

## A Leap of Faith: Managing Health Uncertainty in International Adoption

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It has been well documented that the majority of adopters in the U.S. prefer to adopt healthy, white infants (Simon and Alstein 1992; Solinger 2001; Zelizer 1985). While adoptive parents do receive fairly concrete information on the age and race of children presented for adoption, the amount of information given them about their children's pre-adoptive health statuses varies considerably. This is especially relevant to international adoption, where the majority of parents regularly receive scant or questionably reliable health documentation prior to adoption. Because of this, international adoptions, especially those that occurred in the 1990s prior to the rise of a pediatric specialty in international adoptive medicine, occur in a context of health uncertainty. How do adoptive parents manage this uncertainty? How does it shape the choice of adoptive countries? This paper examines these questions with a particular eye to the influence of professional and media reports that proliferated in the 1990s on living conditions and the physical, emotional, and mental health of children available for adoption from China and Russia.

Data for this paper is drawn from a larger study on parental experiences with international adoption. I completed forty-six in-depth, open-ended interviews with U.S. adoptive parents (40 mothers, 6 fathers) with children internationally adopted as infants and toddlers from China or Russia. Data analysis was guided by the principles of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Corbin and Strauss 1990).

### *References*

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