

EDUCATIONAL WELL-BEING AND SOCIAL IDENTITY OF CHILDREN OF CHINESE ORIGIN ADOPTED IN SPAIN

DAVID DONCEL Y MARTA LAMBEA

Universidad de Salamanca – GIR Humanismo Eurasia (USAL)

INTRODUCTION

THE FOLLOWING STUDY focuses on the quality of the educational experience (or social well-being) of children of Chinese origin adopted in Spain. This social group presents a characteristic which is typical of adoptive families who are of dual nationality and ethnicity: on the one hand, they have Asian phenotypic traits from birth; yet on the other, they are part of the dominant culture due to adoption. This characteristic results in what Lee (2003) named «the transracial adoption paradox».

Under these circumstances, and bearing in mind group integration, children adopted into transracial families may be perceived by some people as members of an ethnic minority due to their birthplace, whereas others (or the children themselves) may view them as part of the dominant culture due to adoption (Baden y Steward: 2000; Lee: 2003). To respond to a potentially ambiguous situation concerning these children's sense of group belonging, many parents encourage biethnic and biracial parenting (Gro-tavant & VonKorff: 2011; Thomas & Tessler: 2007; Gil, Doncel, Lambea, & Morales: 2020). To do so, they follow a socialization strategy which aims to provide their children with some sort of transcultural identity or multi-racial identity (Todorov: 2008) to help them face potential situations of group exclusion (Thomas & Tessler: 2007). Such identities encompass factors relating to both a cosmopolitan and local upbringing (Steingress: 2002).

In sum, the group of children of Chinese origin adopted in Spain can be considered a group whose presence may generate complex dynamics of interaction in school. Particularly regarding bullying in school linked to factors such as the acceptance of others. These are dynamics which may indeed condition the Educational Well-being of this social group. Thus, the objective of this study was to gain an understanding of this group's Educational Well-being, a subject rarely studied in children of Chinese origin adopted into transracial families in Spain. These children possess racial traits of an ethnic minority due to them being of Chinese origin, yet they are members of the dominant culture because they have been adopted—and this characteristic may be affecting their school experience. Although this research was justified by the lack of studies on this

social group, in this study we aimed to go one step further by studying the relationship between these children's educational experience and the idea of «Chinese» that exists in people's collective imagination. This includes positive prejudices (high intellectual capacity and tenacity concerning homework) and negative prejudices (concealment, strangeness). All in all, the question we aimed to answer was: can Educational Well-being condition the social identity of children of Chinese origin adopted in Spain?

METHODOLOGY

Considering the factors influencing the concept of Educational Well-being defined by the OECD, and in accordance with the purpose of this study, we have looked at the following factors: *Satisfaction with Life*, *Social Life*, *Bullying in School*, *Racial/Ethnic Bullying*, *Personal Identity*, and *Interest in Chinese Culture*.

Satisfaction with Life measures the degree of well-being of students in relation to their own lives. In the questionnaire used in this study, the interviewees' satisfaction was rated on a scale of 0 to 10, 0 being the lowest satisfaction and 10 the highest.

Social Life ($\alpha = .81$) has been defined as social integration or social relationships that the individual has established with his or her classmates. The items used to measure the degree of social integration were: «We get along well in the classroom», «I express and defend my opinions without hurting others», «I feel that I have friends», «My classmates care about me when I need them», «I like to collaborate with my friends», «My classmates like me», «I'd rather work in teams than alone», «I felt different from the rest», «It is hard for me to express my feelings». Each indicator was rated on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Based on these indicators, we created the *Social Life Scale*, the scale being from 1 (low degree of social integration at school) to 5 (high degree of social integration).

Bullying ($\alpha = .72$) has been defined as «an intentional, repeated, negative (unpleasant or hurtful) behaviour by one or more persons directed against a person who has difficulty defending himself or herself» (Olweus:2006, p. 81). In this research, this scope was studied by asking the typical questions to measure bullying in PISA: «I have been physically hurt by other students», «Other students took my things from me», «Other students insulted me / called me names», «Other students lied about me, talked behind my back or spread rumours about me», «I was threatened by other students», «Other students left me out of things / isolated me on purpose», «Other students destroyed my things» and «Other students made fun of me». Each indicator was measured on a Likert scale (1-Never, 2-Rarely, 3-Sometimes, 4-Frequently and 5-Always). From these indicators, we created the *Bullying Scale*, ranging from 1 (low perception of having experienced bullying) to 5 (high perception of having experienced bullying).

Racial/Ethnic Bullying was studied by adding a racial element to the typical questions to measure bullying: «I felt intimidated, rejected or bullied because of my facial features». This indicator was measured on a Likert scale (1-Never, 2-Rarely, 3-Sometimes, 4-Frequently and 5-Always).

Personal Identity. To measure children's perception of identity we used one of the *Social Life* indicators: «I felt different from others». This item was measured on a Likert scale, 1 being Strongly Disagree (greater integration) and 5 being Strongly Agree (little integration).

Interest in Chinese Culture ($\alpha = .88$), measured by the following indicators: «News about China interests me», «I'd like to learn Chinese», «I'd like my parents to go to Chinese restaurants more often», «I'd like to attend Chinese celebrations», «I'd like to know how non-adopted Chinese children live in my town», «I'd like my parents to take me to China» and «I'd like my school to organize activities so I can learn about Chinese culture». Each item was measured on a Likert scale, 1 being Strongly Disagree and 5 Strongly Agree. Based on these indicators, we created the *Interest in Chinese Culture Scale*, the scale ranging from 1 (little interest in learning about Chinese culture) to 5 (strong interest).

We added a set of sociodemographic variables to the analysis, these being:

- ISCED: Scale to measure the parents' highest completed level of education, 1 being completed secondary education or lower and 5 being university education (master's degree or doctorate).
- Age: recorded in four intervals: 9-13; 14-15; 16-17 and 18-19 years old.
- Age of arrival in Spain, measured in months.
- Sex.

OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESIS

This research had three main objectives:

1. To measure the Educational Well-being of children of Chinese origin adopted into transracial families in Spain.
2. To learn how the relationships between the different factors influencing the concept of Educational Well-being are established.
3. To learn how the idea of «Chinese» that exists in people's collective imagination influences educational experience.

Accordingly, the following hypothesis was put forward: if a student is bullied because of their racial/ethnic traits, as a result, they will not show any interest in learning about the culture of their birthplace.

TECHNIQUE AND SAMPLING

The following table (Table 1) contains the profile of the final sample:

Table 1. Profile of the final sample

		Count	%
Sex	Male	5	1.5
	Female	263	98.1
Age of arrival in Spain	Less than 1 year old	72	26.9
	From 1 to 2 years old	135	50.8
	2 years old or more	61	22.8
Current school level	Primary (Secondary Education)	8	1.5
	Secondary (Middle School)	124	46.1
	Bachillerato (High School)	103	38.6
	Other formation (Vocational Education)	20	7.5
	Universities (University)	17	6.4
Type of school	Public (Public School)	188	70.1
	Concertado (Charter School)	67	25.1
	Private (Private School)	18	6.7
Parents' highest completed level of education	Secondary or more (Middle School or lower)	11	4.2
	FP Grade middle (Vocational Ed. medium level)	15	5.7
	Bachillerato (High School)	26	9.8
	FP Grade Superior (Vocational Ed. Higher level)	56	21.3
	Universities - primary y secondary cycle (Univ. Bachelor's)	168	63.6
	Universities - master y doctorate (Univ. Master's/PhD)	30	11.4

ANALYTIC STRATEGY

The purpose of these models was to investigate the linear relationship between *Satisfaction with Life* and different aspects of Well-being. To meet our third objective, we conducted a bivariate correlation analysis, using Spearman's correlation coefficient.

ANALYSIS

The analysis presented below is divided into two parts, according to each of the objectives set. First, we addressed the measurement of Educational Well-being of adopted children of Chinese origin. Secondly, we analysed how relationships between different elements of Educational Well-being were connected to one another. Finally, we tested our hypothesis on ethnic bullying and personal identity (feeling different) being linked to the child's interest in identifying with his or her birth culture.

Objective 1. Measuring educational well-being

The concept of Educational Well-being we studied consisted of several factors, namely: *Interest in Chinese Culture Scale*, *Bullying in School Scale*, *Social Life Scale* and *Satisfaction with Life Scale*. From these scales, two more indicators came about. From the *Bullying in School Scale* arose the *Racial/Ethnic Bullying* indicator, and from the *Social Life Scale* arose the *Personal Identity* indicator. For each of these factors we presented the distribution of data, by age cohort, in Table 2, enabling us to obtain an estimate of the Educational Well-being of adopted children of Chinese origin.

As for bullying, on the one hand, we observed that most children claimed to disagree or strongly disagree with having experienced bullying, since the perception of having experienced *Bullying* had an average rating of 1.4 on a 1 to 5 scale. On the other hand, it was found that the prevalence of bullying decreases as age increases. In this sense, both the presence of *Bullying* and its impact by age within this social group shared similarities with figures obtained from studies conducted on other students' profiles. For instance, in the PISA 2015 report (Volume III), it was found that 4% of students reported having been physically bullied, hit or pushed around by other students several times per month—a percentage that varied from 1% to 9.5% across OECD member countries (OECD, 2017). Similarly, Gil Villa discovered that *Bullying* is more likely to happen during the first years of compulsory education and less likely at the end (Gil Villa, 2016), depending on how the school manages such issues. Between 16 and 18 years, the average student increases and diversifies his or her activities outside of school. This perspective is very different for individuals between 11 and 15 years of age, when not only do they begin experiencing emotional changes associated with adolescence, but they also embark on a new educational journey. These figures may give the impression that bullying does not exist, but it does: while analyzing the *Racial/Ethnic Bullying* indicator (having felt intimidated, rejected or bullied because of one's facial features), we observed a slight increase with an average rating of 1.7. This outlined the implication of the racial issue in bullying.

When looking at the *Social Life Scale*, most children of Chinese origin implied that they felt integrated at school. The average rating of 3.7 showed a tendency towards Agreeing (rated 4) and Strongly Agreeing (rated 5) in items such as: having friends at school, preferring teamwork to individual work, or being liked by their classmates,

among others. We particularly wanted to measure the higher or lower integration of this group by their sense of feeling different from the rest of their classmates. Concerning the *Personal Identity* indicator, the average rating was 2.6, which indicates that the majority of children tended to disagree that they felt different from others. However, it is interesting to observe here that, as age decreases, the perception of feeling different from others slightly increases. For example, the 9-13 age group exhibited an average rating of 3.1 compared to the rating of 2.2 from the 18-19 age group.

Regarding the *Satisfaction with Life Scale*, this group reached a rating of 7.8, higher than expected in the Spanish Education System. According to the PISA report, in 2015 the average rating for *Satisfaction with Life* of Spanish children was 7.42 (OECD: 2017). Another surprising discovery was that—according to the same report—girls showed a lower satisfaction than boys, and the sample from this study was mostly made up of girls (98.1% of the cases). In other words, the group of adopted girls of Chinese origin showed higher than expected levels of subjective perception of well-being in relation to their lives.

Putting aside the elements influencing the concept of Educational Well-being, we addressed the *Interest in Chinese Culture* factor. With an average rating of 3.3, we observed elements of indifference towards Chinese culture. That being said, we did notice a slight inclination towards participants agreeing, more than disagreeing, when it came to showing an interest in learning mandarin, traveling to China or wanting their school to hold cultural activities related to their country of origin.

Table 2 Estimation of measurements and common errors concerning the factors influencing the concept of Educational Well-being in addition to the Interest in Chinese

	Interest in Chinese Culture	Bullying in School	Racial/ Ethnic Bullying	Social Life	Personal Identity	Satisfaction with Life	Cases
9-13	3.2 (.190)	1.5 (.084)	2.1 (.248)	3.8 (.212)	3.1 (.322)	8.5 (.291)	15
14-15	3.3 (.092)	1.5 (.042)	1.8 (.092)	3.6 (.065)	2.7 (.127)	7.7 (.121)	83
16-17	3.3 (.066)	1.4 (.031)	1.7 (.069)	3.7 (.046)	2.7 (.113)	7.8 (.080)	120
18-19	3.4 (.113)	1.3 (.039)	1.4 (.099)	3.8 (.074)	2.2 (.158)	7.7 (.112)	50
Total	3.3 (.047)	1.4 (.021)	1.7 (.049)	3.7 (.034)	2.6 (.073)	7.8 (.059)	268

Culture factor (by age group)

To conclude this subsection, we noticed that the level of Educational Well-being of the group of adopted children of Chinese origin was not all that different from that of other student samples registered in other studies (Garaigordobil & Oñederra:2008, p. 27; OECD: 2017). There were however some elements that needed to be considered,

such as the prevalence of ethnic bullying, the importance of feeling integrated at school, to what extent these children are satisfied with life and the way in which these variables are linked to age. Nevertheless, we were unable to draw firm conclusions on these areas by conducting a descriptive, split-into-different-age-groups analysis of the weighted averages of the different scales. It was therefore necessary to develop a more exhaustive analysis of the relationships between these factors. Therefore, we chose to carry out a regression analysis, as illustrated below.

Objective 2. Analysis of correlation between factors

In this subsection we look in more detail at the analysis of the correlation between *Satisfaction with Life* in adopted children of Chinese origin and the factors influencing the concept of Educational Well-being and *Interest in Chinese Culture*. Given the results from the previous descriptive analysis, we explored the factors linked to the well-being of this social group. We therefore chose a regression analysis where the dependent variable was *Satisfaction with Life* and the independent variables were: *Interest in Chinese Culture*, *Social Life Scale* and *Bullying in School Scale*. In the case of the variable that measures the latter, we chose to include the global scale which contained data for *Racial/Ethnic Bullying*, given the high correlation between both scales. We also added, in the last model, a series of sociodemographic variables: age, sex, ISCED and age of arrival in Spain. Table 3 consists of five models: first, they present the relationship between each independent variable of the analysis (*Social Life Scale*, *Bullying in School Scale* and *Interest in Chinese Culture*) and *Satisfaction with Life* (M1-M3). These three independent variables are combined in Model 4 (M4). Finally, the last model (M4 + controls) includes the variables of M4 as well as the control variables.

The regression models (Table 3) revealed that both the integration into school social life and the self-perception of experiencing school bullying give reason for, to some extent, the level of satisfaction with life of the children of Chinese origin who were surveyed. The M1 ($F(1, 266) = 70.11, p < .001, R^2 = .21$) showed a positive relation between the level of integration measured as EVS ($t = 8.37, p < .001$) and the satisfaction with life. In the M2 ($F(1, 266) = 29.85, p < .001, R^2 = .10$) we noticed a link between the perception of having experienced bullying ($t = -5.46, p < .001$) and satisfaction with life, although, as predicted, this relation had a minus sign: the greater the perception of having experienced bullying, the lower the level of life satisfaction. On the contrary, the M3 ($F(1, 266) = .56, p = .454, R^2 = .00$), which included the *Interest in Chinese Culture Scale* ($t = -.74, p = .454$), failed to explain the level of satisfaction with life. These results were confirmed in the models M4 and M4 + controls, although the magnitude of the relationships was slightly reduced.

In all, it can be said that the Educational Well-being of adopted children of Chinese origin in Spain can indeed be predicted, however only to a certain extent, and this can be done by their perception of the level of integration in school social life and their perception of bullying.

Table 3. Models of linear regression. Dependent variable: Satisfaction with Life

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M4 + controls
Social Life Scale (1-5)	0.79*** (0.094)			0.70*** (0.097)	0.70*** (0.095)
Bullying Scale (1-5)		-0.88*** (0.161)		-0.56*** (0.067)	-0.68*** (0.157)
Interest in Chinese Culture Scale (1-5)			-0.06 (0.077)	-0.13 (0.067)	-0.08 (0.067)
ISCED					0.01 (0.041)
Female					-0.72 (0.376)
Age					-0.11*** (0.03)
Age of arrival in Spain					-0.01 (0.025)
Constant	4.88*** (0.353)	9.05*** (0.236)	7.99*** (0.262)	6.43*** (0.517)	8.88*** (0.799)
Cases	268	268	268	268	264
F	70.11	29.85	0.56	30.00	16.07
Degrees of freedom	267	267	267	267	263
p-value	0.000	0.000	0.454	0.000	0.000
R2	0.209	0.101	0.002	0.254	0.305

*** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05

Objective 3. Ethnic bullying and interest in chinese culture

As previously mentioned, in addition to analysing the correlation between the different factors influencing the concept of Educational Well-being, this research aimed to go one step further by determining whether the *Interest in Chinese Culture* of adopted children of Chinese origin may be linked to certain characteristics of this group. In other words, we aimed to understand if school experience could somehow generate preferences in identity within individuals regarding their racial or cultural references. In order to achieve this, we took the factors that showed significant correlations and extracted the indicators that—from a theoretical perspective on identity—were more related to the shaping of identity, both on a social and individual level. Therefore, on the one hand, we took the *Racial/Ethnic Bullying* indicator from the *Bullying in School Scale*, and, on

the other hand, we took the *Personal Identity* indicator (feeling different from others) from the *Social Life Scale*. We analysed the correlation between the two indicators and the *Interest in Chinese Culture* factor.

Table 4. Spearman's Correlations of Interest in Chinese Culture with Personal Identity and Racial Bullying.

	Interest in Chinese Culture
Personal Identity	.009 (268)
Racial Bullying	-.165** (268)

***p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05

As for *Personal Identity*, we observed that feeling different from others showed no correlation with an interest in learning more about China's cultural aspects (see Table 4). Concerning the correlation analysis between *Racial Bullying* and *Interest in Chinese Culture*, we found a negative correlation; however, it must be said that this correlation was weak, reaching an overall correlation of -.165 ($p < .01$). It can be said that although weak, there is a relationship between both factors. This finding suggests that a stronger feeling of having been intimidated because one's facial traits is linked to a reduced interest in Chinese culture.

To conclude this subsection, we found that the interest in Chinese culture of adopted children of Chinese origin is greater linked to school experience than to finding one's personal identity. Schools have a strong influence on this interest and, particularly, the negative racial attitudes that are displayed towards these children and the way in which they are perceived.

DISCUSSION

The question we wanted this research to answer was whether or not Educational Well-being could condition the social identity of children of Chinese origin adopted in Spain. In the light of the collected data, the answer is yes, but it must be stated that the impact of doing so is low. In other words, our hypothesis is correct: these children's perception of having experienced racial bullying does have some influence when it comes to their interest in learning more about the culture of their birthplace.

The analysis reveals that the Educational Well-being of this social group is not significantly different from that observed in other groups of children, although there are some nuances worth noting. First, the incidence of bullying in school is similar to the parameters observed in other reports (like PISA 2015) concerning the school population in Spain. However, the *Racial Bullying* variant ought to be brought to our attention: not only did it reveal that bullies see race as a targeting factor, but it also showed what

people's collective idea of «Chinese» was—including prejudices, some of them positive, but they were mainly negative in this case (strangeness). This result shines a light on the role that schools play, given that they are places in which such negative attitudes continue to be directed towards this social group.

Adopted children of Chinese origin are well integrated in their schools, and this social group's satisfaction with life depends mostly on this factor. This correlation is also linked to the well-established line of research that indicates that children and teenagers who have friends are more socially skilled, more cooperative and have a higher self-esteem (Estévez, Martínez, & Jiménez: 2009; Díaz-Aguado: 2013; Rodríguez-Hidalgo, Ortega, & Zych: 2014). This group stands out due to its high level of satisfaction with life and its low perception of feeling different from others. In this sense, and in order to better understand these results, it would be interesting to learn of the role adoptive families play—especially mothers from this sample, who are noted as having a higher education (63.4% of mothers have a university degree). Similarly, it would be relevant to conduct comparative research including samples of a different student profile, in order to obtain results of significant statistical criteria among different students' groups.

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