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Week 2 Film Review: *Somewhere Between* (2011)

Adoption is an infinitely loaded topic. When international boarders are crossed and disparate cultures are bridged its level of complexity and for the parties involved is extreme. The 2011 documentary, *Somewhere Between* tackles the emotional journeys of teenage girls and adopted in to the United States from China. They struggle with their identities. Foremost, they seem to identify as American teenage girls. They are identified, most of them, in their communities of primarily white folks, as Asian, and as other. This for them has been a notion they have carried with them through their lives. Even in their own homes many of them see faces not like their own.

Haley one of the kids, who lives in Tennessee states “I’m a banana. I’m yellow on the outside and white on the inside.” This she likely truly feels and in a way she is right. She lives a typical Southern Christian life. It also sounds like a strident coping mechanism for someone not having yet found the tools to delve deep into her own self search out her feelings. I have to say it pained me to hear her say it. I’m not sure why.

In the second half of the film we see Haley become inquisitive after a trip to Europe with a group of pen-pals, adopted from China and Southeast Asia. She finds herself more at ease than she maybe even thought herself capable in their company, and this allows her the freedom to ask the questions she has had within her all along. Spurred on by a meeting with the founder of a non-profit working on issues of international adoption she eventually finds her birth family. They present a not so black and white scenario. Her birth father she finds was devastated by the loss of his daughter. Her mother a pragmatist to a fault depending on how you look at it is neither a monster nor a complete victim. She felt she had done what was best, through the pain and all.

The other main plot line is that of Fang. She is from Berkeley and thoughtful beyond her years. Daughter of a mixed race couple, her father, briefly shown, looks to be from east Asia, and her mother is white. Her mother learned Chinese before Fangs adoption and has made all the effort she could to help Fang keep alive, her heritage as well as her birth language. Through many trips back to China, Fang has become involved with a young girl, Run-Yi, suffering from cerebral palsy. Fang and her mother raised funds to provide her with better care and ultimately aid in her also being adopted to an American family. During the process in which Fang translates during the first meeting of Run-Yi and her adoptive family, it is clear Fang is coming to terms with her own past. Fang in a way becomes like Run-Yi’s second surrogate mother. Fang feels the loss her own mother may have felt reliving the adoption from another perspective. Fang, helping Run-Yi through the process in the film, and no doubt I would suspect in the future, is healing for them both, Fang watching and aiding her young self.

Fang’s adoptive parents clearly put her well ahead of the curve when you look at the girls in the film. Her sense of identity is almost more so in a state of upheaval a sign she is further down the road of making sense of it all. Haley is at the start of the road. Her work is ahead of her, and even with parents coming from a vastly different place they seem to be supporting her in the ways she needs.