STUDY ON CHILD WELFARE OF ADOPTED CHINESE CHILDREN AT SCHOOLS IN CASTILLA Y LEÓN

PERCEPCIÓN DEL BIENESTAR SOCIAL DE NIÑOS Y NIÑAS ADOPTADAS DE ORIGEN CHINO EN LAS ESCUELAS EN CASTILLA Y LEÓN

PERCEPÇÃO DO BEM-ESTAR SOCIAL DE CRIANÇAS ADOTADAS DE ORIGEM CHINESA NAS ESCOLAS DE CASTILLA Y LEÓN

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ABSTRACT: The increasing diversity in schools as a result of international adoption has created new social challenges that need to be addressed. Beyond the learning processes of schools, the school is perceived as the ideal space for children and adolescents to develop skills and behaviours that allow them to live in society and it is considered a meeting point of different cultures. In the case of Spain, adopted Chinese children contributed to ethnic diversity in the classrooms, and the schools had to face this challenge. The main objective of this study is to know the social well-being of children adopted in the Republic of China who attend Secondary Education in Castilla y León since it presents itself as a group potentially exposed to the tensions that arise in heterogeneous groups in educational settings. Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted to meet the objective. The analytical strategy followed is based on well-founded theory. The results show that it is a group mocked for its Asian phenotypic features, but not for its adopted status.

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PALABRAS CLAVE:
diversidad
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educación.

RESUMEN: La creciente heterogeneidad en las escuelas, fruto de la adopción internacional, ha generado nuevos desafíos sociales que deben ser abordados. Más allá de los procesos de aprendizaje propios de los centros escolares, se percibe a la escuela como el espacio idóneo para que niños, niñas y adolescentes desarrollen habilidades y comportamientos que les permitan vivir en sociedad y como un escenario de confluencia para culturas totalmente diferenciadas. En el caso de España, la llegada de los niños adoptados de origen chino contribuyó a aumentar la diversidad étnica de la población española en las aulas, y con ello los desafíos para la institución educativa. El objetivo principal de esta investigación estriba en conocer el bienestar social de los niños y niñas adoptados en la R.P. China que cursan la Educación Secundaria en Castilla y León, dado que se presenta como un grupo potencialmente expuesto a las tensiones que se generan en contextos educativos heterogéneos. Para alcanzar el objetivo se han realizado 10 entrevistas semiestructuradas. La estrategia analítica seguida se asienta en la teoría fundamentada. Los resultados muestran que es un grupo objeto de burla por sus rasgos fenotípicos asiáticos, pero no por su condición de adoptados.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE:
diversidade
adoção
intimidação étnica
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educação

RESUMO: A crescente heterogeneidade nas escolas, resultado da adoção internacional, gerou novos desafios sociais que devem ser enfrentados. Além dos processos de aprendizagem das escolas, é percebido como um espaço adequado para que crianças e adolescentes desenvolvam habilidades e comportamentos que lhes permitam viver em sociedade e como cenário de confluência para culturas totalmente diferenciadas. No caso da Espanha, a chegada de crianças adotadas de origem chinesa contribuiu para aumentar a diversidade étnica da população espanhola nas aulas e os desafios para a instituição educacional. O principal objetivo desta pesquisa é encontrar o bem-estar social de meninas adotadas na República Popular da China que frequentam educação média obrigatórion em Castela e Leão, uma vez que se apresenta como um grupo potencialmente exposto às tensões generalizadas em contextos educacionais heterogêneos. Para atingir o objetivo, foram realizadas 10 entrevistas semiestruturadas. A estratégia analítica seguida é baseada na teoria fundamentada. Os resultados também mostraria que eles estão sujeitos a provocação de grupo por suas características fenotípicas asiáticas, mas não por sua condição adotada.

1. Introduction

The increasing heterogeneity of society, as a result of increased international mobility, has created new social challenges that need to be addressed. The cultural, ethnic and social differences pose to citizens new scenarios of relationships, which generate tensions (Maldonado, 2016). In this sense, the school is a clear reflection of the dynamics of social interaction derived from such social diversity (García-Yepes, 2017). One of the factors that influence the experience lived in schools is the new composition of the student body, and that must be considered for its academic, emotional and social consequences. Beyond the learning processes, the school is perceived as an ideal space for children and adolescents to develop skills and behaviours that allow them to live in today's society. The school is, therefore, a space of socialization that must contribute to future social cohesion and remove inequalities (Saraví, 2015). In this sense, it is essential to study the well-being of students in schools where diversity is increasing.

Adopted children from Chinese origin represent a unique group in this heterogeneity. In the late 1990s, Spain had become the second-largest country in the world in adoptions. Due to its geographical origin, Asia, and in particular the People's Republic of China, became a priority destination for adoptive families. According to data from the INE (National Statistical Institute),

from 1995 the first adopted Chinese girls began to arrive, reaching their peak in 2005, when of the 2,854 children adopted in Asia, 2,753 came from that country. A decade later, there are approximately 18,000 adopted children of Chinese origin in Spain, making up the largest group of foreign adoptions. Most of these children were girls. Given the magnitude and uniqueness of this group, they were called the "Mei Ming Generation" or "Generation No Name". This phenomenon contributed to increasing the ethnic diversity of the Spanish population in the classrooms.

In the light of research, being adopted (Raaska et al., 2012), possess Asian ethnic features (Fernández Cáceres, 2016) or being a girl (OECD, 2017) are attributes that condition the school experience as they are perceived as elements of vulnerability. As mentioned above, the underlying reason seems clear: "The school is the first place where they mention the differences, the only space where contact between native and foreign people is mandatory" (García Fernández, 2005, p.185). Consequently, data of the PISA student's Well-Being report (2017), shows clearly, that schools must do more to foster a safe, tolerant and respectful school climate based on tolerance and respect. For these reasons, the PISA report in its 2015 edition included as a novelty the concept of student well-being. This report breaks down the idea of social well-being into several dimensions: student satisfaction with their lives, anxiety

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in study and exams, motivation to achieve something, students' sense of belonging to the school, the social situation and inequality concerning equal welfare and bullying.

We emphasize the bullying as it is one of the most outstanding aspects of vulnerability (Gil Villa, 2016). Ovejero's work (2013) reveals the variations in figures of international studies and he refers to a group of countries with rates above 15%, including the United States, Australia or Japan; the second group of Scandinavian countries with rates between 6 and 9% and the third group including Spain and neighbouring states with bullying rates around 5%. In Latin America, the number of victims would range from 11% in Chile to 47% in Peru (Román y Murillo, 2011). In Portugal, the studies of Carvalhosa (2007) on secondary school students referred to in 1998 and 2004, find almost identical percentages of aggressors, victims and a mixture of both - about 10%, 22% and 26%, respectively. Garaigordobil and Oñederra (2008) mention 42 researches in Spain and 41 studies in other countries, with an average percentage of victims of severe bullying between 3 and 10%; in general, between 20 and 30% of the students suffered violent behaviours. In education, Volume III of the PISA 2015 Report finds that 18.7% of those interviewed say that they have suffered some bullying several times a month (14% for Spain). According to the same report, boys are victims of physical aggression more often than girls, although girls suffer more psychological harassment than boys (OECD, 2017).

If one emphasizes the phenotypic difference, it is well contrasted in the scientific literature that a key factor associated with discriminatory behaviour is ethnic-cultural prejudice (Collins, McAleavy y Adamson, 2004; Verkuyten y Thijs, 2001, 2002, 2006; Rodríguez Hidalgo, 2010; Lloyd y Stead, 2001; Monks *et al.*, 2008; Rodríguez Hidalgo, Ortega y Zych, 2014; González-Alonso y Escudero-Vidal, 2018). For example, schoolchildren living in multi-cultural educational communities prefer to associate with boys and girls of their own culture (Tajfel, 1981); thus, isolate others, who tend to be a minority group. At this point, it is worth noting Verkuyten's and Thijs contributions (2001, 2002, 2006) to studies focused on ethnic-cultural abuse and harassment, or ethnic-cultural bullying. These authors show the existence of a form of racist victimization among equals that goes beyond the racist or xenophobic insult, which is the verbal and direct social exclusion of the victim explicitly based on ethnic-cultural difference. In the same direction Rodríguez Hidalgo, Ortega y Zych (2014) point out that, in the Spanish context,

ethnic-cultural victimization is related to the number of friends of the harassed person.

If we focus on Asian phenotypic features, the literature has analyzed their mediation in situations of bullying. For example, Juvonen Grahan and Schsuter (2003) point out that Asians are less aggressive. Furthermore, Mouttapa, Valente, Gallaher, Rohrbach and Unger (2004) show how Asian students are significantly more victimized than their Latino peers. McKenney, Pepler, Craig and Connolly's work (2006), control the ethnic variable and status and concludes that there were no significant differences in the prevalence rates of general victimization or according to the ethnic group.

Psycho-pedagogical studies regarding adoption have been carried out, focusing on the roles performed by the professionals involved in the adoption process, int the guide of the families that wish to adopt (Palacios, 2010) and guidance on the emotional impact of children adopted after a long period in orphanages (Palacios, Sánchez-Sandoval y León, 2005; Palacios y Brodzinsky, 2010; Rodríguez-Jaume y Jareño, 2015; Bernedo *et al.*, 2017). Psychology focused mainly on the psychological consequences of adoption on minors (Abadi, 1989), or the adaptation of the child to his family and his social and educational environment (Barástegui, 2003 y 2005). The work of Horno and Romero (2017) points out how bullying occurs especially against vulnerable groups, among which adopted children stand out.

From a sociological point of view, few studies focus on this issue despite the enormous quantitative impact and social relevance that adoptions have acquired in Spain in recent decades. Alberdi and Escario (2003) note the immense social acceptance and visibility that international adoption has among Spaniards. The University of Alicante carried out a study on the baby boom of international adoptions in Spain (2011) in which they analyze adoptive families and their lifestyles, as well as other sociologically relevant aspects in the analysis of the family and its dynamics. As regards education, Fernández-Cáceres (2016) found complaints of xenophobia and racism in the testimonies of 32 adoptive families in Castile and Leon, highlighting that possessing Asian phenotypic features, combined with being adopted, enhanced the possibility of being victimized in schools.

The literature consulted shows how adoption, gender or ethnicity are variables that condition the social well-being of individuals. However, there is little research focused on studying the welfare of the people who embody these three elements at the same time – adoption, gender and ethnicity – in Spanish schools. This gap requires further

deepening of this issue from, among others, a sociological approach (Vázquez, Doncel y Soto, 2009), even more, if we consider the consulted literature which point out that the social network of students in a school context is associated with the vulnerability of young women.

Consequently, the main objective of this study is to deepen the knowledge to see if the specific nature of this group of Chinese adopted children influences their social well-being as it is a potentially vulnerable group. Therefore, given their characteristics, it allows a reliable approach to the study of social well-being in schools with increasing diversity. To be more specific, and taking the general objective as a reference, the following subdivision is made:

a. Determine the life satisfaction of the students.
b. Delve into ethnic harassment among equals.
c. Analyze the relationship between supportive social networks and social well-being.

2. Methodology

The result of the approach described leads to the question of the present work: does the uniqueness of the group of Chinese adopted children condition their social well-being in schools? In this sense, well-being is understood as the psychological, cognitive, social and physical skills and activities that 15-year-old adolescent student needs for a happy and full life (PISA, 2017). In PISA 2015, the concept of social welfare is linked to several aspects of the study, of which we highlight those related to the subject studied. First, we will address students' satisfaction with their lives. Second, we will analyze the phenotypic difference linked to bullying; this is an essential element that interferes with the well-being of students in schools (González-Alonso y Escudero-Vidal, 2018). And finally, we delve into the role played by social media and friendships that this group creates within their social well-being.

2.1. Analysis and sample technique

The technique selected to achieve the proposed objectives is the *semi-structured interview*. The reason for this selection is the potential it must provide information through the story of the adopted children themselves and its significant relevance to understanding their social well-being in schools.

The population studied is composed of the adopted Chinese adolescents who are currently enrolled in Compulsory Secondary Education (ESO). A total of ten interviews have been conducted with adolescent boys and girls between the ages of 11 and 18 who have arrived in Spain from China through adoption processes (see table 1). As for the socioeconomic status of their families, they all fall within the upper-middle class with university studies, which is common among adoptive parents, as they must meet specific social, economic and cultural status requirements to start the adoption process (Parsons, 2009).

Table 1: Interviewee´s profile by gender and age		
Interview	Gender	Age
E1	girl	17
E2	boy	13
E3	girl	16
E4	boy	16
E5	girl	16
E6	boy	18
E7	girl	12
E8	girl	15
E9	girl	11
E10	girl	16

To achieve a right approach on how the interviewees think we used a battery of questions connected with the objectives of the study, namely:

- Are you satisfied with your life?
- What's your school like? Do you like to go?
- Do you have many friends? Do you think you have good friends? What are your friends like?
- Do you have a group of friends; how would you define your group? How are they?
- What's your family like?
- How do you see yourself in relation to your peers? How do your peers see you? How do your friends see you? How do your parents see you?
- Have you ever been told that you are Chinese?
- How do you live the ethnic difference?
- Have you ever been insulted or harassed? If so, what kind of insults or harassments.

The interviews took place between May and October 2019 in Salamanca and Valladolid.

2.2. Category of analysis

In terms of category coding, the technical analysis followed consist of coding the quotation within its corresponding group along with the preceding and subsequent paragraphs to encompass the theoretical context of that quotation. To this end, the following initial category of analysis linked to the social well-being of students in schools was defined:

I.   Life satisfaction.
II. Ethnic bullying.
III. Social media and friendships.

Based on information gathered from all interviews, an analysis matrix was developed to identify the main inputs according to the objectives of the research. From this, three sub-categories were drawn up within the ethnic bullying: dedramatization of harassment internalized vulnerability and acquired resistance, which is listed in the following matrix (see table 2).

Table 2: Matrix of analysis.	
CATEGORIES	**SUBCATEGORIES**
Life satisfaction of the students	
Ethnic Harassment	*Dedramatization of harassment*
	Internalized Vulnerability
	Acquired resistance
Supportive social networks.	

2.3. Analysis strategy

The analysis strategy is based on the principles of grounded theory. The axial coding procedure is followed, which is a process of relating the categories to their subcategories (Strauss y Corbin, 1998). The interviews try to study the meaning that the adoptees give to ethnic differences and to the condition of being an adopted child, and places emphasis on their school experience.

At the same time, a computer-aided analysis was used with the Atlas.ti version 6.1 that will offer us a different perspective of the analysis.

3. Analysis

First, we will present the results for each of the defined initial categories: life satisfaction, social media friendships, and ethnic harassment. And secondly, we present the results from the analysis of the detected sub-categories.

3.1. Initial Category Analysis

3.1.1. Life satisfaction

Overall, the interviewees have a good self-perception of their well-being, and this is associated mainly associated to family support. This is depicted as follows: *"Well, I think adolescence is already a difficult stage in itself (...) But.... I don't think I'm finding it harder than other boys or girls my age. I'm fine in general."* E1; *"I'm super happy with everything."* E9; *"Well, except for some fights with my mother... well, discussions, otherwise everything is fine."* E5

Family ties are positively valued, and although they refer to certain conflicts more closely linked to the adolescence, this is not a big issue. The boys and girls that were interviewed feel safe, loved and protected by their families. *"I get along quite well with my parents".* E1; *"My family supports me, so... I don't have any problems."* E4

It is noteworthy that most of the subjects interviewed have other brothers or sisters who are also adopted and from China, which usually gives them support regarding the uncertainty that their adoptive origin may pose, as they share this circumstance and country of origin.

3.1.2. Ethnic harassment

In a first approach to the interviews, none of the interviewees refers to episodes that can be considered ethnic bullying. *"No, not really (no comments/problem for his physical features). The truth is that discrimination well... in my school, apparently, there is no discrimination. For starters, there is a sign that says "school without racism"* E8. But they do point out some specific episodes

of insults related to their Asian phenotype. However, the interviews will show that real life is never so simple. Therefore, linked to the initially analyzed category of *Ethnic Bullying,* three sub-categories emerge, which allow understanding of how members of this social group perceive bullying. The three subcategories are: Dedramatization of harassment, internalized *Vulnerability,* and *Acquired resistance.*

3.1.2.1. Dedramatization of harassment

Within the before mentioned categories they feel hurt in three ways: insults, comments or offensive jokes. These adjectives or mockeries focus both on cultural aspects linked to China, as well as given names as shown by the following fragments: *"Once a classmate called me 'chinita' (little Chinese girl), and I felt annoyed and whatever. And that's it. And then I told the teacher, and they told me to call her 'charrito' (diminutive for somebody from Salamanca), you know, and that's it." E7; "Yes, sometimes they picked on my name, for example, sometimes, and then for different reasons... that have to do with my race." E4.* They also refer to the Asian phenotype, i.e., to the shape of the eyes. *"Yes, it's always the..., it's the difference, that is, mmm..., the physique is what makes the difference, I have not been insulted much more by others. It is always either the eyes or... yes, that" E1.* "Always associated with a negative image of someone who perceives himself differently. *As a child they made fun of me as the Chinese girl at school." E9*

Although none of them considers that it was bullying, we must point out that in some interviews a continued exposure to insults for their condition is observed. For example, quote: *"yes it happened, sometimes... "E6* or *"but they insisted" E3; "or "yes there was a situation that was a little* more important than the *rest" E1* or *"but I could no longer take it" E9.* All this shows that it is not something occasional. The coincidence in all the statements that are made reveals a social group exposed to insults, although we can also observe that it is a situation they are trying to dedramatize. For this reason, they continually emphasize that this situation can be disabled when a third party intervenes.

I try to solve it myself and then it's like "nothing happened here", but I couldn't do it anymore, so I told my parents, and my parents wanted to tell the teachers, that's what I was afraid of, I didn't want the teachers to know, so I said: "don't tell them please, because I don't want to make a big mess and get into trouble". E9

3.1.2.2. Internalized Vulnerability

The analysis of the interviews shows that it is a group that has internalized a sense of vulnerability, which can even be experienced as inevitable. Proof of this is their distrust when they see that they are observed by others with suspicion, as is stated in the following fragment: *"I doesn't matter to me if they look at me strange because I really do not care how they look at me". E3.* It also points out their sense of helplessness when, in moments of change in their lives, the fear of rejection arises in the new scenario: "Then *in the new high school I was afraid, because I said to myself, maybe now when I leave this school and go to another, well they may insult me or whatever, but thank god that did not happen" E3.* Phenotypic features play an important role in nurturing this sense of vulnerability: *"Offensive comments well... yes they are many,* that *is inevitable, because what is different is like ... the physique is what makes the difference, I have not found any more insults from the rest of the people "E1.*

This internalized vulnerability is also observed when one of the interviewees points out that, in large environments such as cities, they are not perceived as someone who is different and are treated "without labels".

Sometimes when I go... I don't know, to Valladolid or bigger cities, or on holiday to a bigger place, where there are more people, and people don't... they ignore you! everyone goes their own way, you feel like free and you don't... I don`t know! You're like anybody else! you're not someone different who everyone already knows ... they put a label on you. E1

Another aspect that shows the internal vulnerability is expressed by a defensive posture, as they find a negative comment poured towards the Chinese in general by a teacher annoying, identifying themselves with that generic comment.

Yes (categorical) I received annoying comments... at high school had a teacher who was not racist but he was more like... It was about the history of philosophy, and sometimes topics of debate arose, and comments were made about the Chinese, that the Chinese invaded Spain... it wasn't that he talked about me exactly, but I felt included within the group and it was annoying. E6

It should be noted that a sense of vulnerability is marked by a certain social class. We must not forget that there is a bias towards classes in adoptive families as they have to meet certain socio-economic criteria in order to qualify for adoption.

This difference is social class is shown when they feel negative about being identified with children from 'Chinese bazaars' which have traditionally been run by the immigrant Chinese population. Or when they refer to those who insult them as *"child of those gipsies"E6.*

> And… many people wonder…, most people think that… we are Chinese girls…from the bazaars … or that we are from Chinese families, living here, that we are their daughters, but that we are from China and that we have emigrated here. And those who know that we are adopted, they know it, but… they don't know the history, I think they don't know very well what the adoption process is like and all that. E1

> It's just that once a friend of mine, they went into a Chinese store, a bazaar, and I walked in and they thought I was a son of the boss who worked there. E2

But beyond the internalized vulnerability, which keeps the members of this social group on alert, the emotional wear and tear they face is highlighted. Because, the offense causes them distress.

> Look, my parents said not to think about it, that was nonsense. Well it's silly for them, because they don't say anything to them. I mean, it's just that they can say it to you in a super affectionate way and others say it otherwise. I know I'm a Chinese, but I just don't want them to say that to me, as if they were making fun of me. E9

> It was mainly the typical group of boys who… They follow the joke to other people and… In the end half class ends up joking so…It's just to follow the joke! But… well we talk about it and… it ends up being solved. Although… it always stays… in your memory. E1

> But when I was younger it annoyed me… but gradually you get used to it… It's as if you have a problem with your face or some stain, at first you have a hard time… E6

3.1.2.3. Acquired resistance

As they grow, they become accustomed and strengthen their resilience to possible rejections for feeling more observed or receiving some offensive verbal comment. Given the reported experiences, the strategies and resources used by adopted children from China have three pillars: the individual, the family and the peer group. We can see how the individual, over time, learns to manage the situation of vulnerability.

> Maybe in some case they have messed with me, but there's more… in fact there was more… of that, that kind of people, but… sometimes it has bothered me. E4.

> Yes, especially at high school, I told my mom about the insults and that I did not want to go to school because I felt uncomfortable, but it did not get to the point of bullying… but I learned that I had to let it go and move on because I think that is the best you can do. E6

The family plays an essential role in support, whether mediation is required in possible conflict situations or when transmitting skills to their children to manage the situation. At this point, it should be noted that families do preventive work before the harassment takes place. That is, they are aware of the uniqueness of their family and perceive vulnerability in it. Hence a common denominator has been the resilience that families try to transmit to their adopted sons and daughters (Ungar,2001; Cristóbal, Calderón-Almendros and Pérez-Cea, 2017). All this is probably, conditioned by the inevitable moment of revelation, a process by which the adoptee knows his status and origin and, ultimately, the unique family status. This is a process that takes place within the family, and each family uses a different strategy, although with a tendency to emphasize the emotional dimension rather than educational or parenting functions (Meil, 2006; Oscón, 2007). For example, in various studies on single-parent families (with a similar profile in terms of education and economic level) it was also found that these families were especially effective in transmitting resilience to their offspring to strengthen them in the face of situations of misunderstanding or rejection outside the family (Ospina-García, 2018; Huaiquivil, Yévenes y Zicavo, 2019).

> I try to solve it on my own and then it's like "nothing happened here", but I couldn't do it anymore, so I told my parents, and my parents wanted to tell the teachers, that's what I was afraid of, I didn't want the teachers to know, so I said "don't tell them please, because I don't want to make a big mess and get into trouble". E9

> When they made those comments, sometimes I pretended not to hear, but if they insisted then I would tell my parents and they told me not to worry and just ignore them, that they want for us to feel offended and that if we ignore them they would get tired and they would stop doing it. E3

At the beginning, when you're younger... and you always have lots of doubts... and mom, why this and that...why do they call me..., why am I different... but... my parents have helped me a lot, that is, they have always told me the story of when they went to adopt me and my sister, what to do and how to do it, how to act in situations if one day they would take it out on us. And anyway, they've always solved the doubts we had. E1

3.1.3. Social media and friendships

But above all, the peer group acquires a special role in the addressed group. They have good friendships and different types of friends: friends in the village, school and high school, and also childhood friends (sometimes children of their parent's friends). Several of the interviewees have already gone from school to high extracurricular school and have made new friends without much difficulty. Extracurricular activities or hobbies is another way to make new friends.

I used to play hockey, but not anymore. I also studied at the Music Conservatory (plays the piano) and I studied Chinese for 3 years in the language school. E1

For six years I think I was going to Chinese, but I quit because it was difficult, I was a little child and as for me I didn't see it as useful. Now I really regret that decision, to let it go... E6

If we take a look at the diversity of the peer group, some have a friend that is also adopted from China or from another nationality, while in other peer groups the diversity is less. We can observe that the children who were interviewed are not particularly or exclusively related to peers of the same ethnic or adoptive background. Over time, in some cases these relationships have faded over the years. They perform a variety of extracurricular activities and range for example from studying other languages (German, English or French), sports (hockey, football, basketball, karate, archery, swimming, chess, skating), studies at the Music Conservatory (piano, violin, guitar, flute) or other activities (chorus, library, scouting, ballet). The following statement describes how important peer protection can be in the face of harassment.

*Also, once, one thing I liked is that I was on the street one day and some guys started to insult me some guys... Curiously it's always boys who insult, and I was with a group of friends and they stood up for me "Do you have any problem with my friend?" and so on.... E6*

At first in class there were some annoying comments, but then as you became friends it no longer happened, you were already part of the class. And in class they didn't say anything because the teachers could hear it... But outside the classroom it did happen, sometimes... E6

3.2. Analysis of emerging categories

The study of the obtained emerging categories – internalized vulnerability, dedramatization of harassment, and acquired resistance – allows us to improve the understanding of this group's school experience. Overall they are satisfied with life, but they also perceive themselves as vulnerable. It is interesting to see that they do not dramatize in their statements, but that the normalization of offensive situations is constant. In other words, one sees a group that has internalized the possibility of being mocked and even so, they show strength to deal with these situations. This strength is acquired by their families who previously use strategies to ensure good integration of the adopted child in their immediate environment. Planning illustrated in Figure 1.

Parents perceive the potential vulnerability of their adopted children and consequently develop a set of responses to manage the potential challenges they may face, given the uniqueness of their family. For example, they expand the family with newly adopted children of Chinese origin. They also prepare their children to respond positively to adverse situations. And finally, they encourage their children to participate in extracurricular activities or associations. A decision that, on the one hand, allows to increase the bonds of friendship of their children beyond schools. And on the other hand, because of the nature of the activities carried out – ballet, music, etc. – that is in line with the academic culture of the centers, and allows them to have better school experience. These factors, along with the ability of individuals to create dense networks of friendship, enable them to face their uniqueness in heterogeneity, offering resistance to mockery. Although it does not exempt them from affliction.

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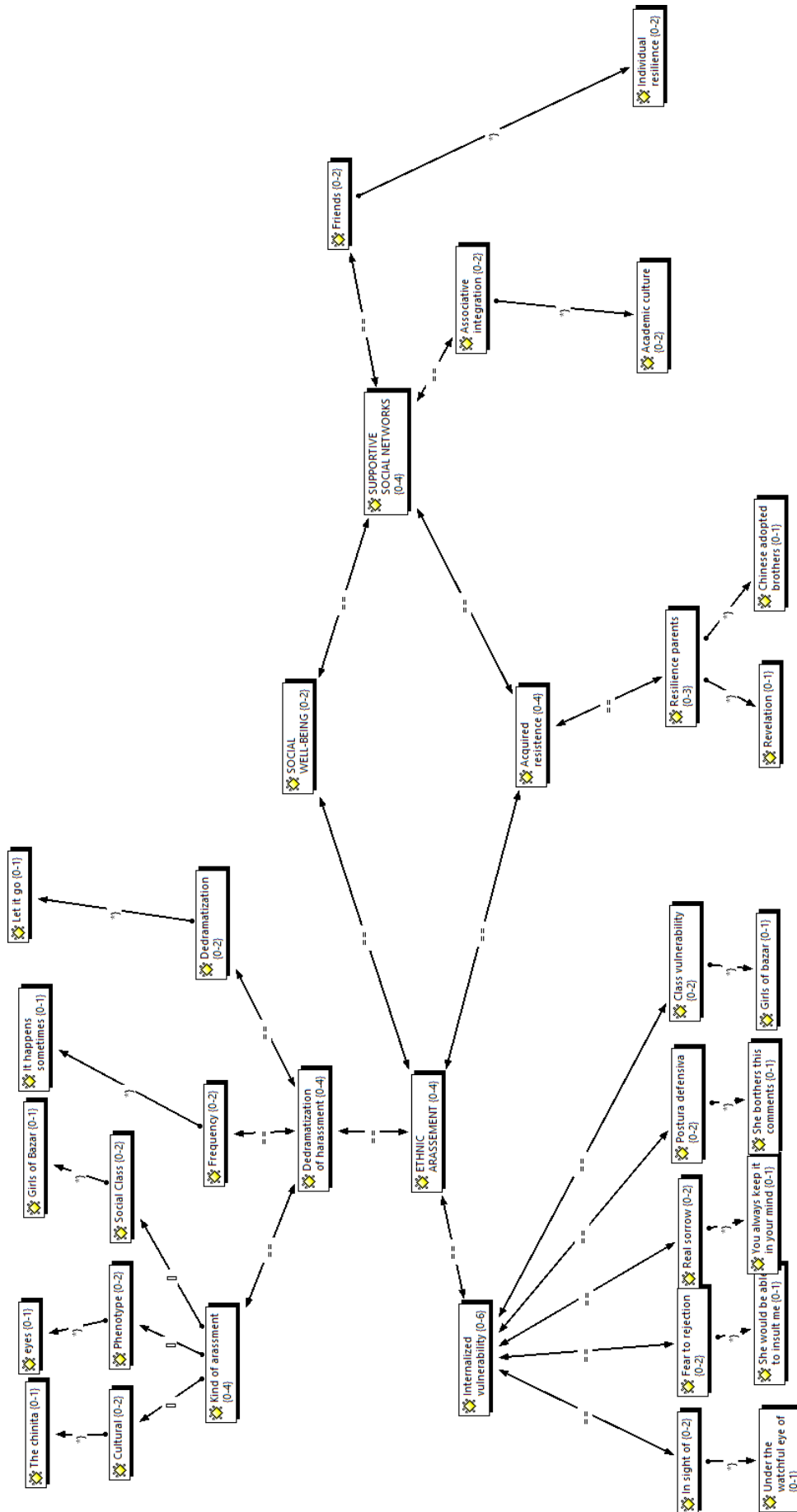
Graphic 1. Starting Category and Emergent categories.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The main objective of this study has been to understand whether the specific nature of this group of adopted Chinese children influences their social well-being in increasingly diverse school contexts. Results show that it is a social group that sometimes is mocked for its Asian phenotypic features, but not for its adopted status. In other words, having differentiated ethnic traits is the attribute that most influences their vulnerability, even more than being adopted or being a girl. Specialized literature also considers these factors as elements that put at risk their well-being in school. Although the participants do not perceive their adoptive status as an important element of discrimination or mockery, it has been observed that their families put the emphasis on preventing this fact from affecting their children's psychosocial well-being and therefore prepare them with tools to make them more resilient.

Adolescents and their families perceive this vulnerability and, as other research show, having strong social ties is presented as a key element to face this situation. Given the results obtained, it is possible to conjecture that it is the perceived vulnerability itself that encourages families to articulate responses as a way to improve their children's well-being.

This research has shown that these girls and boys have a dense social network of both family and friendship. As other research show, social inclusion is a key element to confront their potential vulnerability and ensure their social welfare.

The way of tackling this challenge through qualitative study provides results that are a reflection of how the reality experienced by the adolescents adopted by Spanish families is perceived. However, with the information we have, we cannot generalize according to quantitative criteria, although it has allowed us to deepen the knowledge of the social well-being of this unique group in the schools of Castilla y León. For these reasons, the following lines of work will consist of obtaining more empirical evidence with a questionnaire to extend the knowledge about the object of study. If we do not approach the social well-being, the consequences can be enormous: growing unease, frustration, abandonment, or loss of human capital for 21st-century Spanish society.

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