

**TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION AND ITS EFFECTS TO CHILDREN'S  
PSYCHOLOGY IN STEVE WHAN'S NOVEL BULLETS ON THE BUND**

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*This study analyzed the effects of transracial adoption toward children's psychology. Transracial adoption means the joining of racially different parents and children together in adoptive families (Hall and Steinberg, 2003:1). There are positive and negative effects of transracial adoption which are still debated. This final project was aimed at analyzing how transracial adoption affects children's psychology as reflected in *Bullets on the Bund*. The objectives of the study is answering the statements of problem: first, how transracial adoption is revealed in *Bullets on the Bund*; second, what are the effects of transracial adoption toward children's psychology as reflected in the novel; third, what are the suggested ways to overcome effects of transracial adoption toward children's psychology.*

*I employed Steve Whan's novel *Bullets on the Bund* as the object of this study. This study is a descriptive qualitative study with *Psychology of Literature* as the approach. It is descriptive qualitative since the data of the study are in the form of words, phrases, sentences, narrations and dialogues and I did not employ computation. The data were gained by reading the novel thoroughly, identifying, inventorying, and classifying; then the analysis was done by selecting and explaining.*

*There are several findings as the investigation result. First, transracial adoption is revealed implicitly in the novel since the plot of the novel is about the adventure of transracially adopted child. Second, transracial adoption can affect adopted children's psychology. The psychological effects of transracial adoption found in the novel are: children may suffer feeling of loss, rejection, grief, and confusion of identity. Third, there are some ways to overcome the effects of transracial adoption, they are: letting children know the truth, support group, developing sense of racial identity. However, adoptive family support is the most important role to overcome the effects of transracial adoption toward children psychology. Adoptive parents love and care can decrease the negative effects of transracial adoption. Whereas the openness of children feeling toward situation they face eases the family to take an action to overcome the psychological effects of transracial adoption. For the next researcher, I suggest to analyze loss cultural identity issue in transracial adoption.*

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## INTRODUCTION

*Bullets on the Bund* is written by Steve Whan in 2001. The novel is about the adventure of children in revealing the mystery of dog missing. Autumn Jade is a 12 years old Chinese girl. She was adopted by her Canadian adoptive parents. With her best friend Adam, she stumbles on a mystery; a small dog wearing a back pack, running through a park after school. Autumn and Adam decide to do some detective work, then they reveal that actually the trainer of Happy Puppy Obedient School, training place of Autumn Jade's dog is involved with the loss of some dogs in their area. The missing dogs are trained to smuggle diamond. Beside the main story which is about the adventure of Autumn Jade and Adam to reveal the dog missing mystery, there is another story which is told as Autumn Jade imagination as a transracially adopted child.

When the first time I read the novel a question raises about how Autumn Jade life as transracially adopted child runs. What are psychological effects of transracial adoption toward children psychology? And what are some suggested ways to overcome the effects of transracial adoption toward children psychology? So, to get answer of those questions, this research is conducted.

There are some major reasons for uplifting *Bullets on the Bund* novel for final project. The first one is that transracial adoption nowadays has been a great issue. Transracial adoption means the joining of racially different parents and children together in adoptive families (Hall and Steinberg, 2003:1). We can take a look from phenomena of many Hollywood superstars who also adopt children from different race. Madonna adopts two children from Malawi. Even Angelina Jolie adopts three children from Vietnam, Cambodia and Ethiopia although she has already had three biological children. Transracial adoption not only

happen in Hollywood society, there are also many transracial adoption cases by common society. According to Elizebeth Bartholet (2006), adopted from the data of U.S. Department of State 2004, International adoption is largely a phenomenon of the last half century, with the numbers of children from other countries coming into the United States rising over the years from negligible to some 20,099 in 2002 and 21,616 in 2003. The second reason for choosing the topic is because children are involved in the case of transracial adoption. It is very interesting to analyse the effect of transracial adoption toward children's psychology.

This research has some objectives as listed below:

- 1) To describe the meaning of transracial adoption revealed in novel *Bullets on the Bund*.
- 2) To find out the effects of transracial adoption toward children's psychology revealed in novel *Bullets on the Bund*.
- 3) To find out the suggested ways to overcome the effect of transracial adoption toward children's psychology.

The result of this research hopefully brings advantages for the readers. This study is hopefully encouraging the readers to be more critical about the phenomena which happen around them. Then, they could sort what is good or bad to do by human sense so that they would not simply make a too-early-judgment.

## DISCUSSION

### 4.1 The Revelation of Transracial Adoption in *Bullets on the Bund*

Transracial adoption phenomenon in Steve Whan's Novel entitled *Bullets on the Bund* is revealed implicitly. The plot of the novel is actually the adventure of two children, Autumn Jade and Adam, twelve and thirteen years old, to reveal the mystery of dog missing. In the story is told that Autumn Jade and Adam are transracially

adopted children by the Canadian adoptive parents. The story takes place in Canada in the modern time setting just like today. Transracial adoption means the joining of racially different parents and children together in adoptive families (Hall and Steinberg, 2003). The phenomenon of transracial adoption is experienced by the main character in *Bullets on the Bund*. From the data which is found in the novel and being reflected with the reality, can be concluded that transracial adoption is the joining of racially different parents and children together in adoptive families. A child who is of one race or ethnic group is placed with adoptive parents of another race or ethnic group. As seen in the novel that Autumn Jade who is racially a Chinese girl was adopted by her Canadian adoptive parents. As she was adopted, she then lives together with her adoptive parents who actually racially different with her.

#### **4.2. Transracial Adoption Effects toward Children's Psychology**

Transracial adoption can affect many people who are related to this case. There are the birth parents, the adoptive parents, and the adopted children. It may cause the negative effects to their psychology. However, this study tends to investigate only the effect of transracial adoption toward adopted children's psychology because the focus of this study is psychology of adopted children. According to Silverstein and Kaplan in *Seven Core Issues in Adoption*, the adopted children may encounter seven psychological problems, they are: loss, rejection, guilt and shame, grief, intimacy, mastery/ control, and identity. After analyzing the psychological effects of adoption toward children in *Bullets on the Bund* novel, I found that there are four psychological effects experienced by the main character, Autumn Jade namely loss, rejection, grief and identity.

##### **4.2.1 Loss**

Silverstein and Kaplan stated that the adoptees experience loss of the birth parents and suffer their first loss at the initial separation from the birth-family. As the baby is separated from her birth parent, the baby experiences the loss of birth parents. Of course the feeling of loss can be felt after the adopted child is old enough to understand what is meant by being adopted. Actually the feeling of loss is not only experienced by the child, the birth parents also will feel the same feeling because they loss their baby. . Feeling of loss suffered by the adopted children is not only because the loss birth parents, moreover the adopted children may also loss everything related to their ancestor including their culture and language. Autumn Jade as an adopted child experiences loss of her birth parents. Her los of birth parents make her sad. However, she feels sadder because she doesn't know who her birth parents are and where they are. As Autumn Jade had suffered the feeling of loss, she then poured out her feeling by making a story. In the story she made, she used her Chinese name as the main character. The story can be an accumulation of what she had felt as an adopted child.

##### **4.2.2 Rejection**

The next psychological effect that is found in the novel is rejection. According to Silverstein and Kaplan, the adoptee may feel abandoned and rejected by their birth-family. It causes the feeling of being rejected. Feeling of being rejected and Autumn Jade curiosity about the "real reason" of her parents abandoned her leads Autumn Jade to create one reason of Qiu Yu abandonment in her own story. The story told about a baby girl who is abandoned by her mother because of condition. The plot of the story took place in Shanghai in 1930s. At that time, the baby boy was very precious in the family whereas the baby girl was not important in the family

because the girl unable to proceed the family continuity.

#### 4.2.3 Grief

The next psychological effect that is found in the novel is grief. Grief is the common reaction of losing the birth parents, and grieving may begin when children is old enough to understand what being adopted means (Silverstein and Kaplan, 1982). Autumn Jade then suffered the feeling of grief by the evidence that she may never meet her birth parents. Autumn Jade was also very curious about her history and her dream was to find it out. Autumn felt that there was a part of her life which is still missing because she did not know her past story. She even did not know who were her birth parents and the reason why she was given up then adopted by the Canadian. She hoped that someday she can reveal the mystery of her life.

#### 4.2.4 Identity

According to Silverstein and Kaplan, adoption may also threaten the adoptee's sense of identity. The adoptees often suffer feelings related to confusion of their identity and identity crises, particularly at times of unrelated loss. Adoptees lacking medical, genetic, religious, and historical information are plagued by questions such as: Who are they? Why were they born? Were they in fact merely a mistake, not meant to have been born, an accident? Autumn as an adopted child felt crises of identity because she did not know who her birth parents are. She also did not know why she was given up to other family. According to Adam Pertman (2008) in transracial adoption case, the adopted children may struggle to develop a positive racial/ethnic identity. As a transracially adopted child, Autumn also faces challenges in developing her sense of racial identity. Autumn Jade indeed feels that she is really a Chinese. While Autumn Jade feels that she is a real Chinese, there are some people who

hesitate that she is Chinese and it hurts her. As Silverman (1993) said that the transracially adopted children who have grown up in adoptive families suffer severe identity problems. On the one hand, the community around has not fully accepted them; on the other hand, they have no significant contact with people from the same race. The confusion of their identity positions the transracial adopted in the gray area, neither black nor white.

#### 4.3 Suggested Ways to Overcome the Effect of Transracial Adoption toward Children's Psychology

According to Silverstein and Kaplan in *Seven Core Issues in Adoption*, the adopted children may encounter seven psychological problems, they are: loss, rejection, guilt and shame, grief, intimacy, mastery/ control, and identity. Parents and environment have a very great role in shaping children's psychology. If the children are treated well, the psychological impacts of transracial adoption toward children can be avoided or at least decreased. In this part, there will be some suggested ways to overcome the effect of transracial adoption toward children's psychology. The suggested ways are based on my opinion that is supported by some data from the expert and data found in the novel that relevant to my findings.

##### 4.3.1 Letting Children Know the Truth

Adoption is very sensitive issue for the family who decides to adopt a child. Talking about adoption can be considered also talking about the feeling of people who are involved, the children, birth parents, and adoptive parents. In this part the focus is children, further discussion will investigate some ways to overcome the effects of transracial adoption toward children's psychology. In reality, there are many families who consider that adoption is a big secret that must be hidden from the children.

However, in transracial adoption, as the children are old enough to understand that their physical appearance is different from their adoptive parents, they will eventually realize that they are adopted and there will eventually many questions arise in their mind. Questions about who am I, where did I come from, and why I was adopted are very common in the adopted children mind. Sometimes the family hides some facts about the children. However, it will make the children more curious about their identity and it will hurt them. It is better for children to know their history and the children have right to know it. Then the decision is on children's hand, whether they want to find the birthparents or not. Many adoptees may afraid that the adoptive parents will be hurt if they search their birth parents. This is the subject that must be communicated. The adoptive parents role is supporting the search by permitting the adoptees to search their birth parents.

#### 4.3.2 Support Group

As the children know that they are adopted, they may feel that they are the poorest people all over the world. Supports from family and environment are very important. However, people who experience the same experience will be the one who exactly know their feeling. The support group who has the same experience was very important for the adoptees to share their feeling. In *Bullets on the Bund* novel, Autumn Jade has a very best friend named Adam who is the same adopted child. Besides, Autumn Jade also has friends in Sisters of China, an e-mail service for the girls who are adopted from China. Through SoC they can share their experience and they will feel that they are not alone because there are many people who face the same condition as transracially adopted children.

#### 4.3.3 Developing a Sense of Racial Identity

In transracial adoption case, the children have a difficulty in developing a sense of racial identity. Although the parents cannot fully convey the sense of racial identity, allowing the children and help them to develop their racial identity is very important. Transracially adopted children have right to learn their original culture and the adoptive parents must support them. According to Melina (1986: 177) that is also found in the novel, awareness of racial identity including:

1) Contact with other people of the same race of ethnic group.

Transracial adopted child raised by parents of a different ethnic background are going to have a different sense of racial identity than they who have been raised in a racially homogenous family. They may feel that they are a part of their original race but their adoptive parents are not equipped to successfully convey a positive identity to them. By having contact with other people of the same race, the adopted children can develop their awareness of their own racial identity and will increase their comprehension about their original identity. Like the story in the novel, Autumn Jade is allowed to have contact with her friends in Sisters of China e-mail service. Beside sharing their experience as trasracially adopted children, they can share their knowledge about China.

2) Assimilation of aspects of the child's culture into the home.

Although adopted children and adoptive parents have the different culture, it is better for the adoptive parents to assimilate the adoptees original culture into home. Allowing the adoptees to express their culture at home will be valuable because the adoptees will feel that they are given permission to embrace their original culture. Autumn Jade's adoptive mother did not resist her daughter to develop the sense of Chinese through her creation. Even Autumn Jade is permitted to use Mandarin language

at home. By assimilating aspects of child's culture into the home, the child will feel that not only her presence which is accepted by the adoptive parents but also her culture as part of her life.

3) Exposure to information about different races and ethnic groups through books, television, film, and cultural exhibits.

Exposure to information about adoptees original race and ethnic group through many things such as book, film, and television will gain the adoptees knowledge about their own original culture. By reading book, watching film and attending cultural exhibition the adoptees knowledge about their culture will increase. When Autumn Jade and Adam were in the library, Autumn Jade said 'All About Shanghai - A Standard Guidebook' was the best book. It means that she often read that book to gain the knowledge about China.

4) Discussion in the home of different customs and traditions.

Awareness of child's culture and customs should be a routine part of family life rather than just in a special event. The adoptive parents should communicate that the adoptees' heritage is important. By having discussion about adoptees customs and tradition, they will be proud of their heritage. Autumn Jade's adoptive parents also discuss about Autumn Jade's original culture.

From some suggested ways to overcome the psychological effects of transracial adoption above, family has the most important role to overcome the effects. Adoptive parents love and care can decrease the negative effects of transracial adoption. Whereas the openness of children feeling toward situation they face ease the family to take an action to overcome the psychological effects of transracial adoption.

## CONCLUSION

On this research I draw the following conclusion, they are as follow:

After doing the analysis in the previous chapter, now I take some conclusions of the analysis. *Bullets on the Bund* is a novel by Steve Whan which tells about transracial adoption experienced by the main character in the novel. Transracial adoption has been a phenomenal issue today since there are many positive and negative impacts for the adoptee. One of the positive impacts is that the uncared children can be taken care by more capable family, whereas one of the negative impacts of transracial adoption is its effects toward children's psychology.

Actually psychological impact of transracial adoption is almost the same with the adoption in general. The adoptees may feel loss, grief, rejected, crises of identity. The difference is that the adoptees of transracial adoption may experience more challenging feeling related to their identity because they face challenges in coping with being "different". There are many ways to overcome the effects of transracial adoption toward children's psychology. They are as follow: Letting children know the truth, support group, and developing a sense of racial identity.

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