chuckles], but you can drop off."

Vickie knew that she was adopting a child to fulfill her desire to have a daughter, but felt that the agency led her to believe that there wasn't as much competition as she later encountered when she traveled abroad to adopt her daughter.

Feeling competition and the pressure of paying large sums of money was also troublesome for Christy and Mackenzie, though both started by pursuing international adoption, they eventually switched to domestic adoption. Christy described her feeling of disenchantment with adoption when it felt like an economic transaction that was driven by competition, she said she became:

> Totally bummed out about the idea of like, "Oh my god. I'm going to pay for a baby, knock a couple other people out that like either can't pay or didn't get picked…you just felt like because you see all the couples waiting. Like if I get a kid in a year, and they didn't. And they're as valid as I am, in terms of their need for the kid or something. So it went from like a beautiful process to like, pretty unpleasant.

For Christy, the process became unlinked from sentimentality and instead connected to competition, this feeling of a shift from emotion to market made a “beautiful” process “unpleasant.”

Mackenzie also felt a sense of disenchantment with adoption as different fees came up for different services during the process of her adoption. On the backdrop of her experiences with infertility, sometimes it just started to feel like too much.

> By the time you've done everything else, to be honest with you, sometimes when the nonsense comes up with the adoption stuff, you're like, "Give me a break." I've already done X, Y, and Z, and I've already paid so much money that any time little stuff comes out now, it's like-- you feel like you're buying a kid, and it doesn't feel that good.

For Mackenzie, fees reminded her of the economic nature of adopting a child and made her feel uncomfortable. This kind of interaction happened between Brynn, a social worker, and one of her clients when Brynn tried to encourage the client to file paperwork for the readoption of her internationally adopted child. The parents were repeatedly questioning Brynn’s motivation for suggesting a readoption, and were hesitant to pay an additional fee. Brynn told me: “They probably think we just want more money from them.” I asked her how much it would cost them, in other words what the agency would make, and she told me it was only around $500. When I asked her if it was even worth it for her to press them on it, she told me that it wasn’t about the money, it was about her caring about the adopted child and trying to prevent a crisis for the child and the family later down the line.

When parents felt like adoption became an economic transaction, affected by competition, and driven by money, they became uncomfortable with the process and felt more like consumers buying children than parents building families. Parents, though, were not the only ones that sometimes felt the breakdown of the cultural account of adoption, and of the shared understanding of adoption as a sentimental process, agency staff also felt this disconnect when working with certain parents. In my interviews, I asked agency staff about the parents that were easiest for them to work with, and those that were most difficult. Alexis described for me her favorite kinds of clients, she said that “it’s the people that come to our parties. They see the importance of being connected. They see that we’re here to help and want to help.” In contrast to parents who saw the importance of emotional connection with the agency were parents that treated adoption as an economic transaction where the agency existed only to match them with their desired child. Donna told me that the parents that were most difficult to deal with, though she said they were rare, were those that had the attitude that “Well, you’re agents, I’m paying your agency, so your agency should get me what I’m looking for.” Similarly, Maria told me that for her the parents that made her job challenging were:

> People who look at us as a vehicle that will bring them their kin, like as paper-pushers, as paid service. And the other difficult piece is—well, they’re not very respectful. They don’t think we have brains. They usually have their own ideas of how things will work, and they don't agree with what we tell them has to happen. They don't follow directions or rules. Not always. They have a difficult time accepting that sometimes we don't have control over the process. And it's not that we're not doing our job. It's just that international adoption or any adoption is a roller coaster and sometimes there are

> unforeseen complications or delays that has nothing to do with us or them, and there is nothing you can do about it.

For Maria, these parents challenged the sense of meaning she found in her work, and doubted her expertise—they took adoption from a sentimental process that required the careful work of an emotionally dedicated professional like Maria, and suggested that it was a simple transaction like the purchase of any other good or service. She felt frustrated by parents' assumptions that complications in the process indicated professional failure, and suggested that parents are unable to recognize the ways in which adoption agency staff are constrained by the larger political economy of adoption.

Olivia, who was an international adoptee herself and also worked as an agency staff member, felt very upset when she saw adoptive parents acting as consumers and therefore breaking down a shared understanding of the value of adopted children. She told me:

> It's upsetting to me when people come in here and they feel entitled, because they're in—I don't believe that this is what people are doing, but I believe some people think, "Well, I'm paying for this service. So, I should be able to say what I will and will not accept." This isn't the pound. You're not going to adopt a dog. This is a human life.

When agencies perceived parents as acting like consumers shopping for a product, or parents perceived agencies as facilitating an economic transaction, mutual understandings of the priceless child and the sentimentality of adoption broke down. This was problematic for parents, on the one hand, because it made it difficult for them to imagine their future children as emotionally priceless. For agencies, on the other hand, parents who acted as consumers threw into question the very emotional motivations behind their work. Instead of seeing agency staff as engaged in an emotionally meaningful child welfare project, parents like this suggested that agency staff were simply workers they were paying to provide a service and a product. It also struck a personal nerve for those who were themselves adoptive parents or transnational adoptees.

Conclusion

This chapter considers the ways in which the meaning of transnational adoption, and of the emotionally priceless child, is relationally negotiated by adoptive parents and agency staff. In this chapter, I first relied on data from 157 United States transnational adoption agencies as a way of demonstrating and accessing the field's shared understanding of adoption as a practice that is linked to child welfare and the individual rights of the adopted child to a loving, permanent family. I rely on theories of institutional isomorphism to show that despite variation in types of agencies, websites present a relatively homogenous view of the purpose of adoption. By referencing normative conceptions of the rights of children as the primary beneficiaries of adoption, this cultural account then provides actors within the field with a sense of shared meaning. I then demonstrate that most online agency promotional materials focus not on legitimating adoption practice, but on describing the ways in which they offer professional services to prospective parent clients. This provision of services is not counter to the project of child welfare; rather, agencies rely on parents and children as dual clients in the project of transnational adoption.

Next, I draw on interview data and evidence from my work at Helping through Adoption to show how the emotional bonds between parents and adoption agencies, and the shared meanings created by these bonds, serve an important organizational function in the field of adoption—they legitimate adoption practice and uphold a cultural account that suggests that adoption is an emotional process that finds loving, nurturing, forever homes for children in need. By doing so, these connections between parents and agencies protect both parties from the moral quandary of dealing in the commerce of children. Finally, I turn my focus to the emotional bonds that are created between agency staff and parents and show how, though at times they break down, they serve an important purpose in sustaining a mutual understanding of the sentimental value of the adoptable child.

Chapter 4 | Facing the Decline: Managing Shortage in the Transnational Adoption Economy

"Seriously, they want domestic? We already have too many Asian families waiting for domestic, Kate!" Alexis said, jokingly. I was sitting in Alexis' office when Kate, who mostly handled international adoptions, stopped by to tell Alexis that she had scheduled a consultation for Alexis later that day. Alexis did many of the initial intake meetings with families who were interested in domestic adoption, since she had the most experience in that program. Kate told Alexis that the family that would be coming in was Asian American and interested in adopting domestically because their friends had successfully adopted an Asian child through Helping through Adoption. When I asked Alexis why it was such a problem that they were coming in for a domestic consult, she said that she did not want the family to have any expectations that they could get an Asian child through domestic because that "never happens."

The consult was much the same as the other consults I had sat in on with Alexis. She went over the general points about domestic adoption—making books for birth mothers to see, writing letters to potential birthmothers, and that they would get help with these parts. She asked them what kind of child they would like to adopt. They said that they wanted to adopt a young child; they wanted a baby, not an older child. Though the father expressed that he was open to adopting a child of any race, Alexis explained to the family that their friends who had adopted an Asian child domestically had a very abnormal situation—they hadn't waited very long and their placement was the same race as them. She said, "that doesn't happen very often." She told them that "there is really no rhyme or reason to the waiting," that some couples just seem to wait longer than others. Then she asked them, "Can I throw you a total curveball?" The woman seemed a little surprised, but answered yes. Alexis then started to tell them about a new international program that had just opened in the Philippines.[31] There was much less of a wait with this program, and they would likely be matched with a young child.

The story above represents one of the typical ways in which agency staff encouraged parents to rethink their choices and consider other options. At Helping through Adoption, parents were often encouraged to consider domestic adoption in place of transnational adoption or vice versa, based on their preferences for the type of child that they wanted to adopt, their eligibility for certain programs, and the time that they might spend waiting for a placement. Agency staff members became experts at reading parents' dispositions and potential openness to switching programs. Encouraging parents to substitute one type of adoption for another was not only organizationally useful—it ensured that there were not too many parents in the queue for a particular type of adoption—but agency staff also felt that it was the right thing to do. Sorting parents and matching them with children was a way of accomplishing the agency's mission of serving the child's best interest. They believed that good matches were more likely to lead to successful adoptions.

This chapter is about the strategies that agency staff use to match parents with appropriate adoption programs in an effort to manage shortage. Agencies are fighting to stay open not only

[31] The name of this country program has been changed to protect the identity of the agency and parents. None of the data presented in this dissertation is associated with the transnational adoption of children from the Philippines. Though I realize this makes understanding Helping through Adoption's new international program somewhat complicated and vague, I agreed to change the name of some country programs to render the agency and individuals unidentifiable.

because their own livelihoods depend on it, but also because, as I demonstrated in Chapter 3, they feel genuinely morally committed to the project of finding homes for children. In recent years, the shortage of adoptable children, longer waiting times, and the different types of children that are now available made the work of adoption agencies increasingly complex. While there was a neat alignment between the desires of parents and the availability of children in the 1980s and 1990s, the recent changes in international adoption that I summarized in Chapter 2 have contributed to a mismatch between parents' expectations, preferences, and the reality of a market characterized by shortage and uncertainty. In this chapter I build on an economic model of shortage (Kornai and Weibull 1978) by adapting it for the particular economy of transnational adoption. I demonstrate how certain choices made in the context of shortage become morally positive, while others are morally suspect.

Transnational Adoption: An Economy of Shortage

The decline in international adoptions to the United States since international adoptions peaked in 2004 has been an unprecedented blow to non-profit adoption agencies in the United States. The majority of these agencies were founded at a time when international adoption was a growing trend; most small agencies opened during one of many waves of international adoption to facilitate adoptions from Latin America, former Soviet countries, or from China. The 1990s and early 2000s were a good time for international adoption agencies—more children were becoming available for adoption through new country programs and the overall numbers of international adoptions were on the rise. The experience of a growing market for most of the years of the agencies' existence made the downturn in recent years that much more palpable.

As I demonstrated in previous chapters, the steep growth of international adoptions from the 1980s through 2004 created a neat alignment between the desires of prospective adoptive parents, the availability of certain types of children, and the moral commitment of agencies to children's rights and well being. Prospective parents most often desired (and still desire) white (or Asian, sometimes Latinx) healthy infants (preferably girls) and are often drawn to international adoption because of the "clean break" that children adopted from abroad have from their birth families. The adoption programs of the early 90s fit particularly well with this set of desires. Vivian, the director of International Adoption Together (IAT), gave a clear explanation of the alignment of desire and availability of children in the 1990s. She speaks favorably of the exciting growth of international adoption at the time:

> Other possibilities were opening like China and Russia, it was a match made in heaven, especially China. Most of our families wanted girls, they had lots of little girls, it was an easy process and boom, boom, boom, boom, we did lots and lots of adoptions in the 90s."

Indeed, China was, as Vivian describes, "a match made in heaven." In the 1990s, China not only had young babies available, but they were healthy girls. The "flexibility of Asian difference—strange but adaptable" and the need for adoptive parents for thousands of children that were "abandoned" as a result of China's one child policy made these children both desirable for adoptive parents and available for adoption (Dorow 2006:41). While Russia has always been a slightly less popular option for adoptive parents, the collapse of the Soviet Union opened new possibilities for parents to adopt white babies from Russia and other former-Soviet countries,

who would otherwise spend their lives in state-run orphanages. For agencies, like HTA, adoption from China and Russia fit the moral obligation of helping children in need and, by meeting the desires of parents, finding families for children in need.

Table 3. From Neat Alignment to Mismatch between Parental Desires and Available Children

	Parental Desires	**Available Children**
Growing Economy Characterized by Choices (pre-2004)	• Quickly available • Young • "Healthy" • Racial match or "racial flexibility"	• Time to adoption often less than one year • Infants more readily available • Many available non-special needs children • Children available in Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America
Declining Economy Characterized by Shortage (post-2004)	• Quickly available • Young • "Healthy" • Racial match or "racial flexibility"	• Time to adoption much longer • Older, on average • Fewer available "healthy" children • Fewer children available worldwide

Table 3 above shows the contrast in the neat alignment between desire and supply before 2004 in contrast to the mismatch post-2004. While the neat alignment of parents' desires with the availability of young, healthy, white and Asian babies in the 1990s and early 2000s allowed adoption agencies to process numerous adoptions during that time, in the years since 2004 the availability of children has shifted substantially. As Vivian explains: "In the 2000s, things definitely started changing. You know, the demographics changed, the whole paradigm shifted." The paradigm shift she refers to here is a change in the time from when a parent(s) starts the adoption process to the time of adoptive placement, the age of the children who are most readily available, the average health of available children, and the countries that are open to adoption.

Since 2004, many small country programs have opened to make up for the drop in adoptions from China, Russia, and Guatemala (outlined in Chapter 2), but few programs are operating as quickly as they were in the early 1990s. Further, it has become nearly impossible to adopt an infant from abroad. The mismatch between desire and supply is largely caused by changes in adoption policies in sending countries, but it results in an organizational challenge for adoption agencies. To explain how adoption agencies manage the shortage of young, healthy, quickly available children that are racially flexible, I use Kornai's work on the Soviet economics of shortage and apply it to the case of adoption. Going beyond this economic model, though, I

show how possible choices for substitution and queueing become morally charged in the field of adoption.

Managing shortage in transnational adoption is challenging specifically because it is not a market; instead, it is a peculiar economy where the value of children does not, and cannot, fluctuate. There may be some limited adjustment of fees in sending countries as they see demand for children rise, but these fees are still tied to the administrative cost of adoption. In adoption, shortage cannot be managed the way it is in a free market—through the adjustment of prices. In a typical market, the pricing mechanism balances supply and demand—for goods that are in high demand, prices will increase, which in turn will create increased incentive for production. In adoption, though, putting such a price tag on emotionally priceless children seems unthinkable, precisely because it would reveal a hierarchy of desire, and the corresponding monetary worth of different types of children.

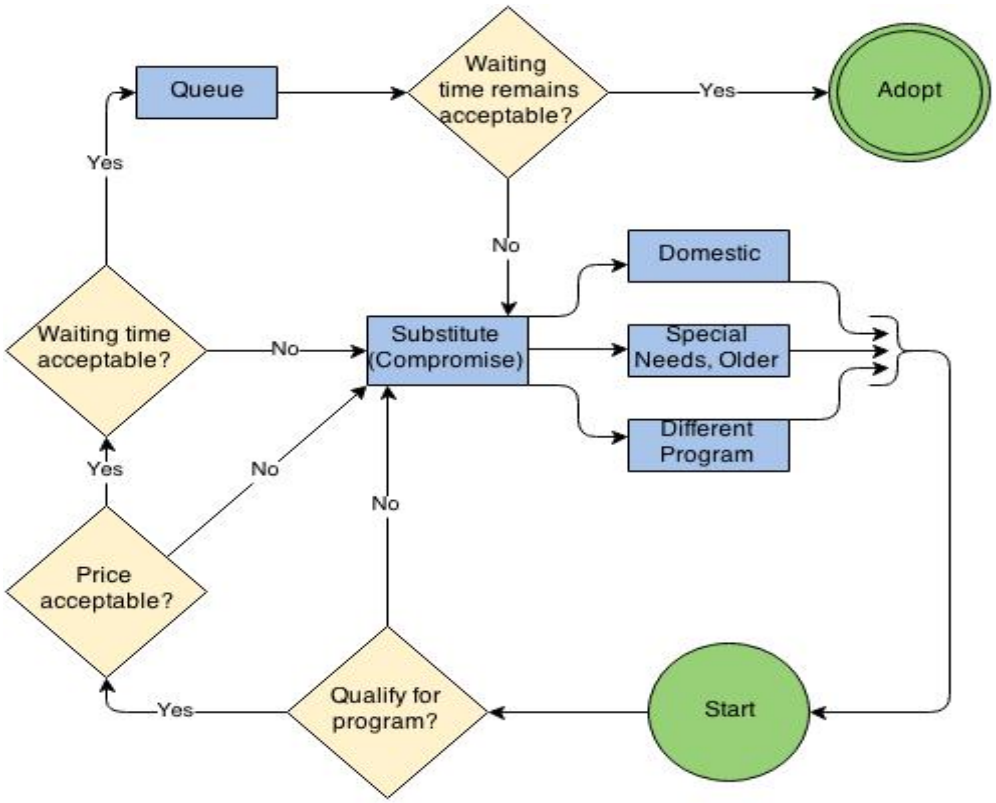
The unusual features of the economy of transnational adoption suggest parallels to the centrally planned economies that János Kornai (1980) has famously theorized. In centrally planned economies of the Soviet bloc, a central authority determined the quantity of goods to be produced, which led to chronic shortage and queuing for everything from basic household goods to cars. In the case of adoption, central authorities do not exactly control how many children are produced for transnational adoption, but they do have some ability to control the supply of children available for adoption by instituting quotas, increasing processing times, or shutting down adoption altogether. Authorities in centrally planned economies were also responsible for setting prices, just as sending countries in international adoption set the fees for adoption. Finally, because prices (in the case of centrally planned economies) and fees (in the case of adoption) do not fluctuate, they cannot be used to regulate supply and demand or to increase incentives to produce. In the case of centrally planned economies, consumers must solve the problem of shortage through queueing of substitution. Similarly, since adoption agencies have no power to manipulate the overall political economy of adoption, they must manage shortage in transnational adoption through substitution and queuing.

Kornai and Weibull (1978), demonstrate the process of decision-making in cases where a centrally planned economy is characterized by shortage and queuing. Figure 3, below, is an adaptation of their model for the case of transnational adoption. Kornai and Weibull's (1978) shopping algorithm suggests that the buyer, after accepting the price of the good in question, must decide whether the queuing time required to purchase the good in an economy of shortage is acceptable. The buyer will either decide to join the queue because the time waiting in line is acceptable, or will face postponement or substitution if the length of the queue is unacceptable. In the case that the buyer does not feel that substitution is a more desirable option than postponement, they will elect to postpone the decision of queuing or substituting. In contrast, if substitution is a better option, the buyer will make a forced substitution of a different good. In this case, "One possible interpretation of [their] assumption is that good H represents the composite commodity: 'goods other than G'. Even in the worst degree of shortage there is always *something* in the stores" (380). The substitution is forced because it is a choice created by the existence of shortage and an unacceptably long queue. In contrast, voluntary substitution happens when a buyer decides to substitute not on the basis of shortage or a queue, but on the basis of price alone.

An example of this model can help to better elucidate its usefulness in the case of adoption. Kapitany, Kornai, and Szabo (1984) describe how shortage works in the Hungarian car

market, where the most important indicator of shortage is the length of the queue that buyers wait in to buy a particular type of car. They explain that, in the case of Hungary, there is not an "absolute" shortage of cars. "If one wants to buy a car, one can do so, at most one has to wait or to accept forced substitution. There is however, a "relative" shortage of cars: supply deviates from the initial demand of the buyers—in quantity; and in composition according to type, quality, age, and delivery date" (239). In the adoption economy there is a similar relative shortage. It is not that there are no children available to adopt whatsoever, but that the supply does not match in quantity or in the desired characteristics—children of as young an age as possible, who are healthy, and can be quickly adopted. In the case of the car market in Hungary, forced substitution can often happen on the spot—a buyer may choose a different model than they initially intended to purchase when it becomes evident that the queuing time for the model they desired is too long. Another important point from Kapitany, Kornai, and Szabo (1984) is the observation that in an economy of chronic shortage, there is not a specific concept of demand. Instead, "the buyer's buying intention is interpretable in several ways and evolves over time" (240).

Figure 3. A Model of the Management of Shortage in Transnational Adoption



Using a model that invokes the buying and selling of cars to understand the highly emotional world of transnational adoption may seem problematic. After all, one of the main points of this dissertation is to understand how the emotional and moral aspects of adoption intersect with the transactional nature of the process. I do not intend here to contribute to the view, expressed by Margaret Radin (1996), and quoted in Chapter 1, that a free market in

children might cause us to measure the value of children the way we measure the value of cars. Transnational adoption is not a free market, but rather a highly sentimental economy where meaning about the value of children is produced relationally. So, why then, is this model useful here? The similarities between the uniqueness of centrally planned economies and the peculiar nature of the transnational adoption economy make Kornai's theory useful tool for understanding decision making processes in adoption. I use this framework to show how agencies manage shortage, but I argue that the decisions made in the context of shortage are imbued with emotion and moral judgment about the appropriateness of adoptive placements.

Figure 3, above, is an adaptation, for the case of transnational adoption, of the visual depiction of decision making in a shortage economy from Kornai and Weibull (1978). The circles represent the start and end points—when a parent enters into the field of transnational adoption and when they leave, having adopted a child. Parents may also exit the process entirely at any point, never making it to the end point of adoption. The diamonds in the diagram represent places where parents are asked questions, the answers to which determine their trajectory through the process. Finally, the rectangles in the diagram show places in the process where decisions are made. Of course, the way in which an individual parent or family moves through this decision-making process will not always follow this exact trajectory. For example, parents may question the acceptable price of international adoption before they even explore whether they qualify for a particular program. This model shows that, in general, parents are faced with two choices—to queue for a long waiting period or to substitute with another adoption program. This diagram is not meant to represent the trajectory of any particular adoption program, but to show some of the common decisions that happen in a transnational adoption economy characterized by shortage. The diagram illustrates the decision to queue or substitute, the decision to remain in a queue when the queue becomes particularly long, and the different types of substitution that become desirable in light of long queues.

In this chapter, I argue that queuing generally becomes a less desirable option for both parents and for agencies; substitution becomes a more reliable path to a successful adoption. Choosing programs with longer waiting times or comparatively longer queues is undesirable because 1) the business model of agencies relies on regular client replacement rates to ensure financial stability, 2) the state of the market suggests that queues are uncertain and may not lead to successful adoptions, 3) parents who queue for a long period of time are more likely to decide not to adopt, and 4) agencies have seen firsthand the disappointment that results from long queuing times and therefore want to assist parents in completing adoptions as quickly as possible. In this way, a rejection of queuing and reliance on substitution becomes moralized as a positive decision, one that is both in line with the best interests of adoptable children and organizationally useful. This finding parallels Livne's (2014) work that shows how scarcity in hospice care can be reframed as both morally positive and economically beneficial.

I show how organizations help to mediate the choice between queuing and substitution. Adoption agency staff help parents navigate the options available to them in an international adoption market characterized by shortage. My interviews with staff members show that queuing and substitution have different implications for parents and for agencies. Although agencies inevitably benefit from parents' decisions not to queue, they use moral terms to explain their reasons for not encouraging queuing. Rather than presenting an argument that queuing is not in parents' best interests, staff members explain that they do not suggest queuing to parents because it may lead to disappointment and is less likely to result in a successful placement. Agencies

frame substitution, on the other hand, as an attractive choice for parents because it allows them to receive a faster placement. I show how, instead of framing choices beyond queuing as forced substitutions, agencies empower parents to have broader preferences and individual agency in making adoption choices. The possible substitutions available to parents are often structured by the opportunities and choices available to them within a particular agency and by requirements for parents implemented in the sending country. Finally, insofar as substitution takes on a moral dimension as an adoption choice, there are limits to the appropriate boundaries of how far substitution can be pushed. To demonstrate this, I explore the ways in which substitution on the basis of race is navigated by the adoption agency.

Queuing: Long Waiting Periods for Adoptive Placement

As we know, parents who enter the international adoption market are faced with increasingly long waiting times from when they initially submit their adoption paperwork to when they are likely to receive a referral for the child that will ultimately come home with them. Kornai and Weibull (1978) suggest that in an economy characterized by shortage, buyers will question whether they should join a queue to wait for the product that they so desire; it is the amount of time a buyer may spend in the queue that becomes a determining factor in the buyer's decision. That is, "the larger the [queuing time], the more reluctant the buyer is to join the queue" (379). Indeed, in international adoption parents are less likely to join longer queues and agencies are unlikely to encourage them to choose countries with longer waiting times. Long waiting times put stress on the finances of agencies. Agencies encourage parents to choose a shorter path to adoption because long queues are uncertain, people are more likely to leave adoption altogether when waiting in a long queue, agency staff say that they care for the well being of their clients and have seen first hand the disappointment that results from long queuing times, and queuing results in fewer successful adoptive placements and therefore is contrary to a moral commitment to the best interests of the adoptive child.

Long queues are organizationally challenging for adoption agencies that rely on fees to cover the costs of operation. Most agency fee structures are designed so that parents pay the majority of their fees before an adoption has been completed. This system worked well before the numbers of international adoptions started to plummet: as one client was completing an adoption, another would be entering into an adoption contract and paying fees for services. Susan at Loving Family Adoption (LFA) likened this model to a merry-go-round:

> The cost of business, I mean, it's like a merry-go-round. You bring in new clients and they pay for stuff and, you know, I can't even define it in my words because it is an ongoing merry-go-round. You know it's like a merry-go-round you can't get off. You know you really are promising services to people that may expand two years down the road. I mean, you're gathering homestudy money, you're looking in the future and it's kind of scary. When that was a one-year process, that was good, because you're turning things over and getting new people. But when it becomes a three to five-year process, you know, then you're in trouble.

Susan's agency, once a very efficient "merry-go-round"—for every new client who got on, another got off—has now become a merry-go-round overfilled with riders with no known plan

for exiting the ride. For LFA and for many other small agencies around the country, the longer the process, the more precarious the financial situation of the organization becomes. It is, then, in the best financial interest of the agency to get people through the process as quickly as possible.

I asked Kate, a program coordinator at Helping through Adoption (HTA), whether this was the case at her agency. She explained that she thought it was, because for those families who had decided to queue for their China program, "The fees we've collected from those families we collected 5 or 6 years ago. And we don't really have any new families coming in." While new families were coming in through HTA's domestic and other adoption programs, few new families were interested in queuing to adopt a baby from China and few families were successfully exiting the queue because of the extremely slow process. The result was that clients who had decided to queue for the China program were not being replaced. Elaina at International Adoption Together (IAT) explained that she saw this fee structure as problematic because "if you are an agency who gets paid up front—and I think the vast majority do—and this thing drags on for 5 years, you just carry that." Agencies "just carry that," not only because there is little to no client replacement for programs with long queues, but also because program prices are fixed at each agency and therefore agencies do not get paid more for clients who stay on their books for many years. It is important to note, though, that Kate said this was not a particular burden on her as a staff member. Kate's clients who had been queuing for long periods of time were not demanding of her energy or time. She said that keeping those clients in the queue was not difficult because she only had to contact them when there were updates about their cases or about the average waiting time, and in recent years there had been very few updates.

In contrast, at International Adoption Together (IAT), the problem of their particular fee structure was not that the fees came early in the process, but that they often came too late in the process. Because of the substantial barriers to adoption for prospective parents, and in part because of the long waiting times, some potential clients were dropping out of the process before paying any substantial fees. As Kornai and Weibull (1978) suggest, there is always a third option to queueing and substitution—exiting entirely. For IAT, parents leaving adoption altogether created a situation where the agency was not being compensated for their time. As Elaina explained:

> We've changed our pay structure a little bit. In the past, a lot of the fees were at the back end and about two years ago…I was kind of commenting that, you know, a lot of families are stopping the process midway and so we've been doing all of this work and we aren't getting paid for it. And so we kind of split some fees up where there was a larger fee at the end.

By altering their pay structure, IAT was able to collect some fees from parents earlier in the process and ensure that they were paid for some of their services even if parents decided to drop out of the process mid-way. Elaina told me that the "primary reason [for dropping out] was length of time" to adoption.

While staff members were clearly aware of the financial struggle that long waiting times created for their agencies, they did not suggest that this would be a reason not to encourage a parent to submit an application for a particularly long program. At IAT, though, they stopped taking applications for the China program altogether because, as Elaina explained, "If you are of Chinese heritage, that's 6 to 8 years for a referral; if you're not of Chinese heritage, it's 8 to 10.

That would just be taking money from you." For Elaina, it didn't make sense to enroll parents in a program that had such an extremely long waiting time. At the time of our interview, though, IAT still had several families waiting in the queue for a non-special needs adoption from China. At HTA, Kate was open to taking applications for the China program despite long waiting times. In this case, though, the HTA staff said that their goal was to educate the families about the reality of the wait and allow them to make an educated decision based on that information. As Laurie, HTA's director, told me, "If you're open [to the wait] and you want a healthy child, we will apply for that." For families that were set on adopting a non-special needs child from China, that option remained a possibility at HTA.

At HTA, though, it was hard to find parents who were open to long waiting times. When I interviewed Maria before Russia had closed for adoptions, she was responsible for heading up a new European program, but had not yet found any prospective parents who were interested because families felt that faster options made more sense. I was surprised to find that she did not see this as a problem.

> Maria: It's not easy to find families who are willing to wait [more than one year], when Russia takes only 1. And it's, Russia is more expensive, but because it is quicker people prefer to go there.
>
> Interviewer: So, that must be frustrating for you.
>
> Maria: No, I totally understand why people don't feel comfortable waiting for three years. It is what it is. Hopefully we'll get the right couples, I'm hopeful.

It's important to note that at the time that Russia was open for adoption, fees for the Russia program were significantly higher than those for all other transnational programs, this fluctuation in fees was uncharacteristic of international adoption more generally. Even though HTA did not have their own in-house program to facilitate adoptions from Russia, Maria was quite adamant and quick to respond to my suggestion that it might be frustrating that parents were unwilling to wait. She was particularly committed to this program, though, and she really wanted to find parents who could offer loving homes for these children. During a particularly financially stressful time at the agency, there was a suggestion by the Director that it might make sense to cut programs that weren't doing very well. Maria immediately explained that this program was not taking a lot of her time, since not very many people were interested. Maria's moral commitment to the well being of the children from this program was particularly apparent during my fieldwork when she would get referrals of children with special needs and would try desperately to place them, despite the fact that most of the children were older and no one was interested. At one point she received a referral of a child with a developmental disability who was one year old. She hoped that her young age would help parents to be interested, but of the parents who expressed interest, none could afford the adoption

Managing the Dilemma of Time to Placement and Parental Age

Part of the challenge for agencies in managing the shortage of children available for international adoption is determining how best to deal with parents who are approaching the age

limits for qualification for the remaining open transnational programs. While parents are qualified for adoption across a number of measures—such as BMI (as an indicator of overall health), marital status, income, psychological history, criminal history—age becomes particularly salient now that parents are waiting longer for adoptive placements. Staff members knew that parental age was an important qualification for ensuring a successful adoptive placement, and therefore they saw fast placements as a necessity for older parents. Though it's hard to determine at what point a prospective adoptive parent becomes an "older parent," the age at which adoption becomes increasingly difficult is likely in the late 40s to early 50s. Older parents are at a distinct disadvantage in both international and domestic adoption. In private domestic adoption, older parents are less likely to be chosen by birthmothers; for example, Martha who was 50 and whose husband was in his late 40s (at the time that I interviewed her), had waited two years for a domestic private placement and had not once been chosen by a birthmother.

In transnational adoption, parents become disqualified from a number of programs when they reach the upper age limit—for example as of 2016 the upper age limit for adopting from South Korea is 44.5, from Taiwan and China it is 50 (though in China, parents over 50 are eligible to adopt children with more severe special needs or older children from the Special Focus program). In other countries there is no specific upper age limit, but they enforce a maximum age difference between the adoptive parent and child to be adopted, for example Ethiopia prefers a difference of no more than 44 years between parents and children, and the Philippines institutes a 45-year difference between parents and adopted children. In this way, as parents age they have less options for adoptive programs and often only qualify for older children.[32]

Many agency staff suggested that they would encourage parents not to enter a long queue and instead to pick faster programs, especially in cases where the families had experienced infertility or were older (entering their late 40s). Alexis, at HTA, said personality, age, and experience were important in deciding how to advise prospective parents: "We used to sort, you know, kind of based on personality." She mimics the sort of conversation she'd have with a prospective parent:

> "I've [the prospective parent] been through infertility, I can't handle the roller coaster." Great, do international. You sign up, you qualify, you get on the list, you get the baby, its done. But now, it's like, we don't say that anymore.
>
> And I think that is sad too, because these families have been through a lot. If you've had a stillborn or 14 miscarriages at 20 weeks or whatever we see… I have a family right now, they tried to get pregnant for 10 years. We see these lists and it's like, oh my gosh. And now they're 48 and they look 48 and it's like, okay, now what?

Alexis believed that understanding the personality or the personal experiences of the client was important to ensure that they had the best chance of a successful placement. It used to be that international adoption was more of a sure thing than the domestic placements she coordinates. As international adoption has gotten more and more uncertain, she realizes that this is not an

[32] Qualifications are widely listed and can be accessed on a number of agency websites. These particular age cut-offs were accessed August 10, 2016 through Holt International at http://www.holtinternational.org/adoption/criteria.php.

option for these families anymore and she expresses some compassion for what they have gone through. She recognizes too, that if they are older and they look older they will have less of a chance of having a birthmother choose them in a private domestic adoption. She wonders what options they will have left. Though how quickly an adoptive parent would be picked by a birthmother in the domestic program was highly unpredictable, Alexis became skilled at recognizing which type of adoption might be a faster option for a particular family. As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, she was quick to suggest an international adoption instead of a domestic adoption for an Asian-American family, because she believed this option would lead to a faster placement in that case.

Kate and Elaina, like Alexis, used parental age as a factor for making calculations of whether a family should take the risk of waiting. As an adoptive parent, Elaina understands how important it is to adopt a child as quickly as possible:

> The average for our families, I would say, in the late 30s, that's when we started. So, let's say you start when you are 39, and it's a 3- or 4-year process. So, when you turn 42, can you handle an infant? So, that starts to play a role…We tell people, you know, it's no guarantee. Things could blow up in that country.

Elaina was aware that the older parents got, the more important it was to have certainty about the amount of time they would wait. In most cases, the wait for an international adoption may be as long as 3 to 4 years, and Elaina realizes that as time passes parents often become less comfortable with parenting a young child. She realizes, too, that waiting times are notoriously uncertain and that with any international adoption there is no guarantee of how long it will take. One of the reasons for this uncertainty is that "things could blow up in that country," by which she means that at times countries may extend waiting periods or end adoptions altogether, requiring waiting families to start the process anew.

For Kate, too, waiting times were especially important for older clients. For this reason, she says she offers her clients other options if they have been in the queue for a long time or even before they enter the queue. She said that she felt sad about the reality of long waiting times and had difficulty letting people know that waiting times continue to expand:

> With the China program, due to the slow down of the referrals, that has definitely been very tough for the families and, I think, some families, they've decided not to continue reading updates, because it is just putting them back into that place where—when I signed up it was supposed to be a two-year wait and it's turning out to be a seven-year wait. So, I think they sort of put it on a back burner. For my job, it's definitely very devastating…When families do contact me about the China program, it is always very sad, because they ask me how long is the wait. And I calculate and I tell them it will be at least a 2-year wait when they've waited for 4 years already. And I can hear it in their voice through the phone and it's just very devastating.
>
> I had one couple who decided not to proceed, because the couple was like 55 or 56. That is a lot of the families who contact us and decide to withdraw because, you know, they're thinking, when we're in our 50s we don't have the energy to run around and chase around a toddler. Which is, it's great that adoptive parents think about their child.

Kate's tone of voice suggested that she felt compassion for prospective parents when she would have to tell them that the waiting times had increased. She described talking to these parents as "devastating," and like Elaina, she was aware that, for many of the couples that enter a long queue, they may never complete an adoption because the waiting times are so long. She felt positively, though, about the decision of the older couple to exit the queue and expressed appreciation for their decision to think about what an adoption by an older couple would mean for a young child.

In a market characterized by shortage, long waiting times were challenging for agencies whose fee structures were designed to operate in a time when international adoptions were processed much more quickly. Agencies, though, suggested that this was not the reason for steering adoptive parents away from programs with longer waiting times. Instead, the emotional bonds between agency staff and parents, and the agency's motivation to place as many children as possible—in line with a cultural account of the child's best interests—affected why they might suggest that parents should not queue. Agency staff members expressed their concern for parents who had previously experienced infertility and particularly those who were in their late 40s and were more likely to successfully complete an international adoption through a faster program. They recognized parents' desire to receive an adoptive placement as soon as possible and understood this desire as a positive choice because it meant parents were more likely to eventually adopt a child. Instead of queuing for a long wait time, like that for China, adoption agencies encouraged parents to consider other programs that had faster processing times. In the section that follows, I show how agencies managed this substitution of one program for another and how they counseled parents to be open, but to only choose an adoption path that felt comfortable. I demonstrate that although parents were encouraged to be flexible, the type of programs available in each agency structured what flexibility meant in these different contexts.

Substitution: Flexibility in Adoption Preferences

In the highly uncertain international adoption market, parents are encouraged to expand their initial ideas about the type of adoption or the type of child they most desire. As Laurie explained at an HTA orientation session, "you need to look at your preferred or ideal situation and then blend that with what is realistic." As we have already seen, waiting times for many countries are unbearably long; because of this, adoption agencies seek to help parents be open to a variety of types of children, in order to ensure that their adoption proceeds more quickly and successfully. In a shortage economy, as Kornai and Weibull (1978) explain, those buyers who do not join the queue often must make a forced substitution for the good that they initially intended to buy. This substitution is not forced by other individuals, but rather by the characteristic shortage within the market: "forced by shortage and revealed in the unacceptably long queuing time" (Kornai and Weibull 1978:380). In contrast, voluntary substitution happens when customers make a choice strictly in considering the relative prices of two different goods.[33]

[33] When a parent enters the adoption market they may, for example, voluntarily decide not to pursue a Russian adoption (at the time that Russia was open) because the price of upwards of $50,000 is unacceptable, instead deciding to pursue an adoption from another country where the price is closer to the average of about $30,000. With the exception of Russia, which is substantially more expensive than other sending countries, prices for international adoptions do not vary significantly.

Adoption agency staff, though, expressed that couples rarely used price to decide where to adopt. Couples were most often concerned with the child's age, health status, race, and gender, as well as time to adoption; families differed in the importance accorded to each factor. Knowing this, and knowing that many parents are automatically excluded from particular programs based on their own demographic characteristics, agency staff made two recommendations to parents. First, they should be as open as possible, but honest and comfortable with their criteria for the type of child that they would adopt. Second, they should be willing to leave a queue and pursue a different program if another acceptable choice became available. Expanding parents' preferences helped agencies to frame forced substitution in an economy of shortage as a substitution of choice based not on price, but on parents' own calculations of what was important to them.

During my interviews at orientation sessions at both International Adoption Together and Helping through Adoption (HTA), and during my observations at HTA, agency staff said that they encouraged parents to expand their expectations of the type of child they were willing to adopt. However, they did not ever want parents to feel pressured in their choices, because a good choice was one that a parent would be able to comfortably handle. During an orientation session at HTA, for example, Laurie concisely summed up this sentiment when she reminded parents: "the broader, the better, because the more possibilities, but don't ever cross the line into something you aren't comfortable with."

While staff members at Helping through Adoption, International Adoption Together, and Shannon at Christian Home Adoptions all talked about the importance of encouraging flexibility among parents, flexibility played out in different ways at each agency. In many cases, parents work with more than one agency (for example, a placement agency that runs the country program that the parent applies to and a homestudy agency that completes the necessary paperwork in the family's county in their home state), in order to find a placement agency that has programs in the countries they are interested in. When a parent enters the adoption process through one agency, though, they may be encouraged to apply to the particular programs that are run by that agency or its partner agency. Due to this arrangement, flexibility meant different things in different agencies.

Helping through Adoption had a particularly strong domestic adoption program that had grown in the years since the decline of the availability of internationally adoptable children. Laurie told me that 10 years earlier, 70% of their adoptions were international while 30% were domestic; now it is roughly a 50/50 split. At HTA, staff members talked about how to help parents decide whether domestic or international was right for a family. While many families came to HTA and the other adoption agencies with a country already in mind, some families met with agency staff to help determine which countries they were eligible for and where they could get the type of child that they were comfortable adopting. Kate explained that in consultation meetings she would question families to find out what they meant when they had very general preferences about things like age or health. "The families that come in to [see] us request a healthy child and as young as possible," she said, "So, what does that mean? So, I always ask them, what is the maximum age that you would be open to? Usually it's 2 years old, or 18 months." Young children, though, are much less available than they have been in the past. Maria explains that she has to help figure out what kind of adoption might work for a family after she knows their preferences:

> Once they tell you what their priorities are for the child they are looking to adopt, it gets pretty clear. Like, if they want an infant, there is no country that will match them with a newborn unless they are Muslim [and therefore able to adopt from Morocco or Pakistan]. If the couple is not comfortable with openness, then they should go internationally. So, it's usually pretty easy to advise them once they tell you what they want.

According to Maria, there were certain preferences that signaled to her that one type of adoption may be more appropriate for a family than another. If the family is adamant that they want an infant, she knows that is not a possibility in international adoption unless they are Muslim; therefore, she might suggest that they go with a domestic adoption. On the other hand, she expressed that an international adoption would be more appropriate if a family was not comfortable with "openness" (in other words, an open adoption where the adoptive family will have contact with the birth mother).

Alexis, also at HTA, described how the shift from international to domestic happened in her agency:

> I think that for families before where you could get an 8 month old out of Guatemala, people were up for that. Or a kid from an orphanage in Vietnam, where the caretakers cared and they had cribs and new toys and were coming home under 1. But, now, like where do you get an 8 month old or a one year old? If you can't cope with the issues that a child is going to have coming out of institution at 2 or 4, then people are going to domestic.

Agencies may suggest domestic adoption for parents who are not prepared to adopt a slightly older child that may have special needs related to prolonged institutionalization. But going domestic was only an option at HTA and CHA where there were existing domestic programs that they could move flexible parents to if that seemed to be the most successful path to adoption.

Flexibility was also important for parents who were deciding between different types of international adoption programs. For example, in a consultation that Kate did with a family that was early in the process, she discussed with them the potential of switching programs. The family was Korean-American and had looked into adopting from Korea. They explained that they had heard about adopting from Korea from a friend who had adopted a child from there a few years ago. They had experienced fertility issues leading them to want to adopt and Korea seemed like the best option. They came to meet with Kate because the agency they had contacted about the Korea program was not local, and they needed another agency that could complete their homestudy for them. Kate went through some of the general information about homestudies and documents with them, and at some point the woman stopped her and asked if there was any case where the homestudy wouldn't work if they decided to switch programs. Kate explained that she hadn't encountered that issue before, but sometimes an agency that is full service and located in the area might want to do the homestudy themselves. In response to this new information, the woman asked, "well, what programs do you run?" Kate told the couple about the China program, though the wait was 7-9 years, and also mentioned a new program that the agency had just opened in the Philippines. It seemed that the couple was interested in making HTA a one-stop shop for their adoption. In this case, flexibility was not a solution for shortage; rather, the uncertain nature of adoption made the couple feel more comfortable pursuing an

adoption with a single agency, even if that mean being flexible and choosing a different country program.

Flexibility was important at HTA, not only at the beginning of the adoption process, but also for families that had already been queued for China for quite a long time. HTA had been successful in moving some families from the China queue to either their own domestic program or to a Russia program run by a partner agency. Laurie explained:

> [We] say to people: based on the new information, China is no longer 5 years, it's 7 years. Do you want to reconsider and talk to us about domestic? Come in, no charge, just talk to Alexis about whether you'd be a candidate for that, because some people aren't. They choose international so they will not know the birthmother, so they're not the right candidate.

Alternatively, Russian adoption had become a good option for families that really wanted an Asian child, but had been waiting for years for a child from China:

> We've had great success. We've had three families in a row, boom, boom, boom, getting Asian children and we have a family there now. And, um, the agencies that we work with…they don't have people who want Asian children. Not so much in the Midwest, that's not what they're requesting. They're requesting the blond or the brown-haired, and we see an Asian kid and think Oh my god, we have families like this. So, it's trying to educate families that instead of waiting six years [they can do this].

Helping parents to be more flexible, for Laurie, is about educating them and giving them more options. The organization's particular programs, though, structure the options that are presented to parents, so that flexibility does not encompass the same options at all agencies. Parental choices also structure agency practices: as parents accept certain options, these options become part of the realm of possibility for future families. At HTA, for example, once it became clear that adopting an Asian child from Russia was an acceptable substitution for one family, it became an option for other families still in the queue.

In contrast to HTA and CHA, International Adoption Together did not run their own domestic program, so parents that worked with IAT were unlikely to be offered private domestic adoption as an option. Whereas parents who had waited a long time in the China queue at HTA might be offered the option of a domestic adoption or an adoption of an Asian child from Russia, parents at IAT were more likely to complete a special needs adoption from China. IAT ran several international adoption programs, including a a special needs program that allowed parents who had initially been interested in the adoption of a so-called "healthy child" to instead pursue the adoption of a child with minor special needs from China. The program was so successful that it was making up for the losses experienced in several other programs. As Elaina noted, "our numbers are going down and going up at the same time, it's just the type of adoptions are different." The benefit of the special needs program was that the time from application to placement was less than one year, but IAT emphasized that they would not push families to consider this program unless they thought they could handle a special needs child. At IAT parents had to be flexible not just in the type of program they were open to, but also, if they

chose the special needs program, in the type of child they were willing to adopt. This is a topic I consider in depth in Chapter 5.

At CHA the structure of options was quite different than that at IAT or HTA because they ran both a domestic program and a number of international country programs. Flexibility was still important within the international adoption programs, but in contrast to HTA there were many more options of in-house programs for prospective parents to move to if their initial choice was not ideal. An important distinction here, too, was that a growing proportion of Shannon's clients were part of what she called a Christian orphan care movement, making them more willing to accept any type of child. She explained this as a significant change in the clients her agency was serving:

> In Christian agencies, it is often noted that we are in the midst of a Christian orphan care movement. I think that's accurate. It used to be that, almost exclusively, the people interested in international adoption were infertile couples. They still are. But there's a new group of people who are interested in caring for orphans, and they'll add a seventh member to their family. So the type of client has changed. That doesn't mean that the old type of client is gone. It just means that we have a new additional client, which is the Christian motivated by compassion, who already has four or five kids and wants to add more.

Later in our interview, Shannon suggested that, because they are motivated by compassion, these types of clients were far more likely to adopt transracially. She specifically mentioned adoptions from Africa by these clients, and told me that she expected that most adoptions to her agency would soon be of "non-white" children. She said:

> And at this point, I think we'll probably cross a boundary over the next two or three years where the majority of children in our agency are non-white and partly that's because that the Christian movement to care for children who are orphaned. It happens to be that the majority of the world's orphans live in non-white countries.

The clients that Shannon refers to that are willing to cross racial boundaries to adopt orphaned children are part of a larger Evangelical adoption movement where "a Biblical doctrine and practice of adoption is viewed as a primary imperative and response to the Biblical call to assist orphans, the fatherless, and the poor" (Smolin 2011-2012:269). This movement has been highly criticized for inadvertently inflating demand for children, and leading to exploitative practices (Joyce 2011, 2013; Smolin 2011-2012).

Imagining the Emotionally Priceless Child

Although flexibility was defined differently in each of the agencies, all agencies encouraged parents to be open and flexible within the confines of the programs that they offered, and often suggested programs from outside of their agencies. Parents were told that the more options they were open to, the more certain they could be that they would have a successful adoption. Interestingly, though, there was a limit to flexibility and a point at which flexibility became suspect. Agency staff members expressed concerns about parents that were willing to

open themselves to options that did not seem to be the right fit for their families. This became particularly concerning when parents abruptly changed the race of the child they were interested in. Since agencies need to place as many children as possible to ensure their lasting viability in a market characterized by shortage, we might expect them to push certain programs if they thought they were a good fit for a particular family. I found, though, that rather than strongly encouraging parents to select certain programs, agency staff wanted to educate families about options and empower them to make their own choices.

Since agency staff valued and encouraged flexibility, I expected to find that they would be frustrated with parents who were narrow in their qualifications for the type of child they were willing to adopt. However, agency staff expressed understanding for parents who choose limited options because a) they do not want to be responsible for a failed adoption, b) they feel strongly that parents should only adopt a child that they feel fits well with their family, and c) a good fit reflects the best interests of the child. When I asked Shannon at CHA whether it was frustrating to her that some parents approached her with specific desires for the type of child they wanted to adopt, she explained that she could understand this type of reaction from her clients:

> It's not frustrating, it's understandable….I'm not frustrated with those families, but I believe bigger. You know, I definitely believe that it can be beautiful, successful and great if they try something else. So, obviously all of our social workers will try to widen the circle for these families, not only because this is a calling and a ministry, but because it increases the success of what they are looking for and it also increases the chances of these waiting children to be adopted…We all share this bigger vision that all these children deserve families. And we're often successful at getting those families to widen their circle. You know, almost everyone wants as young as they can get a child, doesn't always have to be healthy, doesn't always have to be white, but does have to be young.

Shannon understood the reasons that some parents might not want to take on certain types of children, but she also felt that expanding their options was important for the agency's larger vision of child welfare. She suggested that there were certain boundaries of flexibility that many parents would not cross, but that within those boundaries there was often room for some movement. Age, for Shannon, was the most important boundary of flexibility. Within that boundary, adoption social workers were able to help parents choose to adopt a child of a different race or with a different health status.

Laurie, similarly, expressed that she could understand why certain families were not able to be flexible about their choices. For Laurie, though, it was morally wrong to push a family outside of their comfort zone. This sentiment was something I heard repeated by many of my interviewees. Interviewees felt that it would be wrong to push parents to accept a type of child that they did not want or that was not appropriate for their family situation, because this would be unfair to the child and could lead to a less successful adoption—or even an adoption disruption. Laurie wanted families to be honest with her about what they wanted because it was likely to lead to more successful adoptions:

> I am in favor that when families come in, we say to them right away we're the people you can be honest with: if you want a white child, tell me you want a white child. Let's not beat around the bush…And if they say I only want a white baby, well then let's talk about

> where you're going to find a white child….What we're trying to avoid is what happened in adoptions in the past and I'm not badmouthing them at all…We just didn't teach the children that if you look in the mirror you look different, and you are Asian. Now we do that, and we are really happy that we do it. But, it, it's limited. Families can only do so much. So, that's why if they don't look to resources, how else can they do it? Um, so I want families to be honest with us about what child they want to adopt.

Laurie wanted parents to be honest and open about their preferences so that families could be sure that they were comfortable with the type of child they were going to raise. "I think it starts with," she said, "is the child matched to what you feel competent to raise?" She recognized that families could really only do so much outside of their comfort zones and that all she could do was provide them with the resources they needed to make the choices that were appropriate for their families. By asking parents what is within their "comfort zone," agencies elicit from parents their definition of the emotionally priceless child. They uncover an implicit hierarchy of preferences across race, health, and age that is otherwise inaccessible. That is, parents must imagine the type of child with whom they can form an immediate emotional bond.

Indeed, at various times during the adoption process, parents are prompted to imagine their future child in their lives. During homestudy interviews, parents are asked about their own childhoods, their views on parenting, and how their future child will fit into their lives. At adoption orientations, like the one at International Adoption Together, parents are exposed to the stories of families who have adopted children, an exercise that prompts them to envision a future version of themselves. A particularly strong example of this envisioning of the future happens in adoption classes at Helping through Adoption. One of the required seminars teaches parents about how to talk to their children about adoption at different stages in their lives, how to talk to others outside of the family about adoption, and issues related to attachment. The seminar is a visibly emotional experience for parents at different points as they imagine their future children. When I attended the seminar run by Laurie, she taught families about what to expect when they bring their new child home with them and about how to establish trust and attachment with their children. She told the parents in attendance, "young babies learn to trust, we can't assume that was the case for any baby" and that this is true not just for babies, but every adopted child: "We have to treat every child as if they are new born to our family." In teaching adoptive parents about the importance of trust, Laurie simultaneously encourages parents to think about emotional attachment. Though the focus is on creating attachment for the child, parents are also encouraged to imagine themselves as parents.

Later on, when Laurie was teaching the parents about some of the ways that children may explore their adoption story at various points in their development, she told parents that at around age 3, 4, and 5 "your kids are going to start to want to be like you and you should validate the things that they say to you." She looked at one of the men in the room and said "daddy, our hands are the same," she looked at his wife and said, "we like the same things, mommy, we have the same favorite color." As I looked around the room, many of the parents were smiling. As Laurie interpellates prospective parents into the subject position of adoptive parents, they not only imagine themselves as mom and dad, but also imagine the child that is the object of their affection. Though adoption forms may ask parents to specify the type of child they are interested in adopting, it is in and through these types of emotionally connected experiences that parents

can really envision their future children and begin to draw boundaries around the type of child they can imagine as their own.

Race and the Limits of Flexibility

Imagining the emotionally priceless child and the boundaries of flexibility becomes particularly fraught around issues of race. Agency staff like Alexis said that they found parents who were open to any race or ethnicity to be the easiest to work with: "I, of course, love the families who are open to any ethnicity." However, Helping through Adoption staff made special efforts to ensure that parents had thought through issues of raising a child of a different race before making the decision to adopt transracially. At one of the required Helping through Adoption classes, Alexis walks parents through an activity that encourages them to imagine how their transracially adopted child will fit into their social world. She places a set of beads in the middle of the table, each color representing a different race or ethnicity, and walks the parents through a series of questions about the people in their lives, questions like: Who is your doctor? Who is your best friend? Who are the majority of your coworkers? As she asks each question parents are directed to choose a bead that corresponds with the race of the person they think of. By the end of the activity, each individual has a pile of beads that represents their social circles. Alexis then uses this as a jumping off point for talking about how parents can diversify their social circles and forge connections to people that share a race or ethnicity with their child. This activity, and the class it was part of, became particularly meaningful for some of the parents who were adopting domestically, as it often resulted in them changing their mind about a transracial placement after realizing the limits of their social connections.

Issues of flexibility around race came up more frequently in staff conversations with parents at HTA who were adopting domestically. This is, perhaps, because parents do not need to specify race when picking a transnational adoption program. They can instead communicate their racial preferences indirectly through program choice. In domestic adoption, though, parents must specify the types of birth mothers that they are open to, leading to more conversations around issues of race. One particularly difficult situation came up during my fieldwork, though, that demonstrates how substitution on the basis of race, in this case measured by skin color, can conflict with an agency's commitment to the best interests of the child. A couple who had been waiting for a domestic adoption responded to an email about a new program that HTA was opening in the Phillipines by filling out an application to switch to the new international program. On their application they indicated, under the field that asked them about preferences for their child, that they wanted to adopt a child with lighter skin. The staff members in the office were particularly concerned about this answer because they would not fulfill such a preference. Further, they were worried that specifying a lighter skin color was a red flag that this family should not be matched with this particular program. Laurie and Maria decided that when the family came in to meet to talk about the international program, they would question why they had indicated the desire for a lighter-skinned child.

I sat in on the meeting and watched as Laurie asked the couple: "We noticed that you wrote on your forms that you'd like to adopt a child with lighter skin, can you tell me a little bit about why?" She spoke in a calm voice with no judgment, using an inviting tone asking them to describe their experience. Neither the man nor the woman seemed particularly taken aback by the question. The woman gave a short answer—that she thought the baby would look more like

them. Her husband had barely spoken for the rest of the meeting—occasionally mumbling or nodding in agreement—but now he sat up and spoke confidently. He explained that they felt that if they adopted a child with lighter skin, the child would not look as different from them and they might get fewer questions about whether the child was theirs or not. He emphasized that he thought that this would make things easier for the child if the child was not constantly made aware that s/he was different and adopted. However, they were open to adopting a child with darker skin. Laurie countered what the prospective adoptive father had said and explained that even if the child looked more like them, they would need to deal with the fact that the child was adopted. She said that sometimes having a child that looks more like you makes it easier to ignore those things, but that they are things that exist for all adopted children all the time. The father said that he understood. She explained to them also that they can't request a particular type of child for the family, and that they would have to be comfortable knowing that they may end up with a darker skinned child. By the end of the meeting the parents and Laurie had agreed that the parents should sign up for some classes and do some reading about transracial adoption if this program was something that they were interested in.

After the meeting I asked Laurie what she thought about what had happened. She expressed to me that she wondered whether the issue was that the application asks parents for a preference. When parents are asked to have a preference, then they may have to express that preference even if it is not a hard and fast preference. Once she understood that the family was just misinformed and was open to a child with darker skin, she felt secure in allowing them to proceed with the program. On other occasions when parents expressed racial preference, agency staff were supportive and did not encourage parents to expand their options, suggesting an affirmation of racial boundaries. For example, when Maria met with a prospective parent who was exploring a number of different programs, she was supportive of the woman's repeated claims that she just could not adopt a Black child. The woman said it was not that she had anything against Black people, that in fact many of her friends, even her best friend, were Black. It was just that she was concerned that if she had a black child it would create distance between her and the child. In talking about these issues, she asked Maria, "do you understand why?" Maria responded with: "we support you in whatever you choose, and yes, we understand" and that she should "only do what is right for you and your family" and what you can handle. Rather than pushing this client to think about why she felt she "could not handle" a Black child, Maria was supportive of her decisions and tried to help her to find a program where she could adopt a white child.

Sometimes, after meetings like this, agency staff would talk about how uncomfortable they felt with these families' racial preferences, but they believed it was wrong to push families beyond their stated preferences. In explaining to me why it was so important that families think about the type of child they were competent to raise, Laurie told me to think about how much you take away from a child who is adopted and how important it was, given that, to ensure that they were placed in a home with parents who had thought about the issues that the children would face in the future, particularly issues related to transracial adoption. "The families and the children that do better are the ones that think about all of those things," she said, "they just do. And the families that, you know, call me three years later are the ones that haven't thought about those things…so we should be trying to figure out which is the right match for each family and not judge it." Laurie, like many of the other staff members I interviewed, felt a strong moral commitment to the well being of the children that she placed through adoption. Even if agency

staff felt sometimes that the decisions of parents against transracial adoption were rooted in racism, they did not want to make a transracial placement with a family that would not appropriately talk about racial differences. In this way, race became a particularly salient boundary to flexibility, one that agencies were not willing to push parents beyond. In the next chapter, I will show how health status and physical special needs also became a boundary beyond which adoption agencies were unwilling to push parents.

Conclusion

As a result of massive changes in international adoption since 2004, there are now fewer children available for adoption, the types of children that are most desirable to adoptive parents are the least available, and the time from application to adoptive placement has significantly increased. Using interviews from staff members at four adoption agencies in California, this chapter addressed how adoption agencies manage uncertainty and shortage in the transnational adoption economy. In an economy characterized by shortage (Kornai and Weibull 1978), unless parents choose to leave adoption altogether, they are faced with the choice of either queuing to receive the child they most desire or choosing a child that is different from the child they originally hoped for. Choosing programs with longer waiting times, or comparatively longer queues, is undesirable because 1) the business model of agencies relies on regular client replacement rates to ensure financial stability, 2) the state of the market suggests that queues are uncertain and may not lead to successful adoptions, 3) parents who queue for a long period of time are more likely to decide not to adopt, and 4) agencies have seen firsthand the disappointment that results from long queuing times and therefore want to assist parents in completing adoptions as quickly as possible. Given the undesirability of queuing, substitution becomes an attractive alternative for adoptive parents. Agencies educate and empower parents to make choices about the type of substitution that is most acceptable for their family.

The options that are available in any one agency, though, create boundaries for the types of choices that parents make. I show that there is a certain type of path dependency in the options available to adoptive parents. Parents were encouraged by agency staff to be open about the different types of children they were willing to adopt, but the kinds of programs available in any particular agency structured the options that were realistically available to parents. Taken together, these findings suggest that if similar parents enter into different agencies, the type of child that they eventually adopt may be structured by the original options that were available to them. For example, if parents are faced with long waiting times in international adoption, they may only have the chance to explore domestic adoption if they have already connected with an agency that has experience in this area. In contrast, if they are exclusively working with an agency that offers international adoption, they may be encouraged to choose a program with the shortest waiting time. This shows that despite the emphasis on personal choices in existing adoption literature, these choices are mediated by organizations.

Finally, I demonstrate how the emphasis on flexibility in adoption decision making comes up against salient racial boundaries. Staff members encourage parents to be as open as possible in considering their options, but feel that it is inappropriate to push parents beyond what they call “their comfort zone.” Because of their strong commitment to the welfare of the adopted child, adoption agencies feel that it is ethically wrong to match prospective parents with children they are not competent to raise. In particular, race and health status (which I will explore in Chapter 5) become particularly salient boundaries for parental preferences, boundaries beyond

which agencies do not encourage flexibility. In contrast to existing literature on adoption that has stressed the individual nature of parents' adoption choices, I show that parents' choices are mediated within an organizational context where business imperatives and moral commitments to children and family welfare intermingle.

Chapter 5 | Placing China's Waiting Children: Matching Parents and Children through Special Needs Adoption

Statistics on the number of adoptions from China in recent years tell a familiar story—the rate of adoptions has slowed dramatically. The most recent data on worldwide international adoptions from China shows a decline from 14,496 in 2005 to, 5,085 in 2009, in other words a net decline of 9,411 adoptions during that time period alone (Selman 2010). This decline is significant for the landscape of international adoption as a whole, as China has historically been the top sending country for children adopted abroad worldwide, but within these statistics lies an even more important story about the changing face of transnational adoption. The numbers of adoptions overall from China have declined, while the characteristics of the children who are being placed have also changed dramatically—the majority of children now adopted from China carry a special needs designation and are part of China's Waiting Child program.

The "healthy,"[34] young girls who were quickly and easily adopted from China in the 1990s are quite simply no longer available for international adoption, or if and when they are, families are guaranteed to wait for nearly a decade for a placement. Children adopted from China today are more likely to be older, 10.9% were over the age of 5 in 2009 versus 1.4% in 2005, and they are more likely to be male, 5% in 2005 versus 26% in 2009 (Selman 2012:8). Even more staggering, though, has been the rise in the proportion of children labeled as special needs—instead of being "healthy" children, most of the children adopted today have documented physical, medical, or developmental disabilities. The percentage of children adopted to the United States from China who carry the special needs designation has more than quadrupled between 2005-2009. While only 14% of children had a special needs designation in 2005, that proportion rose to 42% in 2007 (Selman 2012:8). By 2009 the majority of children (61%) adopted from China came through the Waiting Child Program, a state-sponsored program that seeks to place children with minor and substantial physical and developmental disabilities (Selman 2012:8).

The increase in special needs adoptions is primarily the result of parents' and agencies response to the decrease in availability of children without the special needs designation[35]; a decrease caused by changes on the sending side, in China. Shifting parents who would have

[34] While adoption agencies and researchers on adoption both juxtapose so-called healthy children with those with special needs, I use the term "healthy" in quotation marks to signal the inaccuracy of this descriptor in this dichotomy. Children who carry a special needs diagnosis are not necessarily unhealthy, and those who do not carry this label are not necessarily free of special needs. This is to say that children with a special needs designation may often be quite physically healthy, but have a single minor physical ailment, or an unnoticeable or easily repaired birth defect. On the other hand, many children that come out of institutional care have special needs related to education, emotional regulation, and attachment that may be unknown at the time of adoption. In this way, contrasting "healthy" children with those with special needs is confusing, but because these are the labels used in the field, I use them with the addition of quotation marks to draw into question the use of the labels in this way.

[35] The agencies (with the exception of Christian Home Adoption) rarely worked with Evangelical Christians and parents in my study did not identify as part of this movement. Wang (2016), though, connects a portion of the increase in special needs adoptions to the American Evangelical adoption movement. In Wang's work, she describes how Evangelical Christians working in China to prepare special needs children for adoption abroad are part of a worldwide movement to promote international adoption, she explains that: "Rather than attempting to alleviate systemic issues of poverty and inequality that deprive children of homes in their birth countries, this movement frames adoption by Western families as the main solution to severe global economic disparities" (130).

normally queued for a healthy infant girl to China's Waiting Child Program[36] has balanced some of the decline in adoptions from China in recent years. Very few scholars have addressed the significant change in the desirability of special needs children from China. A few key works have explored the sending side of Chinese adoption—by documenting how special needs children become adoptable, and desirable before becoming available to American parents.[37] For example, Leslie Wang (2016) demonstrates how children in orphanages are reared, cared for, and provided medical treatment in an effort to increase their chances of being adopted by American parents. While children are produced as adoptable by aid organizations and orphanages in China, much work goes into making special needs adoption a desirable path for American parents in the adoption agencies that assist parents in the United States. Raleigh and Katz Rothman (2014) have explored the rise of what one of Raleigh's interviewees called the "cleft lip and palate program" in China, they explain that the increase in the adoption of children with minor special needs shows stratification on the basis of stigma—those children with less stigma associated with their disability are more likely to be adopted.

For parents who seek a young, quickly available, healthy, racially flexible child, the China Waiting Child program has become a good compromise where most desires can be matched. In what follows, I investigate the rise of special needs adoption from China, how special needs is (re)defined as a desirable category, and the consequences of increasing popularity of special needs adoption for agencies and parents. I return here to the model of a shortage economy that I introduced in Chapter 4 and take adoption from China as a case study to show how adoption agencies manage shortage in their interactions with parents. In an economy of shortage that has no pricing mechanism, how does demand shift from one type of a child to another? How do children who have always been available for adoption, but unwanted, become the objects of parental desire? What is the process by which parents and children are matched? And what role does the adoption agency, as an organization that facilitates family building, play in this process of rearticulating desire?

Prospective adoptive parents learn about the desirability of China's Waiting Child program through acquaintances, online message boards, special needs advocacy groups, and the adoption agencies that lead them through the process of adoption. This chapter considers the adoption agency as the most formalized of the channels through which parents learn about special needs adoption from China. In analyzing the process by which Chinese children are matched with adoptive parents, I show two parallel processes of valuation in two locations—the differentiation of worthy and unworthy adoptive parents by the Chinese government, and the reevaluation of special needs children as desirable by adoption agencies and adoptive parents. I return to and more fully develop an idea that I alluded to in Chapter 4, that of actors' orientation toward the future in the transnational adoption economy. In the previous chapter, I showed how adoption agencies encourage clients to imagine themselves and their future children as a way of accessing parental preferences for and comfort level with adopting certain types of children. In this chapter, I focus on issues of temporality and show how actors in different areas of transnational adoption make decisions with a focus on the future. I argue that a future orientation is key to (re)defining the special needs child as desirable and as worthy of having his/her best

[36] The official China program that places children with the special needs designation.

[37] Wang (2016) has discussed how aid organizations assist special needs children in becoming desirable to American parents. Júlia Vich-Bertran (2013), in an unpublished conference paper, has investigated how special needs children are circulated and arrive in orphanages where they are eventually adopted by parents from abroad.

interests met through adoption. Throughout this chapter, I use insights from Jens Beckert's (2011, 2013) work on fictional expectations, to show how actors in different areas of the transnational adoption economy evaluate children and parents through a future-oriented lens.

After describing the reasons for the availability of special needs children for adoption and outlining China's Waiting Child program, I show how the Chinese government uses a vision of the future best interests of the child to differentiate the worthiness of different types of adoptive parents. Next, I show how children with a minor special needs diagnosis become valuable in the adoption economy. I argue that the young age of many available children, the speed with which they can be adopted, and the successful (re)definition work that frames "special needs" as manageable combine to create children that are easily imagined as part of American families. Finally, I explore the ways in which eligible parents are matched with special needs children in a process that reflects strong preferences and resulting competition for certain types of children.

The Rise of Special Needs Adoption

In Chapter 2 of this dissertation, I described the dramatic increase of transnational adoptions from China to the United States in the 1990s and early 2000s and the subsequent decline after a peak of adoptions from China in 2005. I traced the downturn of Chinese transnational adoption in 2006 to an adoption scandal in the Hunan province that unearthed evidence of baby-trafficking and significantly reduced the number of children sent abroad for adoption (Mong 2011). In the wake of this change, China has also seen a significant increase in the number of children that are placed domestically, one of the most significant factors that has contributed to the decrease in healthy, young girls available for adoption. As a narrative report of adoption statistics from the United States Bureau of Consular Affairs explains, during the last decade "the Chinese government increased its efforts to promote the domestic adoption of children in need of a permanent home. As a result, some 20,000 to 30,000 children are now placed domestically in China each year" (Bureau of Consular Affairs 2016: 3).

Kay Johnson (2016) has complicated earlier understandings of adoption from China. She argues that in contrast to the predominant view that the strong preference for sons made Chinese girls unwanted, "many Chinese wanted to adopt girls and that persistent son preference did not preclude the desire for daughters, even among those who felt pressured to relinquish girls under the harsh coercion of birth planning campaigns" (10). Still, though, many Chinese birth mothers were forced to abandon their daughters because of the harsh one child policy. Johnson (2016) finds that during the period of a great rise in international adoption from China, there were also significant levels of domestic adoption, which is not well-known even in China where these types of adoptions were often hidden from birth planning officials. Johnson's research suggests that the low level of availability of healthy Chinese girls for international adoption, and also for domestic adoption, is connected to the decrease in abandonment of Chinese girls since 2005. Indeed, she finds that in the same area where abandonment was prevalent in the 1990s, her research in 2008-2012 turned up no more than a few cases of abandonment (120). Wang (2016) shows additional evidence of the sharp drop in the availability of healthy girls. In her visits to a number of orphanages between 2005 and 2014 she saw few available healthy girls, she explains, "it quickly became apparent that due to their immense desirability for adoption—both internationally and domestically—healthy girls generally leave institutions quite early" (8).

The demand for healthy babies from China has not shifted, but as a result of the changes in the availability of these children, there has been a dramatic increase in parents from the United States adopting children with special needs, because those are the children most readily available from Chinese orphanages. As a (2016) narrative report of adoption statistics from the United States Bureau of Consular Affairs explains:

> There has been a growing trend in the international placement of children with special needs, as well as those who are older and/or are part of sibling groups. For example, the United States has observed that the profile of Chinese adoptees changed from 95 percent healthy girls in 2005 to more than 90 percent special needs children today, with boys constituting one third of adoptees to the United States. These changes reflect…the overall positive changes made to the child welfare system in China over the last decade (3).

The program that places special needs children from China, the Waiting Child Program, was officially launched in 2000, but the number of non-special needs placements still far outweighed special needs placements at that time (Wang 2016). Parents then continued to desire the healthy, primarily female infants that were widely available for adoption; even though special needs children have always been available for adoption in China, parents have not always desired to adopt them. Wang (2016), though, shows that there has also been a coinciding increase in the number of children available that have special needs caused by birth defects. She explains that:

> Meteoric economic growth has been accompanied by a rapid increase in the number of children born with congenital illnesses and disabilities. Between 2001 and 2006 birth defects jumped by nearly 40 percent, an increase that many have attributed to environmental pollutants, particularly in coal-producing regions. The Chinese government estimates that now every year between 800,000 and 1.2 million babies are born with birth defects of which 30 to 40 percent are life threatening. With few financial, medical, or social supports available for families with special needs offspring, many of these children have also been abandoned to state care (6-7).

Sarah Dorow's (2006) earlier work suggests not only that children with special needs are left in state care because of lack of resources, but also that their placement for international adoption is somewhat troublesome to the people she met working in orphanages in China. In her work she found that abandoned and "special needs" children often were viewed as a burden on Chinese parents that did not have the material resources to care for them, but that "A number of people in China expressed some discomfort at sending handicapped children abroad who did not properly embody the suzhi (quality) of a modernizing Chinese population" (Dorow 2006:79). Wang (2016) also discusses how "In the contemporary period, parental preferences for perfect offspring align well with the Chinese government's goal of producing a new generation of so-called "high quality" (suzhi gao) citizen-workers who can further the country's global economic and political ambitions" (7). Children with special needs may not fit well into this widespread idea of suzhi and in combination with having no access to resources to treat medical, physical, or developmental special needs, many children are left to state care.

Despite the change in the availability of so-called healthy babies, China has remained one of the top sending countries for children adopted from abroad as special needs adoption through China's Waiting Child Program has largely replaced the traditional adoptions of the 90s and early 2000s. Children who are part of the Waiting Child Program fall into two categories, special needs and special focus. Those who carry a special needs diagnosis are typically the more desirable children, those with minor, and often correctable, physical special needs—these conditions can range from more minor heart defects, to cleft lip or palate, missing digits, and nevus or other birthmarks among other minor medical diagnoses. There are three reasons why a child may be considered special focus, all indicators that a child is more difficult to place: 1. the child has particularly significant medical, physical, emotional, or developmental special needs that require substantial management or medical care; 2. the child is over the age of 7; 3. the child has been on the special needs list for 60 days without placement. Even if there are still many special focus children that remain in state care (Wang 2016), the increase in the adoption of children with minor special needs has been staggering. This chapter explores how new desire for these special needs children is produced in an economy characterized by shortage.

In the earlier period of international adoption when there were many available healthy babies from China, special needs children didn't fit well into American ideas of desire. Dorow's (2006) research (done prior to 2006) suggests that despite an increased effort to place special needs children with policy changes in 2002, special needs adoption prior to 2006 was largely a "special channel" for transnational adoption, "special-needs children are on an increasingly specialized track within or between agencies, requiring creative incentives to offset the "risks" parents will be taking" (77). Though this observation remains true for children with significant physical and developmental disabilities, there has been a new interest in children with minor special needs because of the larger context of shortage in transnational adoption. In the 1990s and early 2000s, it was "easier for *healthy* children to embody the right cultural stuff for imagined relocation from China to the United States" (Dorow 2006:79). Though it still may be "easier" for parents and agencies to imagine the adoption of healthy children, there has been a massive shift that has created special needs adoption as the norm. As I will argue here, in the context of shortage, a short time to adoption paired with the possibility of adopting a young Asian child is enough to offset the potential undesirability of minor special needs.

Certain Children for Certain Parents

While more lenient in terms of qualifications than some other international adoption programs, the China Waiting Child program has strict regulations regarding what types of parents can and cannot adopt. Additionally, parents who are not eligible to adopt children with minor special needs are able to adopt children who are older, and who have more significant disabilities from the special focus list. Even before the adoption economy was characterized by a shortage of young, healthy babies, Sarah Dorow (2006) found that "as with the selection of children into the adoption system, bureaucratic clarity and market competition spell the liminality and exclusion of particular kinds of parents" (84). As the international adoption economy has become even more competitive over time, China's requirements have become even stricter for those interested in adopting. Just as families evaluate the desirability of certain types of children, the Chinese government works as a gatekeeper that evaluates the desirability of certain types of parents. But what drives this differentiation of individuals into those who are

more or less worthy of becoming parents of an adopted child? We can theoretically account for this type of differentiation by understanding these calculations as measures of what types of people are likely to become "good parents" for Chinese children in the future. I argue that just as parents are future-oriented in their calculations of what type of child they will be able to emotionally connect with, China's government adoption authority, the China Center for Children's Welfare and Adoption (CCCWA), qualifies parents along a number of characteristics that predict their future ability to serve the best interests of the adoptable child.

The qualification of parents by CCCWA, especially increased restrictions in 2007, is a bureaucratic response to a mismatch between supply and demand, but in order to explain the exclusion of particular parents and the inclusion of others, CCCWA relies on an approach that distinguishes between higher and lower quality parents. Jens Beckert's (2013) work on fictional expectations provides an important framework for understanding how and why the CCCWA evaluates parents in the way that it does. These fictional expectations are "images of some future state of the world or course of events that are cognitively accessible in the present through mental representation" (Beckert 2013:220). In the case of calculating the worthiness of adoptive parents, the CCCWA imagines a future fictional state of parenthood and makes decisions about worthiness on the basis of what parental characteristics might have the best chance, in their view, of serving the best interests of the adopted child.

In late 2006, when new regulations specifying criteria for adoptive parents were released, Belluck and Yardley (2006), published an article in the New York Times that connected the more stringent qualifications for parents to the Chinese government's desire to "recruit adoptive families with qualities that Chinese officials believe will provide the greatest chance that children will be raised by healthy, economically stable parents." In this vein, the CCCWA has repeatedly revised criteria for adoptive parents to, in their view, reduce the demand for adoptable children, while simultaneously providing the best homes for future adopted children. Additionally, those parents who are not eligible to adopt the children who are the most desirable, are offered children who are less desirable—often those who are older, or more significantly disabled. In this way, the CCCWA engages in a process of commensuration where more valuable parents are matched with more valuable children, and parents who are less desirable are matched with those children who are left behind. This process of evaluating the worthiness of parents relies on an imagined narrative about the future adoptive parent and creates a system in which certain kinds of parents are deemed worthy of adopting children, while others are excluded entirely.

Currently, only heterosexual married couples and single women are eligible to apply to adopt children from China, with same-sex couples and single men being excluded entirely. Ideologies of gender and care undoubtedly drive the inclusion of single mothers, but not single fathers. The eligibility of single mothers as potential adopters from China has long been an area of frequent policy change—the China Center for Children's Welfare and Adoption (CCCWA) reduced the total of singles adoptions to only 5% in 2001 (Wang 2016:68), single women were then banned from adopting beginning in 2007, and it wasn't until 2011 that single women were allowed to adopt again, but at that time they were only permitted to adopt children from the special focus list, those children with more significant needs (Joint Council 2011). Vivian, the Director at International Adoption Together, voiced her frustration with stricter criteria and fewer choices for single mothers: "well, she said, they have opened that back up again in China, in their infinite wisdom, [they] have decided that on a very select case-by-case basis they may

consider singles for what they call special focus children. These are children with serious special needs, so singles who have the least amount of resources can get the most disabled kids." In other words, the CCCWA only permits less desirable applicants: single mothers, to adopt less desirable children: those with significant special needs. To Vivian this type of matching is harmful because it places children who are most significantly in need of resources in the custody of single women who are less likely to have access to the resources available to a married couple. In other words, she suggests that level of resources for provision of care to children with significant disabilities should determine who can and cannot adopt, not family structure. Though, to the CCCWA the more stringent qualifications for single parents are rationally based, as Belluck and Yardley (2006) note, the historical exclusion of single parents and quotas for the number of single parents allowed to adopt is based on the "theory that if a single parent dies, the child has no other parent to turn to." Again, here, the criteria point to a forward-looking orientation that seeks to fulfill an imagined future that is most stable for the adopted child.

In March 2015, China expanded the choices available for single mothers and allowed them to adopt children with minor and/or correctable special needs. Though single women are now able to adopt from the same pool of children as married couples, the requirements for single women are more substantial. Table 4 draws on data from Holt International to show the various requirements for adoption by both married couples and single women, note that single men and same-sex couples remain barred from adopting from China. The characteristics of prospective parents that qualify or disqualify applicants include parental age, marital status, family size, income, body mass index (BMI), health, and history of arrest. As the chart shows, single women may have a maximum age difference of 45 years with the child, versus 50 years for married couples. Furthermore, single women are subject to stronger restrictions on the number of children already in their family, and to a higher level of income than those who are married. Strict restrictions on body mass index (BMI) (as an indicator of overall predicted health), health (see extensive list of health conditions listed below), and history of arrest are applicable to both single women and married couples.

The restrictions on who can and cannot adopt reflect a preference for married couples with moderate net worth and minimal health problems. Guidelines for eligibility can be confusing and difficult for prospective adopters who are new to the system, and serve to eliminate those deemed less desirable as parents by the CCCWA. In fact, many people are automatically eliminated from adopting from China based on their inability to fit the requirements for adoption from China at the outset. Ironically, adults with minor and significant physical limitations such as impairment of limbs, facial deformation, deafness and blindness are not eligible to adopt children from the special needs list, some of whom may share similar disabilities. Instead, these prospective parents and others who do not fit China's strict criteria, are often able to adopt children from the special focus list, suggesting a calculation that matches more desirable children (minor special needs) with more desirable parents, while simultaneously matching less desirable parents with the harder to place, less desirable children (special focus).

Table 4.
Requirements for Adoption from China by Married Couples and Single Women[38] (2015)

Characteristic	Requirement for Married Couples	Requirement for Single Women
Parental Age	• Minimum of 30 years of age at the time of application, this applies to both parents. • Age difference between youngest parent and child to be adopted cannot be larger than 50 years	• Minimum of 30 years of age at the time of application. • Age difference between child to be adopted and woman wishing to adopt can be no greater than 45 years.
Marital Status	• Parents must have been married to each other for a minimum of 2 years. • No more than two divorces per spouse will be considered on a case-by-case basis. • If either spouse has been previously married, the current marriage must have a duration of at least 5 years.	• Not applicable
Family Size	• China has no restrictions on the number of children in the home of the applicants.	• No more than two children under age 18 in the home of the applicant. • Youngest child must be older than 5.
Income[39]	• Minimum net worth $80,000 • At least one parent must have stable income and total family income must be equal to $10,000 per member of the household, including an additional $10,000 of income for the adoptee.	• Minimum net worth $100,000. • Income equal to $10,000 per member of the household, including an additional $10,000 of income for the adoptee and another $10,000 beyond that.
Body Mass Index (BMI)	• Applicants to the China adoption program cannot have a body mass index (BMI) that exceeds 40.	
Health[40]	• "If one spouse is healthy, certain medical histories or chronic conditions that are well controlled may be accepted on a case-by-case basis…In general, conditions that are minor and well controlled with medication, including anti-depressant/anxiety medications, are accepted with a positive medical letter." (Holt International 2016)	
History of Arrest	• "Families with an arrest history- even if expunged or if the arrest occurred as a minor- should contact the China program [at the agency] before applying" (Holt International 2016).	

[38] Data in this table is drawn from Hold International (http://www.holtinternational.org/adoption/criteria.php).
[39] China may show some leniency for income requirements for applicants that live in locations with low cost of living (Holt International 2016).
[40] Conditions that disqualify adopters: "AIDS; mental disability; infectious disease that is actively contagious; Blind in either eye; Hearing loss in both ears or loss of language function (those adopting children with hearing or language function loss are exempted from this requirement); Non-function or dysfunction of limbs or trunk caused by impairment, incomplete limbs, paralysis or deformation; Severe facial deformation; Severe diseases that require long-term treatment and that may affect life expectancy, including malignant tumors, lupus, nephrosis, epilepsy, etc; Major organ transplant within ten years; Schizophrenia; Severe mental disorders requiring medication for more than two years, including depression, mania, or anxiety neurosis" (Bureau of Consular Affairs, accessed 2015 available at https://travel.state.gov/content/adoptionsabroad/en/country-information/learn-about-a-country/china.html)

Eligibility is the first hurdle that prospective parents must cross on their way to adopting a child with special needs from China. If parents choose to proceed with the program their eligibility determines what type of child they may adopt. For parents who come to an agency unsure of where they would like to adopt from, consulting an eligibility grid that compares the various countries open for adoption is often the first step, often on their own or with the assistance of an adoption professional. Parents may determine their eligibility, but they must also desire to adopt a child with special needs when they have initially considered adopting a "healthy" child. In the section that follows I show how desire for the special needs designation is created through encounters with adoption agencies and how the integration of choice into the program makes it particularly attractive to prospective parents who have initially pursued the adoption of a child without special needs. In doing this, I again show how the decisions made within special needs adoption are often made on the basis of imagined fictions in which parents and agencies rely on a calculation of an imagined future in a decision characterized by significant uncertainty.

Redefining Desire

If in the 1990s and early 2000s Chinese children were a popular choice for adoptive parents because they were "not so needy or different that they [were] beyond desire and revaluation for white American families" (Dorrow 2006:80) children with minor special needs from China are desirable today because they fit these same criteria, while also being available for adoption extremely quickly when most other country programs have long wait times. The young age of many available special needs children, the speed with which they can be adopted, and the successful (re)definition work that frames "special needs" as manageable combine to create children that are almost as easily imagined as part of American families as the healthy, young, girls adopted from China in earlier years.

Stacy didn't plan to adopt a child with special needs before she went to an adoption agency to inquire about adopting a little girl from China, but nine months after she started the adoption process she brought home a one-year-old girl with a special needs designation through China's Waiting Child Program. Stacy had always wanted a little girl and after having two biological sons, she longed for a daughter. Her husband Andrew was Asian American, so it was important to Stacy that they adopt an "Asian looking baby." She told me: "I thought it would, like, fit better with our family. I thought that China had lots of extra girls available and it'd be easy to get one." Stacy found out, though, that her expectation that there were many baby girls available for adoption in China was outdated.

After asking for suggestions of good adoption agencies on a listserv at work, Stacy found an adoption agency that offered services for adoption from China that was a short drive away from her home. She laughed as she told me: "So I drove down to the agency and I said 'I'd like a baby girl from China, please' and they were like, well, it's a little more complicated than that." Stacy found out that if she wanted to adopt a child without a special needs diagnosis from China that she might wait anywhere from 7-9 years before her child would come home. She told me that they gave her a form with a grid comparing several different country programs and that she was shocked at how much more complicated the adoption would be than she had expected. She and her husband briefly considered adopting an Asian-looking child from Russia, but found that they wouldn't be able to specify that they didn't want a "blond blue-eyed child" and so going to

Russia was "too risky." The coordinator she was working with at the agency introduced her to the China Waiting Child Program and explained that it was a faster option. Stacy decided to pursue adopting a child with a minor, correctable special need and after turning down referrals of some children with more substantial special needs, Stacy and Andrew brought home a daughter with a healed heart condition within a year of their initial decision to adopt.

During our interview Stacy presented the choices she made in her adoption story as quite rational and, at times, obvious. It made sense for her to adopt from China, then to pursue a special needs adoption when she found out about the long waiting times for "healthy" children, and it was an easy choice to decide to accept only a child with a minor special need. The choices that Stacy and Andrew made, though, like the choices that all prospective adoptive parents make, were not unmediated. Rather, these choices were made within the context of an international adoption economy that is characterized by a shortage of the most desirable types of children—those who are young, healthy, and immediately available. Although Stacy framed her path to adoption as a series of individual choices, Stacy and Andrew's eventual choice to adopt a child with a minor special need from China was made possible within the context of a complex economy in which children with special needs are produced as desirable and available, and parents are empowered to make their own choices about the type of child they will adopt.

Time to Adoption and Queuing

For many parents like Stacy and Andrew, the Waiting Child Program initially attracts attention because of the short queue for adopting a child with special needs. While the current wait time for a "healthy" infant from China is estimated at 7-9 years, a special needs referral, depending on the type of child, can happen in just a few months and averaged less than a year in 2010, though has slowly increased since then. This short wait was the driving force in Stacy's decision to adopt a special needs child, and also in the decision that Jillian made to switch to the Waiting Child Program from the traditional non-special needs program. Jillian and her husband Mark married later in life, she was in her early 40s and he was in his early 50s. By the time they were ready to adopt they felt that it was important to choose the fastest program and, at the time, China's traditional adoption program was still moving efficiently:

> One of the things that attracted us was that it was a predictable process, and we had already been through so much with IVF the roller coaster of emotions that you go through, we liked the fact that at the time pretty much it was a year start to finish. And it was very predictable.

For Jillian and Mark, predictability and speed were important considerations given their age as parents, she told me: "it wasn't like we are 35 years old and we have all the time in the world, we knew that we've got to get going here having our family." The speed of the China adoption program was not only important for practical reasons of age, but also for emotional reasons as well. Having already been through in-vitro fertility treatments, Jillian and Mark were aware of the emotional turmoil of not having success with fertility treatment and so they wanted a program that was as predictable as possible. We know that in social life temporal regularity and its predictability have strong psychological benefits for cognitive well-being (Zerubavel [1981] 1985). The effect of predictability on one's emotional state becomes even stronger for those who

have experienced infertility. The decision to pursue the fastest and least risky option in many cases comes from couples' need to manage their emotional state after already experiencing the uncertainty of infertility. Jillian and Mark adopted their first child through the traditional China program and then after adopting their first daughter they began the process again in 2006. When the process for the second adoption slowed down, the length of the queue for a "healthy" infant from China became unmanageable for Jillian and Mark and they chose to switch to the China Waiting Child Program.

Kornai and Weibull (1978) suggest that in an economy characterized by shortage, like that of international adoption, those who find long queues unmanageable may make the decision to exit the queue and pursue the substitution of a different good. This is, in essence, is how the growth of the Waiting Child Program happened. As wait times moved from less than a year to more than 7 years, those already waiting often pursued other options. At International Adoption Together, many families began to switch to the Waiting Child Program in the hopes of receiving a faster placement. In Jillian's case the wait extended further and further until she and Mark decided to pursue another option:

> We applied for another infant [in April 2006] and we were supposed to have our baby the next September and that's when things started slowing down. You know it was very torturous because it wasn't, "it's going to be 3 more years," it was "well it's going to be an extra couple months" …and it just kept getting pushed out longer and longer and it was like an exponential extension and finally a couple of years into it a friend of ours…she had adopted a special needs kid with a hearing condition and she put a seminar together with her agency about this waiting children program…Our agency had been telling us well you know, they were trying to be very optimistic…But meanwhile we were watching message boards online.

Between information on online message boards that suggested a several years wait for the traditional adoption program and the information that Jillian and Mark learned at the seminar, they decided that they wanted to pursue a special needs adoption from China, but they hit a roadblock when their agency did not have a program for special needs adoption. As I demonstrated in Chapter 4, one of the most significant constraints on parental choice in the international adoption economy is the path dependency that occurs when a family has chosen a particular agency to work with. If the agency does not offer another faster, more predictable program when the initial option is delayed or closes, parents are limited to only the range of choices available at that particular agency. In Jillian's case, she had to seek out another agency, International Adoption Together, in order to pursue a special needs adoption that would happen more quickly and offer them more certainty. In a social world that is so structured by temporal regularity and the regimented calendar and schedule (Zerubavel [1981] 1985), when faced with the uncertainty of time to adoption, parents are likely to choose the most predictable option, even when that option may not fit all of their criteria.

If the majority of adoptive parents, like Jillian and Mark, and Stacy and Andrew, are unwilling to queue for long periods of time to receive a "healthy" infant from China's traditional adoption program, who is willing to wait for 7-9 years to adopt a "healthy" child instead of substituting for a different type of child? And why? At both International Adoption Together and Helping through Adoption, Chinese-American couples were most likely to stay in the queue for

the traditional adoption program even as wait times stretched out for years and years. While doing my fieldwork at Helping through Adoption, staff members often talked about the need to send updates to the few families who were holding out for a healthy child from China, even after the adoption agency had given them other options of types of adoptions to pursue. Vivian, the director at International Adoption Together explained her own frustration with these couples that remained in the queue for years on end.

> We have people who have been waiting on our list for five years, and they're not even close to a referral. And I will say, those are mostly Chinese American families, they're not willing to accept a child with any special needs. So they just sit and wait. And I discussed this with our China coordinator, who is Chinese, and she gets furious with them. Because some of the kids with these special needs are pretty darn minor. But they're just not willing to consider it. You know…kids with disabilities in China are considered bad luck, so why would they take something like that into their homes? So it's getting over that kind of cultural mindset.

In Vivian's view, Chinese American families remained in the queue for long periods of time because of discrimination against children even with minor disabilities. Lori, the director at Helping through Adoption also suggested that the Chinese American families who waited for long periods of time in their agency, were those who were particularly unwilling to adopt from outside of their own racial and ethnic background. In this way individual experiences of infertility, preconceptions about children with disabilities, and ideas about transracial adoption determined which families were more or less willing to queue for certain types of children.

The difference between white families who were willing to accept a special needs placement and Chinese-American families who preferred to wait for a "healthy" child, exposes the importance of imagined futures in adoption choices. Insofar as children become priceless to their adoptive parents, moving from a long queue to the Waiting Child program only becomes possible for those parents who can imagine the special needs child as emotionally valuable in the context of their family. If people's children become reflections of themselves and their social status in the world, then for some families imagining the child with special needs as emotionally priceless becomes impossible. For parents willing to queue, special needs children cannot be imagined as reflective of the type of family they would like to have. For other parents who can (re)imagine special needs children as fitting in with their families, the special needs child must be first (re)defined as manageable and emotionally priceless.

Redefining Special Needs

In an economy characterized by extremely long queues to adopt internationally, prospective parents are often drawn to the comparably short wait time to adopt a child with minor special needs from China. Wait time, however, is not enough to sway parents to consider adopting a child with a special needs designation when they may have initially considered adopting a "healthy child." In order to choose the Waiting Child Program for their adoption, parents must find value in the combination of a short waiting time and a desirable type of child. In online materials and in-person meetings parents are taught to rethink their preconceptions

about the special needs label and are encouraged to make their own choices about the type of child they feel able to welcome into their home.

The common and legal understanding of the term special needs in the United States is substantially broader than the meaning of the term in the context of adopting from China. Commonly referred to in the context of accessing special educational or public services for children with disabilities, the term encompasses a broad range of disabilities. In the context of special education, The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (U.S. Department of Education) defines children with disabilities as those children:

> (i) with mental retardation, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance (referred to in this title as `emotional disturbance'), orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities; and (ii) who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services.[41]

I reference this legal definition not to suggest that there is an exact correspondence between this definition and the way that adoptive parents understand a special needs label, but rather to show the breadth of disabilities that may fall under this umbrella term in both legal and colloquial definitions. Indeed, it is clear that special needs as a designation is often confused with disability as a broad qualifying characteristic for special education when looking at special needs as a qualification in domestic adoption. AdoptUSKids, a resource for matching foster children in the United States with adoptive parents, notes that, "a child with special needs should not be confused with a child who requires special education," and that the special needs designation in U.S. adoption "simply refers to children who qualify for adoption assistance due to specific factors or conditions such as: being an older child, having a particular racial or ethnic background, being part of a sibling group needing to be placed together as one unit, medical conditions, physical, mental or emotional handicaps" (AdoptUSKids 2015). Transnational adoption agencies that place children with special needs are well aware of the confusion that this term creates and of the breadth of associations prospective adoptive parents have with the special needs label. In order to relocate parental desire from the "healthy" infant to the child with minor special needs, adoption agencies must reeducate parents about the meaning of special needs within the particular context of the China Waiting Child Program.

One example of this rearticulation of the meaning of special needs comes in the form of a short film produced by a special needs advocacy group that appears on the websites of several adoption agencies that provide special needs adoptions from China. In the video, text rolls across the screen "the special needs label can be frightening and intimidating, leading people to believe that waiting children are not healthy." A series of pictures of smiling adoptees follows, the first picture with the caption "the picture of health," in an effort to distance the term special needs

[41] IDEA further classifies children with disabilities over the age of 3, "The term `child with a disability' for a child aged 3 through 9 (or any subset of that age range, including ages 3 through 5), may, at the discretion of the State and the local educational agency, include a child--(i) experiencing developmental delays, as defined by the State and as measured by appropriate diagnostic instruments and procedures, in 1 or more of the following areas: physical development; cognitive development; communication development; social or emotional development; or adaptive development; and (ii) who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services."

from it's association with children who are unhealthy. The short video goes on to feature a series of stories about parents with successful adoptions of children from the Waiting Child Program; the video heavily features children with minor or correctable special needs. This short film epitomizes the type of redefinition work that creates value in the special needs designation for prospective adoptive parents, and, like other agency orientations, encourages parents to imagine their future with an adopted child. Adopting a child with a special needs designation that may have once been "frightening and intimidating" becomes desirable—these children are portrayed as normal, healthy, and well-integrated with their adoptive families.

This kind of redefinition work takes place not only online when parents initially explore a particular agency, but also at in-person orientation sessions. At an orientation session at International Adoption Together, the facilitator went over a chart comparing country programs with the attendees. She encouraged parents to think of special needs as "meaning something different than it usually means in the United States." When most people hear special needs, she explained, they think that it means something very serious, but it doesn't always mean that in all cases. International Adoption Together, she said, believes that "all children that come from institutionalized care have some special needs" and that parents should be prepared for that. By saying that all children that come from institutionalized care have special needs, she implicitly suggests that the move to adopting a child who has a minor special needs diagnosis may not be that big of a shift. She told the audience that children with a special needs designation are not necessarily unhealthy, and in an effort to decouple associations of health with minor physical special needs, she explained that many of the children available through the Waiting Child Program have minor or correctable physical disabilities. It is in and through encounters like this that prospective parents learn they have choices about the kinds of special needs they are willing to accept in a prospective placement and that not all of the children available through the program have significant special needs that will require long-term support and treatment. In their materials and in their dealings with prospective parents agencies assume, based on experience, that parents are more likely to prefer children with minor, correctable special needs such as cleft lip and palate or reparable heart conditions.

Choosing a Child

The assurance to parents that they can select a child with a minor or repairable condition is often the deciding factor in attracting them to the Waiting Child Program, as Catherine told me her adoption story, she explained that they went with what was easiest:

> I mean we really were just like what's easy. And the traditional program, at the time, the wait at that time was like 5-6 years. So, I don't think I had in my mind to adopt a child with special needs, certainly not somebody with severe needs. So, when it was explained to us what special needs entailed, you know like heart murmur, what our older daughter has…And some had birth marks, scars, things like this, and you know there seemed, it seemed fine to just say you know we can't take someone with severe special needs.

For Catherine and her husband their initial interest in adopting from China was thwarted when they learned of the long wait time to placement, but when one of International Adoption Together's country coordinators met with them and explained to them that special needs could

entail minor physical conditions, they decided to pursue this type of adoption. They were further encouraged by the fact that they had individual agency in the choice that they were making about the placement—they understood that it was okay for them to say they were not prepared to parent a child with more significant special needs. As Catherine explained further:

> And she [the agency staff member] was showing us you know the kids online and you know in China at the time there were so many kids that just got put on the special needs list and didn't have severe needs and we liked the fact that you could list what you were able to accommodate and if you got a referral that for some reason you weren't able to accept you could just say no and it wouldn't put you at the end of some line.

It is through her interaction with agency staff that Catherine becomes assured that she has a choice in the kind of child that she will adopt and that, if she so chooses, she can select a child without severe special needs. This reframing of a necessary forced substitution in an economy of shortage to individual choice transfers some level of control to prospective parents who have little control, and makes them more comfortable to pursue the adoption of a child with special needs. In essence, agencies provide parents with the control to imagine the type of child that they feel able to emotionally connect with. Choosing a child to adopt, or at least specifying one's boundaries and preferences, becomes an act of social reproduction (Bourdieu 2005). That is, in imagining what child fits best with one's family, parents are prompted to create a story about their own lineage and the type of child that matches best with their values.

Figure 4. Partial Checklist of Minor Conditions

Cleft lip (Unilateral, Bilateral)	Hepatitis A, B
Cleft palate	Syphilis
Albinism	Club foot
Thalassemia	Webbed or extra fingers
Anemia	Partial or missing fingers or hand
Cerebral Palsy	Partial or missing toes or foot
Microcephaly	Seizures
Hydrocephaly	Birthmarks
Spina Bifida	Nevus
Partial hearing loss	Removable tumor
Total hearing loss	Crossed Eyes
Heart Murmur	Loss of sight in one eye
Atrial Septal Defect	Blind
Ventricular Septal Defect	
Tuberculosis	

Although agencies expect that parents will find children with less significant special needs to be more desirable, they frame adoption preferences as an individual choice. Choice is built into the process of adopting a child with special needs from China. Regardless of whether they are working with a large or small agency, parents are encouraged to create boundaries around the types of children who are and are not acceptable for their adoption. Though children with special needs do not have different fees associated with adopting them, there is a standardized process through which they are rated and classified by adoptive parents. At the very

beginning of the process parents are provided with what is often called a "Medical Conditions Checklist" or a "Special Needs Checklist," a physical manifestation of the rating process. These types of forms contain exhaustive lists of special needs designations and parents are asked to tick boxes next to the special needs that they will accept.

Figure 4 shows a partial list of minor and correctable conditions from one of the largest adoption agencies in the United States, Holt International (2015). The form is not unique to Holt, many agencies provide parents with a similar form. On this particular form parents select the categories of special needs children that they would consider adopting, here special needs are divided into categories such as: birth conditions, blood conditions, central nervous system, digestive, genito-urinary-digestive, developmental delays, hearing, heart, infectious diseases, orthopedic, seizures, skin conditions, vision, age (children older than 7-8). In some agencies parents are encouraged to pick a minimum number of special needs they will accept (for example, a minimum of 3), and in others they are asked to further classify their choices into different levels of severity that they would accept. For example, parents may be asked to specify whether they are willing to accept a child with a major issue related to cleft palate, or only a child with a minor cleft palate. On the Holt International checklist, parents are asked to tick boxes to indicate if they would, would not, or would possibly consider a child with any of the listed conditions. In this way, parents are asked to become well-versed in the meaning and implications of a variety of diagnoses even before they are matched with a particular child. This process encourages parents to investigate and qualify the severity of different types of minor medical conditions, and to imagine their future children through this process. They research not only factual information about medical conditions, but may also investigate the appearance of children that have visible, physical special needs. By searching the internet, for example, for pictures of children with club foot or cleft lip, parents imagine how their future children may look, and how those children may fit within their conception of the ideal family. Parents themselves, with input from country coordinators, categorize and evaluate different special needs in deciding what they are and are not open to for their adoption.

Just as we saw in previous chapters, a cultural account of adoption that stresses the best interests of the child becomes important in the way that adoption agency staff think about these kinds of choices and classifications. Lena, the China country coordinator from International Adoption Together suggested to me that she was willing to counsel parents that were interested in special needs adoption, but that she did not want to help them to make the decision about whether or not special needs adoption was the right path for them. Like with other types of adoption, Lena believed that parents should make the decision of what type of child to adopt on their own because they will know best which kinds of children they are able to effectively and comfortably parent, even if preferences for children with minor special needs reinforce a new hierarchy of desire where children with more significant special needs are left behind.

This is not to say that there is no intervention, though, from the agency into the process of deciding what special needs a couple will consider. As I demonstrated in Chapter 4, in orientation sessions, on agency websites, and in my one-on-one conversations with agency staff there was a strong emphasis on the benefits of being open in terms of preferences, and this emphasis on openness carries over to special needs adoption. Agencies explained to parents in orientation sessions and on agency websites that the more open you are to different kinds of children, the more options you will have, and the more quickly you will be able to be matched with a child. This is especially true for special needs adoption. As Lena told me:

> Well, we try to educate the families so they don't have unrealistic expectations. You know, like I want a child who has a birthmark only. That's not possible. It is possible, but the chance is so slim. So, we try to tell the families they need to have a broader, or you know, more special needs they are open to. And so, you know, we don't get stuck with the possibility that I can never find a child for them.

Lena suggests that parents who are trying to substitute for a child with a very, very minor special need like only a birthmark, to essentially get the next best thing to a "healthy" child, may have unrealistic expectations about the availability of these types of children. Agencies must manage these expectations because although some parents decide to adopt special needs children for altruistic reasons—they may have faith-based reasons or simply want to help a child in need—and therefore are more open about the type of child they are seeking, many adoptive parents become interested in adopting a special needs child from China only after they have pursued other options, most often traditional adoption from China, and have been faced with the reality of exceedingly long waiting times.

One agency on the east coast states firmly on their website that they do not believe that parents should even consider adopting a special needs child because of a shorter waiting time:

> Because the wait for a healthy infant is extremely long, we do receive more inquiries about [the] waiting children program. However, the long wait should not be a reason to consider a waiting child. It is not fair to the child and it is also not fair to you if he or she is not the very best for you. We do not accept applications from families who only want female infants or toddlers with minor medical needs such as cleft lip only, birth mark not on face, heart murmur not heart defects, delayed but not really delayed, etc.

This agency points to the conflict in substitution related to this particular program, parents may choose this program because they believe that they can adopt a child with nearly no issues, but as the Waiting Child Program has gained more interest, competition for the children with the least significant of the special needs has become quite fierce. This competition derives from children with minor special needs being the closest possible substitution for the healthy infants available in the 1990s and early 2000s. That is to say that parents don't need to significantly shift their fictional expectations in order to picture a child with a minor special need fitting into their families.

The highest demand is for children that have so-called minor special needs that are physical in nature and can be repaired through medical intervention. There are often strong preferences for children with heart conditions that are reparable or may heal on their own, for example ventricular or atrial septal defects; for children with cleft lip and/or palate, or for children with limb differences, such as missing fingers or toes, that vary in severity. In fact, in looking at the websites of a variety of agencies across the country, these physical special needs are often listed first in descriptions of the types of special needs children that are available—presumably because they are not only available, but also highly desirable. The reality is, though, that competition to place these types of children is extremely fierce among adoption agencies. As desire shifts from "healthy" children with no known special needs, to those children who have minor or correctable special needs, the competition to adopt from the special needs program has

increased significantly. Competition exists not directly among parents, but instead among the various agencies that are trying to place similar types of children. This competition is most palpable in the operations that country coordinators undergo in order to make matches between waiting families and waiting children.

Matching and Competition

The process whereby China country coordinators working in adoption agencies match the desires of parents with available children is a complicated one. As of 2015 a number of agencies had one-to-one partnerships with orphanages in China that designate children from that orphanage to be adopted through a particular agency. The CCCWA began asking agencies to pilot this sort of program around 2008, according to Lena, but at that time mostly larger adoption agencies with many staff members chose this route in addition to accessing the shared list, which I explain below. The benefit of the one-to-one partnership is that each agency is paired with a specific orphanage (or with several orphanages in one province) and receives referrals directly from that orphanage. The drawback, though, for small agencies, Lena explained, is that they simply do not have the staff power to sustain such a program. Holt International, for example, boasts a total of over 25 agency staff working in China "who get to know each child and can follow up with local orphanages when families have questions" (Holt 2014).

The alternative for agencies without a one-to-one partnership is to access the "shared list" This list is a record of available children that is maintained by the China Center for Children's Welfare and Adoption (CCCWA) and is released once a month and can only be securely accessed by designated agency staff members. In any given month between 1500 and 2000 children appear on this listing, of which there are two types - "waiting children" and those with a special focus designation. Again, special focus children are those children who are older children, children who have more substantial needs or multiple special needs and have thus been identified as difficult to place, and children who have been on the shared list for more than 60 days. There are several differences between the process for special focus children and for other waiting children, but for the purpose of this discussion, the most substantial difference between special focus children and other waiting children is that special focus children are "locked in" in a different way than other special needs children. "Locking in" is a process whereby an agency staff person identifies a child from the shared list, selects that child's file, enters the information of the prospective parents and clicks through a screen asking to reserve that child for consideration by the prospective family. For children designated as special focus, an agency staff member can lock in a child for a specific family or to be transferred to an agency specific list. For example, if an agency staff member sees a special focus child that she thinks has "potential," as Lena told me, she may request for that file to be moved to an agency specific list for a period of three months, so that she can try to find a family for that child. Similarly, if the adoption staff person already knows of a family looking for a particular type of child, she can lock the file of a special focus child specifically for that family. In this way, "locking in" special focus children is much less competitive than locking in children who do not have a special focus designation.

The process of locking in waiting children who are not designated as special focus is a challenging experience for agency staff, usually country coordinators, who are responsible for finding children for placement through their agency. Of the 1500-2000 children on the shared list in any given month, many have been on the list for months (and are thus designated special

focus). In fact, Lena and Kate, the two country coordinators I spoke with estimated that in any given month only about 50-100 of those children are new listings, and of those new listings only between 20-50 of the children have minor special needs. While 20-50 children may seem high in relation to one agency only, these files are available to all agencies worldwide at the same time. The list is released at the beginning of the workday in Beijing, and adoption agency staff wait for the release so that they can begin locking in children as soon as possible. While we sat in Lena's office during our interview, she graciously explained the stressful process to me, a process that is largely hidden from public view. Lena explained that the process of locking in a child is fast and, "There is absolutely no time. The matter of being able to successfully lock a file is a matter of seconds." Agency staff members must be ready to quickly identify the children who have minor special needs from a long spreadsheet, enter the names of prospective parents, and push an electronic button to lock the file. Oftentimes a file appears available, but when the coordinator reaches the last screen and clicks the button to lock the file, she finds out that the file has already been locked by another agency. At that point the coordinator returns to the main list to try again to lock in another child. The process is tedious and stressful and a coordinator can spend hours on the list and be unable to successfully lock any children at all. When I asked her how many children she is able to place per month from the shared list, Lena explained "I don't know if it's magic or if it's a miracle, I always manage to place at least two or three." But, in contrast, at the time of our interview, Kate had not been able to get on the list quickly enough to lock any files. She explained that:

> I haven't been able to lock any files ever. Because the children that are on the special needs list, some of the medicals are super serious [referring to special focus children]. And I've been seeing a lot of children that have multiple special needs and a lot of the families that decide to go through the waiting child program want minor, correctable…but those are some of the special needs that I don't see on the special needs list and when I do they are older. And [our] families are open to a child that is under three or four.

Kate's frustration with the shared list was that the available children did not match with the desires of the parents that were interested in special needs adoption, making locking in children pointless.

While some agencies are unsuccessful in using the shared list to lock in children for their clients, the agencies that are successful at locking in children with minor special needs do not always have immediate success with placing those children. Lena explained to me that before the web system existed for placing children, China would send each agency paper files of children that needed to be placed. The benefit of that system was that agency staff could carefully consider the characteristics of a particular child in trying to match that child with an appropriate family. Because of the speed now involved in the electronic shared list, agencies no longer have the time to carefully consider the files of parents in making a match. Instead, the matching of particular children with adoptive parents is more arbitrary, at least in the first step of locking them in. Agency staff log into the system and scan the files for general characteristics like age, gender, and the main special need of the child, but they simply do not have the time for an in-depth reading of the file. Lena had developed the specialized skill of being able to quickly scan

files and determine which children were most likely to be accepted by the parents that were waiting to adopt.

After the file is locked for a particular family, the potential adoptive parents have a period of 72 hours to look at the file, consult with a physician about the file, decide if they are ready to commit to parent the child, and to complete a letter of intent to adopt the child. For example, Catherine took the file of one of her daughters to a pediatrician to be assessed, she told me, "We decided within 24 hours to accept the referral. I took the referral to a pediatrician I had found as suggested. And she looked through it with me and said, "She's got this VSD[42]." But she was encouraging…She said she doesn't look blue in the photos, you know, stuff like that. So she encouraged us to say yes, and we did." For some parents like, Stacy, though, they rejected several referrals. During this time it is quite common for adoptive parents to reject one or more referrals that come from the agency. In fact, some adoptive parents may reject several referrals before finally settling on a referral that they feel is a good fit for their family. Lena explained one of the common reasons that a parent might reject a referral is that they just don't feel that they can connect with a particular child, she said:

> I think for people who, when they are presented a file, you look at the pictures of the child and a lot of the times a child with cleft lip and cleft palate facially, you know, it is deformed, you know their nose is pulled down. And it's just. I have seen so many of these files and I think, you know, they are all beautiful. But for the first time if a family looks at a child who has a deformed face, it's hard for them to connect.

Stacy gave another reason for rejecting the referral of a child with a cleft palate, she said that upon seeing the damage to the child's face, she just did not feel prepared to see the child through the multiple surgeries it would take to correct the damage.

The rejection of referrals happens not only in the Waiting Child Program, but also in the traditional China adoption program when parents may find out through consultation with a pediatrician that there are some concerns about the child's medical file. I was surprised to find that the many adoption service professionals I spoke to who worked in all types of adoption programs, not just in China, were not bothered by parents who decided to reject referrals. Rather than seeing the rejection of a referral as creating additional work for them, in needing to find a new match, in most cases they see it as a responsible decision by a parent to not take a child that they believe they cannot properly care for. This understanding of rejection of referrals ties back to the underlying cultural account of adoption as in the best interests of the child. Agency staff perceive rejection as being for the best for all parties involved. Since staff members see their job as centered around a moral commitment to finding families for children, they feel a moral obligation to make sure that parents end up adopting children that they will form an emotional connection with. And, indeed, nearly all of the staff I either personally encountered or had heard of very rare cases of adoption disruption where a match isn't the "best fit" and a parent legally cancels the adoption, leaving the child to be rehomed in the United States, a situation that is emotionally upsetting for agency staff that work hard to find the best homes for adoptable children.

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the belief that parents should never accept a referral that they are not comfortable with is echoed on agency webpages and parents are

[42] Ventricular Septal Defect, a heart condition.

reminded of this throughout the adoption process. For Lena, the stress of locking in files and the frequent rejection of referrals was all worth it in the end:

> I feel extremely rewarded when I see a child with special needs actually thriving in a new home, because, I see the pictures in the post-placement report. It is just extremely heartwarming to me to see the children with physical special needs that are in a wonderful, loving environment and thriving. It is very different from placing [non-special needs children], you know it is more rewarding for me.

Though the work was stressful at times, Lena found motivation in seeing the families formed by the adoptions that she facilitated. For her, special needs adoption aligned even more closely with her personal commitment to finding homes for children in need than traditional adoption. Even if this process of competition can be reimagined and fit into a cultural account of the best interests of the child, like in Lena's case, the practice of locking in children on the shared list is is about trying to find the children that have the most minor special needs, and that are therefore most desirable to the types of adoptive parents who are pursuing special needs adoption because they have come up against the long wait for a "healthy" child.

Conclusion

It may be tempting to understand the system of special needs adoption as morally questionable—a system in which parents are categorized into those who are more and less worthy of having families, where children are differentially valued and commodified on the basis of (dis)ability, and where adoption agencies strategically manipulate matches between parents and children in a way that is most beneficial for their success as an organization. Seeing special needs adoption this way, though, is problematic for a number of reasons: it assumes that commodification of children can only be reprehensible and harmful to the individual and society, and that adoption agencies operate as actors with motivations that are outside of the realm of the adoption economy, an economy grounded in a mutual cultural account tied to children's best interests.

Adoption agency staff are not unaware of the market nature of competition for particular children and of parental preference for children with the least disabilities. This competition, parental preference, and revaluation of special needs children comes to mean different things for different people during the process of adoption itself. In his study of organ procurement organizations, Healy (2006) explains that "these organizations do not stand outside the system of exchange manipulating the participants. Rather, they constitute the system and are themselves engaged in a social relationship with the donors and recipients" (87). Adoption agency staff are similarly embedded within the transnational adoption economy and, as such, their work is driven by and understood through a cultural account of adoption that emphasizes the importance of serving children's best interests by finding forever families for children in need. There are times, though, where this account doesn't quite line up with the realities of the adoption economy, when agencies compete furiously to place children with minor special needs it may seem that they've lost sight of their goal to find families for children, not children for families. However, this cultural account can shift and, as Lena shows us, there can be rearticulation of the meaning of actions within this economy—even though adoption is now more competitive, Lena sees her

work as placing children that would otherwise never find a home in China with loving American families.

Raleigh and Katz Rothman (2014) suggest that the commodification of children with disabilities lays bare the stratification of society by stigma—those children most likely to be adopted are also those least likely to live with lasting stigma. They describe international adoption as a market characterized by "the harshness, and sometimes the ugliness of the adoption world, a world that often looks like any other market, working on supply and demand, ranking, evaluating, and pretty much pricing children, as if they were any other commodity" (45). They suggest that just as transracial adoption shows the stratification of society by race, special needs adoption shows the stratification of society by ability. As I have suggested earlier, though, adoption is a different kind of economy *specifically* because it is devoid of a pricing mechanism.

Shortage does lead to the new commodification of children with special needs; these children who were once undesirable become worthy in the face of the shortage of "healthy" Chinese children. Just as white men who carry the mark of a criminal record in Devah Pager's (2003) work are preferred by employers over Black men without the stigma of a criminal record, special needs children are preferred over domestically available Black children. Special needs children from China become desirable, even when marked by stigma, because they are racially flexible against what Dorow (2006b) calls the "white noise of blackness." A new hierarchy of desire also emerges within the category of special needs where those children that have minor special needs are near the top, when they previously were near the bottom. In this new hierarchy of desire, children with substantial physical, developmental, and emotional disabilities are relegated to the bottom—they have little chance of being adopted except by those who cannot qualify to adopt other children or by those who are motivated solely by altruism or religious faith. This process of remaking desire and matching parents with children is not simple, though, as I have shown it happens within an economy that has a particular context and that has different meaning for different actors throughout the process. For the CCCWA (China Center for Children's Welfare and Adoption) as a representative of the state, the process of matching distinct children with particular parents is one of evaluating parents on the basis of their imagined future propensity to be good parents to adopted children. For adoptive parents, children may not have different prices, but they hold different value, and for those who seek a young, quickly available, and racially flexible child, China special needs adoption becomes a good compromise. In cases of children with minor special needs, the predictability of the program and the young age of the children trumps parental concerns about minor special needs. This happens, though, only in cases where special needs children can be reimagined as fitting well with adoptive families. Finally, for adoption agency staff engaged in the process of matching parents with children, this new commodification of special needs children can take on a positive moral value—placing special needs children that would otherwise grow up in institutions in China is a respectable practice, even if it involves harsh competition for certain types of children.

The question remains whether this new hierarchy of desire is problematic, and whether there is a way to do something about those least fortunate children who, no matter what, will spend their lives hidden away in institutions. People like Lena may find something positive in this remaking of desire—special needs children who previously had no hope of finding adoptive placements have now become the objects of desire of prospective adoptive parents in a context where the most important thing becomes not getting the perfect child, but growing one's family as quickly, and predictably as possible. On the other hand, we could oppose the hierarchy of

desire completely and suggest that parents open to adoption should be encouraged to adopt not only those children with minor special needs, but also those with significant special needs. The problem with this solution, though, is that this implies placing children who need significant resources with parents who not only do not want to manage their conditions, but that in many cases are not well-equipped to take on the responsibility of raising a child with significant special needs. Raleigh and Katz Rothman (2014) suggest that a first step is more accountability for adoption agencies that may not well prepare parents for the potential that minor special needs could become more significant issues. This is a good suggestion, and one that ought to be applied to transnational adoption more generally—adoptive parents whose children have special needs, many of which were *not* diagnosed prior to adoption, need access to resources to help them give the best care to their children. While adoption advocates' call for an increase in post-placement services is not unfounded, it is difficult to achieve in the United States where adoption agencies are private, non-profit entities, where staff are overworked in what has become a highly competitive economy.

Chapter 6 | Conclusion:
Regulation and the Future of Transnational Adoption

This dissertation began with a puzzle: in an intimate economy like adoption, how do organizations and individuals deal with the problem of a mismatch between desire and supply? As an economy that is inextricably tied to the modern conception of the emotionally priceless child, how is the shortage of the most desirable types of children in transnational adoption managed when there is no pricing mechanism to easily restore equilibrium between supply and demand? By considering the work of adoption agencies and the experiences of adoptive parents, I have shown how classificatory schemes, boundary making, morality, and calculation operate within the highly emotional transnational adoption economy. Drawing on in-depth interviews with adoption agency professionals and adoptive parents, participant observation in an adoption agency, and textual analysis of agency promotional materials, this dissertation examines how adoption agencies and the parents they serve manage the mismatch between the desire for certain types of children and the availability of children who are either markedly different from what these parents initially desire, or who take longer to adopt. While existing theories of morals and markets have focused largely on stable or growing markets, my research considers an economy in crisis and theorizes how the management of shortage can take on a moral dimension in this specific intimate economy. I challenge existing understandings of adoption as either the detrimental commodification of children, or as altruistic orphan rescue, a market or not, and show how adoption operates not as a rational free market, but as an economy that is fraught with moral calculations and emotional ties.

As a case, transnational adoption brings another dimension to our understandings of morality and markets—that of how actors navigate an intimate economy that is devoid of a pricing mechanism, and how, in turn, multiple meanings are produced and contested in the process of differentiating children and producing them as sentimentally valuable. The implicit hierarchy of children in adoption is hidden from view because of the lack of a pricing mechanism, but the process of valuation is still morally fraught. Agency staff are aware of this moral conundrum, and navigate it skillfully as they elicit the preferences of adoptive parents. Through the emotional connections that they forge with parents, agency staff carefully determine individual preferences for certain types of children, while helping parents to feel that their decisions are supported, legitimate, and not judged. In the case of a transnational adoption economy characterized by shortage, parents must make compromises about the children they are willing to bring into their families, and the shape of these compromises reveals a hierarchy of socially constructed desire where some children are more emotionally valuable than others. Even when marked by the stigma of special needs, for example, racially flexible and quickly available Asian children adopted from abroad are still preferred to Black children available domestically.

I began my exploration of the transnational adoption economy by demonstrating its relationship to other parallel adoption economies. I show that transnational adoption does not exist as an independent economy that is unaffected by parallel types of adoption available to parents in the United States. Parents' perceptions of permanency, racialized evaluation, time to adoption, and certainty of placement have a strong effect on how they choose between public agency, domestic private, and transnational adoption. Rather than existing independently of one another, these adoption economies overlap and interact when parents make choices about how to adopt a child. Those parents most drawn to transnational adoption are often motivated by the

distinct lack of ties that transnationally adopted children have to their biological kin. Additionally, parents choose transnational adoption over public agency adoption because of an assumption that Black children are tainted by an inescapable culture of poverty.

When parents enter the economy of transnational adoption, after having considered the various adoption choices available to them, they are often faced with the stark reality of a mismatch between the type of child they most want to adopt—young, healthy, quickly adoptable, and racially flexible—and the types of children that are more often available. In order to show how parental desire and shortage are reconciled in the transnational adoption economy, I begin with the origins of the mismatch between supply and demand in transnational adoption. I show that law and policy constrains the supply of children and the eligibility of certain types of parents, and the shortage of children is then balanced and navigated in and through interactions between parents and adoption agency staff. The mismatch between desire and demand in transnational adoption is the result of shifting economic, social, and regulatory contexts in sending countries that are then expressed in policy. Country-specific laws and policies in response to demand, international politics, and allegations of child trafficking in countries such as Russia, Guatemala, and China have contributed to an overall decline in the availability of young, healthy, racially flexible children since 2004.

This overall decline creates a challenge for adoption agency staff who must find a way to reconcile parents' desires with the realities of the availability of certain types of children. It is in and through this reconciliation that we can see the intermingling of economic calculations and the moral responsibility that agency staff feel for both parents and children. Explaining the moral underpinnings of adoption work requires accessing a cultural account "a coherent body of reasons and evaluations that can be used to explain and legitimate some practice or activity" of adoption that is prevalent in the field (Healy 2006:23). This cultural account emphasizes the adoptive child's bests interests and individual right to a loving family. By bridging the divide between the market and the family, this account of adoption practice serves the dual purpose of legitimating the work of adoption and maintaining agreement about shared motivations by actors within the field. I find that the dual nature of clients—parents and children—within the field does not discount an understanding of adoption rooted in child welfare; rather serving parent clients with professional services and emotional support becomes closely connected to "the best interests of the child" and becomes a source of legitimacy for the transnational adoption economy.

The emotional support that adoption agencies offer to prospective adoptive parents serves an essential purpose in building and supporting a mutual understanding of the sentimental value of adoptable children. Adoption agency staff and parents experience emotional connections as authentic and meaningful, and these connections reinforce the link between adoption and family building, rather than child buying. Simultaneously, these bonds create a context in which prospective adoptive parents are able to voice their sometimes discriminating preferences. The importance of sentimental ties for sustaining a shared understanding of the value of the priceless child becomes most evident when this mutual agreement breaks down. For example, in situations where either agency staff or prospective adoptive parents act in a way that indicates an understanding of adoption as an economic transaction, the mutual agreement regarding the child's emotional—not economic—worth is lost and causes discomfort and disenchantment.

For adoption agency staff who feel a strong moral commitment to the project of finding homes for children in need, the management of shortage within the transnational adoption

economy becomes closely linked to a cultural account of adoption that emphasizes child welfare. By applying an economic model of shortage (Kornai and Weibull 1978) and adapting it for the particular economy of transnational adoption, I show how certain choices made in the context of shortage become morally acceptable, while others are morally suspect. Queueing for adoption programs that have long wait times becomes morally undesirable in the eyes of agency staff not so much because it negatively affects agency financial stability, but instead because queues are less likely to lead to successful adoptions. Given the undesirability of queuing, substitution becomes the preferred alternative for adoptive parents faced with the problem of shortage. I find that agencies educate parents and empower them to make flexible choices about the type of substitution that is the best fit. Flexibility, though, is constrained in two ways. First, a sort of path dependency exists for parents who are unlikely to extend their choices beyond what is available in the adoption agency they choose to work with. Second, even as agency staff encourage flexibility, they feel that it is morally wrong to match parents with children that might not be a good fit. In particular initial racial preference becomes a salient boundary for parental desire, a boundary beyond which agencies do not encourage flexibility.

Flexibility, or openness of preferences, plays a strong role in the management of shortage across different types of adoption programs and specifically in the China Waiting Child program. I end my exploration of the transnational adoption economy by using China special needs adoption as a case study to show how agencies manage the shortage of the most desirable types of children—those who are young, healthy, quickly available, and racially flexible. For parents who desire this type of child, special needs adoption fulfills most of these desires—the children available are young, quickly available, and racially flexible—and by (re)defining the special needs diagnosis as manageable the China Waiting Child program becomes an obvious compromise. The process by which Chinese children are matched with adoptive parents involves parallel processes of valuation in two locations—the differentiation of worthy and unworthy adoptive parents by the Chinese government, and the reevaluation of special needs children as desirable by adoption agencies and adoptive parents. I show that in both of these processes of valuation, actors are future-oriented; that is their decision making is grounded in a vision of a fictionalized version of reality (Beckert 2011, 2013) that imagines the futures of adoptive parents and adopted children.

This exploration of the transnational adoption economy and the conclusions I've made from this work are in the context of a very specific location, that of adoption agencies in California that were willing to invite me to interview agency staff or to observe adoption practices. While they provide insight into the everyday work of adoption agencies, the types of agencies included in this study significantly limit the broad applicability of my findings. First, the four agencies represented here are small agencies, with all but Christian Home Adoption having fewer than 10 staff members. Therefore, this study does not represent the largest agencies in the country that have more staff members, more specialization among staff members, potentially less personal contact with parents, and more international adoption programs. It is quite possible that these agencies manage shortage very differently than the small private, non-profit agencies in California. Second, in the introduction to this dissertation I described the difficulty with which I accessed these adoption agencies. Increased scrutiny in recent years, especially as allegations of child trafficking have made headlines in major news sources, has made agencies especially weary of allowing outsiders access to their work. This suggests that the types of agencies willing to open their doors to a researcher are more likely to be those that are

more focused on child welfare and less on economic gain. It goes without saying that this research doesn't capture adoption agencies that engage in ethically questionable practices, or those that have been implicated in child trafficking scandals.[43] Regardless of agency type, though, my goal here is not to make claims about the ethical nature of adoption agency practice, but rather to provide a window into the roles that morality and market forces play in the transnational adoption economy.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the majority of data in this dissertation is based on secular adoption agencies and parents who do not adopt for religious reasons. Shannon, at Christian Home Adoptions was the only agency staff person who I interviewed that was part of a religious agency. Even in my interview with Shannon, it was clear that there were some significant differences between the clientele at Christian Home Adoptions and the other three agencies. As she explained, clients that came to her agency as part of what she called "the Christian orphan care movement" were less likely to have strict boundaries around the type of child that they were interested in adopting. This raises the important question of whether there are significant differences between the clients and practices of Christian agencies and secular agencies. Further research on this topic might explore these differences and the ways in which queuing and shortage are managed in one-on-one interactions between parents and agency staff members. Existing accounts of the Evangelical adoption movement suggest that Christian adopters make up a large portion of adoptive parents searching for children that they believe are desperately in need of homes. Joyce (2013) suggests, though, that "however well intended, this enthusiasm has exacerbated what has become a boom-and-bust market for children that leaps from country to country. In many cases, the influx of money has created incentives to establish or expand orphanages — and identify children to fill them." Critiques of this adoption movement have suggested that despite Evangelicals understanding of adoption as saving children in need of homes, the movement actually creates demand for children that are not actually orphaned or legally available for adoption.

Regulation and The Future of Transnational Adoption

Predictions for the future of transnational adoptions are bleak. Most adoption agencies expect the number of international adoptions to continue to plummet, and expect that there will be even fewer choices available to parents in the coming years. As agencies increasingly feel the pressure of a crashing international adoption economy, they look for new strategies to stay in business. As Elaina at International Adoption Together told me, "the number of kids available and the number of kids you need to be able to place per year, there just aren't going to be enough to go around." Over time more and more small adoption agencies will go out of business. Susan at Loving Family Adoption compared the current crisis in international adoption to a tidal wave:

> "I was likening this to, you're trying to outrun a tidal wave that's coming behind you and you're hoping you can get to higher ground and you're going to be safe up there. And one of

[43] Adoption agencies have many times been implicated in transnational adoption scandals. A very recent example occurred when "on January 8th [2015] James Harding, 55, of Atlanta, Georgia, the former head of International Adoption Guides, Inc. (IAG), a U.S. adoption agency, pleaded guilty in federal court to fraud and bribery charges in conjunction with arranging "phony adoptions" from Ethiopia" (Riben 2015).

> the things is longevity because if you hang tight, you do everything you can to stay in business, as people fold away you're going to keep capturing more business. I mean, we had someone competing with us and now they've left, so now we're glad about that."

Sticking around while other agencies close down might be the best strategy for staying in business in the short-term, but this strategy is, of course, not enough. While some agencies are able to shift desire from programs that have closed or slowed down, to other existing programs they already run, most small agencies, like the ones where I interviewed staff, have a very limited number of direct programs that they run, usually only two or three. So, agencies seek out new countries where they can open new programs, or agencies that formerly only provided international services open a domestic program to give adoptive parents more options while simultaneously helping more children that do not live in a permanent family.

The practice of opening new programs becomes moralized in the same way that substitution does, while it simultaneously supports the economic obligation to keep agencies operating. Adoption agencies feel a moral obligation to expand the search for needy children until there are no more abandoned, relinquished, or orphaned children available for adoption. During my time interviewing adoption agency staff, I learned about new programs at each agency. Most programs were started because of agency staff connections to people on the ground in countries that hadn't yet opened for international adoption. These connections came to the agencies in somewhat unpredictable ways.[44] Shannon at CHA explained to me the importance of having individuals on the ground in countries where agencies run adoption programs:

> Every agency, that does international adoptions, would choose every country that is open for adoption that they could get accredited. We don't choose countries. We get lucky enough to be selected by those countries to work there, and there's a variety of reasons that we're fortunate to do that. One is by building relationships with people on the ground in those countries…An agency that doesn't have that may be able to get accredited, but then won't know what to do. And so, having human capital relationships in those countries takes you from having the right to work there to actually the ability to work there. So, we actually know people in these countries, and have built relationships before the doors opened.

In the other agencies where I interviewed staff, new programs also were opened through personal connections to people on the ground. One program started because a community member living nearby was originally from a country that had no international adoption program, so she helped to facilitate connections on the ground. Another program was opened at a different agency when an adoptive family connected the agency with individuals that they knew in the sending country. In a third case, one of the agency staff members had personal ties to the sending country. These new programs were all quite small, only receiving a few children a year, not nearly enough to make up for the drop off of adoptions from big sending countries like China, Guatemala, Vietnam, Korea, and Russia.

Though opening new country programs may act as a temporary solution for adoption agencies that had run out of options for adoptive parents, these small programs don't have a

[44] I have removed all identifying information about the agencies and new programs for purposes of confidentiality, I offer these as examples of the somewhat idiosyncratic ways in which new programs are opened.

substantial effect on the overall numbers of children sent to the United States from abroad. These programs are also less predictable and secure than adoption programs in the historically top sending countries. Though not always, in many cases new programs have experienced fast rises in adoptions followed by dramatic declines. In countries where this happens, there seems to be a predictable pattern: agencies identify a new location that has children that they perceive to be in need of adoption, free from the heavy regulation of more established programs adoptions initially move quite quickly, parents and agencies flock to the new country because of the promise of fast adoptions of desirable children, adoptions rise dramatically causing demand to outweigh supply, this then creates incentives for child trafficking, which eventually leads to the closure of the program or a drastic slowing of adoptions. Adoptions from Ethiopia are a recent example of this trend, first popularized by Angelina Jolie's 2005 adoption of an Ethiopian child, adoptions rose dramatically at the same time as adoptions from China, Russia, and Guatemala were decreasing (Gross and Connors 2007). Following allegations of child trafficking to meet American demands for Ethiopian children, though, Ethiopia began significantly tightening and slowing adoptions leading to a significant decrease between the peak of adoptions in 2010 and 2011. Joyce (2013) explains that the adoption boom moved from Guatemala "to Ethiopia and, now, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo."

This constant opening and closing of countries and the associated accusations of child trafficking leads to a significant policy debate about what should be done to curb incentives for unethical practices, while also ensuring for the placement of children that legitimately need homes. We can return here to Posner and Landes (1978) suggestion that the disequilibrium in adoption might be balanced by allowing for a free market in children where a system of pricing can more efficiently match adoptive parents with available children. We know, though, that this option is unthinkable not only because of the cultural incompatibility of matching children with a price tag, but because the history of adoption practice positions it as a legitimate and professional practice that is different from both entirely altruistic placements or a black market in children (Herman 2008, Zelizer 1985). Instead, the answer, at least in the recent past has been to regulate the economy through international norms as embodied by the Hague Convention, but these recent changes have slowed adoptive placements and raised questions in adoption agencies and in the legal field about the future of international adoption.

In an article titled "The Debate," Elizabeth Bartholet and David Smolin (2012), two legal scholars famous for their opposing views on international adoption clearly lay out the terms of current conversations about the regulation of transnational adoption. Bartholet argues that international adoption ought to be considered as one of the best options for children in need of families, she contends that "policy makers have failed to date to embrace international adoption. Instead they have surrounded it with restrictions, often citing 'subsidiarity' principles and adoption 'abuses'" (372). She suggests there isn't significant enough evidence of widespread abuse to limit international adoptions worldwide. The subsidiarity principle, the principle that suggests that efforts should be made to place children in their countries of birth, prevents children worldwide from finding loving homes. She explains that the subsidiarity principle in "The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption (Hague Convention or HCIA) both defer to state sovereignty, leaving nation states free to ban international adoption altogether regardless of whether they can provide children with nurturing homes in the absence of such adoption. Both provide that if countries choose to allow international adoption, they should exercise a preference for placing children in-country" (373).

Overall, Bartholet argues for decreased regulation, and the consideration of international adoption as equally in the best interests of children as placement in their countries of birth.

In contrast to Bartholet, David Smolin (who has written extensively on the topic of unethical practices in international adoption) (2012) writes that children should be thought of as separated from their families, not unparented, and that we should conceive of children as having ties not only to their parents, but also to extended families and communities. Therefore, the first step in dealing with separated children should be to try to reunite them with their families and to investigate the circumstances under which they were initially separated. Further, Smolin argues in favor of the subsidiarity principle, suggesting that children who are separated from their families ought to be placed in their home countries before being sent abroad; Smolin favors in-country foster care to international adoption. He argues that the subsidiarity principle preserves the child's potential connections to the family she has been separated from and "also preserves the child's right to maintain continuity with her culture, language, community, and nation, even when she cannot remain with her original family" (386). Finally, Smolin provides extensive evidence for what he calls a widespread denial of practices of "child laundering" and child trafficking when incentives for procuring adoptable children lead to significant unethical practices in sending countries. Overall, in contrast to Bartholet, Smolin argues for increased regulation through implementation of the Hague Convention, and the priority of the subsidiarity principle that ensures that children that are separated from their families retain ties to either their biological families or to their countries of birth.

The debate between Smolin and Bartholet (2012) is representative of larger conversations in the field of transnational adoption about whether and how regulations should be lifted or tightened, and of what type of regulation provides better outcomes for children. While the agency staff members that I interviewed were largely in favor of the idea behind the Hague Convention, some lamented that it had significantly slowed adoptions, causing children to remain longer in institutions before being adopted. Shannon, who was the staff member that spoke to me in the most detail about adoption policies, suggested that the Hague Convention was a very good thing for everyone involved in international adoption, she said:

> A lot of things that the Hague-- most of the Hague policies make sense. The idea of a centralized referral makes a lot of sense. I know that it's frustrating for agencies, if I were only interested in convenience I wouldn't do it, but it really has a lot of positive effects to have a centralized referral. Families should get behind that and recognize that it actually benefits them, even if it's frustrating. It levels the playing field for the children, it levels the playing field for the adoptive families, it levels the playing field for the orphanages.

Shannon felt that, overall, the Hague Convention provided some assurance that corrupt agencies weren't paying orphanages bribes to get the best referrals for the parents that they worked with, therefore leveling the playing field for everyone involved.

Even as more countries have signed onto the Hague Convention, though, United States adoption agencies continue to operate in many countries that have not yet ratified the Convention or put it into action, especially as top sending countries have closed or slowed the pace of adoptions. This dissertation points to one of the potential reasons that regulation of transnational adoption is so challenging; regulation doesn't destroy demand, it just shifts it. If adoption becomes slower, more bureaucratic, and more difficult from countries that have highly regulated

programs, demand will shift to countries that have faster programs and are less highly regulated. Key to this shift in demand is adoption agencies' understanding of their work as serving the best interests of children—opening new country programs where there is less regulation isn't seen as morally suspect, but rather as a way of accessing new populations of children in need. Absent mandatory worldwide regulation of adoption practice, it's likely that desires and the supply of adoptable children will continue to shift. There is a limit to how far desires can shift, though. Prospective transnational adoptive parents, who are markedly similar in their dispositions, are often unable to imagine children who are significantly older, or who have significant special needs, or even those available within the U.S. foster care system as part of their families. Even as supply and desire shift, then, it is clear that some types of children will always be left behind.

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Methodological Appendix

This dissertation draws from a variety of data sources: interviews with 15 adoption agency staff members and 14 adoptive parents, observations at orientation sessions at Helping through Adoption and International Adoption together, participant observation in Helping through Adoption's office, and an analysis of 157 transnational adoption agency websites. The interviews with adoptive parents were conducted between 2010 and 2015, with all but three interviews taking place between October 2013 and June 2015. Interviews with agency staff took place between May 2010 and March 2013, and the majority of observations at Helping through Adoption took place between June and December 2013.

Interviews

Interview schedules for interviews with agency staff and adoptive parents are appended to the end of this appendix. The interviews with adoptive parents were collected to supplement my fieldwork in the Helping through Adoption office, but were not limited to parents who had adopted through this agency, and half of the parents that I interviewed adopted domestically. I interviewed 14 adoptive mothers who were at different stages in the adoption process, my goal was not to compare across the different stages, but to see whether changes in attitudes about adoption were significantly different depending on where parents were in the process. At the outset of my research I expected that parents would be more interconnected and therefore easily contactable through a snowball sample, this turned out not to be true. I drew initial contacts from Helping through Adoption and International Adoption together, and contacted additional parents through the initial interviewees. Helping through Adoption initially provided me with contacts that were willing to be interviewed, all of these contacts were women. Though I initially contacted mothers, two fathers also sat in on interviews. Most of the women I interviewed were stay-at-home mothers, or had more flexible schedules than their husbands, which made them more willing to meet with me for interviews. Women were also more likely to have initiated adoption after experiences of infertility, and more likely to be the partner who handled much of the adoption process, including choosing the adoption agency.

International adoption agencies were far more difficult to access than I expected, due both to the fact that at the time of my research many small agencies were struggling to stay open and because of the increased scrutiny of transnational adoption following a variety of popular news stories about corruption within the field. When I told Donna, a country coordinator at International Adoption Together, about the difficulty I was having with contacting agency staff, she told me that she had been skeptical to speak with me because of how journalists had framed international adoption in the past. She told me:

> Often people have a fixed point of view before they even meet with me. They've already made up their mind that they're going to do a hit piece on you. It happens to us all the time, all the time. And it seems so illogical because international adoption is such a good thing…It's just a very-- I can't see any negatives. I mean I think everything has to be above board and totally transparent, and everybody can agree to that.

Even though not all agency staff expressed this view, at times during my research some did show skepticism for my work. At the beginning of my research at Helping through Adoption there

were also concerns that I might frame adoption from particular countries in a negative light that would have far-reaching consequences for parents, children, and the agency.

With each agency, I began by contacting the director to request an interview before asking to interview additional agency staff. Several agencies outright declined my requests for interviews, others ignored my requests, and some cited stress and lack of time as reasons for refusing a meeting. The four agencies that I did eventually contact were open and willing to have me interview agency staff. Three of the four adoption agencies that eventually agreed to interviews for this dissertation are located in large metropolitan areas in California, I agreed with them not to disclose specific locations. The fourth agency was located in a more rural area. I interviewed the directors of all four agencies: International Adoption Together (IAT), Helping through Adoption (HTA), Loving Family Adoption (LFA), and Christian Home Adoption (CHA). At International Adoption Together and Helping through Adoption I interviewed all current staff members, with the exception of contracting social workers. I interviewed six staff members at HTA and six staff members at IAT. It is important to note that although the staff members at both agencies had very different titles—ranging from directors, to country coordinators, office administrators, and social workers—their titles generally did not reflect the entirety of their work obligations. In recent years, at both agencies, positions had become more generalized as opposed to specialized with more blurring of the lines between the responsibilities of each individual. As a result, all of the staff members at each agency were highly aware of the intricacies of the international programs and all had experience working in international adoptions even in agencies that also had domestic programs.

The majority of the interviews were conducted individually, with the exception of two interviews at HTA that were conducted in pairs. Due to the extremely high workload of the staff members at HTA, the director requested that I interview two pairs of staff together. These paired interviews yielded particularly interesting information since both pairs had worked extensively together. For each of these interviews each individual was given a chance to answer each question, although they often simply added to the other person's answer, and then the original responder often added additional commentary. The remaining interviews were conducted individually. All interviews, with the exception of two interviews with IAT staff that were conducted at a café and at the respondent's home, were conducted in adoption agency offices. The interviews ran between 50 minutes and 1 hour and 30 minutes with the average interview lasting an hour. All interviews with parents and agency staff were transcribed and inductively coded using Atlas.Ti software.

The four agencies differed significantly in the programs they offered with IAT being the only agency that exclusively worked in international adoptions. Christian Home Adoption had an extensive international program offering, ran an open private domestic adoption program and also had an embryo adoption program. HTA offered both a domestic adoption program and an international program. Loving Family Adoption also offered domestic and international programs, but was the only agency to also offer the option of fost-adopt: a program that places available foster children into permanent homes. The different program offerings of the agencies structured the choices available to prospective parents that used the agencies as a "one stop shop" for all of their adoption needs. Parents who adopt transnationally, and those that adopt domestically, must complete a homestudy using an agency licensed in their home county, so many in-state parent clients sought out these agencies to produce homestudies only, and used other agencies as their placing agencies. In contrast, many out-of-state clients would use one of

these three agencies as a placing agency, the agency that houses a particular adoption program and locates a child for adoption, and then used an additional in-state homestudy agency in their state of residence.

Observations

The observations in this dissertation come from once to twice-weekly visits to Helping through Adoption in the second half of 2013. This fieldwork included observations in a variety of contexts in the agency office and at offsite events over the course of over 100 hours. I sat in on interviews for homestudies to approve parents for adoption, post-placement visits, consultations with parents who were considering adopting through the agency, group orientation sessions for potential adoptive parents, gatherings for adoptive parents and their children, staff meetings, fundraisers, and educational workshops. Additionally, I attended two orientation sessions at International Adoption Together. In observing office work at Helping through Adoption, I hoped to gain a more thorough understanding of the ways in which adoption choices are navigated through interactions with agency staff. Surprisingly, I found in the course of my fieldwork that far less interaction with parents occurred in the office on a daily basis than I had expected. Agency staff typically alerted me of days or times when they would have consultations with parents so that I could be present, but on many days there were no parents present in the office. This meant that much of the time the staff members spent in the office was devoted to solitary work: completing necessary documents, writing homestudies, and corresponding with clients over the phone and email. I did not gain access to agency email accounts and did not sit in on phone consultations, so this limited the scope of the data I was able to collect. Most of the observations came from staff meetings, lunchtime conversations, afterhours workshops, and consultations and homestudy visits when parents came to the office.

Data from Agency Websites

Chapter 3 relies partially on data collected from the websites of 157 international adoption agencies in the United States between May 2010 and March 2011. All 235 agencies that were Hague accredited as of May 2010 were identified from the central listing at the State Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs intercountry adoption website, adoption.state.gov. While all agencies were initially considered for inclusion in the study, 78 agencies were eliminated for one or more of the following reasons: they did not have active websites at the time of the study, they were listed as accredited agencies but had gone out of business since becoming accredited, or because their websites had limited or no information pertaining to international adoption[45].

Agency mission statements that were included in the study were both formally indicated on websites and informally included as a part of a larger welcome page of agency description. Mission statements varied significantly in length from those that were short phrases or slogans, to extended paragraph-long mission statements. The descriptions of agencies that were included in the study most often appeared in an "about us" section of the agency websites, or on agency

[45] Agencies with little to no information regarding international adoption on their websites were most commonly larger social service agencies that offer limited international adoption services as part of a plethora of other services for families and children; because international adoption was not their main purpose, they were less likely to have significant information about their involvement in international adoption on their websites.

homepages that described the purpose and services of the agency. After compiling information from agencies in California, the top receiving state for 2009, each mission statement and agency description was open-coded by a team of three researchers[46]. Following open-coding, we developed a set of closed-codes to apply to the rest of our data set.

[46] The full research team included the author and three undergraduate research assistants.

Interview Guides

Interview Guide for Interviews with Agency Professionals

I. Background of Organization

Founding: Can you tell me about the history of agency? When was it first established and what were its initial goals? Have there been any significant changes in the organization since it was first established? Can you tell me a little about the agency's current mission or purpose?

Purpose and Services: What kind of services does your agency provide to parents before they adopt? What countries do you work with? Have you always provided adoption services for these countries? What kind of services does the agency provide to parents and children after adoption?

Adoption Statistics: How many adoptions does your agency typically complete in one year?

Size and Composition: How large is your department, agency or group? How many people work here and what are their different positions?

II. Respondent's Position in the Organization

Can you tell me a little more about yourself and your position in _____?

How much contact do you have with potential or current parents? What kind of work do you do with them?

How long have you been involved in this position and how did you first become employed with _____? Were you always interested in this position? What attracted you to this type of work?

How did you first learn about transnational adoption?

Can you tell me a little about your work prior to your position here? What has been your career been like up to this point? Can you share with me your educational background? Have you ever worked abroad yourself? Have you ever adopted a child either from abroad or from the United States?

III. The Adoption Process

The Adoption Process: I am very interested in the role that adoption agencies play in the process of adoption. Next I will ask you a series of questions about the role of your agency in helping parents to adopt children.

How do parents usually find out about your organization? Can you describe the typical way that a parent finds out about and contacts your organization? When a parent first contacts your

agency, how do you help them to decide whether adoption is right for them? Can you walk me through the typical process that a parent goes through before deciding to adopt?

When parents come to your agency how do you help them to decide where they will adopt from? How do you help them to find a child? What role does the orphanage play in this process? What other people, either here or abroad, are involved in this process?

Tell me about what typically happens after you have matched a parent with a child. How does the parent first meet the child? What services does the agency offer during this part of the adoption?

Do parents usually keep in contact with your agency after the adoption is completed? How and why?

III. Composition of Clientele

Thinking about the placements that your agency has made, how would you describe the typical prospective parentage? Gender? What are some of the reasons that these parents decide to pursue adoption?

Thinking about the children that have been adopted with the help of your agency, how would you describe them? Age? Gender? Country of origin? Health? Race?

Have there been any substantial changes in the countries that you work with over the last several years? If so, what kind of changes and why?

IV. Challenges of the Organization and its Work

How has the U.S.'s ratification of the Hague Convention affected your organization?

Has your organization been substantially affected by changes in adoption policies in other countries? If so, how? How has your organization dealt with these changes?

What would you say are the biggest challenges your department or agency faces in the coming months? In the next five years? Why are these significant challenges for your organization?

Thank you very much for your time. Before we finish, is there anything else you would like to add to your answers? Is there anything else you would like to tell me about

Interview Guide for Interviews with Parents

I. Background of Parent

I'd like to begin by asking you some questions about yourself.

Where are you from? What is your occupation? Would you mind telling me a little bit about your educational background? How would you identify your race and/or ethnicity?

II. Contact with Agency and Pre-Adoption

How did you first find out about international adoption? Why did you decide to consider international adoption? When did you adopt your child [will you adopt your child]? How old was your child [will your child be] when you adopted him/her? Where did you adopt your child from?

How did you first find out about the agency that you used for your adoption? Why did you choose this agency? Did you consider other agencies? Why did you not choose the other agencies?

Tell me about the pre-adoption process. How did you decide to adopt from [country]? Were you interested in adopting a child of a certain age, gender, race, health? How did the agency help you to find an available child that fit your criteria? How long did the process of matching you with a child take?

III. The Adoption Process

Can you walk me through the process of your adoption from start to finish? How long did the entire process take? How did the agency help you through the process?

What were the biggest challenges you encountered during the adoption process? Who did you rely on most to help you overcome these challenges? How did the agency help you to overcome these challenges?

During your adoption who did you work with most closely at the agency? What was his/her position? What kinds of things did he/she help you with? Did you attend any special meetings or classes that were sponsored by the agency in order to prepare for your adoption? What was the most helpful aspect of working with the agency to complete your adoption?

IV. Post Adoption

Would you recommend the agency that you worked with to other parents who are interested in adopting? Why or why not?

What were the biggest challenges you encountered immediately after the adoption? Can you tell me about why these things were so challenging? Who helped you through these challenges? Who did you rely on most during the time after the adoption?

[For those who have already adopted:] Have you kept in touch with the agency since you completed your adoption? Does the agency keep in touch with you? How? Have you attended any meetings or taken any classes or workshops that were sponsored by the agency since you completed the adoption?

Are there any challenges that you've encountered now that your child has been with you for a few (months, years)? What are you doing to overcome these challenges? Who is helping you?

Are you satisfied with your decision to adopt a child from another country? Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about life with your child since the adoption has been completed?

Thank you very much for your time. Before we finish, is there anything else you would like to add to your answers? Is there anything else you would like to tell me about?