

BETWEEN ESSENTIALISMS: AN EXPLORATION OF NON-BINARY RACIAL IDENTITY  
AND PLACEMAKING

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY  
Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Science in Urban Planning

Adviser: Leah Meisterlin

Reader: Douglas Woodward

By

RILEY BURCHELL

Spring 2021

## **ABSTRACT**

Over the past forty years, the practice of transracial adoption has become an increasingly pervasive occurrence, specifically as it relates to the extraction of infants and children from East Asian countries to the United States. While this increase in prevalence has been noted and corroborated by state and country data as well as academic research conducted on the topic, little has been pursued that establishes its significance in terms of individual, community and place-based identity development. This research aims to evaluate the effect of place on East Asian transracial adoptee identity development in these multiple contexts. Specifically, it focuses on the experience of East Asian transracial adoptees in New York City and the ways in which members of this community employ spatial, social, and cultural placemaking practices in their efforts to create landscapes of belonging reflective of their unique identities. Informed by a review of pertinent literature across the disciplines of sociology, psychology, geography and urban planning, survey responses from East Asian transracial adoptees, and interviews with placemaking and adoptee community development professionals and East Asian transracial adoptees in the New York City area, this thesis proposes a new conception of placemaking that addresses the liminal experience of the East Asian transracial adoptee identity and carries implications for placemaking for other non-binary identities.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to first thank my adviser, Professor Leah Meisterlin, for her continuous support and unwavering dedication throughout this entire year. Thank you also to my reader, Adjunct Professor Douglas Woodward, whose expertise and experience around placemaking and public space guided many aspects of this research.

I am grateful to all of my peers who provided feedback and moments of levity throughout this process. Special thanks to Justin who walked through it with me every step of the way.

Lastly, thank you to all of my interviewees, for your generosity and kindness. Without you, this thesis would not have been possible.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION &amp; BACKGROUND</b>	<b>5</b>
Definitions	6
Historical Context	8
Asian Transracial and International Adoption Trends	8
Notable Waves of Adoption	
<b>CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE</b>	<b>13</b>
Placemaking Practices	13
Approaches and Methodologies	
Early Applications of Placemaking	
Placemaking as a means for place-based identity development	
Planning & Ethnic Enclaves	17
Pluralism in Planning	17
<b>CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN</b>	<b>19</b>
Research Question	19
Methodology	19
Case Study: East Asian Transracial Adoptee Community in New York City	
<b>CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS</b>	<b>22</b>
Survey Results	22
Reported Birth Country of Respondents	
Placemaking Questions	
Interviews	29
Practitioner Interviews	
<b>CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>32</b>
Discussion	33
The Adoptee Experience as Manifested in Places	
The Uniqueness of Adoptee Placemaking	
Current Placemaking Efforts by the East Asian Transracial Adoptee Community	
Implications	38
For Adoptee Communities in NYC	
For Planning Professionals	
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>APPENDIX</b>	<b>44</b>
Interview Questions	44

Interviews with Professionals	
Interviews with Adoptees	
Survey Questions	45
Figures & Tables	46

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

This thesis seeks to understand the diverse experiences of East Asian American adult transracial adoptees, holding paramount the concept of place, albeit in multiple manifestations. Given the researcher's personal positionality as a Korean American transracial adoptee, these concepts were easily seated and interrogated within the context of the East Asian transracial adoptee community in New York City. Specifically, it focuses on the experience of this community and the ways in which its members employ spatial, social and cultural placemaking practices in their efforts to create places of belonging reflective of their unique identities. Drawing upon prior bodies of research pertaining to the sociology of identity within ethnic enclaves, it situates the East Asian transracial adoptee experience within a racial binary, and the constructions of insider/outsider positions inherent to this binary, across both planning practice and theory, arguing that this experience defies the aforementioned binary, instead sitting on a spectrum within which groups and individuals experience space in nonspecific terms. In other words, the liminality of their identities determines that they occupy an intentionally distinct place and thus makes traditional race-based categorization difficult to apply and in many cases, irrelevant.

While there has been substantial academic interest in exploring identity development of East Asian transracial adoptees in the context of childhood development and adoptive family dynamics, formal research efforts have remained primarily located within the disciplines of psychology and sociology (Johnston et al., 2007; Lee, 2003; Quiroz, 2010). Few studies focus on the individual impact of transracial adoption across the life course of the adoptee (henceforth understood interchangeably with East Asian

transracial adoptee, transracial adoptee), and even fewer have attempted to establish the experience in place-based terms. Additionally, there is limited information available pertaining to migratory and settlement patterns of adult adoptees; though anecdotal evidence suggests that Asian American adult transracial adoptees seek out places occupied by non-white and non-majority ethnic and cultural communities (Shiao & Tuan, 2008; Freundlich & Leiberthal, 2000). Scarcity and decentralization of these data exposes a unique opportunity for potential application of urban theory and practice in exploration of this subject.

While this thesis focuses on the experience of East Asian transracial adoptees specifically, the associated methodology and research questions may be relevant in understanding the transracial adoptee community at large. As the prevalence and visibility of non-binary ethnic identities continue to grow, this research also presents an opportunity for urban planners to adapt long-accepted conceptions and definitions of place, community development and race or ethnicity-based categorizations. It also makes contributions to discourse around non-binary racial identity development, formation and representation.

## **Definitions**

*Intercountry adoption* is defined by the US Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs as the process by which a citizen of one country legally adopts a child from another country with the ultimate goal of obtaining permanent residency for the child in the adopter's country of citizenship (U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs, 2020). The term "intercountry adoption" is used interchangeably with

the terms “international adoption” and “transnational adoption.” For the purposes of this thesis, the term “intercountry adoption” will be primarily used.

*Transracial adoption* often occurs in attachment with intercountry adoption, though the practice itself is distinct. Transracial, or transcultural, adoption occurs when parents of one racial or ethnic group are joined with a child or children of other racial or ethnic groups (Fanshel, 1972; Lee, 2003). While transracial adoption was first challenged in the United States in the context of domestic adoptions involving African American and Black children and white adoptive families, the concept was popularized much later in connection with intercountry adoption of Asian children by non-Asian, primarily white families in the United States, Canada and parts of Western Europe.

The *transracial adoption paradox* is the contradictory experience inherent to the transracial adoptee identity. Simply put, it describes the challenges faced when one’s phenotypic racial or ethnic identity does not align with their cultural identity or upbringing as a result of adoption (Lee, 2003). The issue was first raised in research pertaining to domestic transracial adoptions involving American Indian children, and has since increasingly been the subject of anecdotal and academic discussions on the ethics and implications of transracial and intercountry adoptions involving children from various countries of origin (Fanshel, 1972; Lee, 2003).

This research defines non-binary communities as identity groups that hold characteristics overlapping multiple categorizations. This is most directly applied to the identity of East Asian transracial adoptees, but is not limited to categorizations or classifications based on race or ethnicity alone.



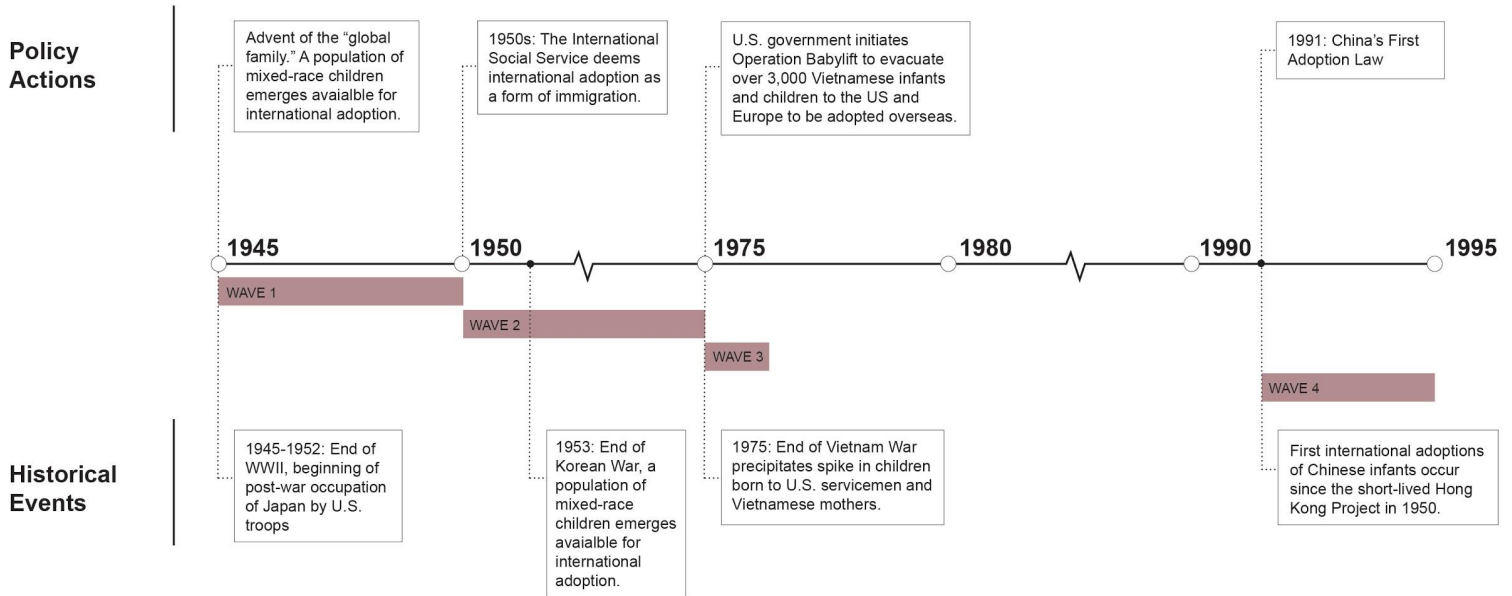
## **Historical Context**

For the purpose of this thesis, contextual research was conducted regarding the history of Asian transracial and international adoption trends in the U.S., providing important points of reference that speak to the development of the practice in the States while further establishing a growing need for analysis of these trends in terms of urbanity and placemaking. These connections rely heavily on adjacent bodies of research pertaining to pluralism in planning as well as planning as it relates to ethnic enclaves to ground certain assumptions and operationalizations adopted within the research.

## **Asian Transracial and International Adoption Trends**

Documentation of Asian transracial and international adoption practices across decades distinctly coincides with major foreign policy decisions and military occupation abroad by U.S. forces (Park Nelson, 2016). As such, these adoption trends are often discussed in waves with corresponding temporal markers and associated historical or political events. Informed by the literature, four distinct waves are defined for the purposes of this research.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Timeline of East Asian Transnational Adoption Trends to the US**



*Adapted From: Park Nelson (2016)*

### **Notable Waves of Adoption**

The first wave of Asian transracial adoptions started around 1945 at the close of the Second World War and pertained to biracial children born to U.S. military personnel and Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese women they encountered during their service abroad (Park Nelson, 2016). High rates of abandonment attributed to a lack of support, scant resources and the burden of social stigmatization associated with distinct physical differences characteristic of these children was publicized by U.S. news sources and social welfare organizations. Coupled with the advent and subsequent widespread use of contraceptives that impacted the prevalence of domestic adoptions, this created a pathway for prospective U.S. parents looking to expand their families.

The second wave of adoptions occurred during the final years of the Korean War and in the years directly following (Park Nelson, 2016). Korean and American newspapers began advertising the high rates of orphanhood among Korean youth as a result of death tolls and resource scarcity, calling upon American couples to consider less traditional means of family planning via international adoption (Park Nelson, 2016). As conditions in Korea improved and some resolved, the Korea-to-America arm of what was steadily becoming the global adoption complex remained intact, with tens of thousands of adoptions being processed annually since the 1970s (Park Nelson, 2016).

“Operation Babylift” was the systematic evacuation of over 3,000 Vietnamese infants and children by the U.S. to the U.S. and other countries in 1975. At the behest of seven U.S.-based international adoption agencies, U.S. President Gerald Ford announced Operation Babylift as an effort to secure thousands of Vietnamese children already selected for adoption by families abroad. According to the official report:

Operation Babylift was initiated on April 2 in response to the emergency situation resulting from the communist military offensive in South Vietnam. Prospective adopting U.S. parents were concerned that Vietnamese orphans already selected for adoption, who might be physically endangered by active hostilities, would not be able to leave Vietnam expeditiously if normal, lengthy Vietnamese exit procedures and U.S. immigration procedures were followed (Agency for International Development Operation Babylift Report, 1975, p. 1).

An excerpt from Gloria Emerson’s (1975) book titled *Winners and Losers*, offers a more critical perspective on the operation, highlighting methods of false reporting and propaganda efforts by the US government during the Vietnam War.

Operation babylift became a carnival: tearful, middle-class white women squeezing and kissing dark-eyed children... The arrival of nearly 2,000 children from Vietnam—I won’t call them orphans since we now know that some of them did indeed have parents—has aroused some of the emotions felt in 1973 when the American prisoners of war came home at last... This

time, only two years later, there is the same self-congratulatory spirit...It is almost forgotten during these excited, evangelical scenes at airports that it is this country that made so many Vietnamese into orphans, that destroyed villages ripping families apart, this country that sent young Vietnamese fathers to their deaths. Now we have decided the Vietnamese we will “save” and “love” must be very pliant, very helpless (Emerson, 1975, pp. 8-10).

The legacy of Operation Babylift is further tarnished by the now infamous plane crash that occurred, killing 138 people, 78 of which were Vietnamese children (Emerson, 1975). Despite this event and the human rights violations that were exposed by Emerson and their colleagues, international adoption from Vietnam and other Asian countries persisted, becoming increasingly popular in the United States and Canada.

A notable political event that reinforced and encouraged these trends was the institution of the Adoption Law of the People’s Republic of China in 1992. This law made it possible for international adoptions of Chinese infants to take place with the caveats that the adoptive parents must be first time parents and meet a minimum age requirement of 35 (Order No. 54 Adoption Law of the People’s Republic of China, 1991). In the year directly following the announcement, 206 adoptions to the US were completed and processed (US Bureau of Consular Affairs, 2021). From 1991 to 2000, that number increased to 5,053 annually. To present, intercountry adoptions of Chinese infants and children to the US continue to increase in prevalence.

It is clear that U.S. military policies, involvement in wars and subsequent occupation of involved countries have acted as drivers of socio-economic conditions that led to the establishment of the East Asia arm of the global adoption complex. While the impetus for international adoption to the U.S. has shifted, underlying assumptions born out of these initial conditions continue to shape narratives around international adoption and international transracial adoptees to this day.

A cursory look at available data published by the U.S. Department of State shows an unmistakable upward trend in the number of legal international adoptions from 1971 to 2011 (U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs, 2020). According to this data, from 1971 to 2001, 156,491 out of 265,677 (59%) legal international adoptions processed by the U.S. Department of State during this time period involved adoptees from Asia (U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs, 2020). Out of those, approximately 110,000 (70%) involved children from South Korea. From the year 1999 to 2011, approximately 18,605 adoptions involved children from South Korea (Hoffman & Peña, 2013).

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A review of relevant literature corroborates the earlier claim that while significant research has been done to understand dynamics within ethnic enclaves, the intricacies of identity development for transracial adoptees and the relationship between place and social functioning, explicit acknowledgement of the connection between these subjects is significantly more sparse. Together with the previous section, this literature review attempts to bridge those gaps and investigate new potential pathways for interdisciplinary integration.

### **Placemaking Practices**

#### ***Approaches and Methodologies***

The concept and practice of *placemaking* exists in various manifestations across many disciplines including social sciences, urban design, and spatial planning among others (Dupre, 2018). While there are multiple definitions and operationalizations attached to each disciplinary context, placemaking generally depicts a process or activity that leads to collective reimagining of a group's surroundings to be more reflective of their interests or identities (Boeri, 2017). This thesis utilizes placemaking as defined by the Project for Public Spaces (PPS) for its historic use and general acceptance by urban planners and designers. According to PPS (2021), placemaking is both an approach and a process that centers communities in the creation and maintenance of public spaces. This definition serves as the foundation for considerations of expanding the ways in which placemaking is operationalized for communities and planners alike. This thesis

focuses on place as an intervention in space that imbues meaning unto that which it occupies (Lefebvre, 1991).

Using the definition of placemaking by the Project for Public Spaces, Mark Wyckoff (2014), in affiliation with Michigan State University Land Policy Institute, created a standard categorization for placemaking efforts and processes. Elements of this framework have since been adopted by various organizations and institutions involved in placemaking across the country and internationally. Placemaking strategies are grouped into four main classifications based on the results that they yield for the communities in which they sit. The table below outlines the four main classifications and the problems that they attempt to address.

<b>TABLE 1</b> MSU Land Policy Institute Comparison of Four Types of Placemaking		
<b>The Problem</b>	<b>The Solution</b>	<b>The Payoffs</b>
<b>Standard Placemaking</b>		
Communities are not effectively using public spaces to create vital, vibrant and livable communities that people want to live, work, play, and learn in.	Broad public and stakeholder engagement in revitalizing, reusing, and creating public spaces using short and long term techniques rooted in social engagement and new urbanist design principles.	More quality places with quality activities and a strong sense of place. More vital, vibrant and livable public spaces, communities and regions that residents, businesses and visitors care deeply about.
<b>Strategic Placemaking</b>		
Communities are not competitive in attracting and retaining talented workers.	Revitalization that increases housing and transportation choices, and urban amenities to attract talented workers.	Faster gains in livability, population, diversity, jobs, income and educational attainment, than by standard placemaking.
<b>Creative Placemaking</b>		
American cities, suburbs and small towns confront structural changes and residential uprooting.	Revitalization by creative initiatives that animate places and spark economic development.	Gains in livability, diversity, jobs and income. Innovative products and services for the cultural industries.
<b>Tactical Placemaking</b>		

<p>Many physical improvements are expensive and policy-makers are understandably reluctant to commit resources due to uncertain risks.</p>	<p>Test various solutions using low cost proxies to gauge effectiveness and public support.</p>	<p>The public and policy-makers can actually see the result and degree of support for various options before committing permanent resources.</p>
--	---	--

*Source: MSU Land Policy Institute and Mark A. Wyckoff, 2014*

While these frameworks are helpful in understanding the motivations and problems that these four types of placemaking attempt to address, it is often helpful to seat them within specific examples. Examples of standard placemaking include street and facade improvements to downtown buildings, or activities such as events in public spaces. Strategic placemaking examples include green pathways to parks and waterfronts and mixed-use developments in targeted locations. Creative placemaking is often development that is focused on the arts such as public art displays. Tactical placemaking is best exemplified by parking space conversions into parklets and pop-up cafes. Complete Streets projects are also associated with tactical placemaking.

### ***Early Applications of Placemaking***

The origins of placemaking in a specifically spatial context can be located in the work of Jane Jacobs and William Whyte, whose combined writings regarding issues of sprawl and urban revitalization continue to inform many modern assumptions about the interaction and relationship between the built environment and social functioning (Dupre, 2018). Whyte (1980) led many early efforts to use observational research methods to understand the impact of built urbanism on social behaviors and functioning. Jacobs' (1962) seminal work, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, focuses its critique of urban planning and policy on the demise of communities at the hands of rational planning ideals that were not built to acknowledge the importance and complexity of



social systems like neighborhoods, public spaces and open spaces. Jacobs argued that safety, security and social integration were primary functions of the built environment and therefore the responsibility of planners to consider. Together, Whyte's and Jacobs' legacies are manifested in the Project for Public Spaces, a New York City-based organization dedicated to creating and sustaining public spaces and public life in the city primarily through the use of placemaking (Project for Public Spaces, 2021).

Since these early contributions and conceptions of placemaking were established, placemaking itself has moved from a complex, but broad conceptual framework to a context-specific and oftentimes example-based categorization (Dupre, 2018). Additionally, co-option of the term by businesses and organizations has been speculated to dilute the general understanding of placemaking and presents a challenge in building definitive consensus around usage and meaning (Wortham-Galvin, 2008).

### ***Placemaking as a means for place-based identity development***

Place-based identity, also referred to simply as place identity, is a term originally used in environmental psychology to describe the "individuals' incorporation of places into the larger concept of self" (Proshansky et al., 1983; Peng, J., Strijker, D., & Wu, Q., 2020, p. 3). Original measures of place-based identity development included place attachment, place dependence and sense of place (Peng, J., Strijker, D., & Wu, Q., 2020).

In urban studies and urban planning, place-based identity development is a term used to similarly describe the relationship between sense of place and the sense of self (Proshansky et al., 1983). Main and Sandoval (2014) examine the connection between place and identity in the context of placemaking practices of immigrant communities and

conclude that groups seek out and recreate elements of places with past significance i.e. places through which their identity was formed. In short, placemaking is a means by which individuals and communities are able to exert agency over their locality and foster tradition and culture creation.

This thesis borrows from such conceptions of place-based identity in evaluating the importance and effectiveness of current placemaking activities engaged in by the East Asian transracial adoptee community.

### **Planning & Ethnic Enclaves**

Planning research and practice has increasingly sought to understand ethnic enclaves in both environments of Western urbanization as well as in developing contexts (Liu & Geron, 2008; Qadeer & Kumar, 2006; Fainstein, 2015). In both planning and sociological contexts, researchers are often inclined to define a boundary of distinction—between those who live within the physical and psychological space of the enclave and those who do not. Commonly known as the insider-outsider debate, this delineation, while perhaps seeking to empower these communities, also places the experience of holding this identity in a strict binary context (Barth, 1969; Merton, 1972; Qadeer & Kumar, 2006). Some of the literature has attempted to challenge this assertion, especially as it relates to informal settlements in the Global South (Roy, 2005; 2011).

### **Pluralism in Planning**

Pluralism in planning, as closely tied to advocacy planning, views planning as a means by which cities can address diversity of communities and interests (Davidoff, 1965). The conceptual model challenges the assumed singularity of “public interest” and

acknowledges the ways that different individual contexts can exist and be represented in a given space (Davidoff, 1965). Entering mainstream planning discourse in 1965 with Paul Davidoff's article, "Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning," this model identified racial discrimination as a key impetus for reimagining the role of planning in designing and organizing places. Building off of Davidoff's work, theorists and practitioners like Sandercock and Forsyth extended these epistemological challenges to include incorporation of feminist perspectives, also touching upon intersectionality as it relates to gender and ethnic identity (1992).

More recent research pertaining to planning's adaptation to growing multiculturalism in urban environments postulates that theory has adapted behind practice, with the latter being more willing to integrate consideration of cultural differences with traditional methods (Qadeer & Agrawal, 2011).

This builds on the body of work found in planning and ethnic enclaves, employing a similar approach to understanding the East Asian transracial adoptee experience in the context of urban space. It also explores the concept of pluralism in the context of non-binary communities as embodied by the East Asian transracial adoptee community.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **Research Question**

Informed by available data and pertinent literature, this thesis seeks to understand the ways in which placemaking is being used by the East Asian transracial adoptee community to foster identity development. Through case study research, it defines current transracial adoptee places in New York City, explores the specific characteristics unique to adoptee spaces in this geographical context and identifies certain characteristics that make them unique to the larger communities in which they sit. The thesis also illuminates current placemaking efforts that are being carried out to establish and foster Asian American transracial adoptee spaces, promoting successful strategies for future use and exposing areas for further research.

### **Methodology**

Several methods were employed for the purposes of this study. A review of placemaking definitions was conducted to understand the application of the term as it relates to community and identity development. From this review, a list of common placemaking practices and processes was compiled that provided the framework for the creation of a matrix of placemaking strategies in use by adoptee-centered organizations in the New York City area.

East Asian transracial adoptees living in New York City were used as a case study. Justification for this was both practical and in recognition of the existence of East Asian ethnic enclaves located within the five boroughs. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with planners, individuals involved in community development for transracial adoptees, and East Asian transracial adoptees in the New York City area. Interview

questions with planners and community development professionals focused on placemaking efforts. Interviews with adoptees focused on the adoptee experience with placemaking.

A survey was distributed to East Asian transracial adoptees via social media platforms and adoptee community organizations. Due to various unknowns and potential barriers to engagement, the survey instrument was designed to be non-exclusive and low barrier (with the exception of self-identification as an Asian American transracial adoptee). Survey respondents were asked to identify their city/neighborhood of current residence, but responses were not limited based on geographical location.

The survey was designed and disseminated to East Asian transracial adoptees with the purpose of (1) providing a baseline of demographic information pertaining to East Asian transracial adoptee community, (2) gathering information regarding settlement patterns and the relationship between the adoptee identity and place-based factors and (3) identifying specific placemaking processes and signifiers most effective in identity and community development for East Asian transracial adoptees. New York City specific results were isolated and analyzed separately as part of the case study. Survey questions can be found in the appendix. The survey garnered 62 responses viable for analysis. No survey responses were eliminated in the final analysis of results. All responses are self reported.

### ***Case Study: East Asian Transracial Adoptee Community in New York City***

Variation in built environments, demographic representation and availability of cultural access points across different East Asian transracial adoptee hubs guided the

selection of a case study area for this research. Anecdotal information gathered in pre-interviews on the specificities of community development with East Asian transracial adoptees indicated New York City to be a viable case study for this research due to the prevalence of established adoptee-focused organizations, opportunities for engagement with transracial adoptees and practitioners and proximity to East Asian ethnic enclaves. Issues of feasibility in terms of conducting in-person research were also considered.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

### Survey Results

The demographic profile of the respondents is summarized in the table below. Survey respondents reported predominantly female (83.9%), with a smaller percentage of responses classified as “Other” (14.4%) and even fewer identifying as male (4.8%). Responses classified as “Other” include “non-binary,” “genderqueer,” “gender fluid” and “nonconforming.”

Eligibility for submission of survey responses was limited to adult adoptees (18 or older). A selection of age ranges following accepted generational distinctions were given for respondents to choose from. A majority of respondents identified within the age range of 18-24 (75%). Approximately one-fifth identified within the age range of 25-40 (20%) with the remaining identifying over 40 (5%).

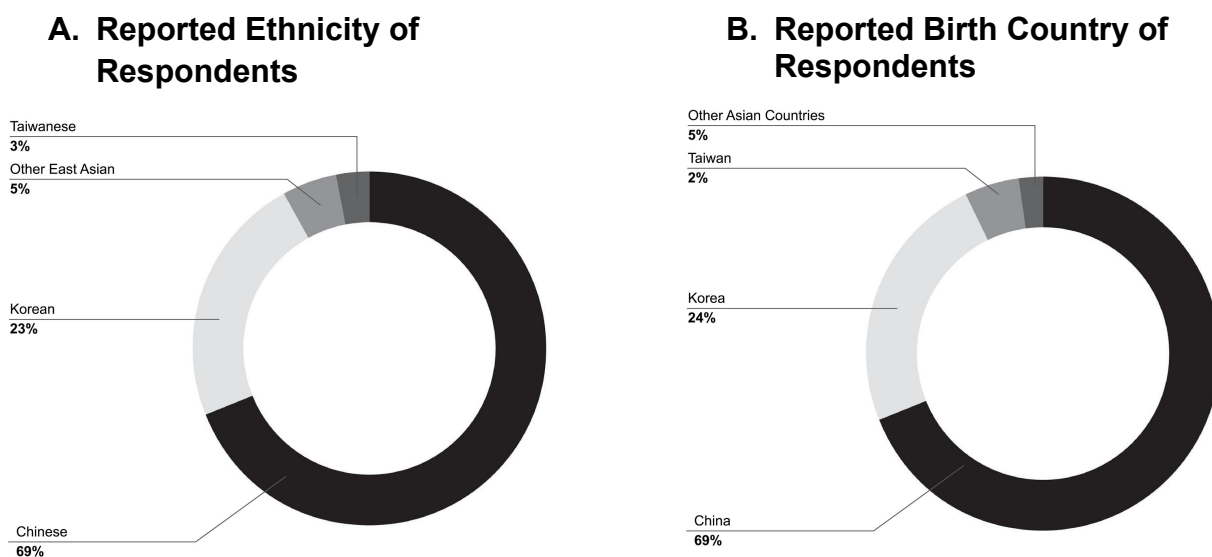
83.87% of survey respondents were adopted to families in the United States and spent a majority of their childhood in the United States. 16.13% of survey respondents grew up in a country other than the United States.

83.90%	Female
4.80%	Male
14.40%	Other
75%	Age 18-24
20%	Age 25-40
5%	Over 40
83.87%	Grew up in US
16.13%	International
n=62	

A majority of the respondents identified as Chinese or Chinese American (69%) and Korean or Korean American (23%). Smaller representations of Taiwanese (3%) and other East Asian ethnicities (5%) were also present. The survey yielded similar corresponding results for the reported birth country of respondents (Figures 2 and 3).

100% of respondents lived in a household with at least one parent who they identify as white or caucasian. Many respondents indicated living in a two parent household with white parents. Some respondents identified one parent of a different race/ethnicity, but of those many indicated that the non-white parent identifies as white or is white passing. 50% of total respondents responded affirmatively to the question, “*Is anyone in your family the same race/ethnicity as you?*”. Of those, only 12.9% explicitly identified one or more adopted siblings also from East Asia. 75% of those respondents who identified one or more adopted siblings also from East Asia also indicated that their identity as a transracial adoptee impacts the decisions about where they choose to live.

**FIGURE 2**



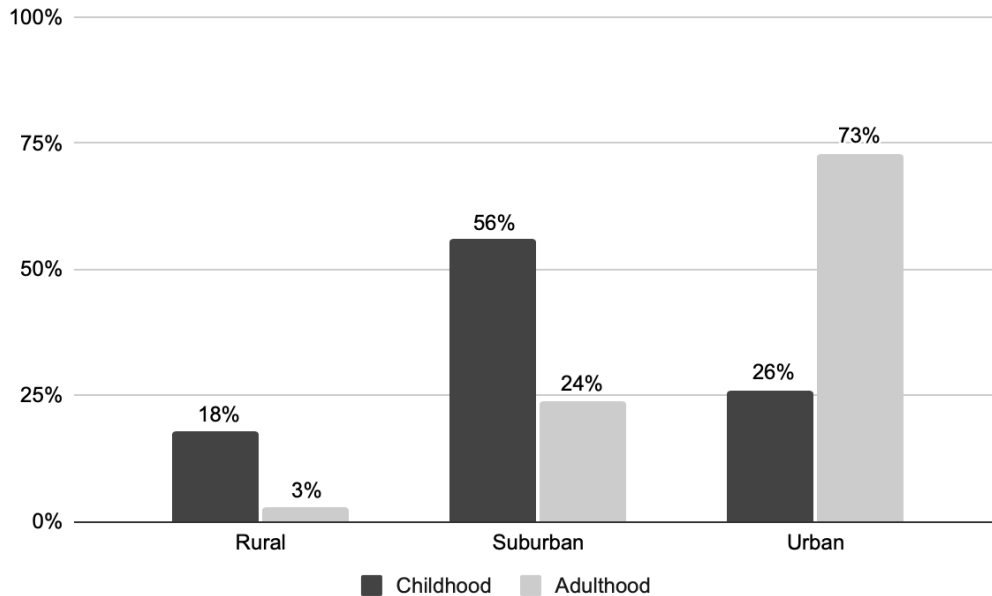


Respondents were asked the questions, “*What best describes your hometown?*” and “*What best describes the places you have chosen to live as an adult?*” and were instructed to choose from a selection of “urban,” “suburban,” and “rural” designations. A write-in option was also provided. Distribution of results for childhood hometowns was majority suburban.

Out of the 62 total survey respondents, 5 identified as current residents of New York City. These responses were then isolated and examined separately. Out of the 5 survey responses in this sample, 4 identified as female (80%) and 1 identified as male (20%). Unlike the results for the entire survey sample, no respondents identified outside of these conventions. Reported ages of the selected respondents skewed slightly older than those for the entire sample, with a majority identifying between the ages of 25 and 40 (60%). Slightly fewer identified within the age range of 18-24 (40%) with none of the selected respondents over 40 years old. All of the selected survey respondents were adopted to families in the United States and spent a majority of their childhood in the United States.

<b>TABLE 4 NYC Respondent Profile</b>	
80%	Female
20%	Male
0%	Other
40%	Age 18-24
60%	Age 25-40
0%	Over 40
n=5	

**FIGURE 4**  
**Comparison of Settlement Patterns from Childhood to Adulthood**  
**Among East Asian Transracial Adoptees**



As illustrated in Figure 4, a majority of respondents identified the places they grew up as “suburban” (56%), with less identifying them as “urban” (26%) and the least number identifying them as “rural” (18%). Distribution of results for places respondents lived as adults skewed toward more urban (73%), with a significantly smaller percentage of responses “suburban” (24%). Only a fraction of the responses identified rural settlement choices in adulthood (2%). In total, 3.2% of respondents moved away from urban environments (urban to suburban or suburban to rural). 51.61% of respondents moved toward urban environments (rural to urban or suburban to urban). The remaining 45.16% of respondents sustained their environment from childhood to adulthood. The survey design could have influenced with regards to respondents’ perceptions of what urban, rural and suburban mean.

Respondents were also asked the question, “*Did/does your identity as a transracial adoptee impact the decisions you make about where to live?*” A majority (70.97%) of respondents answered with “yes, on a neighborhood scale,” “yes, on a citywide scale,” or “yes, on a neighborhood scale” and “yes, on a citywide scale.” Few answered “no, not at all,” (9.67%), with only a small number declining to give a response (1.61%).

In isolation, the survey questions pertaining to adoptee settlement patterns could be interpreted to merely reflect overall trends toward urbanization and city in-migration. However, when asked in sequence with a question establishing the importance of the adoptee identity as a determining factor in where adoptees choose to live as adults, it becomes more likely that the settlement patterns reported could reflect specific choices that adoptees make as a community.

***Placemaking Questions***

Lastly, survey respondents were presented with a series of three scenarios depicting various sensory and place-based experiences listed in Table 3.

<b>TABLE 3 Scenarios from Survey</b>
SCENARIO 1: Smelling culturally distinct food
SCENARIO 2: hearing identity/experience specific terminology being used (biological family, birth search, transracial adoptee, etc.)
SCENARIO 3: visual cues (ex: ethnically East Asian, exposure to “white” culture evident in other aspects of dress, posture, etc.)

They were asked to contemplate each using the premise, “*How do you know you’re in an adoptee place?*” This was asked as a way to get a proxy for sensory perception.

**Scenario 1.** 33.8% of respondents rated this scenario 4 to 5 in terms of importance. Of those respondents, 61.9% answered positively to the question “*Did/does your identity as a transracial adoptee impact the decisions you make about where to live?*” (“*yes, on a neighborhood scale,*” “*yes, on a citywide scale,*” or “*yes, on a neighborhood scale*” and “*yes, on a citywide scale.*”). 66.67% of these respondents settled in urban areas as adults with 71.43% following a trend toward increasing urbanism or sustained residence in urban environments from childhood to adulthood.

32.25% of respondents rated this scenario 2 or lower in terms of importance. Of those respondents, 25% answered negatively to the question, “*Did/does your identity as a transracial adoptee impact the decisions you make about where to live?*” (“*no, not at all*”). 71.43% of these respondents settled in urban areas as adults with 76.2% following a trend toward increasing urbanism or sustained residence in urban environments from childhood to adulthood.

**Scenario 2.** 88.7% of respondents rated this scenario 4 or higher in terms of importance. Of those respondents, 72.73% answered positively to the question “*Did/does your identity as a transracial adoptee impact the decisions you make about where to live?*” (“*yes, on a neighborhood scale,*” “*yes, on a citywide scale,*” or “*yes, on a neighborhood scale*” and “*yes, on a citywide scale.*”). 76.36% of these respondents settled in urban areas as adults with 78.2% following a trend toward increasing urbanism or sustained residence in urban environments from childhood to adulthood.

4.83% of respondents rated this scenario 2 or lower in terms of importance. Of those respondents, 33% answered negatively to the question, *“Did/does your identity as a transracial adoptee impact the decisions you make about where to live?”* (*“no, not at all”*). 33.3% of these respondents settled in urban areas as adults with 33.3% following a trend toward increasing urbanism or sustained residence in urban environments from childhood to adulthood.

**Scenario 3.** 56.4% of respondents rated this scenario 4 or higher in terms of importance. Of those respondents, 56.76% answered positively to the question *“Did/does your identity as a transracial adoptee impact the decisions you make about where to live?”* (*“yes, on a neighborhood scale,” “yes, on a citywide scale,”* or *“yes, on a neighborhood scale”* and *“yes, on a citywide scale.”*). 70.27% of these respondents settled in urban areas as adults with 75.68% following a trend toward increasing urbanism or sustained residence in urban environments from childhood to adulthood.

14.52% of respondents rated this scenario 2 or lower in terms of importance. Of those respondents, 66.7% answered negatively to the question, *“Did/does your identity as a transracial adoptee impact the decisions you make about where to live?”* (*“no, not at all”*). 66.7% of these respondents settled in urban areas as adults with 66.7% following a trend toward increasing urbanism or sustained residence in urban environments from childhood to adulthood.

Survey responses overwhelmingly support the idea that culturally distinct places are important in identity development. When presented with the previously described scenarios, the majority of respondents stated that at least some sensory perceptions which denoted cultural distinctiveness were important in their perception of what an

adoptee place is. While responses were fairly mixed, survey respondents demonstrated greater consensus around more personally experienced markers such as “*hearing identity/experience specific terminology being used (biological family, birth search, transracial adoptee, etc.)*” versus visual cues like cultural dress and signage. This may be a demonstration of the adoptee identity as an embodied experience that is less concerned with circumstances that exist outside of one’s presence (visual cues) than those markers that are personal and embodied.

## **Interviews**

Interviews were conducted with three professionals involved in Asian American Transracial adoptee work and community building and two East Asian transracial adoptees. All interviewees’ work and personal experience was screened for relevance to the case study defined for the purposes of this thesis. Across these conversations, common themes emerged regarding the evolution of placemaking efforts in the East Asian transracial adoptee community and defining characteristics of East Asian transracial adoptee places.

### ***Practitioner Interviews***

All three interviewees are community development professionals who identify as East Asian transracial adoptees. Key topics discussed include current placemaking efforts (virtual placemaking and in-person/physical placemaking), unique characteristics of adoptee places and the manifestation of identity in places. One of the key findings was that many current placemaking efforts by the East Asian transracial adoptee community are virtual in nature.

**Adoptee-led placemaking.** In varying degrees, all interviewees referred to a transition that occurred in the mid to late 1990s when adult adoptees began stepping into leadership positions within the community. This occurred in contrast to prior community building and placemaking efforts that were organized by white adoptive parents. On this transition, one interviewee said, “[we asked ourselves] what it would mean for us to create an identity and a community for ourselves separate and apart from our parents?” For this interviewee, the desire to create access points and resources for future generations of adoptees was one of the strongest drivers behind these efforts. Multiple interviewees spoke about personal experiences navigating the disparity between racial phenotype and cultural upbringing, one interviewee pointing out that many adoptees are taught to understand their adoption as “the beginning” (their birth), thus normalizing experiencing birth culture through a white lens and minimizing their experiences pre-adoption. “We can’t have another generation of adoptees that don’t know who they are.”

**The importance of placemaking within the adoptee community.** Consensus was established across interviews regarding the importance of placemaking in the East Asian transracial adoptee community as it relates to the inherent intentionality of the adoptee experience and relationship with adoptee identity development. Most interviewees described a specific event (including moving to a new place or returning back to their country of birth for a period of time to study or live) as the impetus for becoming involved in East Asian transracial adoptee places in various capacities. Unlike many non-adopted Asians and Asian Americans, Asian adoptees do not have birthright access to intergenerational perspectives to be able to fully understand what it means to

identify and be identified as Asian. As a result, any knowledge adoptees accumulate about the culture associated with their birth country is intentionally obtained. Multiple interviewees reference this as an intentional and deeply personal synthesis of racial identity. This intentionality is central to understanding why placemaking is uniquely important for the adoptee community.

**What does an adoptee place look like.** According to interviewees, three key elements that define an adoptee place are (1) greyness, (2) intimacy and (3) existence completely divorced from an assertion of the superiority of whiteness or white culture.

Greyness refers to an intentional middle ground. Several interviewees described the idea of “in-between” places as places which are not absolute in their cultural identity or cultural markers, thus making them accessible and comprehensible to many groups. They are not exclusive or exclusionary by any means. Intentionality is key. Grey places in these terms should not be confused with interstitial places, and are characterized by a perceived blendedness. Interview subjects described situations of blended nature that may have characteristics of certain ethnicities but are not absolute, stark or exclusionary. As an example of this, one interviewee described the act of adoptees sitting down to a drum performance together in Koreatown. The public outing that, by any onlooker’s guess, is a group of ethnically and culturally Asian individuals going to a performance that harkens back to their cultural heritage, is actually culturally white East Asian adoptees sharing an experience that is both enjoyable and educational. Behind their actions and choices is a certain intentionality that is inherent in the adoptee experience. Therefore, greyness is not a condition of being unclaimed, unknown or absent identity, it is a condition of being non-absolute. One interview respondent noted, “I just think it is



impossible to divorce ethnic culture, phenotypic culture, from the adoption identity. How I feel about adoption is so intertwined with how I feel about Korea and being Asian American.” Thus, it is in the in-between or liminal places, as an embodiment of greyness, that adoptee culture is situated.

All interviewees spoke about the intimacy of adoptee places. Anecdotally, this likely results from common identity-rooted trauma points and finding validity in the absence of an overarching assertion of whiteness. As one interviewee stated, “I will disclose and bond over things with fellow adoptees I just met in a way that my partner will be surprised by...they ask, ‘how have we never talked about this?’” While the ideas of greyness and intimacy are difficult to conceptualize with respect to placemaking, the importance here is to understand that adoptees carry these conceptions within them and thus, if the predominant people within a space carry the adoptee identity, that space can take on these conceptions.

Lastly is the conceptualization of adoptee places in terms of proximity and relationship to whiteness. Interviewees described the familiarity and safety of white space. However, conversations with interviewees supported the idea that adoptee places exist absent of the dominant white lens. That is not to say that adoptees may not use an adoptee place to speak about and understand their experiences navigating whiteness or white culture, but rather that the inherent nature of the space not be built on the white perception of what it should be. This returns to the idea of centering the adoptee experience and therefore identity in creating and maintaining these places. Currently, it is unclear whether adoptee spaces exist as interviewees have conceived but these conceptions provide guideposts for future placemaking efforts.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

### Discussion

Based on the findings, this research provides ample evidence that the concept of place impacts identity development for East Asian transracial adoptees, and is in fact central in the ongoing community development efforts being helmed by the community at large.

### *The Adoptee Experience as Manifested in Places*

While some East Asian transracial adoptees may choose to view the adoptee identity completely independent of “asianness” and “whiteness,” it is more common for East Asian transracial adoptees to create a place for themselves that borrows from aspects of both. The motivation for this appears to be different for both “asianness” and “whiteness.”

**Asianness.** While historically considered distinct, there is a growing movement to consider East Asian or Asian transracial adoptees as one of many manifestations of Asian America. Definitionally (and legally), intercountry adoption is considered a form of immigration. Therefore, some interviewees argued that the East Asian transracial international adoptee immigration is in fact a part of the larger East Asian diaspora. Placement of the adoptee experience within the constellation of the Asian American experience has wide reaching implications for creating a common language of lived experience and identity formation. Shared phenotypic racial identity means that East Asian transracial adoptees experience place and are received in an identical way to their non-adopted Asian American and Asian counterparts. The key distinction is the way in which these experiences are internalized. This shift of perspectives may also lead to

opportunities for mutual support and community building between the adoptee community and Asian American communities at multiple scales.

**Whiteness.** East Asian transracial international adoptees share a complex relationship with whiteness, and this complexity is not better illustrated than in the places they seek and create. Interviewees, both practitioners and adoptees, discussed this in detail, describing the familiarity and safety of white space. One interviewee stated:

“I think as much as adoptees hate the white gaze, it is what they're comfortable with. They understand it. They understand how to navigate it. They understand how to find it, keep it at bay and recognize when it's inappropriate. They kind of know the rules of being in white space. And yet, desire, the Asian space.”

Therefore, it is not the presence of whiteness that is rejected by adoptee places, but rather the assertion of whiteness as the superior lens through which experience passes, as evidenced by the sensory perception question responses in the survey. Until recently, the adoptee experience was not able, for a variety of reasons previously covered in the background section, to be manifested in places. Thus, at this point in time, the manifestation of the adoptee experience in places relates primarily to the existence of a place by, and for, adoptees which would employ concepts of greyness, intimacy, and the removal of whiteness as the superior lens. How this is actualized in practice is yet to be determined.

### ***The Uniqueness of Adoptee Placemaking***

All data from surveys and interviews indicated that adoptee places exist as unique to the larger communities in which they sit. This is relevant in both the context of virtual and physical places. Having established that as discussed in the literature review, what makes a virtual and physical space a place unique to adoptees is adoptees claiming

these spaces. Thus, adoptee placemaking is a manifestation of space claiming, which can be both the symbolic or physical occupation of a place to assert an idea, a belief, or an identity. Because of this, the concept of whiteness is extremely important and in fact vital to the transracial adoptee community. The act of claiming by this community cannot be done without the societal imposition of binary classification.

As stated by one of the interviewees, transracial adoptee placemaking is “collapsing a fence between American and [Asian] and [creating] an in-between space for ourselves.” Relating to such in-between spaces is the concept of liminality (Ybema et al., 2011). Where a general inclination exists to treat in-between spaces as peripheral, underused or underdeveloped, liminality argues for comprehension of them as permanent and intentional conditions (Ybema et al., 2011). The fallacy of treating in-between spaces as margins or interstices between between fixed boundaries denies the legitimacy of the experiences of those who use them and forgoes an important opportunity to understand the embodiment of liminality in non-binary identities more deeply. As an example of this in-between space creation, an interviewee presented the scenario of Korean American adoptees all going to a restaurant in Koreatown together. “Adoptees can blend in in [Koreatown] quite well. It is not until we open our mouths that we expose ourselves.” While adoptees often have the ability to move through East Asian ethnic enclaves unnoticed, entering enclaves as a group of adoptees seeking to find common ground in adoptee lived experiences and opportunities for birth culture education is in many ways an act of defiance and an act of explicit space claiming.

While the East Asian transracial adoptee community employs a variety of placemaking efforts, space claiming is notable in its inherent ability to accommodate the

conditions of liminality. Non-binary identities are unique in their state of permanent liminal being that is integral to the person and cannot be separated from or left behind.

Production of liminal spaces allows for creation of these in-between places, thus broadening and legitimizing the experience of non-binary identities.

### ***Current Placemaking Efforts by the East Asian Transracial Adoptee Community***

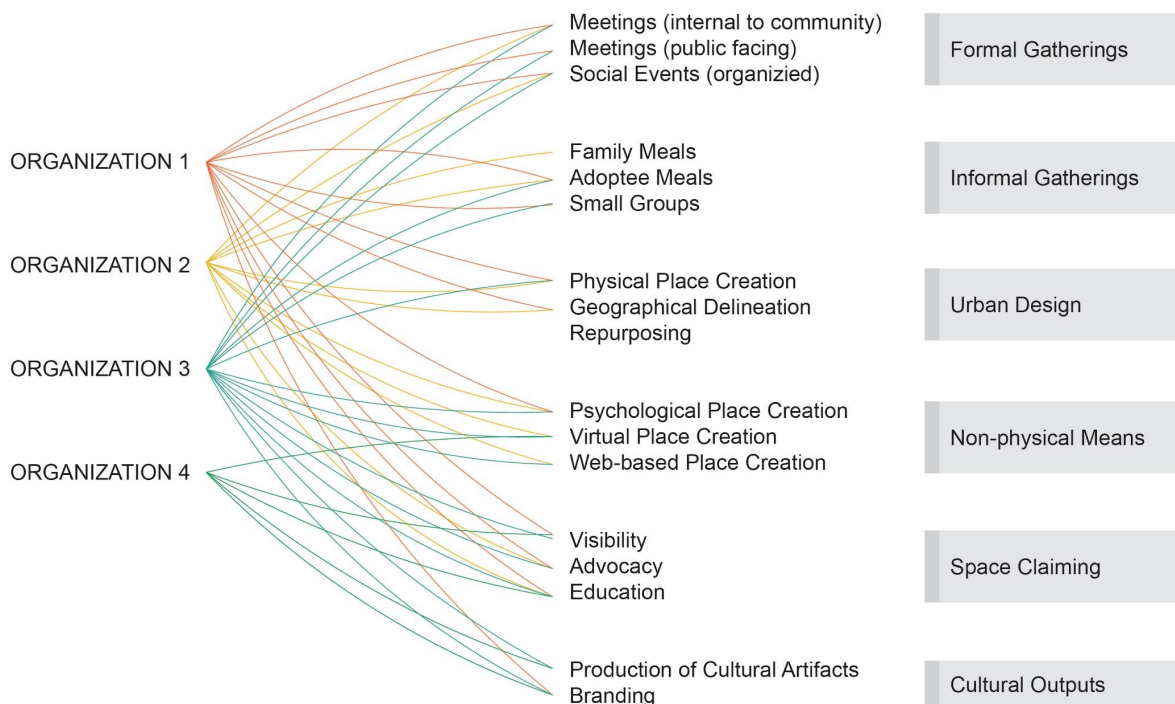
Many current placemaking efforts by the East Asian transracial adoptee community are virtual in nature. Adoptees are using the internet in a way that aligns with the act of claiming space as described in the previous section. Web-based platforms can more easily support the liminality of non-binary interactions due to the removal of racial and ethnic markers that by default define interactions in physical spaces. Examples of virtual spaces in which placemaking by adoptees is occurring include websites, blogs, social media platforms, YouTube, and podcasts. Many non-virtual adoptee places also have a virtual presence. Here, the distinction between virtual placemaking and virtual space using must be drawn. Virtual placemaking in this context occurs with the intention of creating a destination for the East Asian transracial adoptee community. Virtual space use is a pathway carved out for wider engagement and awareness of non-virtual placemaking efforts occurring elsewhere. Nonetheless, websites and web platforms associated with these non-virtual adoptee places do offer an important access point and introduction into the community. This interconnected network of virtual placemaking, virtual space using and nonvirtual placemaking efforts is embodied in the case study and elucidated in the interviewee example above.

Based on existing placemaking strategies and interviews with practitioners, the research proposes the following three general groupings of placemaking efforts as

especially relevant to the East Asian transracial adoptee community: formal gatherings, advocacy efforts and virtual place creation. Formal gatherings, advocacy efforts and virtual place creation can all be acts of space claiming. Formal gatherings include social events, meetings for community members. While public spaces may seem like a natural and convenient venue for these gatherings to take place, there are clear complications when it comes to upholding the previously defined markers of an adoptee place, specifically that exists completely divorced from an assertion of the superiority of whiteness or white culture. In a public setting, this criterion cannot be guaranteed. It may also be notable that currently there are no privately owned public spaces (POPS) located in East Asian ethnic enclaves in New York City. While my research indicates that public spaces may not be appropriate for placemaking efforts by the East Asian transracial adoptee community, the potential of public spaces or POPS in East Asian ethnic enclaves to serve as a place for formal gatherings or pop-up events needs to be examined more fully. Advocacy efforts exist primarily as cultural education that serves to advocate for a place for adoptees in the context of Asian America and provides education to other groups about adoptees. Advocacy utilizing media (like podcasts, videos etc.) is an important caveat here. Understanding and acknowledging the role that media plays in creating cultural products and artifacts by which the adoptee community can be recognized is reductive, yet essential in the internal and external validation and normalization of the community at large. Virtual place creation could exist as social media platforms and groups that increase visibility of adoptee experience. Interaction between place-goers is an essential element of these platforms. The virtual-ness of these spaces is especially relevant for diaspora communities like the East Asian

transracial adoptee community. Space claiming is the act of asserting the non-binary identity within already defined spaces like ethnic enclaves or within white culture more broadly.

**FIGURE 5**  
**Trends in Placemaking Practices for Adoptee-centered Organizations/Entities**



## Implications

### *For Adoptee Communities in NYC*

Implications of this research for the East Asian transracial community in the New York City area are twofold.

**Opportunities for collaboration.** First, it serves as a call for situation of this specific group within a larger group of non-binary communities and hyphenated identity

groups. These may include but are not limited to multiracial individuals, second and third generation children of immigrants and American-born children of immigrants, members of the LGBTQIA community and other adoptee and transracial identities. Establishment of networks for facilitation of peer to peer learning exchanges, mutual aid in advocacy efforts and expansion/continuation of the discourse is also supported by this research.

**Opportunities with existing funding mechanisms.** While many of the placemaking efforts discussed in this thesis were individually scaled, it seems clear that given the appropriate resources, the community would benefit from intentional and community-led larger scale programming for placemaking. Further research exploring funding availability within existing pipelines that could include and prioritize these communities as underrepresented and marginalized groups is highly recommended.

### ***For Planning Professionals***

Findings from this research imply that the existence of non-binary communities as a “new” or “growing” phenomenon necessitates careful reflection on how community development takes place, how and by whom communities are defined and how place is conceptualized in the context of ethnic enclaves.

**Planning and categorization.** Participatory planning in the context of non-binary communities is a futile endeavor for its reliance upon systems of racial and other forms of categorization and classification. The pre-supposition of a singularly identifying community during participatory processes based upon racial categorization as in the case of ethnic enclaves is also harmful to non-binary communities like the East Asian transracial adoptee community for whom this involvement triggers an automatic recontextualization of their existence against whiteness and asianness.



There are clear additional issues with the requirement of categorization for the purposes of an overarching planning vision. Singular categorization in the participatory planning process (with the planner as facilitator) ignores the complexity of identity and associated group forming processes that this thesis just established. Any attempts to engage non-binary identity groups in systems that rely on categorization such as this undermines that group's ability to actualize their identity in full.

**Liminality as a planning paradigm.** Planning professionals have a responsibility to continuously refine the tools and approaches they use in serving communities, especially when the communities are underserved or otherwise marginalized. This thesis has already established liminality as it relates to non-binary communities. It is now required that planning professionals work to understand the ways that placemaking processes can be used to produce liminality for facile communities like the East Asian transracial adoptee community.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adoption Law of the People's Republic of China, no. Order No. 54, Standing Committee of the Seventh National People's Congress (1991).

<http://www.asianlii.org/cn/legis/cen/laws/alotproc376/>

Barth, F. (Ed.). (1969). *Ethnic groups and boundaries: The social organization of culture difference*. Universitetsforlaget ; George Allen and Unwin.

Boeri, C. (2017). Color loci placemaking: The urban color between needs of continuity and renewal. *Color Research & Application*, 42(5), 641–649. <https://doi.org/10.1002/col.22128>

Davidoff, P. (1965). Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning. *A Reader in Planning Theory*, 20.

Dupre, K. (2018). Trends and gaps in place-making in the context of urban development and tourism: 25 Years of Literature Review. *Journal of Place Management and Development*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPMD-07-2017-0072>

Emerson, G. (1975). Collecting Souvenirs: Operation Babylift. *New Republic*, 172(17), 8–10.

Fanshel, D. & Child Welfare League of America. (1972). *Far from the reservation: The transracial adoption of American Indian children*. Scarecrow Press.

Freundlich, M., & Lieberthal, J. K. (2000). The Gathering of the First Generation of Adult Korean Adoptees: Adoptees' Perceptions of International Adoption. *The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute*.

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BKE2UPSye4vf4O2EQ3nCL6mvuehZjoeehqi2kl8abfU/edit?usp=drive\\_web&oid=111406481463543179359&usp=embed\\_facebook](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BKE2UPSye4vf4O2EQ3nCL6mvuehZjoeehqi2kl8abfU/edit?usp=drive_web&oid=111406481463543179359&usp=embed_facebook)

Hoffman, J., & Peña, E. V. (2013). Too Korean to be White and Too White to Be Korean: Ethnic Identity Development Among Transracial Korean American Adoptees. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 50(2), 152–170. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jsarp-2013-0012>

Jacobs, J. (1962). Review of The Death and Life of Great American Cities. *The Yale Law Journal*, 71(8), 1597–1602. <https://doi.org/10.2307/794509>

Johnston, K. E., Swim, J. K., Saltsman, B. M., Deater-Deckard, K., & Pettrill, S. A. (2007). Mothers' Racial, Ethnic, and Cultural Socialization of Transracially Adopted Asian Children. *Family Relations*, 56(4), 390–402. JSTOR.

Lee, R. M. (2003). The Transracial Adoption Paradox. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 31(6), 711–744. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000003258087>

Lefebvre, H., Nicholson-Smith, D., & Harvey, D. (1991). *The production of space*.

Liu, M., & Geron, K. (2008). Changing Neighborhood: Ethnic Enclaves and the Struggle for Social Justice. *Social Justice*, 35(2 (112)), 18–35. JSTOR.

- Main, K., & Sandoval, G. F. (2014). Placemaking in a translocal receiving community: The relevance of place to identity and agency. *Urban Studies Journal Limited*, 1(16).
- Merton, R. K. (1972). Insiders and Outsiders: A Chapter in the Sociology of Knowledge. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78(1), 9–47. JSTOR.
- Park Nelson, K. (2016). *Invisible Asians: Korean American Adoptees, Asian American Experiences, and Racial Exceptionalism*. Rutgers University Press.
- Peng, J., Strijker, D., & Wu, Q. (2020). Place Identity: How Far Have We Come in Exploring Its Meanings? *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00294>
- Proshansky, H. M., Fabian, A. K., & Kaminoff, R. (1983). Place-identity: Physical world socialization of the self. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 3(1), 57–83. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-4944\(83\)80021-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-4944(83)80021-8)
- Qadeer, M. A., & Agrawal, S. K. (2011). The Practice of Multicultural Planning in American and Canadian Cities. *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*, 20(1), 26.
- Qadeer, M., & Kumar, S. (2006). Ethnic Enclaves and Social Cohesion. *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*, 15(2), 1–17. JSTOR.
- Quiroz, P. A. (2010). Transcultural Adoptive Parents: Passing the Ethnic Litmus Test and Engaging Diversity. *Race, Gender & Class*, 17(1/2), 194–205. JSTOR.
- Roy, A. (2005). Urban Informality: Toward an Epistemology of Planning. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 71(2), 147–158.
- Roy, A. (2011). Slumdog Cities: Rethinking Subaltern Urbanism. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 35.2, 233–238. <https://doi.org/DOI:10.1111/j.1468-2427.2011.01051.x>
- Sandercock, L., & Forsyth, A. (1992). A Gender Agenda: New Directions for Planning Theory. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 58(1), 49–59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944369208975534>
- Shiao, J. L., & Tuan, M. H. (2008). Korean Adoptees and the Social Context of Ethnic Exploration. *American Journal of Sociology*, 113(4), 1023–1066. JSTOR. <https://doi.org/10.1086/522807>
- U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs. (2020). *FY 2019 Annual Report on Intercountry Adoption* [Annual]. U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs.
- Watson, V. (2015). Seeing from the South: Refocusing Urban Planning on the Globe's Central Urban Issues. In S. S. Fainstein & J. DeFilippis (Eds.), *Readings in Planning Theory* (pp. 540–560). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119084679.ch27>
- What is Placemaking?* (2021). Project for Public Spaces. <https://www.pps.org/category/placemaking>

Whyte, W. H. (1980). *The social life of small urban spaces*. Washington, D.C: Conservation Foundation.

Wortham-Galvin, BD, "Mythologies of Placemaking," *Places Journal*, June 2008.  
<https://placesjournal.org/article/mythologies-of-placemaking/>

Wyckoff, M. A. & MSU Land Policy Institute. (2014). Definition of Placemaking: Four Different Types. *Planning & Zoning News (PZN)*, 1–10.

Ybema, S., Beech, N., & Ellis, N. (2011). Transitional and perpetual liminality: An identity practice perspective. *Anthropology Southern Africa*, 34(1–2), 21–29.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23323256.2011.11500005>

## APPENDIX

### Interview Questions Interviews with Professionals<sup>1</sup>

#### Background/Bio Questions

1. What is your title?
2. How long have you worked in your current position?

#### Placemaking Questions

3. In thinking about placemaking as an approach to building a sense of community and a collective identity for populations based on race/ethnic identity or shared experience like being a transracial international East Asian adoptee, what role has placemaking played in building community for residents of [relevant neighborhood]?
4. In your view, what is the connection between placemaking and community identity, specifically as it relates to ethnic enclaves like (relevant neighborhood)?
5. What are some examples of placemaking that have been successful in the context of your community or work?

#### Community Identity Questions

6. In what way is the adoptee community distinct from or similar to the Asian American/Asian community at large?

### Interviews with Adoptees<sup>2</sup>

#### Background/Bio Questions

1. What is your age?
2. Where did you grow up?

#### NYC/Adult Life Questions

3. How long have you lived in New York City?
4. What other places have you lived in your adult life?
5. Is there/was there something about New York that attracted you to the city and are there specific places or neighborhoods in New York City that feel more comfortable to you than others?

#### Adoptee Spaces Questions

6. Describe adoptee spaces you occupied or spent time in as a kid and as an adult.

---

<sup>1</sup> Urban planning/placemaking professions and professionals involved in Asian American Transracial adoptee work and community building

<sup>2</sup> Adult East Asian transracial adoptees living in the New York City area

## Survey Questions

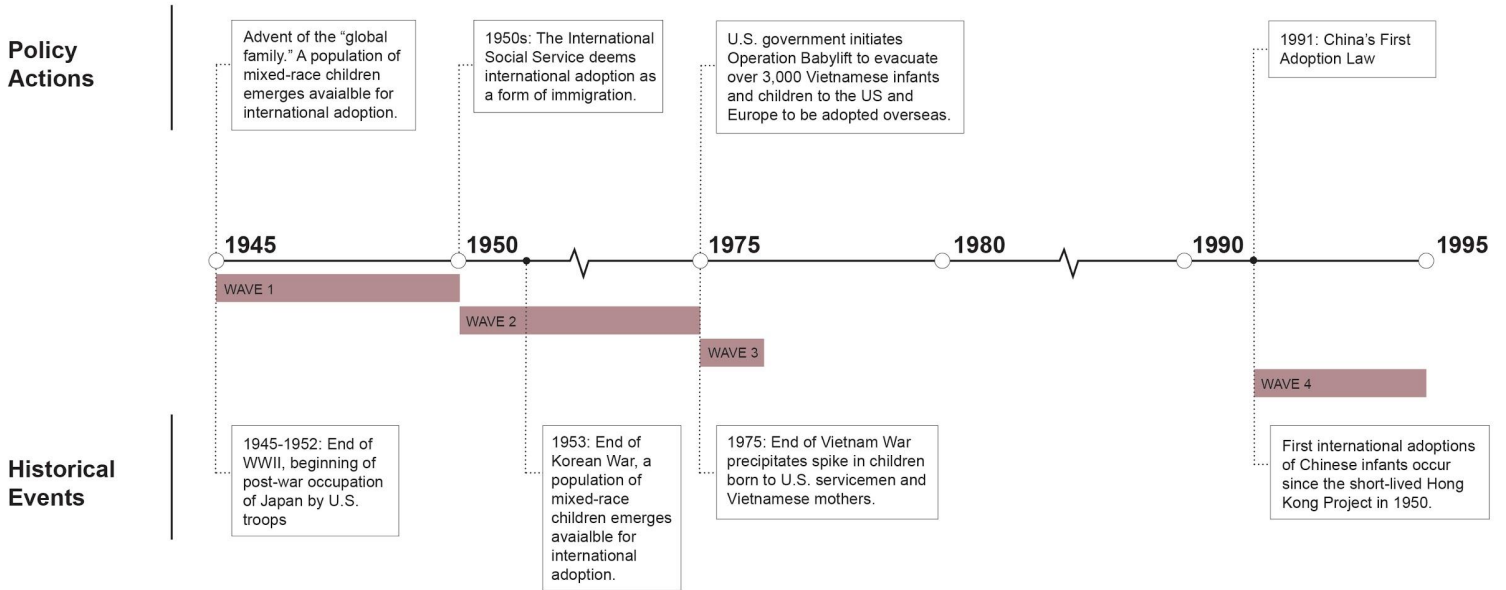
<b>Demographics</b>	
Subject	Format
Age	18-24, 25-40, 41-56, 57-75, 76 or older
Gender	M/F/write in
Race/Ethnicity	Write in
Current Residence (Neighborhood, City, State, Country)	Write in Ex: Washington Heights, NYC, NY, USA

<b>Background</b>	
Subject	Format
Birth Country	Write in <i>In what country were you born?</i>
Hometown	Write in <i>Where did you grow up?</i>
Family Context	Write in <i>What race/ethnicity are your parents?</i>
	Write in <i>Is anyone in your family the same race/ethnicity as you?</i>

<b>Placemaking &amp; Identity Development</b>	
Subject	Format
What best describes your hometown?	Check one option <i>Urban/Suburban/Rural</i>
What best describes the places you have chosen to live as an adult	Check one option <i>Urban/Suburban/Rural</i>
Did/does your identity as a transracial adoptee impact the decisions you make about where to live?	Check all that apply <i>Yes, on a neighborhood scale/Yes, on a citywide scale/No not at all/Other with write in option</i>
Placemaking Scenarios that speak to different sensory and place-based experiences - how do you know you're in an adoptee space?	Rate from 1-5 least important or most important SCENARIO 1: smelling culturally distinct food SCENARIO 2: hearing identity/experience specific terminology being used (biological family, birth search, transracial adoptee, etc.) SCENARIO 3: visual cues (ex: ethnically East Asian, exposure to "white" culture evident in other aspects of dress, posture, etc.)

## Figures & Tables

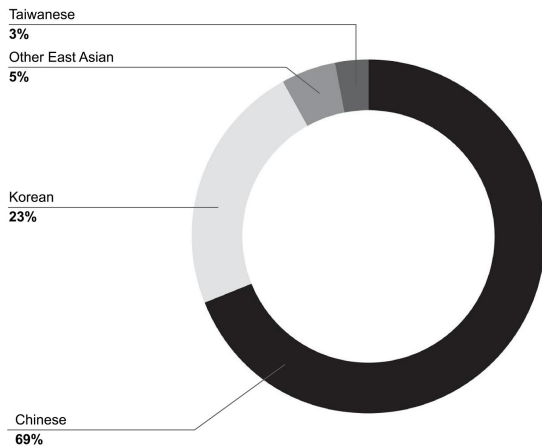
**FIGURE 1**  
**Timeline of East Asian Transnational Adoption Trends to the US**



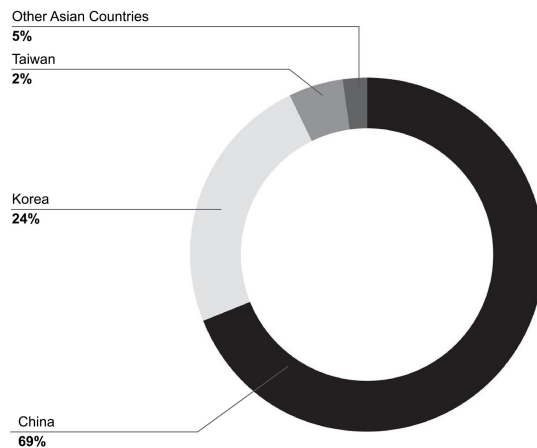
*Adapted from: Park Nelson (2016)*

**FIGURE 2**

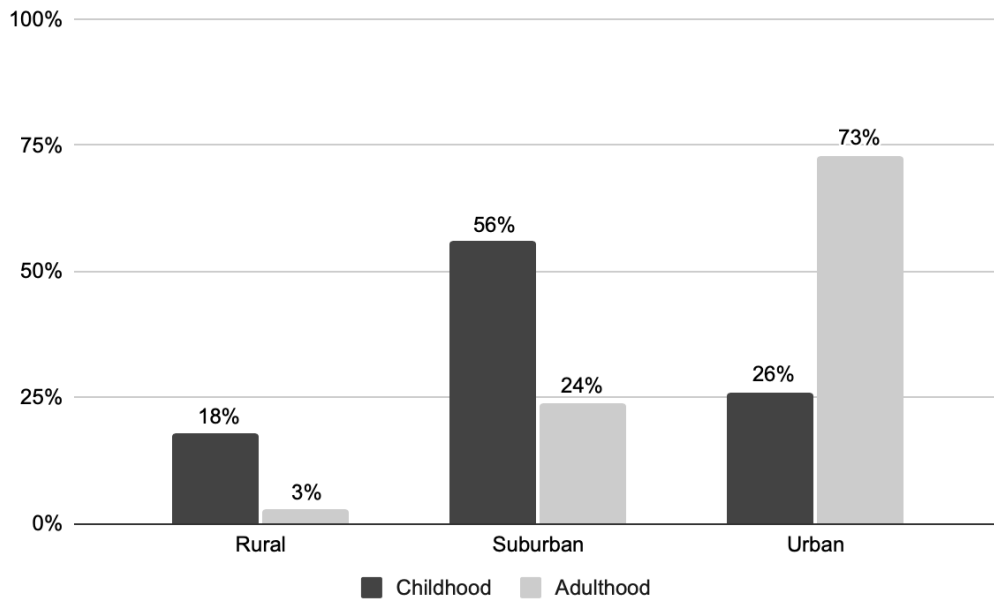
**A. Reported Ethnicity of Respondents**



**B. Reported Birth Country of Respondents**

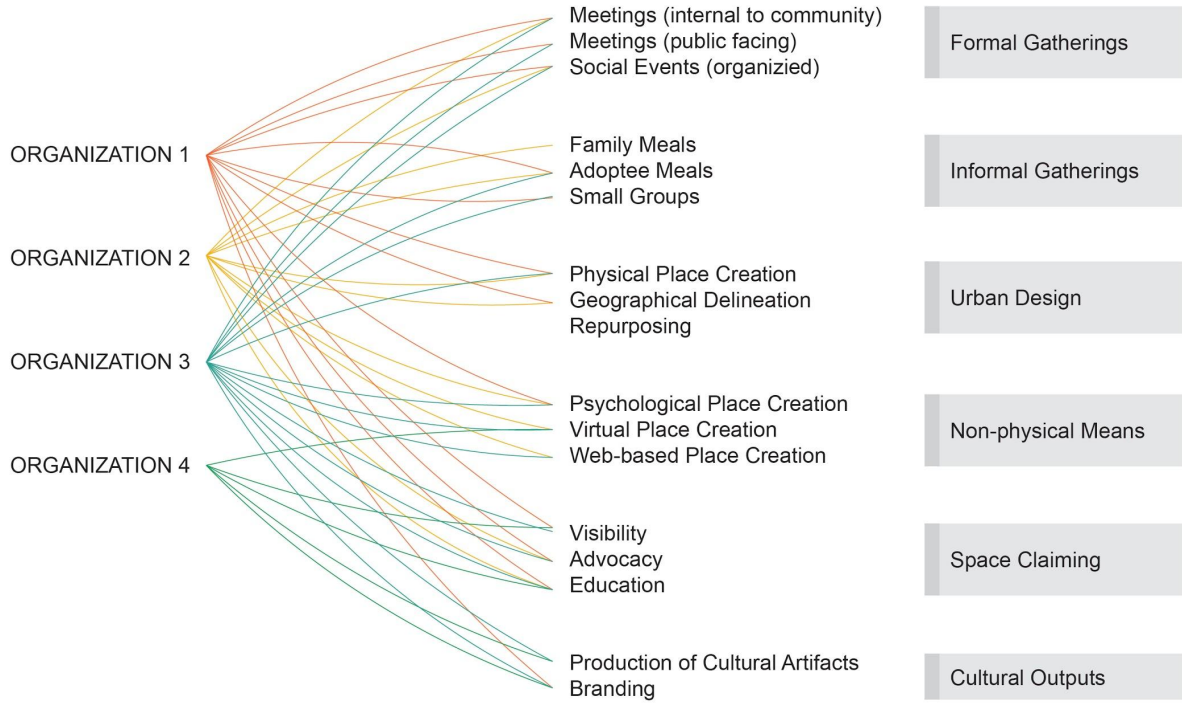


**FIGURE 3**  
**Comparison of Settlement Patterns from Childhood to Adulthood**  
**Among East Asian Transracial Adoptees**





**FIGURE 5**  
**Trends in Placemaking Practices for Adoptee-centered Organizations/Entities**



<b>TABLE 1</b> MSU Land Policy Institute Comparison of Four Types of Placemaking		
<b>The Problem</b>	<b>The Solution</b>	<b>The Payoffs</b>
<b>Standard Placemaking</b>		
Communities are not effectively using public spaces to create vital, vibrant and livable communities that people want to live, work, play, and learn in.	Broad public and stakeholder engagement in revitalizing, reusing, and creating public spaces using short and long term techniques rooted in social engagement and new urbanist design principles.	More quality places with quality activities and a strong sense of place. More vital, vibrant and livable public spaces, communities and regions that residents, businesses and visitors care deeply about.
<b>Strategic Placemaking</b>		
Communities are not competitive in attracting and retaining talented workers.	Revitalization that increases housing and transportation choices, and urban amenities to attract talented workers.	Faster gains in livability, population, diversity, jobs, income and educational attainment, than by standard placemaking.
<b>Creative Placemaking</b>		
American cities, suburbs and small towns confront structural changes and residential uprooting.	Revitalization by creative initiatives that animate places and spark economic development.	Gains in livability, diversity, jobs and income. Innovative products and services for the cultural industries.
<b>Tactical Placemaking</b>		
Many physical improvements are expensive and policy-makers are understandably reluctant to commit resources due to uncertain risks.	Test various solutions using low cost proxies to gauge effectiveness and public support.	The public and policy-makers can actually see the result and degree of support for various options before committing permanent resources.

<b>TABLE 2</b> <b>Overall Demographic Profile</b>	
83.90%	Female
4.80%	Male
14.40%	Other
75%	Age 18-24
20%	Age 25-40
5%	Over 40
83.87%	Grew up in US
16.13%	International
n=62	

<b>TABLE 3 Scenarios from Survey</b>
SCENARIO 1: Smelling culturally distinct food
SCENARIO 2: hearing identity/experience specific terminology being used (biological family, birth search, transracial adoptee, etc.)
SCENARIO 3: visual cues (ex: ethnically East Asian, exposure to “white” culture evident in other aspects of dress, posture, etc.)

<b>TABLE 4 NYC Respondent Profile</b>	
80%	Female
20%	Male
0%	Other
40%	Age 18-24
60%	Age 25-40
0%	Over 40
n=5	