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Child Adoption in Contemporary Rural China

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Based on qualitative information from in-depth interviews and quantitative data from a survey of 425 adoptive families conducted in summer 2001 in rural China, this study attempts to explain the social and demographic patterns of adoption and investigate the roles of the State and families in adoption processes in contemporary rural China. Within the changing context of the new political economy, culture, and social conditions brought about by market reforms (1978) and the "one-child" policy (1979), this study shows that adoption is now increasingly used as a strategy for the childless as well as reproductive couples to reach ideal family size and particularly ideal sex composition of children. Moreover, Chinese families are willing to adopt girls, though strong son preference persists. Overall, it appears that individual adoptions of children in rural China follow increasingly individual desires rather than State directives.

Keywords: *adoption; market reform; one-child policy; rural China*

Numerous studies have been carried out on adoption in the West. These studies have touched on many issues, such as open and closed adoption, interracial adoption, intercountry adoption, the role of the State and markets in adoption, and the effect of adoption on the adoptive children and parents. However, literature on adoption of children in China is thin. In this largely unexplored field, there are few studies on the adoption of children in China.

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Two recent studies stand out, one by Waltner (1990), on the adoption of boys as family heirs in late Imperial China, and the other by Wolf and Huang (1980), on the adoption of girls as *xiaoxifu*, or child brides, in Taiwan in 1845 to 1945 under Japanese colonial rule. Studies on the adoption of children in socialist China, where the State has been playing an important role in family formation, are particularly lacking. This is especially true of contemporary China, which is experiencing institutional reforms and rapid changes that began at the end of the 1970s. A notable exception is the study in central China by Johnson, Huang, and Wang (1998), based on a survey of 392 adoptive families collected in China in late 1995 and 1996.

China has experienced rapid changes since the socialist revolution in 1949. After three decades of State planned economy, it started its institutional reforms with an introduction of market-oriented economy in the late 1970s. It also introduced the so-called "one-child" policy roughly at the same time. Economic and population policies implemented in the 1980s and 1990s have influenced almost every aspect of social and family lives in China. Many large-scale, nationally representative surveys were conducted to capture the changes in the postreform era of China, with some containing information on adoption. Such surveys include the following important ones, for example, the 1988 National Sample Survey on Fertility and Contraception (NSSFC; Editorial Committee of National Sample Survey on Fertility and Contraception, 1993), the 1992 National Sample Survey on the Situation of Children (NSSSC; State Statistical Bureau, 1993), and the 1997 National Population and Reproductive Health Survey (NPRHS; State Family Planning Commission, 2000). Although those national surveys do not particularly focus on adoption, they nevertheless provide useful adoption information. Using data from the 1988 NSSFC, for example, Johansson (1995) and J. Liu (2003) provided a full picture on adoption patterns and trends at the national level from the 1950s till the end of the 1980s. Using the 1997 NPRHS data, Song (2000) added further information on adoption patterns in the 1990s.

Johnson et al.'s (1998) study in a province in Central China and my previous observation in a village in North China based on 17 months' fieldwork in 1992 and 1993 (Zhang, 2001) indicate the following two characteristics regarding adoption in socialist rural China: (a) not only childless couples adopt children but also many reproductive couples with children also adopt, (b) Chinese families are increasingly willing to adopt girls, though parental preference for a son still persists. These are consistent with the adoption patterns revealed at the macro level.

Recent changes in adoptions of children in rural China are closely related to the changing context brought about by the market reforms initiated in

1978, the shift of Chinese family-planning policy to the so-called "one-child" policy in 1979, and the later 1992 adoption law. In Johnson et al.'s (1998) research, they attempted to find out how decades of political change, economic development, and legal restrictions on fertility and adoption in socialist China reshaped adoption practices, and what are the new reasons to adopt girls in present Chinese families that differ from adoption of girls as daughters-in-law in the past. In a similar spirit, the current study specifically looked into the patterns of child adoption in rural China. It investigated how the changing context brought about by the transition of a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented one and the shift of population policy from a "later, sparser, and fewer" policy to a "one-child" policy shaped the pattern of adoption of children in contemporary rural Chinese society. By *adoption*, I mean "any customary and optional procedure for taking as one's own a child of other parents" (Carroll, 1970, p. 3).[1] A man who is taken in as a son-in-law, which is treated as adoption in some literature (e.g., Kurosu, 1998), is not treated as adoption in this article. Stepchildren adoptions are also excluded here. In my fieldwork in China, I did not come across the posthumous adoption, a term used by Wolf and Huang (1980) to describe a situation in which a son was assigned to a usually sonless deceased person; thus it is not included in the current study.

The current research focuses on qualitative interpretations of adoption patterns, with regard to, particularly, the following questions, some of which are not covered by the national sampling surveys: Who adopts children? How many children do they adopt? Do they adopt boys or girls and why? From whom are the children adopted? Do adoptive parents pay for an adoption, and if so, how much? I first investigated the demography of child adoption, with questions focusing on who adopted, why, and how many children they adopted, how much they paid for the adoption, and so on. I wanted to show that Chinese families are increasingly resorting to adoption as a means to achieve the ideal family size and particularly sex composition of children, and that such adoptions are being made not only by childless families but also by reproductive couples. In addition, it is not just families who already have sons that are adopting girls, but many childless families adopt girls as well, but no sons, thereby going against the traditional Confucian ideology of having sons for the continuity of the family line.

I wanted to explore the new reasons for adopting girls since the 1980s because the traditional practices of adopting girls as servants or "little daughters-in-law" are no longer prevalent. I was also interested in the question why reproductive couples, who are physically capable to produce an additional child, adopt rather than give birth to their own child. In particular, why do

those who have only sons opt to adopt a girl instead of trying to have one themselves?

Furthermore, the current research explored, particularly, the decision-making processes within the family and attempted to shed light on the interaction between families and the State in the adoption processes. It investigated how government macro policies influence family decisions in child adoption: How do market reforms affect the motivation of families and individuals regarding adoption? How does the 1992 adoption law, mirrored in the family-planning regulations started in the mid-1980s, influence individual decisions on adoption?

In the same way that people produce children to satisfy their immediate and long-term needs (Greenhalgh, 1988), adoption may be a strategy unmarried individuals or married couples use to meet their own short-term and long-term needs (Wolf & Huang, 1980). Thus under the changing context brought about by the intensive family-planning programs at the local level, and the new changing political economy in rural China, adoption behavior of individuals also change. As the current study shows, for example, couples who have undergone sterilization in official family-planning programs before reaching their fertility ideals may resort to adoptions to reach fertility ideals. In addition, given the differential cost of having boys versus girls (higher cost for having boys than girls), and of different parities (higher cost of having higher than lower parity mainly because of the State-imposed family planning that prohibits mostly some second and all third parities), others may find it easier or less costly to adopt one child (of desired gender) than producing one of their own (whose gender may be not particularly desired). Nevertheless, many adoption practices do not follow what the State had planned for. Many adoptive families or individuals do not satisfy the State's requirement for an adoption. Most of them adopted children informally, without officially registering their adoptions (thus illegal), though many of them, when their informal adoptions were discovered, had to pay an official penalty. Overall, it appears that individual adoptions of children in rural China follow increasingly individual desires rather than State directives.

The analysis in this article is based on qualitative information from in-depth interviews, and quantitative data from a survey of 425 adoptive families conducted in summer 2001 in rural China. My early study (Zhang, 2001) based on interviews in a Hebei village in 1992 and 1993 provided a useful starting point for this 2001 survey and in-depth interviews of additional adoptive families. The majority of adoptions included in my survey (87%) occurred since the 1980s, with the rest (13%) spreading throughout the 1950s, the 1960s, and the 1970s. Although it is not my intention to do a representative study on child adoption in whole rural China, my adoption cases,

nevertheless, cover a variety of Chinese provinces of Hebei, Henan, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Hunan, and Fujian. The eastern and southeastern provinces of Jiansu, Zhezhang, and Fujian along the coastline are among the most economically developed regions in China. The inland provinces of Henan, Hunan, and Jiangxi in central and south central China lag behind, while Hebei in north China situates somewhere in between in economic development. China's western provinces are not included in the current sample. According to the NSSFC data prepared by J. Liu (2003), Fujian had the highest adoption rate of 8.1%, Zhejiang had a low adoption rate of 1.2%, and the rest provinces in the current sample ranged in between 1.8% to 3.4% in 1988.

In the following pages of this article, I first provide the context within which individuals and families make decisions on adoption. I then describe the data and methods used in the analysis. After qualitative explanation of quantitative patterns regarding adoption, I then focus on the various roles of families and the State played in adoption. The final section offers some discussion and concluding remarks.

Background

States influence family structures and systems. The Chinese communist state has made tremendous efforts to reformulate and transform Chinese families since it took power in Mainland China in 1949 (e.g., Andors, 1983; Johnson, 1985; Parish & Whyte, 1978; Stacey, 1983). The promulgation of the first marriage law in the People's Republic in 1950 was intended to liberate women and men from the long oppression of the feudalist and patriarchal family systems.[2] During the peak of the commune system in 1958, the Chinese state tried to replace some of the family's functions—for example, responsibility for child and elderly care, for food preparation, and ultimately for agricultural production. The disastrous results of this social engineering program led the government to restore the family's role in the area of reproduction; however, its role in agricultural production was largely replaced by the collective production systems that continued for another 20 years (S. Liu & Wu, 1986; Yu, 1984).

The Chinese state brought the market back into the economy at the end of the 1970s, allowing the household to resume its role as a production unit.[3] However, State control over human reproduction within the family was strengthened through its rigid "one-child" policy started in 1979. This was a dramatic shift from an earlier "later, sparser, fewer" family planning policy implemented in the 1970s. Implementation of family planning policies is not uniform but varies across provinces and villages in rural China (Scharping,

2003; Short & Zhai, 1998). In one place, a reproductive couple who has a first child as a girl is allowed to have a second child, while in another place essentially a "two-children" policy is practiced. Village cadres who implement the State family planning at the grassroots level do not necessarily know the policy details but simply follow, and sometimes go against, the directives made by above authorities (Bianco & Hua, 1988; Zhang, 1999). The majority of rural families indicate that their ideal family size is one boy and one girl, at most two boys and one girl (e.g., Greenhalgh, Zhu, & Li, 1994; J. Wang, 1990). Families seldom wish to have more than two sons. They can utilize various means to negotiate or bargain with local family planning cadres to achieve their ideal family size (Zhang, 1999). Rural families may also resort to selective abortion (Chu, 2001), abandonment of baby girls (Johnson, 1996), and so on for the hope of producing a son. At the aggregate level, it is observed that in China there are increasing problems in the imbalanced sex ratio at birth (e.g., Hull, 1990; Johansson & Nygren, 1991; Poston, Gu, Liu, & McDaniel, 1997) and excessive female infant mortality (Coale, 1991; Li & Zhu, 1994). Chinese government also adjusts its policy according to the changing situation over the past two decades. The increasing abandonment of baby girls and the increasing adoption of children by peasants to get around family planning policies motivated the government to modify its policy with regard to adoption beginning in the late 1980s. The promulgation of the "adoption law" that was put into effect in 1992 was partially designed to eliminate illegal adoption and to control unplanned childbirths (personal interviews with local government officials, April 10, 1993).

With regard to adoption, little is known about the history and contemporary practice of adoption in China. The prevalence of adoption of children in traditional China (a convenient shorthand for pre-20th-century China) is unknown. Scholars suspect that an heirless family would adopt a boy but that a girl was unlikely to be wanted for adoption (Baker, 1979, p. 31, 40). Using genealogical archives of the imperial lineage of China's Qing dynasty (1644 to 1911), F. Wang and Lee (1998) showed that in the middle of the Qing period, the rate of adoption of boys among male births ranged from 6% to 10% from 1730 to 1810. However, this particular population group in F. Wang and Lee's study might have very different patterns of adoption than other subgroups of the population. Adoption by commoners was probably more frequent than by the nobility because of higher infant mortality and possible higher incidence of childlessness in the poor families than in the rich ones. Another limitation of their study is that there was no information regarding the adoption of girls because their adoptions were not usually registered. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that the adoption of boys was prevalent in

traditional China, and also in the pre-1949 period of the 20th century because of the demographic regime of high infant mortality.

The adoption of girls may have been common for poor families, who adopted girls as daughters-in-law. Buck (1964) recorded for the first time the quantitative information of male and female adoption in China circa 1930, though these figures are controversial (see Wolf & Huang, 1980). The data indicated more frequent adoption of girls than boys circa 1930 at the time. At least one half of the girls were adopted as future daughters-in-law. The other one half balanced the number of male adoptions.

In 1950, the Chinese government promulgated the first marriage law that, among other things, prohibited parents from adopting infant girls for the purpose of marrying them to their sons. Many women who had been child brides sought divorces after the marriage law came into effect (Diamant, 2000). This new law and the demographic situation of decreasing infant mortality and likely decreasing childlessness in the 1950s and the 1960s probably reduced the demand for children for adoption. The Chinese population in general improved its living standard. There was a dramatic reduction of mortality and improved life expectancy. Fertility remained high; in fact, fertility during the initial years of the socialist construction was higher than in previous decades because of improved health and living standards (Zhang, 2002). In the past, many poor men remained unmarried and, if possible, would adopt a child for their old age security if not for perpetuation of the family line. After 1949, the declining proportion of men remaining single for their whole lives may be one important reason for less frequent child adoption.

In the 1970s, the Chinese government implemented a "later, sparser, and fewer" policy and then in the 1980s a "one-child" policy. Fertility showed a dramatic decline in the 1970s, fluctuated in the 1980s, and remained at a low level during the 1990s (see Goldstein & Wang, 1996; Peng & Guo, 2000). While aggregate fertility went down in the 1980s and the 1990s, there was, however, increasing abandonment of baby girls (Johnson et al., 1998). Many families claimed that their birth children were adopted or used adoption as a loophole to get around State family planning policies (Bianco & Hua, 1988, p. 154; Greenhalgh & Li, 1995, pp. 630-632; Zhou, 1996, pp. 186, 195; Zhang, 2001). Starting in the late 1980s, the government explicitly excluded reproductive couples who adopted out their children from eligibility for further childbearing (Greenhalgh, 1994, p. 15) and prohibited adoption by couples who had given birth to their own children.

In 1992, China put into effect its first Adoption Law, which outlined specific conditions for adoption.[4] Persons who wanted to adopt a child needed to satisfy the following three requirements: (a) no children, (b) the ability to rear and educate the adopted child, and (c) at least age 35 years. The age

requirement was reduced to age 30 years in an amendment that came into effect on April 1, 1999. Previously, the only exceptions to the requirement for adopting more than one child were if the family adopted a child whose parents were deceased or a child who had a special need. In 1998, the law was amended to add another exception: children who were abandoned whose parents cannot be ascertained or found and who are under the care of social welfare institutions.

The evidence from national surveys and official registrations shows that adoption of children in China increased dramatically in the 1980s and the 1990s. The 1988 Two Per Thousand Fertility Survey indicated that the total number of children adopted in the 1970s was fewer than 200,000, and it increased to about 400,000 in 1984-1986, and more than 500,000 in 1987 (Johansson & Nygren, 1991, p. 45). According to statistics from the Civil Affairs Department, there were about 2,900 officially registered adoptions in 1992 (Ministry of Civil Affairs of China [MCAC], 1992). These figures increased sharply to more than 26,000 in 1999, 38,000 in 2000, and 55,000 in 2001 (MCAC, 1999, 2000, 2001).[5] However, these accounted for probably a small proportion of all adoptions in China because many adopted children were adopted informally without official registrations, as shown in the following section.

Data and Method

Data used in this article are based on qualitative and quantitative information collected during May to August of 2001 in rural China. The quantitative data were collected with the assistance of university students in July and August of 2001, during their summer vacation at their home villages (referred as the 2001 Rural Adoption Survey). The survey adopted a nonrandom sampling strategy. In total, 425 questionnaires regarding adoptions of children since 1949 were collected, mostly in the provinces of Hebei, Henan, Anhui, Shannxi, Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Hunan, Sichuan, and Fujian. The 425 collected questionnaires contain demographic information for adoptive parents or individuals and adopted children, and the processes with regard to adoption, like how decisions were arrived at, and so on. Some of the basic demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of adoptive families are presented in Table 1, together with information available from Johnson et al.'s (1998) study, the 1988 NSSFC, the 1992 NSSSC, and the 1997 NPRHS.

The survey adopts a nonrandom sampling strategy simply because of the unavailability of a good list of adoption cases as the sample frame. Another possibility would be to use a multistage sampling strategy, randomly select

Table 1
Basic Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Adoptive Parents

	Rural Adoption Survey (2001)	Johnson et al.'s survey (1995/1996)[a]	NSSFC (1988)[b]	NSSSC (1992)[b]	NPRHS (1997)[c]
Age					
Younger than age 20 years	0.0	NA	0.1	0.4	1.7
20 to 29 years	2.6		10.3	19.9	11.8
30 to 39 years	27.5		40.0	47.3	34.4
40 to 49 years	42.1		27.3	23.2	52.1
50 to 59 years	19.5		22.3	5.6	0.0
60 years and older	8.2		NA	2.8	0.0
Missing value	0.0		0.0	0.8	0.0
Total	100.0		100.0	100.0	100.0
Education					
No schooling	9.7	NA	56.3	42.5	39.5
Elementary school	42.2		33.5	38.2	31.5
High school	40.2		10.1	18.4	26.4
College +	7.9		0.1	0.5	2.5
Missing value	0.0		0.0	0.4	0.0
Total	100.0		100.0	100.0	100.0
Marital status					
Married	84.0	NA	96.0	96.9	95.4
Unmarried	6.8		NA	0.2	3.4
Divorced	3.2		0.4	1.9	0.4
Widowed	6.0		3.5	0.6	0.8
Missing value	0.0		0.0	0.4	0.0
Total	100.0		100.0	100.0	100.0

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

	Rural Adoption Survey (2001)	Johnson et al.'s survey (1995/1996)[a]	NSSFC (1988)[b]	NSSSC (1992)[b]	NPRHS (1997)[c]
Annual family income (in yuan)					
Less than 5,000	24.7	NA	NA	78.7	NA
5,000 to 9,999	33.2			20.9	
10,000 to 14,999	21.9			0.0	
15,000+	19.3			0.0	
Missing value	0.9			0.4	
Number of children at the time of adoption					
Childless	49.5		44.4	NA	NA
1 child	16.3		15.5		
2 children	24.2		18.9		
3 children or more	10.0		21.1		
Total	100.0		100.0		
Sex composition of children at the time of adoption					
Childless	49.5	49.7	44.4	NA	NA
Sons only	31.1	34.2	24.7		
Daughters only	11.3	7.4	12.9		
Sons and daughters	8.0	7.7	17.9		
Unknown	0.0	1.0	0.0		
Total	100.0		100.0		
Number of cases	425	392	9078	4923	238

Note: NSSFC = National Sample Survey on Fertility and Contraception; NSSSC = National Sample Survey on the Situation of Children; NPRHS = National Population and Reproductive Health Survey.

a. Johnson, Huang, and Wang, 1998, p. 488.

b. Prepared by Liu Jihong from the rural samples of the National Sample Survey on Fertility and Contraception (Editorial Committee of National Sample Survey on Fertility and Contraception, 1993) and the National Sample Survey on the Situation of Children (State Statistical Bureau, 1993).

c. Song, 2000, p. 92.

an area (e.g., village), and interview all those households that have adopted children. This strategy would work if the proportion of adoptions within the areas were relatively large and adoptive parents were open about their adoptions. However, many adoptive families do not reveal their adoption status to outsiders (with reasons given below), so the respondent rate would be extremely low. Many adoptive parents do not reveal adoption information to outsiders, even to their neighbors or fellow villagers, because of the following reasons.

First, childless couples may not want to admit that they were infertile, a social stigma in the Chinese society where fertility is highly valued. A woman in the survey on fertility in a Hebei village in 1993 reported her single child as her own birth and later admitted that the child was an adopted one after I probed further after noticing the exceptionally long time gap between her marriage and the first birth. Others may carefully consider various ways to disguise the infertility. The following story, told by a relative of an infertile couple, illustrates this point. The couple negotiated with a relative in another village who became pregnant after having several children that they would adopt the child once born, no matter if it was a boy or a girl. Because they knew the expectation date, the wife pretended to be pregnant by showing around the neighbors with things on her belly underneath the clothes. By this way, the neighbors would never know they were infertile. There was also another advantage: Adoptive parents could also keep the adoption secret from the adopted child (discussed below), and the adopted child would never get to know his or her adoption status from neighbors, a usual way of getting secrets released in rural China.

Second, sonless couples would not like the fact that they could not produce a son. Couples who give birth "only" to girls may not be able to "raise their heads" in the extended family and among their neighbors, friends, and other villagers. In Chinese society, where son preference is strong, not producing a child or not producing a son may be seen as a curse on the family. Having no son means discontinuity of the family line, which was traditionally an important factor for strong son preference. A family without a son may adopt one; however, their friends or neighbors would keep quiet and be careful not to mention the sensitive topic in front of them.

Third, many adoptive parents do not want their adoptive children to know that they were adopted. Some adoptive families in cities move to new neighborhoods after adoption to keep the secret of adoption from the adoptive children. This is, however, more difficult for a rural family. Adoptive parents worry not only that their adopted children may be stigmatized[6] but also about the children's loyalty to them once they have grown up (Waltner, 1984).

Examples of adopted children who returned to their birth parents, or who mistreated their adoptive parents occur (see, e.g., Lijie Wang, 2000).

Finally, adoptive families, especially couples with their own birth children, would not reveal such information because they would not want to alert the family planning cadres. As mentioned above, informal, nonregistered adoptions are prohibited by law and by family planning regulations. Thus, underreporting of adoptions is similar to underreporting of births, which is adopted by individual families as a strategy to escape the officially imposed fines.

Underreporting of births has been seen as a serious problem in national surveys and even in the State-organized censuses and has been extensively discussed in the literature (e.g., Feeney & Yuan, 1994; Merli, 1998; Merli & Raftery, 2000; Zeng et al., 1993; Zhang, 2002). It has been used as a strategy by families with "unplanned birth" to escape officially imposed family planning sanctions. Underreporting of adoptions in national surveys, however, has largely remained unnoticed. This article shows later that nonregistration of adoptions, mostly informal, frequently occurs to avoid the officially imposed penalties. It is reasonable to suspect that such unregistered adoptions may not show up in national surveys, especially when it is officially organized.

To make data quality of various national surveys a more complicated matter, some parents with "excessive" children born outside the State birth plan may report some of those births as adoptions, hoping to get away from official penalties as mentioned earlier. Thus the national representative surveys with a focus on fertility, family planning, and reproductive health, or situation of children, which contain information on adoption, may have a certain degree of reporting errors. They may miss many true adoptions and, at the same time, include some false ones. For example, the NSSFC, the NSSSC, and the NPRHS reported higher proportions of the young who adopted children than the current survey. More than 10%, 20%, and 13% of adoptions in the NSSFC, the NSSSC, and the NPRHS, respectively, were reported to occur in families where adoptive mothers are younger than age 30 years, some of them have not even reached age 20 years (see Table 1). Part of those adoptions may be false ones, with own births reported as adoptions. It could happen when the interviewer registered what interviewees reported about birth or adoption status of their children without further probing, or the reliability of the information is not easily detected in practical interviews or by logical checks at later stages of the data collection. The youngest age in the current sample who adopted a child was 28 years, and among many other cases that we know brief information about their adoption, there were none adopting a child before that age. As discussed later, many adoptive families

waited for years after marriage before they adopted, though I cannot deny that the current nonrandom survey could miss some young adopters who married early.

The large-scale sampling surveys may also have other limitations for studies on adoption. For example, the NSSFC, with a focus on fertility and contraception, covered ever-married women (those who married and those who divorced or became widows) from age 15 to 57 years and thus left out those unmarried men and women, and older adults, who had adopted children; the NPRHS surveyed women of reproductive age from 15 to 49 years, excluding adoptive men and older adults; the NSSSC surveyed children of age 0 to 14 years thus capturing more variety of adoptive families. The number and sex composition of children of those adoptive families at the time of adoption are similar among the current survey presented in this article, Johnson et al.'s (1998) nonrandom survey conducted at the local level, and the rural sample of the NSSFC, a random survey conducted at the national level. One noticeable exception is that the NSSFC survey reported much higher proportions of adoptive families with three or more children and with sons and daughters, which is about 21%, and that is 11 percentage points higher than that reported from the current survey. It is reasonable to suspect that most families with three children and with sons and daughters would not adopt, except for unusual circumstances (discussed later). It may be an indication that some families reported their own births as adoptions in the officially organized survey as discussed above, a typical way of getting around family planning in the late 1980s when the survey was conducted.

Furthermore, because the national surveys do not focus on adoption issues, they include only limited information on adoption like the adoption status of children. They do not include information, for example, with regard to when and where, and how adoptive children are adopted. Thus, national surveys, though depicting trends and patterns of adoption at aggregate levels, do not reveal microprocesses and adoption decision making of individuals.

The qualitative information is thus an important element in the current data collection. For the above-mentioned reasons, I chose to focus on obtaining quality and in-depth information, and to focus on microprocesses, with a sacrifice of representativeness. The representative survey is also economically, if not organizationally, prohibitive for an individual researcher because of the cost involved in using family as sampling unit with relative low occurrences of adoption cases as was the case in the national surveys mentioned above.[7] A majority of the interviews were conducted in May and June 2001 (with a few conducted in December 2002). My previous research on fertility in a north China village in 1992 to 1993 touched on issues regarding adoption (see Zhang, 2001). The village study is thus the basis for the current research,

which guided the research design including design of questionnaire survey and preparation of a checklist questions for in-depth interviews. I traveled in two counties in north China in May and June 2001, interviewing adoptive families and informants who were familiar with the adoption processes of their neighbor and friends.

In addition, fieldwork notes from students during their survey period in July and August 2001 provided another important source of qualitative information. My survey assistants were specifically requested to interview only families that they were familiar with, such as their own relatives or friends, to ensure data quality. They were requested to write reports, though some were brief and others were in detail, which not only provided further qualitative information but also ensured the quality of the quantitative survey. This article also uses secondary sources to supplement the qualitative information. Information concerning trafficking of children for adoption, for example, is mostly drawn from newspapers and popular magazines.

Adoption: Quantitative Patterns and Qualitative Explanations

Adoption is different from giving birth to children in the sense that adoption usually involves a clear decision-making process. Some couples mentioned in the current interview on fertility studies that they may give birth to children "without knowing why they produce kids." Those who adopt children, however, often actively seek information, negotiate with birth parents or intermediaries about the adoption, and put in the time, energy, and often money needed to adopt a child.

Who Adopted Children?

Traditionally couples with no surviving children would adopt, or those who had no surviving sons would adopt a son to be the family heir (Waltner, 1990). In some localities in China, parents who had sons used to adopt other sons, for the purpose of performing the more dangerous and risky tasks by the adopted sons instead of birth sons (Waltner, 1990). Sometimes families who had children of their own would adopt children who are abandoned or orphans out of humanitarian considerations. A family might adopt a daughter for the purpose of marrying her to one of their sons when they grew up (Wolf & Huang, 1980), as mentioned previously. This practice was more prevalent in poor areas where families were unable to pay the bride price (Wolf & Huang, 1980). It has virtually disappeared in Mainland China, now

that they have been prohibited for about one half a century. Of all the adoptions that I have come across and the adoptive families that we surveyed in 2001, only one family adopted a girl in the early 1990s in the hope of marrying her to one of their sons; another childless couple adopted a son and a daughter in the late 1960s and arranged their marriage to each other in 1992.

A majority of people in the current sample were married at the time of adoption. Of 425 adoptive families, 93.2% were ever-married. A small proportion of adoptions (6.8%) were by unmarried individuals, all of them male. The age at which they adopted a child ranged between 28 and 54 years (M = 39 years, SD = 7 years). The unmarried men, many of whom were poor or who had physical disabilities, were seen as having no marriage prospects. Unmarried young usually do not adopt children if they wish to marry. Potential mates would be turned away if they do adopt before marriage, no matter under what circumstances. Some successful stories, depicting unmarried men or women adopt orphans out of humanitarian consideration, even with strong resistance from their parents or kin against the adoption, occasionally appear in Chinese newspaper and magazines.

Almost all childless couples adopt children, sooner or later. However, more than one half of the adoptive parents in the current sample had children of their own before adoption. Of these, the percentage of parents with only sons accounted for 31%; the percentage of parents with only daughters, 11%; and the percentage of parents with a son and a daughter accounted for 8%. Parents with only sons or daughters would adopt a child of "missing sex." Parents who have sons and daughters adopted children probably not for reaching ideal family size, per se, but because of various exceptional considerations. For example, a woman adopted a girl because all her adult children had grown up and she felt lonely otherwise. One couple who had one son and two daughters adopted a girl to replace one daughter who was accidentally killed in a traffic accident. There are other examples that couples adopted children of broken families of their brothers or sisters, or other kin, because of divorce and subsequent remarriage, though they have sons and daughters of their own.

How Many Children Did Adoptive Families Adopt?

The majority of adoptive families, or more than 95% of the current sample, adopted one child. A few, or less than 5%, adopted two children. Adoption of three children was extremely rare. There are only three such cases in the current survey. A newspaper reported that a couple in Henan adopted 25 children who were abandoned during the past 30 years (D. Wang, 2000). There are other examples that occasionally appear in newspapers and popu-

lar magazines. Those cases served the official media to establish good models in the society to care for the welfare of children who are abandoned; however, clearly those cases are exceptional. Families with two adopted children are mostly childless couples who adopted a girl and a boy.

It is difficult to judge if the number of children adopted was directly related to the ideal size of a rural family. One observation is that, even before the 1970s, when many couples had four or more children, childless couples did not adopt more than two children. Childless couples have consistently adopted one or two children, seldom more than two.

Did Families Adopt Boys or Girls?

Childless couples usually adopt a girl first. A childless couple, especially a young couple who did not produce any children in their early years of marriage, may adopt a girl in the hope that it will "lead" them to a son. If the hoped-for son does not materialize, the couple at least has a daughter who might serve as a caretaker and as a possible means to obtain a son-in-law uxorilocally, that is, someone who would allow his son to become his father-in-law's heir (Johnson et al., 1998).

Couples who still cannot produce a child after adopting a girl may adopt a boy. Families wishing to adopt a boy need to have the means to do so because it costs more to adopt a boy than a girl, as I discuss later. Childless families may wish to adopt a boy but adopt a girl instead because only girls are available for adoption. Of 282 adoptions of girls since 1980 in the current sample, 12% of those adoptive families wished to adopt a boy instead (see Table 2). Adoptive parents consider not only the expenses for the adoption itself, which is usually a once and for all transaction, but also the expenses for the adopted boy or girl anticipated later in life. For example, many parents prefer not to adopt more than one boy because they need to pay a bride price to get their son married. Bride prices have risen substantially in some localities following the institutional reforms (see, e.g., Han & Eades, 1995; Zhang, 2000). Thus some rich families, and families with strong social networks, see adopting a boy as a demonstration of their social status among their villagers.

However, the proportion of couples and individuals who specifically wished to adopt a girl has been rising. Since 1980, more than 42% of the adoptive families specifically wished to have a girl, more than 30% did not mind adopting a boy or a girl, and less than 27% wished specifically to adopt a boy. In contrast, from 1950 to 1979, more than 41% of adoptive families wished specifically to adopt a boy (Table 2). From Table 3, we can see that in the early years of socialist China beginning in 1949, the adoption of girls was higher than that of boys, and the proportion of adoption of girls has increased

Table 2
Did You Wish to Adopt a Boy or a Girl Before Adopting This Child?

	Wished to Adopt a Boy	Wished to Adopt a Girl	No Preference	Total
1950 to 1979				
Adopted a boy	11	1	2	14
Adopted a girl	12	18	12	42
Total	23	19	14	56
Percentage	41.1	33.9	25.0	100.0
1980 to 2001				
Adopted a boy	65	3	19	87
Adopted a girl	34	155	93	282
Total	99	158	112	369
Percentage	26.8	42.8	30.4	100.0

Table 3
Number of Boys and Girls Adopted Since 1950

	Number of Boys Adopted		Number of Girls Adopted		
	Number	%	Number	%	Total
1950 to 1959	8	42.1	11	57.9	19
1960 to 1969	9	40.9	13	59.1	22
1970 to 1979	18	36.0	32	64.0	50
1980 to 1989	42	23.9	134	76.1	176
1990+	62	25.3	183	74.7	245
Total	139	27.2	373	72.9	512

significantly during the past five decades, especially in the 1980s and the 1990s. The proportion of adoption of girls increased from around 60% in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, to about 75% in the 1980s and the 1990s.

It is not always the case that parents adopted a girl because they could not afford to pay to adopt a boy or for other costs involved with a son later in life. Many believe that girls are more loyal and reliable than boys. In the eyes of some Chinese parents that I interviewed, the loyalty of the adopted son cannot be guaranteed. There is a sense that adoptive parents believe that the son may find out that he is adopted and go back to his birth parents and not take care of his adoptive parents. People generally believe that girls, however, have "tender and loving" hearts and would remain with their adoptive parents even if they knew their adoption status. There are occasionally examples in the current interviews and my assistants' reports that some adopted boys did

return to their birth parents after discovery of their adoption status, whereas a few adopted girls paid only visits to their birth parents; however, all returned back to their adoptive families. This may be related to the cultural belief that sons belong to the families that is patrilineal in nature in rural China, and girls are only temporary members of their birth families.

Adoptive families with only an adopted girl would not necessarily like to have a married-in son-in-law in the future. Some parents in the current sample who adopted only daughters said they expected to live with their daughter when they can no longer take care of themselves. For example, a couple adopted a girl from a close relative in the 1950s. When the husband died, the woman, in her late 80s in 2001, lived alone. She could still cook for herself. The married daughter, though she knew she was adopted, came frequently to see her mother, sometimes with her husband, bringing medicine, cleaning and decorating the house during Chinese festivals or village market fairs. When asked how the elderly mother would cope when she could not take care of herself, her neighbor told me that the daughter said she would take the mother to live with her.

Married couples with children who opt to adopt most often are usually trying to achieve a sex balance among their children (see also Johnson et al., 1998). When talking about adoption, parents always say that families with only sons may want to adopt a girl, and vice versa.[8] Most often couples with girls only will try to produce their own son. Only after they give up, for medical reasons or because of sterilization in compliance with the State family planning regulations, do they consider adopting a son (see later discussion).

From Whom Were the Children Adopted?

Traditional custom in China prohibited adopting a male child from a nonagnate (Waltner, 1990). Only when adoptive families could not find an agnate willing to surrender one of his sons were they allowed to adopt a child from a nonagnate (Watson, 1975). In many areas, these rules were not observed (Wolf & Huang, 1980, p. 108). In contemporary China, the current interviews suggest that the traditional customs or rules have faded away. There are no requirements that adoptive families must adopt a child from the same lineage, or from strangers. Many adoptive families indicated that they would like to adopt children from strangers. Adopting the children of strangers, often through intermediaries, could help protect adoptive ties from birth parents and ensure the adopted children not return to their birth families (Watson, 1975; Wolf & Huang, 1980).

In the current sample, parents adopted children either from intermediaries, or from kin, or they directly adopted children who are abandoned. Nearly

50% of the adoptions took place through intermediaries, 26% from kin, and 23% adopted children who were abandoned directly or with the assistance of their friends, kin, or neighbors. Less than 1% of children was adopted from the State orphanages. This suggests that many children who are abandoned go directly to rural families without going through official channels for adoption.

Families may adopt a child from their kin. Although more frequent in the past, it is still common. One of the advantages of adopting a child from kin is that it is usually easier with regard to getting information and generally reduces transaction costs. Adoptive families do not need to travel so far and spend so much time and money to adopt. Adopting a son from a brother can also insure that the property remains in the same extended family. However, adopting a child from kin is not always the first choice because the families know each other, and adoptive families may worry about the loyalty of the adopted child.

Adoptive families sometimes find children who are abandoned at their doors or in public places. Parents with unwanted children for whom they cannot easily find prospective adoptive families may abandon their children near civil affairs departments, or by the gates of welfare institutions, or in public places like markets or road sides where their children can either be adopted or will ultimately reach official welfare institutions. Some parents may first investigate prospective families who may wish to adopt and abandon their children to these families accordingly. For example, they would not abandon their daughters in front of doors of families with daughters, and many childless couples and daughterless parents frequently find girls abandoned at their doorsteps. Parents may abandon their children in front of doors of potential adoptive families in the dark, they knock at the door and then run away to insure the child is discovered and taken into the home soon. My research assistants noted many such cases. Thus even when the families decide to abandon their children, they had hope that their children would be adopted by appropriate families who will take good care of them (see also Johnson, 1996, p. 93; Zeng et al., 1993). Sometimes, birth parents may leave money or milk powder with the baby. They often hide and watch over the baby until it is taken away by the desired adoptive family. A piece of paper with the date and time (*shengchen bazi*, "eight characters") of the birth of the child is often attached to the baby who is abandoned. The "eight characters" are believed as determinants of a person's fate in life, and it is frequently used to match a marriage when the child grows up. Abandoning a child to a family that they know can also ensure the birth parents' curiosity to know and quietly observe how the child grows up. There were occasions that birth parents would appear in the adoptive families suddenly and wanted to take back their previ-

ous birth daughters who were abandoned, and these occasions created conflicts between both families. Other birth parents might appear and also manage to keep good relations with the adoptive families.[9]

Relatives or friends often may assist in giving away the baby to avoid the stigma in relation to the abandonment. Parents who have a child of undesired sex, mostly girls, may also send the girl to somebody they know. For example, parents who have two or more girls may send, usually their youngest girl, to a family with only boys. Usually the parents bring some clothes for the baby and leave money for the adoptive families to buy milk powder.

However, not all families with children abandoned in front of their homes wish to adopt. There was one case where a mother with two sons did not wish to adopt a daughter. Her two children were still young, and she felt it would be difficult taking care of another baby. She then ignored a baby girl abandoned on her front door one day in 1984. She thought that people who abandoned the girl would hide somewhere and go away only after the child was taken in. She thought if she ignored the baby, the baby who was abandoned would be taken back by the birth parents. She left the baby who was abandoned there for hours. It was only when one neighbor told her that the baby would be bitten by the village dogs, she decided to take the baby home.[10]

Adopting out boys is not as common as adopting out girls. Many people indicated that parents seldom give out their sons. However, there are cases with families with three or more boys who adopted out one of their youngest. Some choose to give out a boy and get in a girl into the family. For example, a Hebei couple in their late 40s who gave birth to three sons adopted a girl in 1993 and adopted out the youngest son thereafter. In some cases, child traffickers sell infants, boys and girls, for profit.[11] Occasionally in Chinese newspapers there are reports that parents may sell their own infants for profit.[12] Children might also be adopted out when both parents died, or when one parent died, and the other would like to remarry and does not want to bring children along to the new family, or parents get divorced, and nobody wants to keep the children.

How Much Did an Adoptive Family Pay for the Adoption?

How much an adoptive family needs to pay for adopting a child depends on from whom the child is adopted, if the adopted child is a girl or a boy, and the age of the child.

Adopting a child from kin usually does not involve direct monetary payment. However, it is not to say that adopting a child from kin is costless. Adoptive family may compensate the birth parents of the adopted child in a

Table 4
Some Costs of Adoption Indicated in Various Provinces and Different Years

Cost Adopting a Boy	Cost Adopting a Girl	Place	Year	Sources
2,000 to 5,000 yuan	500 yuan	Southern Hebei	1993	Zhang, 2001
6,000 to 7,000 yuan	NA	Fujian	1992	Sun, 2000
6,000 to 8,000 yuan	NA	Yunnan	1998	Lai, Hong, & Hong, 2000
1,2000 yuan	NA	Henan	1998	Anonymous, 2000
2,000 to 6,000 yuan	600 to 3,000 yuan	Shanxi	2000	Chi & Hu, 2001; Wu, 2001
8,000 to 15,000 yuan	5,000 to 6,000 yuan	Huairen, Hebei	n.d.	Su, 2000

variety of ways. Adoptive family may contribute labor, pay in kind to their kin, or pay the cost for certain rituals in relation to the adoption. For example, an unmarried man who was born in 1941 adopted, when he was 36 years old, a son from his brother in 1977. His married brother had four sons. He did not pay any money for the adoption. However, the unmarried man spent 2,800 yuan inviting people for a banquet arranged to celebrate the event.

Child adoption via intermediaries usually involves a direct monetary transaction, though gifts or payment in kind may also be used. It is much more expensive to adopt a boy than a girl from intermediaries, and the prices vary. Many adoptive families do not like to expose information regarding the payment for an adoption. In the current sample, where parents did release the information on the cost of adopting children, the highest cost for paying a boy is 15,000, and that for a girl, 5,700 yuan.[13] According to my informants, in southern Hebei in 2001, adoptive families paid 2,000 to 3,000 yuan for adopting a girl and more than 10,000 yuan for adopting a boy. According to newspaper articles, adopting a child from a baby trafficker cost a family thousands of Chinese yuan, though sometimes a few hundreds would do to adopt a girl (see Table 4). However, the data presented in this table are from scattered sources so a generalization is difficult to make. There may exist regional differences in cost of adoption that also vary over time. Adoption in poorer regions may generally cost less for an adoption than that in richer regions.

Adopting children through intermediaries or from child traffickers mostly involves negotiation of prices, as purchasing commodities in free markets. It is often the case that the person who paid the higher price gets the child. The following story I heard in my fieldwork serves to illustrate this point. One

couple with a son came across a man holding an infant girl in a train station, who seemed to be selling the child. After they knew the man did sell the infant and the starting price was 900 yuan, they bargained and finally paid 600 yuan to complete the transaction (personal interview with a sister of the adopter, June 23, 2001).

It may take some time for the child traffickers to sell a girl, and sometimes they may take the risk of being caught and prosecuted. However, selling a boy, or adopting out a boy, with a higher price, may not take much time. Another story that I heard in the field illustrates that it is easy to adopt out a boy. A woman came to know one family in her village had a premarital pregnancy and subsequent birth of a boy. She informed her sister about the possibility of adoption. They together negotiated with the family that they could take away the child with a payment of 12,000 yuan. They came to the family with the prepared money the next day (with some borrowed money) and discovered that the child had already been adopted by another family who paid 15,000 yuan.

As mentioned above, sometimes families may not need to pay anything for adopting a girl from another family, even through an intermediary. Those parents who wish to give up their girls may not expect to get any money. They may even offer some money or buy clothes and other daily necessities for the baby to be used by the adoptive families.

Adoptive families prefer adopting infants who are not yet conscious of their birth parents, to ensure the loyalty of the child. These parents usually do not want to reveal the adoption information to their adopted children when they grow up. Thus an older child with possible consciousness of his or her own birth parents is usually not preferable for adoption, and cheaper if adopted. The majority of our respondents adopted infants, mostly a few months old, some as young as a few days old. A small proportion of couples adopted children of 1 year of age or older. Sometimes a newly born infant is cheaper for adoption than a child of a few months old because a child of a few months old has been taken care of by the parents for some time, and it involves time, energy, food, and clothing. Furthermore, a child of a few months old is believed to have a better chance of survival.

Adoption of young adults is exceptional but still occurs, mainly in richer families with symbolic meaning of continuity of family line if not for inheritance of family property. Poorer families have neither economic means nor necessity to adopt young adults simply for continuity of family line when they themselves struggle for survival. The best approach for the nonrich families may be adopting a young adult from close kin. One boy was adopted when he was 15 years old by a rich couple with two girls in Hebei.[14] In another

case, a whole family—a young couple in their late 20s with two daughters and one son—was adopted by an uncle and aunt who had a single girl.

Adoption Decision Making: Roles of the State and the Families

Adoption Decision Making Within the Families

A majority of rural Chinese, if not all, tend not to use contraception at the beginning of their marriage and start to have children right away. Age at marriage and the corresponding age of giving birth to their first child appear to have decreased for Chinese couples in the 1980s and the early 1990s (F. Wang & Yang, 1996; Zhang, 2002). Among 20 or so marriages in my fieldwork in a Hebei village in 1992 to 1993, all but one became pregnant within the 1st year of marriage, while villagers observed that the previous generations used to have difficulties conceiving (Zhang, 2002, p. 210).[15] Couples who do not have a child within a year or 2 may go to doctors for check-ups. Some may go to temples to pray for having a child. Some may believe that adopting a child is conducive for couples to conceive, thus they would adopt a child at early years of marriage for the hope of having their own births soon. Adopting a child is not easy and takes time to get a preferable one. Of the married couples in the current sample, 80% adopted a child after 5 years of marriage. In average, married couples waited as long as 10 years of marriage before they adopted a child. There is no difference in the timing of adoption after marriage between the periods before and after 1980.

In postreform rural China, some families, especially women, seem to have strong motivations to adopt girls, though son preference persists. It may be that adoption, like reproduction, is more often a concern for women. A mother who had two sons of her own prior to the adoption of an infant girl said that she admired families who had girls wearing little skirts. Although anecdotal as it is, it does indicate there are families and mothers who like to have girls. However, adoption of girls was not as frequent during the collective period as it is in the postreform era. Many couples could produce the number and sex composition of children they desired in prereform era, when State family planning programs were either not in place, or loosely implemented. Thus, during the collective period, it was mostly infertile couples, primary or secondary, who adopted children. In addition, it was not worthwhile for peasants to adopt a girl, raise her, and then marry her out to become a member of another family. The married daughters had to work in their hus-

bands' production teams and could seldom come back and work in their natal village to earn an income for her birth family.

The economic and emotional considerations for parents to have daughters became noteworthy since the reforms began. As usual, girls help more in household chores that are mostly done by women. Many mothers believed that young girls could help a lot at home, while young boys know only "playing around" without much help at home. Young boys may seldom cook or wash clothes, which are believed to be women's work; and they are still laughed at if they do. A girl is also believed to be closer to her mother. Girls keep good company. Some women I talked to said they adopted infant girls after their own children had grown up because they otherwise would feel bored and would like to have a daughter whom they could talk with.

As discussed above, girls' loyalty can be better ensured than boys' loyalty to the adoptive families. Since the reforms when the institutional and economic constrains have been broken, girls are believed to be able to provide much-needed physical and emotional care to her mother in her old age, even after marriage, when married women increasingly keep close contact with their natal families (Zhang, 2003). In addition, as I discussed elsewhere, family structure has been reshaped since the introduction of the market reforms initiated in the late 1970s, that the traditional primary relations between father and son has gradually given way to that between husband and wife (Zhang, 2002). Wives are increasingly participating in household division, in taking up available nonagricultural opportunities, in managing family incomes, and in establishing cooperation between their new families and the natal families. Subsequent to reform, newly married couples are also separating from their parents much earlier. Newly married wives are no longer under the authority of mother-in-law nowadays as was the case in the past, even during the prereform collectivization period. It is believed that women provided better care than men, especially for elderly women. For example, a woman in her 50s said that "old women may never seek help from a son for washing their feet, with a daughter it would not be a problem" (personal interview, June 23, 2001). Thus, as reproductive women start to invest in the uterine families with their daughters (see Judd, 1994),[16] childless women, including their husbands, are increasingly willing to adopt girls.[17]

Rural Chinese prefer adopting girls also because adopting boys is too costly following the economic reforms. It is because the direct cost of adopting a son is much higher than adopting a girl as discussed above. The cost of bringing up a son includes education and health-related expenses. Prior to reforms, the collectives primarily covered the service fees for children's education and health care. At present, villagers have to pay for these service fees themselves. Such costs have been rising after the deconstruction of the col-

lective system. Most importantly, the cost of having a son includes the cost of getting him married. It is the parents' responsibility to ensure that their children marry. Marriage expenses usually require many years' worth of total household savings, and marriage costs have been escalating tremendously since the economic reforms in some rural localities (e.g., Han & Eades, 1995; Siu, 1993; Yan, 2003; Zhang, 2000). At present, the expense is so great that most parents must borrow a portion of the money needed to arrange their sons' marriages. Ten years ago, house building was not a necessity for arranging a marriage as the new couple could live in either a new house or in a newly decorated old house. At present, however, one house and a yard are viewed as a basic necessity for marriage. Although parents also need to provide dowry to marry a daughter, however, the amount of dowry is flexible, more or less, depending on parental wishes. However, providing a bride price is a must, though the groom's family is not always willing to pay; and my studies in a Hebei village indicate that it is not the poor who requested least bride price; they often have to pay more than part of the economically better-off families (Zhang, 2000). Thus, for many families with economic difficulties, including the childless ones, they would rather adopt girls than boys, paying no attention to continuity of family lines and more to pragmatic survival issues. Furthermore, the sense of family continuity and ancestor worship, which used to be the firm basis for strong son preference in traditional Chinese society and has been under continuous attacks by the socialist ideology, has weakened among the young than in former generations.

With the rising power of the young, including that of daughters-in-law, women seem to be playing increasingly important roles in adoption decision making. In many cases, it is the wives who initiate the process of adoption, and women may actively seek information or travel with intermediaries to get children. Nevertheless, the decision to adopt is usually a joint one within the family, especially at present when young couples become more intimate than their former generations (Yan, 2003). In the past, a man might divorce his childless wife and remarry, or get a concubine, if he strongly wished to have a child of his own. The concubinage system has been demolished with the socialist revolution when the communists took power in Mainland China in 1949. Infertility has also become less frequent as an apparent reason for men to divorce, though it may become disguised when couples would finally divorce when they could not sustain the marriage. Some husbands may have tried but are not always successful. A young man in his late 20s in Jiangxi tried to divorce his wife who did not produce a child after 4 years of marriage. He did not succeed because the wife did not want to divorce. They adopted a son in 2000 (assistants' reports, August 1, 2001). On the contrary, a woman with or without children nowadays may seek a divorce if her husband insists

on adopting a child when she does not want to. For example, a wife in Hebei who had two girls divorced her husband who insisted on adopting a son.

Women may also decide to adopt a child even if their husbands do not agree. For example, one woman kept an adopted girl with her mother until her husband agreed to the adoption. A childless couple in their late 30s adopted a daughter from their neighbor in 1991, after 4 years of marriage. The child had been adopted by two families previously, and neither of the families wanted to keep the baby. The wife used to take care of the baby for the neighbor and then decided to keep the baby. Her husband did not want to adopt the baby at first so she left the baby with her mother. Her husband could not do much about it but agreed to the adoption a few months later (personal interview, July 26, 2001).

There exist other examples that women may adopt various strategies to negotiate with their husbands to achieve their own advantages when there exist disagreements between the couples in relation to adoption. An infertile woman adopted a disabled boy after adopting a girl without her husband's approval, and she separated with her husband for 1½ years before her husband accepted the adoption (Cheng & Cheng, 2001). However, it is not to deny that some women may give in to requests for adoption when they differ from their husbands.

Adoption may be a decision made by or a process involving the whole extended family, and sometimes even beyond. Couples may let it be known that they want an adoption, thus close kin and even neighbors could help to seek information or bring back a child who was abandoned when they came across one. Grandparents sometimes seem very eager to adopt a grandchild. They may initiate the idea for an adoption and may even travel far to inspect and get a preferred child. Grandparents may also pay to cover various costs in relation to an adoption. For example, a couple in their late 50s had three married sons and seven grandsons. They were supportive when the second son adopted a girl in 2000 after having three boys. They were happy that the extended family had finally gotten a girl child. They contributed part of the money to pay the 1,500 yuan cost for adopting the girl, and later 1,000 yuan penalty imposed by local officials.

The parents of adoptive couples may be involved in adoption decision making; however, the final say usually rests with the couple. The following case illustrates this point, and it also shows crucial roles men play in adoption:

> I was born in September 1965 and got married in October 1989. We did not produce any children after a few years of marriage. My parents frequently mentioned about having a grandchild. I started then thinking of adopting a boy. However, there were almost no people who were willing to give away their

sons for adoption, at the same time I frequently had the chance of adopting girls. I thought, my later life would be too lonely without a child. I sought information from many people but could not find an appropriate one for a long time.

One day when I went to the county town, I saw a lot of people in a circle watching something. When I squeezed in, I saw a baby girl. She had very big eyes and very dark hair. I heard that a baby with dark hair would be smart once she grows up. I then decided to take her back home. There was a note stuck on her back: "This child was born on 19 July 1997. Wish there would be good-hearted people to bring her up, with appreciation." I thought, the child would not know I was not her birth father if nobody told her; even if she knew, she would not abandon us and not take care of us in our old ages in future since we brought her up. My wife was also very happy with the baby when I brought her home. My parents did not like adopting this girl. They would like to have had a boy. They later accepted the girl after I talked to them, though not willingly. (assistants' reports, August 9, 2001)

Adoption may be arranged between two families before a child is even born. Women often initiate such prebirth adoption arrangements. For example, two women who were cousins, born in the 1950s, made an arrangement when the younger cousin was pregnant. The older cousin had a boy, the younger one a girl. They agreed that if the new baby was a boy, the younger cousin would keep him, if a girl, she would give the child to her cousin. This way, the younger cousin still had a chance of producing a boy later.[18]

Interaction Between Families and Local Officials

Until the mid-1980s, rural families usually arranged adoptions informally without any official intervention by government officials. Official intervention in child adoptions started in the second half of the 1980s, before the adoption law was put into effect in 1992. It was mainly for preventing reproductive couples from using fake adoption as a strategy to escape from family planning penalties. In the 1980s, when the one-child policy started to be implemented in the vast areas of rural China, rural couples, who have already had one or two children of their own, frequently claimed that their newborn children were adopted from strangers, for the hope of getting away from officially imposed sanctions on "extra" born children outside the family planning norm. Thus the family planning regulations and the adoption law were promulgated with requirements of no children and older than age 35 years (later amended to older than age 30 years), as mentioned above, for an adoption. Only childless couples are legally permitted to adopt children, thus reproductive couples with children who claim their newborn as adopted, and

Table 5
Was There Any Intervention by Cadres for the Adoption?

	Yes	%	No	%	Total	%
1950 to 1979	1	1.9	53	98.1	54	100.0
1980 to 1984	1	2.7	36	97.3	37	100.0
1985 to 1989	33	28.4	83	71.6	116	100.0
1990 to 1994	22	20.0	88	80.0	110	100.0
1995 to 2001	29	28.7	72	71.3	101	100.0

even couples with children who have genuine but informally arranged adoption, will have to pay a penalty. The age limit was set by the regulations and the law following this logic: the majority of couples, especially in rural China, married young and had children immediately after marriage (see F. Wang & Yang, 1996; Zhang, 2002); by age 35 years, or even age 30 years, most if not all reproductive couples would have had their children. The penalty at the grassroots level, as I interviewed in rural Hebei, was that families were fined with the treatment of the adopted child as an "extra" child born outside the family planning.

However, the promulgation of the law did not significantly increase the official intervention in the 1990s, indicating family planning regulations regarding adoption was already in place in the late 1980s and continued afterward (Table 5). At the grassroots level, it is almost exclusively the family planning officials who implement family planning policies regarding adoption that is mirrored in the national adoption law.

The family planning penalty, including a penalty for adoptive parents who do not satisfy adoption requirements, is a process of bargaining and negotiation between adoptive families and local cadres. Adoptive families may use various strategies to avoid an official penalty or to reduce the penalty to a minimum. The amount of penalty is decided locally, thus it varies from province to province, and it differs even at the county level. In practical implementation, it may also vary year by year and even case by case, depending on family situation and the practical bargaining process. The penalties become so flexible in practice that, in fact, adoptive families seldom pay the amount of money requested as the fine by government officials. A poor family who adopted a girl in 1991 after having three boys managed to pay 300 yuan when they were requested to pay 1,500 yuan.

One way to avoid any penalty is through nonregistration, sometimes hiding the adoption. Most, if not all, rural families, including village cadres, do not know the specific adoption regulations. Almost all of the adoptions in the

current sample did not go through official registration at the time of adoption. Many families who adopted in the 1990s had their adopted children registered during the Fifth National Population Census in November 2000, when the government adopted incentives to promote families to register those unregistered children to get an accurate enumeration of the population (Tong, 2000). Otherwise, many adoptive families would wait for years to register their child and only do so when it became necessary; for example, the child needed to be enrolled in school, or the child grew up and wanted to work as a migrant laborer in towns, or when the family wanted to get a housing plot for the child from the village.

Avoiding the penalty through nonregistration has sometimes led to unintended results. For example, a couple in their 40s adopted a son in 1995 without official registration. One year later, the village cadres intervened, wanting to impose a penalty. The adoptive family then sent the child to their sister's family who had two daughters and one son in another village. They agreed that the boy would be sent back when the family planning restrictions became less rigid. However, the family planning work in the village had never been relaxed and became much stricter through the years. After 6 years, when the boy was age 7 years and was accustomed to the new family, the families decided that the child should stay where he was rather than return to the original adoptive family.

Thus many families would like to keep their adopted children by paying the smallest possible fines when family planning officials approach them. One way to pay a smaller fine for an adoption is to show that the adopted child was abandoned, and that may appeal to the sympathy of the local government officials. Adoption law allows Chinese couples, regardless of whether they have children or not, to adopt more than one child who was abandoned, through official channels. Local officials might take away children of nonregistered adoptions (see, e.g., Deng, 1999); however, it is rare. Adoptive families may not know the specific regulations with regard to adoption of children who are abandoned. However, they know that the State has to bear the burden for the care of babies who are abandoned. In fact, many State welfare institutions are unable to accommodate babies who are abandoned (see, e.g., Johnson, 2002; Shanxi Wanbao, 2000). Local authorities, therefore, do not focus on stopping the informal adoptions prevalent in contemporary society, so much as on charging fines for nonregistered adoptions. When the fine is paid and the adopted child registered, the adoption becomes legal.

No matter if the child is really abandoned, or claimed to be abandoned, parents may go through similar bargaining process with government officials if they wish to keep the child. The following case gives an example of how an

adoptive family interacted with the local cadres (and the process of how an abandoned girl was adopted by a couple with already two sons):

> It was autumn 1995, harvesting season. We got up very early in the morning and went to the field after our breakfast. We found the girl, who was still deeply sleeping, on our way to the field. There was a note and 50 yuan with the baby. It noted the date and place of the birth and her family origin. The note indicated that the child was born by an unmarried mother who wrote that she could not keep the baby and wished good-hearted people to bring the child up.
>
> After a glance at the girl, I could not let her remain there abandoned. She was so lovely. She did not even cry after she woke up, and she stared at me with her big eyes. I was so moved. I though it was my fate that I found this girl. Also, we were not too poor to feed the baby, so we decided to keep her.
>
> On the same day I took the baby home, the family-planning cadres came to me. They wanted to impose a penalty of 3,000 yuan if I wanted to keep the baby. I refused to pay any money. I told them that this baby was not ours, and what was wrong in keeping a baby abandoned by her own parents? The officials said they had the policy with regard to adoption, and they would have to follow the policy. I later went to the township to reason with township officials. Finally the penalty was reduced to 1,000 yuan. (assistants' reports, August 24, 2001)

Most often, cadres simply follow local norms rather than State laws or policies. Village cadres may have no idea about the policy on adoption, some may even think adoption should not be regulated by the State. A village governor my assistant interviewed mentioned that adopting a child was a personal matter, and it had nothing to do with the State. Even when local cadres know adoption law, they may often turn a blind eye to numerous informal adoptions that may not be consistent with the legally required conditions for adoption. Sometimes the village cadres themselves may send the children who are abandoned to those who want to adopt. For example, a village cadre sent a baby girl who was left at his house in 1995 to a couple in their late 40s who had been sterilized after giving birth to two boys. The cadre did not ask the family to register the adoption at the time.

In addition, village cadres usually do not intervene with childless couples who have adopted children, no matter if they went through official registration or not. Other legal restrictions on adoptions of children may be simply ignored at the local level. For example, Article 9 of the adoption law requests that the age difference between the adopter and the adoptee shall be no less than 40 years where a male person without a spouse adopts a female child. As mentioned, the average age of the 29 unmarried males in the current sample at the time of adoption was 39 years, the youngest only 28 years; and 25 of

Table 6
Did You Have Sterilization Before Adopting the Child?

	Had Sterilization	%	No Sterilization, but Fertile	%	Infertile	%	Total
Adopted a boy	28	39.4	22	31.0	21	29.6	71
Adopted a girl	118	49.6	72	30.3	48	20.2	238
Total	146	47.2	94	30.4	69	22.3	309

the 29 unmarried men adopted a girl. They were not approached by local officials. However, in some areas, newspaper stories indicate that cadres deal with adoptions strictly, according to law, which are used as means of spreading legal enforcement information to the families (e.g., Deng, 1999; Jia, 2001; Tang & Si, 2000).

As discussed, adoption of children is not the only way for the childless to get children, it is also a way for couples who already have children of their own to achieve an ideal family size within the present context of family planning policies. Some may have undergone sterilization and then chose to adopt a desired child. Others who have not been sterilized may calculate the differential costs (in terms of State penalties) between producing a child of their own and adopting a child and decide to adopt a child because it is cheaper.

In the current sample, of the 309 adoptive families who provided the information, nearly one half were sterilized before they adopted a child, more than one fifth were infertile, and less than one third were fertile but chose to adopt a child (Table 6).

Discussion and Conclusions

This article attempts to explain the social and demographic patterns of adoption and investigate the roles of the State and families in the adoption processes in contemporary rural China. The adoption of children in China is a neglected area of study. It is hoped that the current study will help focus more scholarly attention on various aspects of Chinese adoption. Because of the methodological constraints already mentioned, I limit myself to a few issues of interest and provide some preliminary conclusions.

The findings in the current study in a wide geographic area in China are consistent with Johnson et al.'s (1998) study in central China, and they are also consistent with the findings from national surveys with information on

adoption (Johansson, 1995; J. Liu, 2003). In contemporary rural China, the childless, married or single, continue to use adoption as a form of family formation, to obtain offspring, as the childless did in the past. What is new is that adoption is now increasingly used as a means for couples who already have children to reach their ideal family size. A significant proportion, about one half of all adoptive families in the current sample, already had children at the time of adoption. Adoptive families mostly adopt one or two children, seldom three or more. An increasing proportion of adoptive families prefer adopting girls, which has been overlooked by many foreigners involved in international adoption of Chinese infants, and by Chinese scholars (Johnson, 2002). The majority of adoptive families adopted children who were abandoned or children from strangers. Some adopted from their kin. Only a very tiny proportion adopted children from orphanages.

The current study shows that adoption is now increasingly used as a means for couples with children to reach the particularly ideal gender composition of children, as was shown in Johnson et al.'s (1998) study and in Johansson's (1995) and J. Liu's (2003) analysis of the NSSFC data. Couples who already have sons resort to adoption of girls to reach ideal gender composition of children, rather than to get child brides as daughters-in-law as in the past. It is mainly because of the following considerations. A couple may produce another boy when they want a girl. Although sex-selective abortion is relatively easy in certain areas (see Chu, 2001), it is almost exclusively used for aborting female fetuses, and aborting a male fetus sounds alien to rural families. As noted, most families with two or three sons do not wish to produce any more boys.

Present adoption practices have been strongly influenced by the government family planning programs implemented during the previous decades. The implementation of birth restriction programs, especially the one-child policy in the 1980s and the 1990s, has enhanced the extent of informal transactions of children among rural families. It makes more children, especially girls, available for adoption in the society and,[19] at the same time, creates an increasing demand for adoption at the family level. Families with daughters frequently give up one or more of their girls to give birth to boys. Families with sons usually stop producing more children but opt to adopt girls. In addition, many couples adopt when they still prefer having more children, or having a child of missing gender, after having gone through sterilization largely because of official family planning programs. Almost one half of adoptive families in the current sample had sterilization prior to their adoptions.

At the same time, family planning regulations and the adoption law prohibit many of these informal adoptions. Nevertheless, a majority of adop-

tions in rural China were informally arranged among families, or adoptive families simply adopted children who were abandoned, without going through official registrations. Those adoptions are thus illegal by official standard, and the adoptive families usually have to pay fines officially imposed when those informal adoptions are discovered, though the amount of the fine could be negotiated, as shown in the article. At the same time, implementation of family planning regulations regarding adoption and the adoption law could not avoid arbitrariness, and it differs from time to time, and from different localities. For example, children who are adopted without official registration could be taken away from the adoptive families by government officials in some occasions (e.g., Jia, 2001), while in other occasions village cadres could send children who are abandoned to adoptive families without requesting official registration, as mentioned in the article. In many cases, government officials simply impose fines and then register the adoptions. It is most likely that the informal and thus illegal adoptions occur in such localities where family planning policy for restricting fertility rather than controlling child adoption is more rigidly implemented. In places where the family planning program is not rigidly implemented, reproductive couples thus could produce children of their own to reach the ideal family size or ideal gender composition of children. Under such situations, they will be less likely to resort to adoption for achieving such ideals. In localities where family planning and adoption of children are rigidly implemented, it may be the case that no extra babies and no adoptions would occur. Even within a same locality, for sure there exist differences in household behavior in getting around official policies and laws in relation to fertility and adoption across different families (e.g., rich or poor, families with members as government officials and those without), that need further exploration. Nevertheless, State policies are filtered by individual desires. Rural families make decisions following their own perceived interests rather than State directives. Moreover, people do not simply respond to the policies on paper but to how policies are implemented in practice.

Purposes of adoption and corresponding adoption practices in contemporary China have also been reshaped by the changing context in socialist China. As mentioned, previous literature has indicated that the primary aim of adoption by the childless in the past was to get a son as an heir or a girl to be a future daughter-in-law. Adoption, which was an important strategy for family succession in the traditional Chinese family system, is now carried out mainly to provide future elderly support and for economic considerations.

In the past, the Confucian ideology of producing sons to fulfill filial piety and to worship ancestors was an overriding aim for Chinese families. However, the motivation for adopting a son as a family heir has been weakened in

contemporary China. As Jack Goody (1976) indicated in his strategy of heirship, one can increase the chance of obtaining an heir by either "adding wives" through polygyny, concubinage, or divorce and remarriage, or by "adding sons" through in-marrying a son-in-law or adoption. In China, polygyny and concubinage have essentially died out since the revolution. Divorce and remarriage increasingly occur but are not frequently used as a strategy to have an heir. The increasing rates of adoption of only girls by childless couples, and the intention of not having an "in-marrying son-in-law" for their adopted daughter in those families, have indicated that present-day Chinese couples do not have a strong sense of the need to have a son or heir for the continuity of the family line.

Pragmatic social and economic considerations dominate contemporary adoptions by rural families. At present, the notion of elderly support seems to take predominance in adoption decision making. Daughters provide important support to the elderly and are easy and cheap to adopt. The increasing adoption of girls is simply not because of increasing availability of girls for adoption but a reflection of a stronger desire to have girls, although son preference still persists in contemporary rural China (see Zhang, 2002). The increasing adoption of girls may be also an indication of increasing involvement of women in adoption decision-making processes, as it becomes usually a joint decision rather than a decision made by male family members alone. Furthermore, infertility or not giving birth to at least a son could be a reason for a man in a traditional patriarchal family to divorce his wife and remarry or take in a concubine for the purpose of producing a son in prerevolution China; this has become less common as a reason for divorce in contemporary China. These are related to a general pattern of contemporary gender and family relations reshaped by market reforms and population policies that cannot be easily discussed here.[20] However, what we can observe regarding changing adoption patterns over time is that even though there were more girls than boys available for adoption in the past, adoptive families used to have strong motivation to adopt boys than girls in the past. This pattern is especially clear for adoptions among the childless couples, as childless couples strived to adopt a son in the past, while many childless couples are happy with adoption of a girl at present.

Notes

1. It excludes any kinship established through swearing, for example, the relationship between sworn brothers and their nonbirth parents. Sworn brothers are men who have no blood relations but pledge to become brothers. By entering such a relationship, those men tend to emphasize or prolong especially close friendships in the interest of economic or political advantage (Jordan, 1985).

2. China promulgated its first Marriage Law in 1950, to emancipate numerous Chinese people from mercenary and arranged marriages, and enable them to marry the partners of their choice. The law specifically prohibited marrying girls as child brides. It also prohibited concubinage, gave women full right to divorce, and encouraged simplification of the wedding ceremony.

3. The communes were replaced by a household responsibility system, in which collective land was assigned to individual households and local governments took the strong initiative of transferring production decisions and profits from communes to households. After paying government taxes and contract fees to the village, which still owns the land, the family is largely free to consume or sell what it produces.

4. For a complete text of the adoption law and information on amendments to the adoption law, which come into force on April 1, 1999, please refer www.china-ccaa.org/lyfe.htm.

5. The number includes international adoptions of 5,887 in 1999; 6,490 in 2000; and 6,765 in 2001 (Ministry of Civil Affairs of China [MCAC], 1999, 2000, 2001).

6. There are examples in the current sample that some adopted children suddenly undergo a personality change, for example, becoming quiet, sensitive, or difficult after finding out they were adopted. Some are even said to have become criminals. The consequences of adoption for children in China, especially regarding their psychological well-being, need more study.

7. It is my hope that China will establish specific institutions in researching adoption, which becomes increasingly important simply because of the tremendous amount of adoptions and various problems in relation to it, some of which has been revealed in this article. It could then adopt a national representative sampling survey with a focus specifically on adoption itself, as what has been done elsewhere.

8. In my fieldwork, there are also many cases that parents who have only sons or daughters do not opt to adoption to gain a child of missing sex. Many of them simply say that they are happy with the situation. It may be useful to further explore different characteristics of those individuals and families who adopt and those who do not adopt (or have not yet adopted), and the underlying reasons for adoption and nonadoption.

9. One adoptive mother became infertile after giving birth to a boy. The couple adopted a girl abandoned at their doorstep on one morning in 1989. After 2 years, they got to know the birth parents. The birth father came once to see the baby girl.

10. It is not known if the neighbor used that strategy to persuade her to adopt the baby. Her husband was not happy with the adoption either. Life was hard. However, they kept the baby anyway. At the time of the survey, the child had already graduated from junior high school and worked in Shenzhen as a migrant laborer. It was said that she was very filial. The adoptive mother felt very fortunate that she kept the child. She said she would regret her whole life if the child had been bitten by dogs.

11. There are numerous examples from official newspapers and magazines about government's efforts to stop child trafficking in China in recent years. Child trafficking seems to have become a lucrative business after the market reforms. See Chi and Hu (2001), Su (2000), Lingshu Wang (2000).

12. For example, a couple sold their son born outside the birth plan to a child trafficker for 200 yuan (Gao, 2000). Another couple sold all their children, the first one for 300 yuan, the second for 2,000 yuan, and the third for 1,000 yuan (Wang & Ma, 2001). For other examples, see Chi and Hu (2001), Wu (2001).

13. 1 U.S. dollar was approximately 8.28 yuan in 2001.

14. Xiaoshan (not his real name) was born in a poor village in Xian County, Hebei Province, in September 1982. His father died when he was age 12 years. His mother had difficulties bringing up her five sons and remarried, leaving her five kids behind. Xiaoshan's four elder brothers left their village to find work after their mother's remarriage. Xiaoshan lived with his uncle for 3

years and went out with the uncle to work as a construction worker in an urban area when he was age 15 years. The wife of the leader of the construction team met the boy. She introduced him to her sister, who had two girls and no boy, and made an arrangement for her sister to adopt him. The sister was born in May 1961, married in 1982. Xiaoshan agreed. They invited their relatives and friends to meet Xiaoshan in 1998, when he was age 17 years. They arranged a marriage of Xiaoshan with a beautiful girl in the same village. The idea was to get him married young to ensure his loyalty to the family.

15. It may be because of poorer health in the past, or lack of intimacy between couples thus less frequency in sex. This issue is, however, outside the scope of the current study.

16. *Uterine family*, a term used by Wolf (1972) in her analysis of Chinese families in Taiwan, refers specifically to the bond established between a mother and her sons, through which women gain formidable influence over family decision making.

17. Fertility motivation, including consideration of giving birth to daughters, is in itself an important topic for further exploration, which could not be discussed in detail here because of space limitation. Readers may refer to my study in a Hebei village (Zhang, 2002) for stronger parental motivation to have daughters in the postreform era than before, and Yan's (2003) study in a Heilongjiang village for the formation of a new fertility culture that parents are happy with having only girls.

18. The child was born in 1991 and it was a girl.

19. See Greenhalgh and Li (1995), in three Shannxi villages; and Johnson, Huang, and Wang (1998) in central China.

20. Readers may refer to Davis and Harrell (1993), Greenhalgh and Li (1995), Yan (2003), and Zhang (2002, 2003) for such discussions.

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