DAUGHTERS FROM CHINA:
TRANSNATIONAL ADOPTION AND IMAGINING COLD
WAR AND POST-COLD WAR CHINA

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY
OF
HAWAI‘I AT MĀNOA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

IN

AMERICAN STUDIES

MAY 2014

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Key words: transnational adoption from China, U.S. cultural representations, Cold War, post-Cold War
Acknowledgments

To all who have offered their love and commitment in the process of my thesis-writing: Thank you for your support and encouragement, without which I would not have completed the thesis.

My sincerest gratitude goes to my thesis committee. My chair Professor Mari Yoshihara has, throughout the two years of the MA program and especially during my thesis-writing period, provided with constant and miraculous guidance in my academic growth. Since the beginning of the MA program, I have been so fortunate to be invited into her academic writing workshop, in which I have made tremendous progress in learning, as a non-native speaker, how to write a good piece of academic writing in English and how to give constructive comments to other writers. Professor Jonna Eagle and Professor Kathleen Sands have offered me precious time, encouragement and inspirational thoughts. Their critical comments and meticulous editing, together with Professor Yoshihara’s, have become the most important driving force under which this thesis comes into being.

I have been so blessed and grateful to be enrolled in the Department of American Studies at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa and to work closely with a group of friendly, supportive and academically rigorous professors and colleagues during the two-year study for my MA degree. Professor David Stannard and Professor Elizabeth Colwill have both generously offered time to read and talk with me about my MA research proposal, and given inspirational comments on how to make it better. My colleagues in the Department of American Studies, Yuka Polovina, Jeanette Hall, Jonathan Valdez, Shannon Cristobal, Keiko Fukunishi, Sean Trundle, Sanae Nakatani, Yohei Sekiguchi and Yu Jung Lee all have offered precious time, encouraging thoughts and incisive comments on my research or shared any piece of helpful information they could find about this research project.

I owe many thanks to my circle of friends, including my neighbors, the Leuŋ and my Chinese scholar friends. In the most trying moment when writing and sickn•
almost exhausted me, they have kept me in their everyday prayers, taken turns to look after me, and helped me recover physically and spiritually as soon as possible.

My last and deepest gratitude goes to my family. My husband Chunbo Gu has always been supporting me from China, both financially and spiritually. At the same time, he has to balance his time between his full-time engineer job and the responsibility of a son/son-in-law to take good care of both our aging parents, so that I can be fully devoted to my study and writing. Without his support, the MA thesis would be impossible. My eleven-year-old daughter Sabrina Gu has been a sweet company in the lonely writing days. She was also a great helper and patient nurse when I was sick during the writing process. Thanks go to my mom and dad who have kept me in their thoughts every day, and to my parents-in-law who have supported and cheered with me in every step of my growth. This thesis is dedicated to my beloved family.
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Introduction

Stepping into the classroom at University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa in fall 2012, I was surprised to see a senior white lady sitting in my Chinese class, and that was how I got to know Linda, a white mother of three adopted Chinese daughters. Driven by the desire to understand her daughters’ birth culture and encourage them to learn Chinese, she became one of the most diligent students in the class that semester. At the same time, she kept her full-time job as a physician and took the sole responsibility of taking care of her daughters when her professor husband left the island on business trips. Once we got to know each other better, she began to tell me how she and her husband adopted their daughters. “Why did you choose to adopt only girls?” I asked one day. She told me because girls in China were suffering, and she wished she could adopt more girls and offer them a better life. “You can’t imagine what would happen to the girls if they were left in China!” She exclaimed, with tears in her eyes. I tried to find out how she had the impression that girls were suffering in China, but she couldn’t remember whether she got it from newspapers or other sources. However, she recalled that in the 1990s when she and her husband decided to adopt from China, news of girls suffering in China “was everywhere,” and she herself never doubted it was true.

This conversation triggered my interest in researching how transnational adoption from China has been represented in American popular culture and how China and Chinese people, specifically women and girls, have been imagined in the representations. I was less driven by curiosity than by uneasiness that what Linda read about girls suffering in China was not what I knew about China. Born a female in the Chinese countryside, and travelling far and wide later for college and graduate school or simply for sightseeing in the country, I never felt I or most other girls I met were suffering. It is not my intention to disprove Linda and American representations of Chinese women and girls. What I am interested in is how images of China and of the United States have been constructed, and what ideologies have been constructed by
these cultural representations. Linda’s words also suggest that she felt it was her obligation to rescue girls from China and offer them a better life. Where did this narrative of rescue and obligation come from? This thesis addresses these issues by analyzing American cultural representations of transnational adoption from China during the Cold War period and post-Cold War decade.

**Transnational Adoption from China: An Overview**

At the turn of the twenty-first century, transnational adoption from China became a prominent phenomenon that drew wide attention from the mass media.\(^1\) China was the second largest source country of transnational adoption to the U.S. (Russia being the largest). In 1995, Chinese children accounted for 22% of adoption to the U.S. By the end of the 1990s, about 30,000 Chinese orphans had been adopted by Americans, and by 2012 the number reached to 80,000.\(^2\) Almost all major research on transnational adoption from China mentions that American adoption of Chinese children started in the late 1980s or early 1990s.\(^3\) Catherine Ceniza Choy’s new book on the history of Asian international adoption in America, *Global Families*, however, unearths a part of Chinese adoption history in the 1950s and 1960s that has been overshadowed by both Asian mixed-race adoption and by the later larger wave of adoption from China around the 1990s and beyond. Largely drawing on records from the International Social Service (ISS), an organization sponsoring and organizing the adoption programs, Choy found that starting from 1958 to 1962, ISS processed a large

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1 There are a variety of terms used in previous studies concerning adoption from China, ranging from “transnational adoption,” “intercountry adoption,” “transracial adoption,” “interracial adoption” and “international adoption.” Yet, as Catherine Ceniza Choy puts, “transnational adoption” is a term commonly used by scholars of adoption, as it emphasizes “the ways that the phenomenon creates a significant social field between two or more specific nation-states.” See Choy, *Global Families: A History of Asian International Adoption in America* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2013), 117. Other scholars who use the term are, for instance, Eleana Kim, Sara K. Dorow and Toby Alice Volkman.

2 The first two figures are given by Toby Alice Volkman. See her edited book *Cultures of Transnational Adoption* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 82. The last number was given by filmmaker Linda Goldstein Knowlton’s 2012 documentary *Somewhere Between*.

3 The first book-length research, conducted by Richard Tessler, Gail Gamache and Liming Liu, accounts that “Beginning in 1989, the PRC informally allowed foreigners to adopt children on an ad hoc basis (formal approval did not come until 1992).” Jay W. Rojewski and Jacy L. Rojewski, however, start their book by stating that “In the early 1990s, intercountry adoption from China was practically nonexistent,” but their later research shows that sporadic and non-officially approved adoption by Americans did occur as early as 1985. Sara K. Dorow, Toby Alice Volkman, Kay Johnson and other researchers have not mentioned a specific time, but unanimously conduct their research from the early 1990s and beyond. See Richard Tessler, Gail Gamache, and Liming Liu, *West Meet E American Adopt Chinese Children* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Bergin & Garvey, 1999), 4. Jay Rojewski, and Jacy L. Rojewski, *Intercountry Adoption from China: Examining Cultural Postadoption Is* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Bergin & Garvey, 2001), 1-4.
number of Chinese orphans in Hong Kong to be adopted by American families through the Hong Kong Project, which attracted wide news coverage in both national and local newspapers.

Here is the starting point of my MA thesis. Unlike current research on transnational adoption from China which starts from the 1990s and afterwards, this thesis starts from the Cold War period and ends in 2011. I focus specifically on two periods. The first is the early Cold War period from the late 1940s to the 1960s in which a large number of Chinese orphans were adopted to the United States through the Hong Kong Project. The second period is the post-Cold War decade, largely from 1989 to 2001, in which transnational adoption from China started a new and much bigger wave that aroused tremendous attention from the Western media. This period also witnessed China’s emergence as the world’s biggest Communist country while it experienced political upheaval on a global stage such as the Tiananmen Democracy Movement. It is also a period in which the U.S. readjusted its own post-Cold War foreign policy towards China while continuing its traditional anti-Communist stance. I terminate my project in 2001, as it is a watershed year for both the United States and U.S.-Sino relations. The terrorist attack on 9/11 made the U.S. define terrorism as the biggest enemy and China emerged as a necessary co-fighter in the war against terrorism. At the same time, China was undergoing tremendous political and economic changes, and its Communist color gradually faded. Therefore, after 2001, both the images of China and the U.S. would be tremendously different from before, and conceivably representations of transnational adoption would also differ from the post-Cold War decade.

Current research on transnational adoption from China mainly focuses on adoptive parents’ concerns and uses methods of sociology, psychology and anthropology. Research done by Richard Tessler, Gail Gamache and Liming Liu, and by Jay W. Rojewski and Jacy L. Rojewski addresses post-adoption issues such as adoptive parents’ attitudes towards their children’s bi-cultural socialization, adoptee’s adjustment in the Unites States, and the racial discrimination they might have to fac Sara K. Dorow explores the cultural economy of American adoption from China with
overlapping issues of gender, race, migration and kinship. She argues that the stories of adoption from China are told in the tropes of client, gift, and ambassador. In the edited book *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*, Toby Alice Volkman and Kay Johnson focus on the China part of adoption with issues such as Chinese culture as the roots of girl-abandonment and the plight of Chinese parents caused by the family-planning policy. While these scholars research on transnational adoption from China from a variety of pre-adoption aspects in China and post-adoption issues in America, none has examined the role cultural representations may play in how adoptive parents and adopted children imagine about China, Chinese women and female children.

As for the study of transnational adoption and Cold War politics, studies done by scholars such as Laura Briggs and Christina Klein are particularly inspirational to me. Briggs’s new book *Somebody’s Children* is a powerful intervention in and contribution to the scholarship of interracial and transnational adoption both within the United States and in Latin America. She explores the genealogies of the compassionate investment in adopting, or “rescuing” children from outside the U.S., and how anti-Communist ideology played out in the mission of rescue and in the manipulation of politics of pity and compassion towards children “who need the home and emotional investment that only ‘we’ can provide.”⁴ Klein’s book *Cold War Orientalism* illustrates how the U.S. views its political obligation towards Asia through family ties formed by transnational adoption during the Cold War. I will continue to analyze how the narrative of rescue and obligation is conveyed in the U.S. newspaper articles during the Cold War era, but I argue that representations of adoption from China in this period employed not only what Briggs and Klein label as the narrative of rescue and politics of obligation, but also other narratives, such as the that of the white, middle-class family in the U.S. and of missionary persecution in China (and the strong ties between the persecuted missionaries and Chinese orphans) as part of the ideological war to promote Capitalism over Communism.

Another study by Catherine Ceniza Choy intervenes by situating her analysis of adoption from Asia in the context of family formation, which she calls “global family making.” In her chapter on “the Hong Kong Project,” Choy mentions that the narrative of rescue and liberation of Chinese children abandoned or orphaned by refugees who fled from Communist mainland China prevailed in American news reports, and that adoption from China during this period was interwoven with U.S. involvement in the Cold War. However, she has not dug into what anti-Communist ideologies were produced in the newspaper coverage and what images of China and of the United States were created.

As for research on interrogating adoption through cultural representations, Briggs and Klein are again useful. Briggs finds that since the 1950s, visual images like starving, homeless children in Ethiopia played a powerful role in shaping support in America for a number of public policy and foreign policy initiatives. Klein offers an analysis of adoption from Asia through her reading of middlebrow cultural texts in which Cold War Asia was imagined. In the scholarship on adoption from China, cultural representations gain only sparse attention from a few scholars like Lisa Cartwright. Cartwright illustrates how Human Rights Watch, 1996 and documentaries like The Dying Rooms (1995) and Return to the Dying Room (1996) generated a wave of attention, compassion and pity in the Western world towards Chinese orphans. She argues that such news media images work to construct the production of the “global social orphan” and the politics of pity. Like her, I will take the Human Rights Watch publication and the two documentaries as my primary source in Chapter Two, but I will argue that in these representations, an anti-Communist ideology undergirds the framework of the narrative of rescue and obligation.

My project hopes to intervene in current scholarship in the following aspects. First, I examine how cultural representations of Chinese orphans and adoption

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5 Choy, Global Families, 66.
function as a Cold War anti-Communist ideological apparatus that persisted in the post-Cold War decade and shaped image of China as a family-less, homeless living hell for women and female children as well as the self-image of the United States as a permanent home provider and benevolent caregiver. Second, I put my project in the larger context of American empire building and demonstrate how white, middle-class women empower themselves by extending their domestic influence into China and build up “the empire of mothers” by either going to China as missionary caretakers or adoptive mothers and home providers at home. Third, I look into how white adoptive mothers narrate transnational adoption through imagining Chinese birth mothers as victim-heroines and adoption collaborators, and what images of China and the United States are constructed in this imagination. My overall argument is that transnational adoption from China serves as a political, cultural, ideological apparatus to construct Cold War and post-Cold War images of China, of Chinese women and female children, and of the United States.

Studying transnational adoption from China through popular cultural representations is significant in various ways. First, my premise is that cultural representations are ideological. They produce ideological meanings, influence the public, and shape knowledge production about China and Chinese people in the United States. Such knowledge production generated in the West may also influence how Chinese people look at themselves and their culture in the tide of globalization and the information age. I thus hope my research sheds light on how and what ideologies are constructed in these cultural forms, and provides an alternative voice to the Western-centric knowledge production about China. Second, transnational adoption as a special way of family formation challenges the conventional meaning of family, and touches on issues of race, ethnicity, kinship and nationalism. Specifically, adoption from China takes place in the context of gender, class and political system (Communism) that is different from the United States. Therefore, research on how adoption from China is represented in the U.S. mainstream culture provides us a rich picture of how race, gender, class, ethnicity, culture and politics intersect in the Western imagination about China and Chinese people. Third, cultural representation
of transnational adoption blur the conventional demarcation of public and domestic spheres as well as the national borderlines by portraying a white mother embracing a child adopted from China. An analysis of these cultural forms, therefore, provides a lens through which we see how the domestic sphere may extend into a foreign land and how white women partake in U.S empire building that was purportedly reserved only for men. Last, the tide of a large number of female children adopted to the United States and other Western countries since the end of the Cold War overshadowed the adoption from China occurring during the Cold War. My research will reveal the important role the Cold War adoption from China played in the larger anti-Communist ideological war.

**Methodological and Theoretical Framework**


Edward W. Said’s Orientalism and Ming Dong Gu’s Sinologism will be the theoretical basis for this thesis. Said provides an instrument by which we can understand how the West defines itself through its imagination of the East. In cultural representations of adoption from China, the binary of West/we/modern/democracy and East/they/traditional/despotism still prevails. However, as China scholar Ming Dong Gu contends, the framework of Orientalism has left out how non-Western

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people view the West and themselves. Gu’s notion of Sinologism addresses not only how Westerners use Western-centric perspectives to look at China, but also how Chinese, since the beginning of the twentieth century, have been influenced by and employed such perspectives to look at the world, their own culture, and themselves. Gu defines Sinologism as “a theory of knowledge production about China, guided by Western-centric ideology, epistemology, methodology, and Western perspectives, and immensely complicated by the responses of the Chinese and [other] non-Western people.”⁹ In the media representations examined in this thesis, Sinologism is demonstrated in two ways: condescending Western outcry over Chinese women and orphans; and support from Chinese witnesses. The two trends work together to portray China as a living hell for women and female children. It should be noted that Gu confines his theory more to academia or intellectuals, whom he considers as the major force of producing knowledge about China. I suggest that what he labels as the Western-superiority complex has been deeply ingrained in not just intellectuals’ but also ordinary Chinese people’s minds. A number of Chinese people played an active role in the Western media condemnations against China, as they see Western intervention as the only solution to problem of orphans in China.

**Contextualizing Women and Female Children in New China**

It is necessary to situate my study in the Chinese social and historical context during the two periods on which the thesis focuses. For more than two thousand years, China was a feudalist, patriarchal society in which women had been discriminated against and oppressed. Becoming prostitutes and concubines were common choices for women of the lower classes to survive. Baby sons were valued much more than girls, as they not only carried the family line but also took the sole responsibility of taking care of their seniors. In difficult times, female infanticide and daughter-selling to guarantee the survival of other family members were more common. Since the second half of the nineteenth century, Western colonizers and Chinese local warlords further exacerbated the situations by making China a war-stricken nation.

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However, unlike the cultural representations I will discuss in Chapter Two and Chapter Three in which Chinese women and female children were forever victimized in a static, patriarchal society, previous research shows that such a one-dimensional description overlooks the nuances and complexities of Chinese women’s lives.\textsuperscript{10} In his book \textit{Women and Gender in Twentieth-Century China}, Paul J. Bailey problematizes the conventional image of Chinese women in the twentieth century as “the helpless and victimized sufferers of ‘feudal’ and ‘reactionary’ forces” before 1949 and then afterwards simply the beneficiaries of emancipation and freedom granted them by “the omnipotent (and male-dominated) Chinese Communist Party.” Bailey argues that far from being merely victims, Chinese women played a role in the early twentieth-century nationalist and revolutionary movements. From the 1910s to 1930s there was a discourse of “new woman” among the women who challenged the patriarchal social norms. In the 1950s and 1960s women continued to play a significant role in social, economic transformations and political movements. He also critiques the simplistic assertions of some Chinese films that the dire situations of women in the “old society” had “gone forever and will never return” by stating that in the post-Mao era (after 1978 to the present) many Chinese women once again were reduced to housemaids and sex workers.\textsuperscript{11}

While I largely agree with Bailey’s criticisms of both the simplified victimization of Chinese women before 1949 and the idea that they have achieved complete gender equality ever since, those who played a role in nationalist and revolutionary movements in the first half of the twentieth century were mostly well-educated women from privileged classes, and the common female populace was still oppressed and vulnerable until after the founding of the People’s Republic of China. It should not be ignored that women’s social status did rise tremendously since the new Marriage Law enforced in 1950 outlawed concubinage and prostitution, and guaranteed women’s equality with men. The central government advocated that men and women were of the same importance in the construction of New China. Women


could enjoy far more advantages and rights than American women, such as maternity leave, children’s day care and preschool care to relieve women from the caretaking burden so they could have the same opportunities to join the work force as men, as well as equal payment with male colleagues.

China was not alone in advocating and granting women’s equal rights and social status. Previous research has shown that gender equality advocated by the Communist Soviet Union greatly influenced other Communist countries. William C. Kirby claims that the Chinese concept of women as “half the sky”—women were equal with men in the construction of modern China—was borrowed from the Soviet Union in the early 1950s.\textsuperscript{12} The same influence was seen in Communist Yugoslavia. Sabrina P. Ramet, scholar of post-Communist cultural studies, also argues that Socialist Yugoslavia from 1945 to 1991 witnessed an unusual experiment to eliminate gender inequality so that women could enjoy complete equality with men in politics, education, careers and in family life, and such aspiration was shared by other communist societies.\textsuperscript{13} Therefore, when American feminists in the second-wave women’s movement were still fighting for what Betty Friedan called “the problem that has no name”—women had little identity except as “housewives”—their counterparts in Communist societies were being encouraged to take employment outside of the home.

Research also shows that with the collapse of Communist system, the gender equality that women in these societies had been enjoying for more than 50 years was also endangered. Feminist scholar Kimberly A. Williams observes that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian women experienced an obvious backward move in the gender equality they had achieved during the Soviet era.\textsuperscript{14} Ramet also laments that the aspiration and experiment of complete gender equality in Yugoslavia ended

after 1991.\textsuperscript{15} Bailey’s observation of the reemergence of housemaids and prostitutes in the post-Mao era—after China started to introduce Capitalist elements such as the market economy—could be explained by the backlash as well. Even so, his research shows that in the 1990s Chinese women still enjoyed a comparatively high social status. In 1994 China ranked twelfth in the international league table of “women in politics.” In 1997 there were 20 million private entrepreneurs in China, 25 percent of whom were women. In the countryside on which the Western media representations mainly focus, women in many ways became “agents of change in the family and physical landscape,” as most women now have their own nuclear homes after marriage and construct “an identity for themselves as ‘modern.’ ”\textsuperscript{16}

Similarly, as women’s social status has tremendously improved, female babies also became much more welcome than before. Infanticide did exist in this period, but only sporadically and not confined to female babies, and with more complicated reasons than the alleged “one-child policy” represented in the Western media. Actually some Western scholars, such as Bailey, observe that in both rural and urban areas at the turn of the twenty-first century, daughters were increasingly valued and regarded as “potentially more reliable and compassionate than sons” in providing emotional as well as material support for parents in their old age.\textsuperscript{17} However, in the Cold War and post-Cold War representations of orphans and adoption from China, Chinese female children were portrayed as always suffering and discriminated against in a static, backward, patriarchal society, and that only the benevolent, humanitarian United States could provide them with a permanent home.

\textbf{Chapter Outline}

The thesis consists of three chapters. In Chapter One, I analyze news media representations of transnational adoption during the early Cold War decade from the late 1940s to the early 1960s. In this period two narratives are prominent in the anti-Communist ideological war. The first is the narrative of white middle-class family, in which the United States was constructed as the permanent home-provider

\textsuperscript{15} Ramet, \textit{Gender Politics}, 6.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 148-150.
\textsuperscript{17} Baiely, \textit{Women and Gender}, 145.
and benevolent caregiver to Chinese orphans. Another is the narrative of missionary persecution which demonized “Red China” whose government dismantled families and orphaned children but repaid Western missionaries, the caregivers of the orphans, with persecution. In both narratives, white, mostly middle-class women are central as maternal figures, either as women missionaries who went to China and dedicated their lives to Chinese orphans or as adoptive mothers who remain in the United States and provide a loving home for those adopted to the country. I argue that in these representations, white, middle-class women became an important part of American empire building in Asia.

In Chapter Two, I focus on the ideological war in the post-Cold War decade between China and the West led by the United States over Chinese orphans in state-run orphanages. In these Western representations, the narrative of coercion—women were forced to abort, sterilize and abandon their female children—was strongly conveyed, and anti-Communist ideologies continued to play out. While China made its voice heard by the West, this voice was largely overwhelmed by the criticizing voices from the West in the name of Chinese women and female children. Adoptive parents and adoption agencies challenged the accusations made by U.S. media and supported China, in which process the adoptive parents both reinforced the narrative of rescue and unsettled it by revealing their anxiety that if China was angered by the Western condemnations, it might close its door against adoption by Westerners.

In Chapter Three I examine how white, middle-class adoptive mothers imagine their children’s Chinese birth mothers, and what images of China, of birth mothers and of the United States are constructed. I focus on children’s books and Karin Evans’ adoption memoir The Lost Daughters of China, all of which were published in the post-Cold War decade. In these imaginations, the birth mother is depicted as a victim-heroine who was brave enough to give birth to her daughter but forced to abandon her in order to save her, and as an adoption collaborator who willingly helped to make the adoption happen.
Chapter One
Chinese Orphans Waiting: Cold War News Media Representations

In 1959, an article was published in a local newspaper, *The Bakersfield Californian*, urging readers to read a book entitled *Democracy Versus Communism* to learn basic differences between the two. The article occupies the whole upper page, but inserted on the page is a small piece of advertisement, “Chinese Orphans here for Adoption,” calling for American families to adopt six newly arrived Chinese orphans from Hong Kong.¹ The two pieces of writing form a dialogue with each other. The advertisement serves to show the difference between Communism and democracy that the article advocates—Communist China was a country unable to take care of its orphans, but the “democratic” United States could provide them a permanent home. At the same time, the article creates a sense of mission and obligation among readers to embody the U.S. democratic model by adopting Chinese orphans. This page provides an insight into how the U.S. media used adoption of Chinese orphans as a platform to launch the anti-Communist ideological war against China.

This chapter examines how Chinese adoption during the Cold War era was represented in the U.S. press, what images of China and Chinese people, as well as those of the U.S., were constructed, and how the Cold War ideologies played out in these representations. China during the Cold War was far distinct from other Asian orphan-sending countries, such as Japan, Korea and Vietnam, in the American geopolitical imagination. After the founding of the People’s Republic, for Americans, China was not simply a cause lost to Communism, but was viewed as increasingly threatening since its revolutionary model “resonated throughout the Third World and had a profound impact on the Cold War.”² Unlike Japan, Korea and Vietnam, in which the United States could intervene politically, economically or militarily, the door to China was totally closed to the Western world by Mao Zhedong and the

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¹ See “Communism-Democracy Differences Defined,” *The Bakersfield Californian*, July 6, 1959. Although Hong Kong did not belong to China in 1959, my following analysis will show that orphans from Hong Kong were largely reported by U.S. newspapers as fleeing from Communist China.
Chinese government, which further stimulated the Western imagination about the
country as splendid in culture yet intolerable in politics. Adoption of Chinese orphans
thus became a particularly important channel through which the U.S. could continue
to carry on its interventionist foreign policy and possibly win the
Capitalist-Communist rivalry through adopting orphans from Communist China into
the United States. Therefore, media representations of adoption from China during the
Cold War involve not just what current scholarship labels as “the politics of obligation”
and “narrative of rescue,” but also an ideological war to promote Capitalism or
democracy as a synonym of Capitalism in the American vocabulary over
Communism. 3

The U.S. “rescue” of Chinese orphans started right after WWII and was mainly
conducted through fund-raising activities in the United States and missionary work in
China until 1949, when the People’s Republic of China was founded by the
Communist Party. From 1948 when Communists came into power in most of China to
the mid-1950s, there was wide coverage in the U.S. media of Western missionaries
being expelled or persecuted by the Communist government, and they were often
associated with Chinese orphans, since one of the major works Western missionaries
conducted in war-stricken China was founding orphanages. The inherent connection
between Chinese orphans and Western missionary work, therefore, made the rhetoric
of missionary persecution a powerful anti-Communist weapon.

Starting from 1958 to 1962, as Communist China closed its door to the Western
world, “rescue” of Chinese orphans turned into adopting the orphans to the United
States through the Hong Kong Project. Catherine Ceniza Choy’s research on the
history of Asian international adoption in America shows that the Hong Kong Project
was a prominent phenomenon and major vehicle for American adoption of Chinese
orphans during the Cold War. The adoption from China decreased after 1963, in part
because of the improved economic and social stability that reduced the rate of child

3 Laura Briggs’s book Somebody’s Children traces the genealogy of narrative of rescue in adopting children froi
outside the United States since WWII, and Christina Klein argues in her book Cold War Orientalism that the U.S.
viewed adopting Asian orphans as its political obligation. See Briggs, Somebody’s Children, 130 and Klein, Cold
War Orientalism, 146.
abandonment and encouraged domestic adoption. Adoption of Chinese children by American families did continue until the late 1970s, but according to Choy, its level never reached those of the early 1960s.4

My analysis will address two points: the narrative of missionary persecution as constructed in the press and its association with Chinese orphans from 1948 to the mid-1950s; and the Hong Kong Project from 1958 to 1962. I conduct a close reading of news articles on Chinese orphans and adoption published in mainstream newspapers, such as the New York Times, Washington Post, the Chicago Tribune, Christian Science Monitor; the Boston Globe, Los Angeles Times, as well as some local newspapers. I argue that two narratives are particularly prominent in the representations of Chinese orphans and adoption from China during the Cold War—the narrative of missionary persecution in China and the narrative of white, middle-class family in the United States—and the two narratives work together to produce powerful anti-Communist ideologies among readers. The first narrative is employed to demonize China as a sinful nation whose government treats its own orphans callously and is ungrateful to Western missionaries who dedicated their life to Chinese orphans. In the second narrative, the image of American suburban, middle-class nuclear families is used to promote the United States as a benevolent caregiver and permanent home-provider for these orphans.

In the media representations of Chinese orphans and transnational adoption, American white middle-class women are central, either as missionaries providing Chinese orphans with maternal love and care or as adoptive mothers welcoming and embracing Chinese adoptees. Many white women missionaries, most of whom were from the middle-class, stepped out of the national boundary to assume the role of mothers for Chinese children accepted into the missionary orphanages, and were depicted in the U.S. press as heroines who sacrificed their lives for Chinese orphans.5

4 Choy, Global Families, 57.
5 Jane Hunter claims that missionary women “were seldom of working-class origins” in her book The Gospel of Gentility. Although women missionaries discussed in this chapter were far later to enter China than the era Hunter engages, it can be presumed that they were also from the middle class. See Hunter, The Gospel of Gent American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 11 29.
The white middle-class women who remained at home also found that the U.S. media offered them a stage to perform the roles of a caring mother and permanent home provider. Both within and outside the U.S., white women constructed what Amy Kaplan calls “the Empire of the mother” and “the Empire of affections and the heart,” and became “the engine of national expansion, the site from which the nation reaches beyond itself through the emanation of women’s moral influence." Although Kaplan situates her study between the 1830s and 1850s, a time when the U.S. was expanding its territory across the American continent, her analysis of “manifest domesticity” still applies to the Cold War era. The Cold War U.S. shares some commonalities with the antebellum U.S. First, like the antebellum period, the Cold War era was another period of expansion, in which the U.S. attempted to restructure the world pattern and extend its power and influence as the global leader. Second, the ideology of “separate spheres” and the “cult of domesticity” that dominated in the first half of the nineteenth century were revived vigorously in the Cold War period. Suburban middle-class families and rigid gender roles were dominant narratives. Third, both periods witness the domestic sphere as “mobile and mobilizing outpost that transformed conquered foreign lands into domestic sphere of the family and nation.” Although it might be imprecise to compare China during the Cold War with annexed Texas in the 1840s, taking care of Chinese orphans in China or adopting them in the United States did extend white American women’s domestic sphere into the foreign land. In this sense, through Chinese orphans and adoption, white American women became an important part of the U.S. empire building in Asia.

Adoption from China in the 1950s and 1960s also involved the relations between Britain, the old imperial power, and the United States, the new world power. During this period Hong Kong was still a British colony, and U.S. “rescue” of Chinese orphans through adoption from Hong Kong produced conflict between the two powers. I demonstrate that through adoption the United States not only carried on its anti-Communist ideologies and justified its post-war interventionist stance, but

7 Ibid., 25.
also strengthened the U.S. empire in Asia by rivaling the old imperialist British power. And in the conflict between the two powers over Chinese orphans, white women and suburban nuclear families became essential tropes.

**Fund-raising Agencies and Missionary Work**

American “rescue” of Chinese orphans started as early as the beginning of WWII, when U.S. newspapers appealed to people’s compassion by advertising orphans waiting to be adopted and praising those who helped Chinese orphans. Headlines together with photographs of Chinese children, such as “[Chinese] Orphans Suffer” in the *Boston Globe* on February 19, 1945 and “Support 2 Orphans” in the *Chicago Tribune* on January 22, 1950, easily caught readers’ attention. On Thanksgiving Day, 1950, some national newspapers such as *Christian Science Monitor* and the *Chicago Tribune* reported that the crew of a U.S. cruiser gave Chinese orphans Thanksgiving dinner. An international organization named The Foster Parents Plan for War Children was reported in the *New York Times* to aid one thousand Chinese orphans in Shanghai area. Individual Americans who helped Chinese orphans also appeared in both national and local newspapers.

Although news of aiding Chinese orphans was widely reported, adoption of Chinese orphans by Americans before the Hong Kong Project was uncommon. However, it did appear sporadically in the U.S. newspapers, and rescue and liberation of orphans was an enduring theme in those accounts. In January, 1947, an article entitled “a Chinese waif, 14, adopted by U.S. Captain” appeared in *Washington Post*. The boy was reported to have been living with his grandmother, whose death reduced him to a “waif.” Then he tried hard to survive on his own, working in factories, or roaming the streets where he hid, ate and slept when and where he could. After being adopted, the article says, he finally ended his life as a waif and “dropped a firm

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11 Heavy news coverage on Americans who helped or adopted Chinese orphans can be seen, for example, in a article “Mr. and Mrs. Staples Rear Chinese Children Who Will Help in Shaping Better Tomorrows,” *Christian Science Monitor*, June 1, 1945.
anchor.” Here the boy is compared to an unattended little boat, drifting in the storms of strife in China until the U.S. captain offered him “a firm anchor” in a peaceful harbor—a permanent home in the United States, a country far from wars and strife.13 “Just call him ‘lucky’ Lo Yin Ling……,” claims the report, implying that being “rescued” from the war-stricken China through adoption and being brought to the United States, the boy was definitely lucky. In the narrative of “luckiness,” the image of the United States is constructed as a land of peace and freedom in contrast with the war-stricken China.

More prominent during this period was the orphan-aiding activities conducted by organizations in the United States, such as J. Calvitt Clarke’s China Children’s Fund (CCF) and Pearl S. Buck’s Welcome House. Laura Briggs and Christina Klein have studied the two organizations, both suggesting that the U.S. anti-Communist ideology continued all through the years encompassed by these efforts. J. Calvitt Clarke founded CCF in 1938 to aid the victims of Japanese bombing and to raise funds for Chinese orphans. As a Presbyterian minister, he saw that “thousands of children [are] starving to death” and asserted that “it’s a shame that America isn’t doing more.”14 His lament indicates that he saw rescuing Chinese orphans as not only his personal obligation as a minister, but a national obligation of the United States. He not only raised money in the United States for Chinese orphans but also represented the prospective donors’ relationship with the children they sponsored as one of “adoption.”15 But unlike the transnational adoption appearing several years later that involved accepting the orphans into the United States, his idea of adopting Chinese orphans was more a token gesture. The type of adoption advocated by Clarke meant that “Asians did not have to enter the United States in order to become tied to Americans through family bonds; instead, the American family, and the love and aid that went with it, could extend out beyond the borders of the nation.”16 As Choy argues, race is fundamental to the understanding of early Asian international adoption,

14 Briggs, Somebody's Children, 143-144.
15 Klein, Cold War Orientalism. 152.
16 Ibid., 153.
and adoption of Chinese orphans raised the same issue of race, involving “racial
tolerance” among prospective adoptive parents and their communities.\textsuperscript{17} Therefore,
“adoption” without including the racially different children into America protected the
racial purity of the American family and reserved its racially exclusive immigration
laws that excluded Chinese since the turn of the twentieth century. It also incorporated
the foreign land of China into the U.S. domestic sphere, expanding U.S. empire in
Asia.

CCF was one of the first groups in the United States to use the “sponsor an
orphan” appeal as a way to defeat Communism. Through a close reading of
fund-raising promotional materials, Klein claims that by warning that “the miserable
human beings” were “the most powerful weapon in the hands of the Communists,”
CCF saw that its mission of saving war-time Chinese orphans went hand in hand with
anti-Communist ideologies. As Klein asserts, CCF advertisements strategically
invoked the double anxieties of the Cold War—Communism and the atomic
bomb—to rationalize the obligation of saving Chinese orphans. In one of his
funding-raising tours, Clarke concluded that “The hungry children of the world are
more dangerous to us than the atom bomb.”\textsuperscript{18} In 1950 the organization was expelled
from China, but by 1955 Clarke continued to support refugee children from
Communist China and North Korea.\textsuperscript{19}

Pearl S. Buck’s Welcome House, an adoption agency established in 1949, went
further by finding homes for mixed-race Asian orphans in the United States. It should
be noted that although most children her agency helped were from other Asian
countries (since China closed its door in 1949), Buck was closely associated with
China and Chinese orphans, first, because of her deep connection with China as a
missionary’s daughter born in the country, and as a Nobel Prize winner for her
writings on China and Chinese people. Second, she saw the founding of the People’s
Republic of China as a failure of U.S. foreign policy in China, claiming that it was
because “too few Americans understand both China and America and mediate

\textsuperscript{17} Choy, Global Families, 10-12.
\textsuperscript{18} Klein, Cold War Orientalism, 154-155.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 152.
between them.” She proposed Welcome House as “part of the solution to America’s foreign policy problems,” and believed that “hybrid Asian and American families created through adoption could eventually facilitate political relations between the U.S. and Asia……and perhaps prevent further losses of Asian nations to Communism.”

Besides the agencies, one way to aid Chinese orphans was Western missionaries’ founding of orphanages in war-time China. Since the second half of the nineteenth century, a large number of Western missionaries started to preach in China, and founded schools, hospitals and orphanages all over the country. A 1913 statistics indicates the presence of more than 5,000 missionaries, and of over fifty Catholic bishops assisted by more than 1,400 European priests. In 1925 there were about 7,700 American missionaries in China, and when the People’s Republic of China was founded in 1949, around 4,000 missionaries remained in mainland China. It is difficult to find statistics about the number of orphanages founded by Western missionaries, but opening and maintaining orphanages in China was commonly regarded as one of the effective ways to “exhibit to the Chinese the humanitarian aspect of Western civilization,” and was therefore widely supported by denominations in their home countries. For instance, a missionary organization named the French Holy Childhood Association in China started to raise money and provide care for abandoned Chinese children in 1843, and gained support and membership from other major Western countries until the association was closed in 1951 by the Communist government.

Since 1948 when the Communist Party came into power in most parts of China, U.S. media began to report news of Western missionaries being expelled or persecuted by Chinese Communists. In most national newspapers such as the New

20 Klein, Cold War Orientalism, 144.
York Times and Washington Post, various types of persecution are listed, including killing, jailing, trial, beating, and torture, and China is always referred to as “Red China,” “China Reds,” “Reds,” who gave missionaries “Red Pressures.” The color red is typically associated with killing, blood and danger in English language. Connecting China with red, therefore, connotes China as a dangerous country among Western readers. Mathew S. Hershberg argues that “Red China” means Communist, and “was perceived as evil, oppressive Soviet puppet.” The color “red” in the discourse is thus associated with Communism. Terrill E. Lautz claims that since the victory of Chinese Communists over Nationalists, U.S. media “created new images of a repressive, monolithic, godless, Communist state that was allied with the specter of Soviet Union,” and that after China’s involvement in the Korean War in 1950, the old imagery of a yellow peril merged with a new red menace, which generated fear of China that directly contributed to McCarthyism. The U.S. reports of missionary persecution, therefore, continued to reify Communist China’s godless and repressive nature. An emphasis in the U.S. media on China’s Communist Red color and the juxtaposition of it with various types of missionary persecution construct a powerful anti-Communist ideology.

It is true that the missionaries played a major role in saving and helping Chinese children orphaned by decades of war, and many of them were maltreated and mistaken by Communist officials as “imperialist spies” of the United States. However, these anti-missionary movements had far more complicated historical and political factors than what the U.S. media simply depicted as godlessness of China Reds. As Western missionaries were often followed or accompanied by imperialist invasion and colonization in China since the middle of the nineteenth century, Chinese anti-imperialist/anti-colonialist history was also anti-missionary history, culminating in the 1898 Boxer Uprising, in which numerous missionaries were killed or burned by angry Chinese mobs. These anti-missionary activities usually provoked costly

reprisals, and “were used as excuses to advance foreign interests and erode Chinese sovereignty.”

Research also finds that the missionary community in China lacked internal unity, with some taking pro-Nationalist position and others pro-Communist, so they often became targets of both troops. In the early 1920s, when the Communist Party in China was still in its incubation period, there had already existed wide-spread anti-missionary activities which provided a foundation for the outburst of the larger-scale anti-missionary movements in 1926 and 1927. Jane Hunter asserts that the anti-Christian campaign occurring in the late 1920s was launched by the Nationalist administration with the result of taking over mission schools opened by Western missionaries.

Indeed, the newly founded Communist government inherited the century-old tradition of anti-missionary movements, but its treatment of missionaries experienced changes and was part of the nationalist movements shared by other third-world countries and a demonstration to be free from Western influences. Nancy Berknope Tucker finds that from 1948 to 1950 the Communist government was notable for its restraint and tolerance in treating Western missionaries, so much so that in March 1950, more than fifty American missionaries submitted “A Memorandum Regarding Recognition by the United States of the People of Republic of China” to the U.S. Congress and State Department. The restraint and tolerance of the Chinese government can be explained by its hope that the newly founded government could gain recognition among the Western countries. It was not until after the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 and U.S. President Harry Truman’s order of placing Seventh Fleet in the Taiwan Strait in the same month that caused the escalation of anti-American feeling and led to the public trials, imprisonment and expulsions of missionaries.

The U.S. involvement in both Korea and Taiwan Strait was treated by the Chinese government as imperialist interventions that Third World countries should

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unite to fight against. Its response to U.S. interventions was to start the new wave of anti-America, anti-missionary movements at home and join in the Korean War which it propagated as “the war to resist U.S. aggression and aid Korea.” One month later, China started the Three-Self Patriotic Movement among its existing Christian organizations, advocating self-support, self-government and self-propagation to cut foreign ties. Therefore, the anti-missionary activities in the 1950s reflected the Chinese government’s decision of gaining autonomy in religious affairs and being free from Western imperialist interventions.

However, the Communist anti-missionary movements were represented by the U.S. newspaper media as an example of the inhumane nature of the Red China. A striking feature in the news coverage of the missionaries is accolades given to their care and sacrifice for Chinese orphans on the one hand, and anti-Communist ideologies on the other, either by reports of how cruel Chinese Reds treated their own orphans and how they expelled, imprisoned, tried, maltreated, or killed the Western missionaries. On March 29, 1949, ninety-six Catholic missionaries were reported to have been killed by Chinese Communists. Similar news followed constantly in the next few years. For instance, 145 Catholics were reported to be in Red China jails on April 20, 1952, and on September 4, 1952, an U.S. bishop was reported to have died in Red China.

The China Reds were reported to have not only persecuted missionaries in China, but also in North Korea during the Korean War, which further demonized Communist China as an aggressive Red menace that would spread its Red influence to neighboring states and thus became an obstacle to the “democratic” geopolitical structure the U.S. attempted to maintain. On May 4, 1953, *Washington Post* reported that “After Chinese Entered the War: 100 died or slain by Reds on 10-day march to new camp.” The article juxtaposes depiction of the totalitarianism represented by a Chinese Communist official named Tiger and harsh treatment the captured, both Western missionaries and U.S. soldiers, received on the way to the new camp. Tiger is

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33 “After Chinese Entered the War: 100 Died or Slain by Reds on a 10-day March to New Camp,” *Washington Post* March 4, 1953.
portrayed as the dictator in the march. He gave orders, shot those who disobeyed him or “whose only fault was that he could no longer walk.” Contrary to the formidable Red dictator, the group of prisoners is reported to be comprised of unarmed G.I.s and feeble, sick missionaries carrying their old and young and tied up together on the march:

Father Quinlan carried an eighty-year-old French missionary. Miss Nellie Dyer, an American Methodist missionary, carried Sister Mary Clare, an Anglian nun. Father Hunt, suffering from gout, was dragged along by his companions. Commissioner Lord, our official interpreter, tied a rope around the waist of an elderly Russian woman and pulled her along. Two white Russian women carried their cold, crying babies on their backs and held their other young children by their hand. Two Carmelite nuns were spitting blood. Two old French fathers suffering from dysentery were forced to keep up by guards who shot off guns in their ears.34

Besides the vivid picture of missionaries suffering, the article also depicts the killing of an American G.I. from Texas and a 77-year-old woman missionary, who is reported to have devoted all her life to Korean orphans. The G.I. was shot in front of all the captives because he had disobeyed Tiger. The old woman missionary’s fault was that she could not walk by herself, and was therefore dealt with as a burden. She had been carried by other missionaries, but soon Tiger ordered not to carry her as he would send her to the people’s hospital. A few minutes later there was a shot, indicating she was killed behind the back of other captives.35 The article strongly encourages association between Communism and inhumane behaviors as it paints a vivid picture of how China Reds committed inhumane crimes of relentlessly torturing and randomly killing the civilian missionaries and unarmed young American G.I. captives in Korea.

While this report only casually mentions the association between the 77-year-old woman missionary and Korean orphans, a number of reports emphasize the connection between Western missionaries and Chinese orphans. On March 28, 1952, nine Chinese orphans were reported to have been arrested along with a French

34 “After Chinese Entered the War.”
35 Ibid.
Roman Catholic priest Jean Billot, the director of the Zikawei Boys’ Orphanage when the orphans “resisted a police attempt to remove the French priest.” In this article, Chinese orphans are represented as fighting together with the missionary against the Communist police who attempted to arrest their Western caretaker and leave them unattended. Another American Catholic priest from Massachusetts was reported to be expelled on April 2, 1953, after he had spent twenty-one years caring for orphans in China. Emphasizing the connection between expelled missionaries and Chinese orphans impresses upon American readers that Red China was callous enough to force its own orphans into abandonment by severing their ties with Western missionaries.

In the newspapers there is a consistent use of the rhetoric of Exodus, comparing the missionaries fleeing from Red China to the Jewish people’s exile of Egypt in Old Testament; Communist China is thus represented as the biblical Egypt. An article entitled “Protestant Missionary Exodus from Red China Reported Near” on January 6, 1951 reported that large groups of Protestant missionaries applied for permission to leave China due to “the increasingly hostile attitude toward Western missionaries in general.” In 1956 another article set aside large space to tell readers about “A Tale of Exodus from Red China,” in which “thousands of missionaries [flew] out” after China declared “an all-out war on the foreign missions in late 1950, which was coupled with a general ‘hate America’ drive in 1950 and 1951.” Through the rhetoric of Exodus, China is imagined not only as the modern Egypt—a sinful, corrupted world in the hands of Communist devils as an analogy in biblical typology, but is fundamentally anti-America, opposing the (holy) City upon the Hill. The United States, on the other hand, is represented as the promised land of freedom and democracy where persecuted missionaries flew in flock.

The missionaries were not only escaping from China themselves, they were helping Chinese orphans to escape as well. In 1955 a five-year-old girl was reported to have ended “flight from China Reds” with the aid of the Catholic Committee for Refugees of the National Catholic Welfare Conference. John Moore, a former

missionary in China, helped the girl to get the aid after her mother died and father had been ‘liquidated’ by the Communists. The girl is said to have flown from Hong Kong after being “smuggled out of Communist China,” and became the first one to “come to the East Coast for adoption.”

Hundreds of Chinese children followed her route of fleeing China to Hong Kong and then were sent to the United States for adoption. Such a move, named the “Hong Kong Project,” is described in an article in the New York Times as a “mass exodus from Red China.”

The trope of Exodus thus not only applies to the missionaries who fled China as Jews in biblical sense, but also extends to Chinese orphans, the homeless little “gentiles” that only the U.S., the free country, welcomes and awaits with warm and permanent homes.

The U.S. news reports of Chinese anti-missionary movements during this period also feature a number of Western women who went to China as missionaries, exerting their domestic influence by assuming the maternal role through caretaking work in orphanages, and gaining international attention not possible for women confined in the private sphere at home. U.S. women missionaries at the turn of the twentieth century usually conducted “women’s work” in China as medical workers and teachers in mission schools or girl schools, and had their influence felt through their efforts of “civilizing” Chinese people such as liberating women from foot-binding.

During WWII till the mid-1950s, however, they were more often extolled for their heroic deeds of saving or taking care of orphans. For instance, in 1944, Edith Jones was praised for her courage because she walked 600 miles in Henan Province guiding a group of orphans to safety, and Greta Clark was remembered by her bravery in walking through the battle lines attempting to save thirty-five orphaned babies from Chengchow, Henan.

In the Communist anti-missionary movements, the women missionaries’ heroic images became more prominent in the U.S. press representations which contrast their sacrifice to Chinese orphans against the harsh treatment they received from China.

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Reds. Through such portrayals the American media effectively stimulated the anti-Communist sentiments and heightened the rhetoric of “democracy over Communism.” An English woman Gladys Aylward was well known in the Western world during this period as a missionary who inspired the movie *The Inn of the Six Happiness* by heroically leading one hundred Chinese orphans on a march through the mountains to the Yellow River and to safety at Siam during the Japanese invasion. Her deeds were widely reported by the U.S. national and local newspapers during the Cold War, and she was invited to give fund-raising lectures and preaching in the United States. In one of her lectures in 1959, she told American audiences that she would go back to China for the orphans “even if they turned out every foreigner.”43 Another white woman is featured by the *New York Times* because she “defied Reds.” Sarah Perkins, a 63-year-old American Presbyterian missionary nurse, told the reporter on September 21, 1955, that when the Communists cajoled her to tell on other missionaries or they would shoot her, she told them they could shoot [her], but she would tell the truth.44 While these women are portrayed as fearless heroines who would die for Chinese orphans or for truth, China is further demonized as a sinister, brutal persecutor.

One issue particularly exemplifies the portrayal of China as the modern “Egypt” and Western women missionaries as heroines. In March 1951, five Canadian Catholic nuns were arrested in Canton by the Communist government under the suspicion of murdering 2116 Chinese orphans in the orphanage called Holy Childhood Receiving Home run by the nuns. Most national newspapers, such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Boston Globe*, tracked the story in many pages from 1951 to 1952. In December 1951, the five nuns were accused and went on a public trial in Canton. Three of the nuns were freed in March 8, 1952. The next day they explained in the *New York Times* why there was such a high death toll in the orphanage:

“Most of the babies who, to us,” Ste. Germaine said, “were only one or two days.

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Even with the best of care, most of them could not be saved because they had been delivered and handled by unsterile midwives. Most of mothers were opium addicts, and such children were addicted from birth. Many babies were premature because their mothers bore them while doing heavy coolie work. Many had congenital syphilis. Others were in advanced stages of malnutrition and starvation.”

China is portrayed in their account as a patriarchal oppressor of women, who were forced to be coolies even in heavy pregnancy or reduced to be prostitutes or opium addicts. The three nuns also described how they experienced the “red ordeal,” including a public trial and forced parade on the street in front of an angry mob. On the same day, Washington Post reported that the nuns were stoned and spat upon by the crowds of the trial. The other two nuns were sentenced to five years in prison when the three were expelled, and the orphanage was taken over by the government, under which, according to the three expelled nuns, “55 of 60 babies died in two days.” China depicted in these news articles is not only infanticidal, but also an arch devil framing the nuns to avoid its own responsibility for the death of the 2116 babies, and by quoting the nuns’ words that fifty of sixty babies died in two days after take-over of the orphanage to the government, the article reaffirms the image of China as a country in which most orphans were neglected to death in contrast to the United States as a free, humanitarian home-provider for homeless children.

In the following year, American readers followed the news reports about the five nuns and what they had experienced in China. In December 1952, the last two nuns were released from prison, and Washington Post tracked their story. The two nuns reported that they were unexpectedly released and expelled after serving only part of the five-year sentence, and that the Communists gave no reason for doing so, echoing the earlier reports which suggests that it was the Chinese Communists who killed the orphans but imprisoned the nuns as scapegoats to wash away their own crimes. The end of the article does not forget to remind readers what had happened to the five nuns two years before by recapping their arrest and trial, and by saying that

their case drew “world attention” when they were “reviled in a four-hour trial that was broadcast over the Canton radio,” suggesting that the five nuns not only experienced the “Red ordeal” that humiliated them in public, but also was manipulated by the Chinese Reds as a propagandist tool to educate its people about the so-called crimes committed by the nuns and the imperialist West backing them. In the span of two years, there was a wide and successive coverage of the event in national newspapers, which, in the age of McCarthyism, easily kindled fear and hatred towards Chinese Reds among American readers, and reinforced their perception that Communist China was sinister and menacing to the democracy advocated by the United States.

The U.S. press also portrays these five nuns and other women missionaries expelled or persecuted in Red China as what Amy Kaplan labels as “the engine of national expansion, the site from which the nation reaches beyond itself through the emanation of women’s moral influence.” In other words, through the women missionaries’ maternal love and care of orphans in China, the American empire reached into China. When they were expelled out of China, the U.S. media adjusted its discursive strategy by emphasizing the harsh treatment they received from China Reds to meet its Cold War ends of containing the Communist spread and promoting the American “democratic” model in Asia. Hunter has illustrated that Christian mission was a necessary accompaniment to American expansion, and women missionaries’ “highest ideal of national selflessness” and their “domestic work” in China obscured the fact that they were a critical part of U.S. empire-building. In the U.S. Cold War representations of Communist anti-missionary campaigns, however, these women missionaries differed from their predecessors in that they stepped on the political stage and told stories of how China Reds committed inhumane crimes against them and against Chinese orphans. Their witness strengthened the narrative of rescue and became a powerful weapon used by the U.S. media to demonize China and contain Communist spread. Furthermore, they themselves partook in the U.S.

48 Kaplan, The Anarchy of Empire, 29.
expansion in China through their maternal influence as benevolent caregivers of Chinese orphans.

The Hong Kong Project

Choy’s archival study of ISS record shows that starting from 1955, the International Social Service began to assist American families to adopt Chinese children from Hong Kong, but its publicity was overshadowed by the coverage of the adoption of mixed-race children from Korea and Japan. In 1958 a new adoption-processing program, the Hong Kong Project, was launched by ISS, and around the same time, American interest in children from Hong Kong “increased significantly, even exceeding interest in adoptions from Japan and Korea.” By January 1, 1959, ISS processed 139 children to be adopted from Hong Kong by American families, while only twenty-six from Japan and forty-nine from Korea. Nevertheless, these figures do not necessarily mean that adoption from Hong Kong outnumbered that from Japan and Korea, since there might be other organizations assisting Americans to adopt from these two countries. For instance, Buck’s Welcome House in the 1950s mainly dealt with mixed-race adoption from Asia. Yet, Choy’s finding indicates that adoption from Hong Kong in this period was a significant event in the history of transnational adoption from China and thus deserves a thorough research.

As the door of mainland China was completely closed to Western adoptive parents by the People’s Republic, places like Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan that were not controlled by the Communist government became the only outlets for adoption of Chinese children. Where did the orphans in Hong Kong come from? After more than half a century, it is almost impossible to trace the origin of those adopted children, but American mainstream newspapers, as seen in a New York Times article on June 21, 1962, commonly claimed that these children were refugees from mainland China, one of whose parents, usually the father, had been killed by the Communists, and whose mother fled to Hong Kong with the children but was unable to provide them with the basic necessities. Therefore, many children were not orphans in a

50 Choy, Global Families, 51.
strict sense, since their mothers were still alive but had to relinquish their maternal rights due to poverty.

My research on the national and local newspapers echoes Choy’s archival study on ISS records that 1962 is an important year for publicity about adoption of Chinese orphans from Hong Kong, who were carried to the United States by charter flights in high frequency and large numbers. On June 27, forty-eight orphans arrived as the biggest single group to be processed by ISS. One week earlier, on June 20, most major newspapers started to carry substantial coverage of their forthcoming arrival, and on the very day they arrived, these orphans were given “a mass greeting” at the airport. Greeters included Robert Kennedy, the Attorney General on behalf of the United States and its President, and the movie star Jane Russell who was the founder and president of the international adoption program of ISS and herself an adoptive mother.\(^5\)

Contrasting with China which was painted as a dark, infanticidal country dominated by the Communists, under whom orphans and their widowed mothers could only survive by fleeing from it, the United States was depicted as the provider of warm homes with loving parents and welcoming siblings. Many of the news articles headlined reports of adoption from Hong Kong with phrases such as “a new home,” “a new life,” “orphans find home,” “welcome home,” “home for refugees,” or “welcome to the U.S.A.” More frequently covered were the stories, with large, affecting pictures, of how individual orphans were adopted by white families.

*Freeport Journal Standard* in Illinois caught the readers’ eye with a large family album in which a white middle-class couple and four children—two biological children of theirs and two newly arrived Chinese daughters—showcase a happy mixed-race family. “Now it’s The Wessings Six: Chinese Daughters Join in Circle,” announces the headline. The two Chinese girls were reported to be cold, frightened and unused to beds when they first arrived, indicating their long insecure and homeless state before adoption. They also kept screaming when faced with their new family members who were total strangers. But the article assures readers at the end

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that “hugs and loving care make little girls from different continents all alike and one big happy family.” This article foregrounds the benevolent white, middle-class American family by emphasizing that with “hugs and loving care,” a big happy family will be made in spite that the girls were from another continent and were racially different.

It should be noted that most of the children were adopted by Americans of Chinese ancestry, according to Choy’s research on ISS records and newspaper articles reporting adoption of Chinese orphans during this period. The main reason was that the Hong Kong Project initially targeted Chinese American communities for the recruitment of potential adoptive parents, as “a strategic move to facilitate adoptive placements and less an attempt at racial matching,” though the project did consider families of other ethnic groups. Choy mentions that many white American families showed their eagerness to adopt Chinese children, but the actual number of those adopted by white families was unknown. However, newspaper reports on the single event of the forty-eight children being sent to the U.S. for adoption on June 27, 1962 may provide us some hint. A New York Times article says, one week earlier, that all but about a half dozen of the forty-eight children would “be going to Chinese-American families.” On the same day, a local newspaper Corpus Christi Times in Texas reports that six would be adopted by families other than Chinese American ones. On June 27, the New York Times follows up with the arrival of the children and repeated that “today’s group will be adopted by American families, most of them of Chinese ancestry.” According to these reports, two things are clear: the vast majority of the forty-eight children went to Chinese American families, and those who went to white families may be even less than six, since families of other ethnic groups may also be included.

54 Choy, Global Families, 49.
55 Ibid., 51.
56 Ibid., 55.
However, most of the pictures feature a white middle-class family embracing or welcoming one or two Chinese orphans and exhibiting their benevolence and humanitarianism. Usually these families are a typical middle-class nuclear family with well-dressed father and mother stretching their arms to the newly arrived orphan(s), or Chinese orphan(s) surrounded by smiling and welcoming well-dressed, white siblings, or a family album featuring white parents and siblings joined by the Chinese child(ren), indicating the formation of a new, bigger family.\textsuperscript{60} Throughout the Cold War, the image of affluent, suburban families was constantly used by the United States to demonstrate American Capitalist superiority over Soviet Communism. In the 1959 “kitchen debate” between Nixon and Khrushchev, Nixon insisted that “American superiority in the [C]old [W]ar rested not on weapons, but on the secure, abundant family life for modern suburban home.”\textsuperscript{61} Laura A. Belmonte critiques that U.S. propagandists “sold American family life” as a way to counter Communism which was represented as destroying families, and advocated that “democracies cherished freedom, families, and the sanctity of the home.”\textsuperscript{62} She also finds that children became a critical element in U.S. portrayal of family life in the Cold War era. In the binary between American democracy over Communism portrayed by the U.S. propagandists, the Communists warped children’s mind and divided them from their parents, but young people in the United States were enjoying a comfortable, carefree life. The U.S. newspaper pictures discussed above do more than what the propagandists expected. They not only showcase white, middle-class American families—parents and children—as affluent and carefree, but also make them embody U.S. benevolence and humanitarianism by welcoming Chinese orphans whose birth families had been “dismantled” by the Communists.

What is particularly worth noting is how the pictures in the newspapers center on the figure of white adoptive mothers. In June 29, 1962, nine-year-old Chinese

\textsuperscript{60} The former picture is seen in “Orphan Greeted by New Family,” Racine Journal Times in Wisconsin, June 29, 1962. The latter is shown in “Now It’s the Wesings Six; Chinese Daughters Join Circle,” Freeport Journal Standard in Illinois. August 6, 1964.
orphan Susan Elizabeth was greeted by her new white middle-class family led by the adoptive mother wearing fine clothes, followed by the formally dressed adoptive father and their biological daughter. In the picture, the adoptive mother eagerly steps forward and warmly stretches her arms to welcome the newly arrived orphan. While the article introduces everyone else—the adoptive father, his biological daughter and the Chinese girl—by their names, it does not mention the adoptive mother’s name, except that she is the wife of Martin H. Dean. To the editor of the newspaper, the woman’s own identity is not important. What matters is that she stands for housewives of the affluent, middle-class suburban nuclear families, and for adoptive mothers made up of loving and caring white women. In the family album mentioned above, the husband is holding his biological infant but the mother is standing behind her newly adopted Chinese daughter, one hand stretching to help hold a toy for the girl. While other members are all looking at the camera, all her maternal attention is on the Chinese orphan. Her role as a patient and caring adoptive mother is thus emphasized in the picture.

More arresting is a photo published in *Waterloo Daily Courier* of Iowa, in which a seemingly young, educated white adoptive mother was shot kissing and embracing a Chinese toddler affectionately. Below the picture is the headline “Chinese Orphan Finds a Mother.” The woman is referred to as Mrs. Robert Moon. Yet in the photo she is shown alone holding the orphan, indicating her sole importance as an adoptive mother. The article says that she went to the airport to meet the orphan that night, apparently for the first time, but her spontaneous love at the first sight of the orphan is expressed through her long, affectionate kiss. The picture, along with the other two discussed above, vividly represents middle-class white women as benevolent, patient, caring and loving. They also exemplify what Kaplan calls “Empire of the mother” or “the Empire of affections and the heart” by embracing the foreign child into the “women’s sphere.”

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63 “Orphans Greeted by New Family.”
64 “Now It’s the Wessings Six.”
American families expressed their preference for “Oriental-American children,” and could not accept a “purely Oriental” child. However, the display of spontaneous affection towards the newly arrived foreign child indicates that the white woman immediately subjugates her own role as a racially different stranger to the child, demonstrates natural affinity towards him and typifies “the Empire of affection and love” by embracing and kissing the newly met foreign child.

The white adoptive mothers’ image as a representative of the “Empire of affections and love” also implicates them in the U.S. empire building in Asia. Robert Hariman claims that one of the three tropes of empire is affection, or “the idea of benevolent administration of a global civil society.” Although the empire of affection in his concept applies more to the imperialists’ exhibition of natural affinity to the colonized to mediate the imperial violence, his research shows that affection is an important tool for empire-building. In other words, in the Cold War media representations, the benevolent and humanitarian mother figure from a civil, free and democratic society like the United States is one of the key images the U.S. uses to rival with Communism and spread its “model of democracy” in Asia. Elaine Tyler May critiques that while the trope of white, middle-class family was used to contain Communism, it simultaneously contained American men and women within the nuclear family. I would argue, however, that U.S. representations of adoption from China during this period gave white, middle-class women a stage to extend their domestic influence to China by offering maternal love and permanent homes to the homeless Chinese orphans without transgressing national and gender boundaries. Unlike women missionaries, they did not need to step out of the country and sacrifice their comfortable suburban life, but like the missionaries, they had their domestic influence felt by the world as loving adoptive mothers embracing the orphans. In this process they themselves become an important part of U.S. empire building in Asia.

While most visual images of adoptive families are white, only two pictures feature Chinese American families welcoming their adoptees, which goes against the

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67 Choy, Global Families, 68.
historical fact that most adoptive families were of Chinese ancestry. This discrepancy not only demonstrates how powerful the dominant narrative of white middle-class families was during this period, but also marginalizes Chinese Americans as a racial minority group in U.S. media representations. Two features are prominent in the two pictures of Chinese American families. First, in both pictures, the father is formally dressed, indicating his middle-class status—though previous research reveals that Chinese American adoptive parents ranged from restaurant workers and grocery store owners to physicians, engineers and university professors—and exemplifying Asian Americans’ image of “model minorities.”

Second, while most of the white families are represented as having adopted Chinese girls, the adoptee children in these two pictures are boys, held by the adoptive mothers. In one picture, the child seems to be the only child, but in the other, three biological daughters of the couple are shown surrounding him. Such a disparity conforms to the stereotypical impression that in Chinese society and for Chinese people, even those who have immigrated to the United States, girls are not valued, but the U.S. is gender-equal country. It also implies that Chinese American families adopted these orphan boys only when they could not have biological sons to carry on their family lines, but white American families adopted out of altruistic purposes, thus Chinese Americans are still not “American” enough.

Altogether, these visual images indicate how the categories of race, class and gender intersect in the U.S. representations of adoption from China. Both the ISS archival records and the U.S. newspaper reports mention that almost all the birth families of the orphans were poor. Fathers usually died in Communist China and mothers fled with the children to Hong Kong but lived a terrible life under dire conditions in which children were usually undernourished. However, most of the adoptive parents represented in U.S. press, including the two pictures of Chinese American families, were represented as affluent middle-class nuclear families with fine-dressed father and mother, and well-mannered siblings, though Choy mentioned

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69 Choy, Global Families, 58, 61.
70 Ibid., 52.
in her ISS study that Chinese American adoptive parents came from “diverse socioeconomic background,” and some were working-class people.\textsuperscript{71} Belmonte argues that the U.S. propagandists made their family selections carefully to meet the requirements of a typical middle-class family, which should be “respectable and suitable as subjects for the picture story.”\textsuperscript{72} Clearly, class plays a role in the representations to justify the dominant narrative of rescue and liberation. Both news media and adoption organizations present transnational adoption as “the sole opportunity” for the children’s survival. One ISS newsletter in 1959 reemphasizes the importance of adopting Chinese orphans by American families and pleads that new adoption legislation to be passed by the Congress, otherwise, “thousands of children like these in all parts of the world will be deprived of the opportunity to live a normal, happy life with American couples.”\textsuperscript{73} In these reports, the U.S. is portrayed as the only country that could provide a “normal,” “secure” life for orphans all over the world, and that only with the middle-class American couples could they enjoy such life.

A comparison between the birth families and the adoptive families also reveals how gender plays in these representations. Many birth families are reported to have lacked fathers, thus losing financial support so the children were reduced to pitiful situations of being relinquished by their mothers for adoption. On the contrary, most visual images of the adoptive families include well-dressed fathers as bread-winners who can provide a comfortable middle-class life for their families and have the economic capital to adopt children from Hong Kong. Through the comparison the U.S. press teaches readers that women’s role is only a mother and wife in domestic sphere, and that without their husbands, the Chinese women’s motherhood cannot be guaranteed. In the similar way, secured by their middle-class husbands, the American women can exert their maternal influence to foreign children and claim them as their own. Transnational adoption of children from Hong Kong thus provides the U.S. media a stage to sell one of the most important part of the “American way”—clear-cut

\textsuperscript{71} Choy, Global Families, 58.
\textsuperscript{72} Belmonte, Selling the American Way, 151.
\textsuperscript{73} Choy, Global Families, 66.
gender roles in American middle-class family, or what Belmonte calls “Mr. and Mrs. America” in a “typical” American family.74

It is striking to find that under the powerful Cold-War narrative of white, middle-class families, “Mr. and Mrs. America” could also include Chinese Americans. But this is exactly how race is played out with the rhetoric of “model minorities” in the Cold-War U.S. representations of adoption from China. The pictures of the two Chinese American middle-class families provide a powerful counter-narrative to the criticism the United States received from the international world, and display to the world that a “good” minority, like Asians, could also represent America. On May 3, 1952, Toy Len Goon, an unknown Chinese immigrant woman was selected the Maine Mother first, then won the national title of American Mother of the Year. She was invited to Washington D.C., visited the Congress, attended a luncheon arranged for her in the Speakers’ dining room, where she sat next to the Assistant Secretary of State, John M. Allison, and later was arranged to meet the first lady Bess Truman. Chiou-Ling Yeh argues that although the Cold War politics promoted white-middle class domesticity as a way of containing Communism, the Goon case reflects the ideology of racial integration that required positive transformation of Chinese American women and mothers in the media.75 What is peculiar about the case is that Goon was a widowed mother of eight children and a laundry shop owner. Her role as a single working-class mother seems to complicate the narrative of rigid gender roles in middle-class families the Cold War politics advocated. However, her working place of the laundry means she did not step out the domestic sphere confined for women, and her self-employed, hard-working Asian American image strongly supports the narrative of model minorities. Her meeting with politicians and celebrities also demonstrates to the international world that the United States is a democratic country of class and racial equality. More importantly, compared with the birth mothers in Hong Kong who had to give up their children to orphanages, then to adoption, after their husbands died, Goon’s image proves to the world that only in America, the free

74 Belmonte, Selling the American Way, 137.
land, a widowed mother like her could keep all her children and reserve her basic right to be a mother.

The category of race plays out more saliently in the photos of the white families embracing the racially different Chinese children. They demonstrate to the world that humanitarian Americans are racially tolerant enough to accept full-blooded Oriental children, and that the accusations of racism in the United States fail to paint an accurate picture of the country. Adoption of Chinese children gave white American families an opportunity to conduct what Choy labels as “global family making”—a process of decision making and action taken by people who create and sustain a family by crossing national and racial boundaries. It also gives the U.S. press a vehicle to display racial integration by promoting images of those “global families.” Two photos in which white children are surrounding and welcoming their newly arrived Chinese siblings portray a persuasive picture of racial integration and equality by exhibiting that racially different children could happily and peacefully live under the same roof as brothers and sisters. Therefore, through adoption, not only white parents, but also white children take part in what Yeh calls the “cultural Cold War.”

A detailed reading of these visual images also shows how the narrative of adoption shifted in the representation of the Hong Kong Project from those analyzed in previous research. Images analyzed in current scholarship of adoption from Asia during the Cold-War period represent Communist China as a dark, despotic country where Communists deprived children of homes, but the ones discussed above showcase the United States as a free nation of affluent nuclear families made up of caring parents and friendly siblings expecting the homeless orphans. Both Briggs and Klein analyze photos of Chinese orphans during the Cold War, and both argue that these photos stimulated an impulse that demanded intervention overseas as well as a sense of obligation and rescue among Americans. The most impressive of Briggs’s Somebody’s Children is her discussion of a picture in which three homeless, almost-naked children are sleeping outside a rice shop in a Hong Kong street in 1958.

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76 Choy, Global Families, 9.
The caption on the picture lamented that they were refugees from China and that Communism caused their homelessness. Briggs points out that it might also read as “a placard for ‘capitalist’ hard-heartedness, where children are not guaranteed a place to live, even years after they arrived in Hong Kong as refugees.”

The set of pictures included in Klein’s book *Cold War Orientalism* in the same year in mainland China highlights the point the U.S. media has consistently made that family did not exist in Communist China. A group of three pictures—entitled “Men Without Women,” “Women Without Men,” and “Children Without Parents”—was published in *Newsweek* to support its declaration that “The family does not count anymore,” implying that under Communist rule families were not valued and therefore were largely dismantled. A scrutinization of the photos—men uplifting guns in the air, women carrying hoes in a field, and school children lined up on the playground—reveals that these are typical images the Chinese Communist Party in the 1950s often utilized to show the socialist new life and high spirits people had in China. Clearly, China and the United States used the same pictures to convey totally different ideologies: while China intended to display the Communist superiority and national pride, the U.S. media interpreted them as evidence to show “the sundering of family ties under [C]ommunism,” which, Klein argues, became “a familiar theme in the cultural containment of China that took place after 1949.”

While these images focus mainly on China to urge Americans to join the mission of rescuing Chinese orphans and giving them a home, the newspaper photographs in my research function as an answer to the call by displaying the humanitarian white, middle-class American families embracing their new Chinese children. The shift of representational focus from China to the U.S. is significant in that the news media not only educates its readers that under Communism there is no family at all, but shows the world that the United States is the only place where people can enjoy stable, affluent family life, and where warm and loving homes are awaiting the orphans whose homes have been ruined by Communists.

78 Briggs, *Somebody’s Children*, 141.
79 Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 148.
80 Ibid., 147-148.
The Hong Kong Project also reveals that the United States uses adoption from China as a tool to rival traditional British empire and extend the U.S. empire in Asia. The location of Hong Kong as an orphan-sending city complicates the adoption relationship as Hong Kong was still a British colony until its return to China in 1997. Andrew J. Whitfield argues that Hong Kong was key to Britain to retain its Far Eastern empire and that losing it would set a precedent for its other colonies. Nevertheless, during WWII Britain first lost it to Japan, then found that its own allies, China and particularly the United States, became the real threat to its reclaiming of Hong Kong, as Chiang Kai-shek intended to take Hong Kong’s sovereignty back to China, and was strongly backed up by the United States. Whitfield also suggests that the U.S. intervention mainly aimed to deny Britain its empire. In other words, by containing the influence of the old British empire in Hong Kong, the Unites States could expand its own influence in the Far East. Richard W. Mueller asserts that America has had long-term interests in Hong Kong which could be traced back to the late 1830s, when the largest American trading company pulled out of the opium trade in the seas surrounding Hong Kong. Clearly, the U.S. interests in Hong Kong have been shaped by both political and economic objectives. To both the U.S. and Britain, Hong Kong was crucial in the Cold War period to contain the spread of the other but retain or expand its own empire-building.

In the 1950s and 1960s adoption of Chinese orphans by American families intensified such rivalry. To Britain, taking a large number of orphans from Hong Kong to the United States for adoption was tantamount to a slap in its face that the old empire was unable or unwilling to take care of Chinese orphans in its colony. But to the United States, adoption provided it a precious opportunity to further its intervention in this area and exhibit that the new empire had an obligation and ability to offer these orphans a permanent home, since the old empire failed to do so. On June 11, 1962, a local newspaper, the Greenville Delta Democrat Times in Mississippi reported, in an article entitled “British Gov’t in Hong Kong Denies Chinese Orphans

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81 Andrew J. Whitfield, *Hong Kong, Empire and the Anglo-American Alliance at War, 1941-1945* (Palgrave: 200 1-3.
Exist,” that when the Attorney General Robert Kennedy telephoned the British authorities to offer to find homes for Chinese orphans in Hong Kong, he was told that there was no need to discuss the matter because no orphans were available for adoption in Hong Kong. The author Drew Pearson sharply points out that “apparently the British don’t want to give the world an impression that they have neglected Chinese children,” but “anyone can see homeless children on the streets of Hong Kong begging for food.” Robert Kennedy then appealed to the British Ambassador to “let the American people help these needy Chinese children.” In the early 1960s most Chinese were still excluded from entering into the country, yet the author ensures readers that “Chinese Refugee Relief, headed by former Presidents Herbert Hoover and Harry Truman” has offered entry to Chinese orphans.82

However, Britain did not lack of spokesman in the United States to provide a counter-narrative. Soon a reader named Russell R. Roth responded by stating that Pearson’s Chinese orphan story was misleading. In his letter to the editor of the Billings Gazette in Montana, Roth comments that the British “have done and are doing an unsurpassed job of emergency housing construction (as well as having instituted numerous other relief programs) for these children and their refugee parents.” He labels Pearson’s reporting of “homeless children in Hong Kong” a “misstatement” and that there was “no destitution, no starvation and no homelessness.” At the end of the letter, he also extols that the British were showing “unexampled humanitarianism.”83 Clearly, in Roth’s account the British was humanitarian, and the colonial government had the willingness and ability to solve the orphans problem, thus the U.S. intervention was not welcome.

Roth was obviously defending the British government in Hong Kong and these two letters indicate the ideological confrontation and rivalry between the British authorities and the United States. As a declining empire, Britain increasingly lost its control in Asia, and it was reasonable that the British government was sensitive to any intrusion from America, the new power. The American intent revealed in Pearson’s

letter was clear: since the British neglected the Chinese children, the responsibility of
taking care of refugee orphans, and other affairs in Asia, should fall upon the United
States, whose government and people, including former Presidents Hoover and
Truman, were caring, loving and ready to give homes to the homeless Chinese
orphans. Chinese orphans thus became a battleground between the two Capitalist
rivals, and between the old empire which tried every means to maintain the status quo
of its control in Asia and the new empire which seized every opportunity to extend its
influence in the same area.

It is also worth mentioning that the U.S. rivalry against the old British empire in
Hong Kong was conducted not through weapons and military forces, but through the
loving, gentle arms of white middle-class American adoptive mothers and their
offering of a warm home and caring family to the orphans. Despite the reality that
most of the orphans were adopted by Chinese Americans, the mainstream media
foregrounded the image of middle-class, white housewives exhibiting their maternal
love and charms of suburban homes to the world and providing Chinese children with
homes and parental love that were alleged to have been deprived by the Communist
Reds. Therefore, in the cultural Cold War centering on the Hong Kong Project, white
middle-class women and their families are mobilized as an important weapon of U.S.
empire expansion in Asia than military forces.

**Conclusion**

An analysis of newspaper articles about Chinese orphans and transnational
adoption from Hong Kong in the 1950s and 1960s offers us an insight into how Cold
War ideologies played out through the intersection of gender, class and race. China
was imagined as a despotic country ruled by the Communists who not only murdered
or orphaned children, oppressed women, but dismantled families. By contrast, the U.S.
was depicted as a permanent home provider, whose benevolence and humanitarianism
were shown not only by ordinary housewives but also by politicians such as the U.S.
Presidents, both former and the present, and Attorney General Robert Kennedy.

Adoption of Chinese children from Hong Kong during this period also provide
window through which ideological confrontations were shown not just between
Capitalism and Communism, but also between the old and new imperialist powers, and in these confrontations, Chinese orphans and adoption are manipulated by the U.S. media as forceful weapons. By representing the Communist anti-missionary movements, the American newspapers represents China not only as cold-blooded and inhumane as to ignore its own orphans, but also an arch evil that repaid the sacrifice of missionaries to its orphans with persecution and expulsion. The confrontation between Pearson and Roth reflected another U.S. Cold-War dynamic that substituted the old imperialist power and constructed the American empire in Asia. Unlike in Europe and Japan where the United States acted as an economic supporter and political instructor, in Hong Kong, the British colony, America turned into a caregiver and home provider for the homeless orphans. Its interventionist mission of rescuing Chinese orphans from Hong Kong demonstrated to Britain, to Communist China, and to the world, that only the United States could provide warm, loving homes to orphans.

Analyzing media representations of adoption from China in the Cold-War period is important in the scholarship of transnational adoption from China. It recovers the part of adoption history that is overshadowed by both the mixed-race adoption from other Asian countries during the same period, and the wave of adoption from China in the post-Cold War era. It also provides a lens through which we examine how the dominant official narrative of rescue and obligation was originated in WWII and constructed in full swing in the Cold-War era. As the next chapter will show, the powerful narrative continued in the cultural representations of adoption from China in the post-Cold War decade.
Chapter Two

Saving Chinese Orphans from the “Dying” Rooms

In June 1995 a documentary, *The Dying Rooms*, was released by British Channel 4 television and triggered a wide-spread Western media campaign against China over its children in state-run orphanages. The filmmakers Kate Blewett and Brian Woods, posing as workers from an American orphanage, visually documented the terrible conditions of children in Chinese state-run orphanages with a hidden camera. These children, epitomized by the emaciated body of a child named Mei Ming (“No name”), immediately prompted far-reaching outcry over Chinese orphans in the American media. A series of releases and reports on Chinese state-run orphanages exploded in early January, 1996. On January 6, the *New York Times* reported “U.S. Rights Group Asserts China Lets Thousands of Orphans Die.”¹ The next day, Human Rights Watch/Asia, a New York-based international human rights organization, published a 331-page report entitled *Death by Default* on its investigation of the Shanghai Orphanage and drew wide attention in American and international media. On January 9, *Return to the Dying Rooms*, the reworked version of *The Dying Rooms*, was released by Channel 4, the same British commercial television station. On January 10, *The Dying Rooms* was first aired in the United States.

Following the release of the documentaries and publication of the human rights report was heavy coverage of Chinese orphans being neglected and abused. Reports appeared in almost all the U.S. national newspapers, and a large number of local newspapers, such as *Daily Herald* in Chicago, Illinois, *Ukiah Daily Journal* in California, *Northwest Florida Daily News*, to name only a few. In the *New York Times* alone, there were eleven articles on Chinese orphans in January and February, 1996, including two articles on both January 9 and January 15. The same number of articles

appeared in Washington Post from January to March, 1996, and in Los Angeles Times from January to April. A slightly smaller number appeared in the Chicago Tribune, Christian Science Monitor, and the Boston Globe. What was notable about such coverage was not just the frequency and intensity but the big sensational headlines above long reports often placed on the front page of national newspapers. “Holocaust, the China Parallel,” reads one headline on January 24 in Washington Post. “Inhuman Neglect in China’s Orphanages,” says Los Angeles Times on January 10.

Not everyone agreed with such accusations, of course. Right after the release of The Dying Rooms on June 14, 1995, the Chinese government denounced it as “vicious fabrications” and “a contemptible lie” that “cannot but arouse the indignation of the Chinese people.” In August, 1995, a documentary entitled A Patchwork of Lies was released from China to counter The Dying Rooms by revisiting all the filmed places and people and providing evidence and witnesses to prove the film was indeed “a contemptible lie.” Moreover, the publication of Human Rights Watch/Asia report Death by Default on January 7, 1996 provoked sharp criticism not only from the Chinese government but also from the West, so much so that the Human Rights Watch/Asia responded with a follow-up article. The Chinese government responded the next day of the Human Rights publication by denying the accusations and inviting twenty journalists to visit the targeted orphanage. “Does China Have the Will to Starve Orphans?” questioned a New York Times article on January 15, 1996. Los Angeles Times reported on February 7 that “Abuse Charges Stir Adoptive Parents.” Since foreign adoption was officially approved by the Chinese government in 1992, Western adoptive parents could go to China and visit the orphanages before and after they met their adoptee babies. What disturbed these parents was not just that the sensational reports defied what they had seen and experienced in China, but also that the Chinese government responded by refusing orphanage visits to foreigners, including prospective adoptive parents.

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2 The words were cited by Returns to the Dying Rooms as a response from the filmmakers to China's denouncement.

What was it about the documentaries and the Human Rights Watch/Asia report that caused such a big stir in American news media? What messages did the representations transmit that aroused strong criticism from both China and the West? How were China and Chinese people, particularly female orphans and women, represented in the Western, mainly U.S., media? What did the media war among these groups reveal about transnational adoption from China in this period? What were the characteristics of representations of Chinese orphans and adoption from China in the post-Cold War decade compared to those of the Cold-War era?

In this chapter I first analyze the documentaries, *The Dying Rooms* (1995), *Return to the Dying Rooms* (1996), and U.S. newspaper articles about Chinese orphanages to examine how Western representations of China’s family-planning policy, the narrative of coercion, and the Human Rights Watch’s condemnations of China’s institutionalized neglect of orphans worked together to construct China as a living hell for women and female children. I also demonstrate that the anti-Communist ideology was still strongly conveyed in these condemnations in the post-Cold War decade. Then I turn to China’s responses, mainly the rebuttal documentary *A Patchwork of Lies* (1995) and other counter-narratives China made, and the U.S. media reactions afterwards. I aim to demonstrate the dynamic of Sino-West ideological confrontations and present China’s counter-narratives as an alternative voice, and to demonstrate how powerful the Western critical voices were. Last, I analyze dissenting voices appearing in newspapers from adoptive parents, adoption agencies and film reviewers to explore how they complicate the images of China and Chinese orphanages portrayed by the mainstream media. I argue that these representations both reinforced and unsettled the narrative of rescue and obligation inherited from the war-time and Cold War adoption from China.

**Orphans in The Dying Rooms and Women outside**

*The Dying Rooms*, made in 1995, has had considerable influence since its release. It is estimated that over 100 million viewers in 37 countries have watched it.4

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It provoked compassion and pity among its Western viewers. In an interview Blewett described the immediate reaction the film inspired: “When the film actually hit the screens, it was just phenomenal. [Our] office, from floor to ceiling, was full of sacks and sacks of mails from everyone wanting to help.”5 In 2012, Lord Grade, former BBC chairman, deemed *The Dying Rooms* as the first of “Ten of the Greatest Documentaries” in Britain.6 In the United States, Oprah Winfrey introduced the films twice in her program in 1996 and 2004. In 1996 Oprah introduced that “according to the filmmakers, the United Nations became stricter on China, and American families have adopted more Chinese girls than any other nation.”7 In her 2004 program, she read a letter from an audience member, Patty Smith, who wrote that watching the film in 1996 became “a defining moment” to her, and that “those images never left her, which made her feel that ‘we were supposed to adopt one of those children.’” She became one of the thousands of adoptive parents. When her healthy, happy Chinese daughter appeared on the big screen, countering the miserable, sick orphans in the “dying rooms,” the whole studio audience applauded.8

Although *The Dying Room* and its reworked version *Return to the Dying Rooms* were made by British filmmakers and therefore technically not U.S. cultural representations, they were aired in the United States and aroused a huge media response. The filmmakers themselves were also closely connected with the United States. In 1995 when Blewett and Woods entered the Chinese orphanages, they used a false identity as workers for an American orphanage. A closer collaboration between the filmmakers and Human Rights Watch/Asia is seen in the reworked film *Return to The Dying Rooms*. The film not only reveals how the organization contacted the filmmakers and provided them with evidence and witnesses, but used the film as a platform to criticize the Chinese government of neglecting orphans in state-run orphanages.

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5 “The Dying Rooms and Return to the Dying Rooms.”
8 “The Dying Rooms and Return to the Dying Rooms.”
The most influential part of *The Dying Rooms* is the numerous sensational images of orphans and the grim, dark rooms in the state-run orphanages. At the beginning of the film, three babies appear one by one in close-ups, one lying on the bed, one sitting on a baby-chair, and one leaning against the head of the bed. All are silent but faced the camera with blank looks in their eyes, then look away. Even in what the filmmakers thought of as one of the best state-run orphanages, the same close-ups of baby faces appear, some crying, some staring afar, milk bottles next to their mouths but nobody feeding them. Accompanying the faces is the mournful music that ran through the whole film. Many infants are shot in close-ups with cameras positioned outside the iron-bar crib handrails to create an impression that these babies are imprisoned. Toddlers are filmed sitting in the typical Chinese bamboo potty chairs, and their feet tied on the chairs are shot in lengthy close-ups. Older children are shot from outside an iron-bar gate of the courtyard, cuddling together and looking at the camera and the outside world. The iron-bar gate is the most commonly used gate in China even today, and can be seen in almost every household courtyard in less developed cities and countryside due to its secureness and low cost. But it is highly possible that Western viewers, who have never been to China, would associate them with prison and imagine the orphans being incarcerated. Moreover, the images of orphans behind the iron bars appear repeatedly, together with the mournful music, throughout the film. Through such repetition, the film emphasizes that Chinese orphans’ freedom is restricted in the prison-like state-run orphanages.

Besides the orphans, another focus of the film is the dark rooms in the orphanages, from which the film’s title *The Dying Rooms* came into being. The first sequence of the film is a flight of gloomy stairs, and upstairs, a dim room, both shaking due to the hand-held camera intended to produce a realistic feeling. In the room there are only two children, one sitting in a chair and the other on the floor, surrounded by noise from crying infants nearby. A male voiceover explains how the film got its title: “In the state-run orphanages in China today, [we] found dying rooms. Understaffed orphanages simply abandon those who become ill and put them in the room and leave them to die.” Soon the film shows a building in another orphanage,
calling it the “dying building,” in which a big room is captured in wide angle again accompanied with the mournful music. In the room there are no orphans but many empty wooden cribs, a basket of baby shoes on one crib covered with a grass mat, a baby sock on another. In one corner, a leg of a plastic toy baby is lying beside a broken basket and a pile of firewood. In the sequence there is a sharp contrast between presence and absence. Cribs, shoes and socks are associated with orphans but no orphans are seen. The sock and the toy leg appear not in pairs but discarded casually, single and broken, signifying that the orphans who once lived in the room have been discarded or treated casually by the caregivers as well. While viewers might wonder where the orphans are, the film answers itself. At the end of the sequence, a white-coat staff appears and closes the door of the building, then the female voiceover narrates, “Eighty or so lives ended here last year, unnoticed, unremembered, and unmourned.”

The epitome of orphan neglect in the alleged dying room appears at the end of the film, and becomes the most provocative sequence of the film. In this room the iconic image—a dying child named Mei Ming—was found and shot. Before entering the room, the voiceover tells viewers that a baby girl was left inside to die ten days before, and that the staff “preferred not to enter the room, waiting instead for one of the children to report if the infant has died,” meaning that Mei Ming was deliberately neglected in the dying room which even the orphanage staff tried to avoid. When the child appears on screen, he/she is lying on a bed, wearing thick clothes and covered with a quilt. Then the filmmaker Kate Blewett, herself wearing winter coat, starts to unclothe the child so his/her skinny, naked body is exposed little by little under the gaze of viewers. Even naked, the child’s genital is always concealed, and viewers can hardly tell his/her sex. As the long-shot of the whole naked body changes into close-ups of the pale face, viewers see his/her sunken cheeks and layers of blisters circling around the eyelids. Now the child starts to wail in a weak, hoarse voice, sometimes shaking his/her head, stopping for a while and wailing again. Along with the scenes, a Chinese-accented voice from a female Chinese journalist who appeare earlier comments in English, “Very sad. It’s so inhumane that I cannot believe. If sh
were a boy, they would try their best to save him, but because she is a girl, she is left to die. She is waiting to die.” Here viewers are presented with an extremely sick child being neglected to fight for death by himself/herself. The sick, neglected image of the child as well as the commentator’s voice in Chinese accent that sounds authentic and her profession as a journalist leave viewers with no doubt that the child’s only crime is that he/she is a girl, though it is hard to tell his/her sex from the film itself.

While the images impress viewers with abject orphans being neglected or restrained from freedom in the grim “dying rooms,” several Western experts appear in the film, giving the reasons of such neglect. These experts, including Jonathan Mirsky, editor of East Asia edition of Times newspaper and Steven Mosher, author of A Mother’s Ordeal, explain that the Chinese family-planning policy is the direct cause of women’s distress, female infanticide, and of a large number of female babies being discarded and ending up in state-run orphanages.

China’s family-planning policy was started in 1978 to curtail the rocketing population, and the policy has undergone multiple adjustments. On the fifth National Congress held in March, 1978, article 53 of the Constitution was passed, clearly stating that China would promote the family-planning policy. On October 26, 1978, the Central Committee of the Communist Party issued its No.69 document, announcing that “a couple was encouraged to have only one child, at most two at intervals of at least three years.” On February 1980, the strict “one-child policy” was confirmed by the central government, which means one family could only have one child. Yet the implementation of the policy met obstacles from rural areas where people preferred to have at least one son to undertake the responsibility of the major labor force in the fields and to provide for the parents’ senior years, since traditionally female children would marry into other families and share their husbands’ responsibilities, and the social welfare in the rural areas was yet to be established. The central government realized that the strict application of the “one-child policy” caused serious social problems, including forced abortion, sterilization and severe economic

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damage to the violators. Therefore, it adjusted its policy in 1984 so that a couple in rural areas who already had a female child of above five years old was allowed to have a second child.  

It is worth noting that in the 1980s the strict “one-child policy” and later the “one-son or two-child policy” were implemented to a varied degree and in different duration in specific provinces and regions. Research shows that since 1984 only a minority of rural areas have practiced the “one-child policy.” Most rural areas had, instead, the “one-son or two-child policy.” In the urban areas, however, the strict “one-child policy” has been implemented without obvious obstacle. In sternest years from 1980 to 1984, forced abortion, sterilization and phenomenon of birth guerillas (couples who fled to other areas in order to keep the child) occurred frequently in some areas, but usually the couple, rather than the woman alone, was faced with the situations. For example, not only women but also men might be encouraged or forced to be sterilized. In other areas those who violated the policy would incur economic forfeit to a varied degree. Research also shows different provinces responded to the changing policy in different ways. As late as 1990, for instance, in two provinces, Hubei and Hunan, where the implementation of the policy was still stringent, the number of abandoned children kept increasing, but Johnson treats them as extreme examples of abandonment that “in recent years may not have occurred elsewhere in the country,” and that the regional flood in that year was another important cause of children abandonment.

There is no evidence that the implementation of the policy has ever caused frequent or serious coercion among parents since the 1990s. The Chinese government made a profound adjustment of its family-planning policy in this period, and corrected ways in which the implementation of the policy in the 1980s had incurred serious

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problems among parents. By the time the documentary *The Dying Rooms* was filmed in 1995, the policy had been loosened significantly, and female infanticide as well as coerced abortions and sterilizations upon both men and women had largely disappeared. However, the film represents the family-planning policy as the static, unchanging “one-child” policy, making it the biggest target of condemnation against the Chinese government and the only cause for infant abandonment, infanticide and women’s human rights violations.

The Western experts in the film draw a dire picture of how the policy was created and implemented by the government. Steven Mosher cites former Chinese President Deng Xiaoping’s words that “Use whatever means you have to control China’s population. Just do it. With the support of China’s Central Committee of Communist Party, you have nothing to fear.” As he says this, the film cuts to a clip from a typical Chinese television news report of Deng appearing on the screen and being applauded by a large number of Chinese Communist officials surrounding him. The officials wear the same dark blue Chinese tunic suit and present in front of Western viewers like a uniformed army. By emphasizing Deng’s words of “whatever means” and “you have nothing to fear with the support of the Communist Party,” the film stimulates familiar Cold War anti-Communist sentiments among Western viewers. The image of Deng, who has long been depicted in the Western world as another dictator after Mao, followed by his army of Communist officials wearing uniformed, dark-colored clothes in the film, further reinforces such sentiments.

With such provocative sequences, the narrator and filmmaker Brian Woods continues that it was “the one-child policy” that has caused vast numbers of babies being dumped into the orphanages. He further concludes that “local people frequently confirmed the brutality of the one-child policy,” and “Along with Tiananmen Square and Tibet, this law was hated by Chinese people as it met international condemnation.” Woods chooses words like “dictate” and “brutality” to show how the policy is forced into implementation by the Communist totalitarianism. By equating the policy with Tiananmen Square and Tibet, two events in which China has been highly criticized.

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the West, he further reminds Western viewers of how inhumane the family-planning policy was and how it was condemned by the Western world.

However, baby abandonment in China was far more complicated than what the film claims as the direct and only result of the family-planning policy. After 1984, parents in rural areas began to abandon their second, third or fourth daughter. A large pool of female children ended up in orphanages. However, unlike the Western media’s common depiction of parents being “forced” to abandon their second (or third, fourth) daughter, this was more of a choice made by parents in remote areas who were still influenced by ‘remnant feudal thoughts’ of valuing boys over girls. It should also be noted that there are more parents in rural areas of China who were happy with two daughters and no son. Throughout Chinese history, there have been parents who only had girls and still found out ways to carry their family lines and solve the problem of old age. A popular way to do so was to take in a son-in-law to bear the bride’s family name, assume all the responsibilities of a son and inherit properties from the parents. Moreover, not all children in the orphanages came from married couples affected by the family-planning policy, and not all the abandoned children were girls (which can be proved by the film itself, as it shows quite a few healthy boys in the orphanages). Since China opened its door to the Western world in 1978, Western culture, brought forth by Hollywood films and other cultural forms, tremendously influenced Chinese young people. Sexual freedom was a large part of it, resulting in a prominent social problem that unwed mothers, usually high school/university students or factories workers, discarded their new-borns in order to get rid of the trouble that would bring shame to themselves and their families, and further affect their future marriage. In the 1980s and 1990s, babies were also given up because of some type of congenital disability or disease that the parents felt they could not afford to cure, and the health care system was yet to be established to help cover the forthcoming formidable medical costs.

Current research also provides multiple reasons of female children abandonment in China and does not trace the family-planning policy as the single, direct cause. For instance, Dorow synthesizes the possible factors listed by scholars and adoption experts:

the stringencies of the family-planning policy, cultural and economic gender relations that “necessitate” a son, rural or urban poverty, stigma and lack of resources for special-needs children, and lack of social and legal support for single motherhood. But it is difficult to know which of these factors come in play in individual cases, with what frequency, or in what ways.  

To Dorow and other scholars she cites, the family-planning policy is only one of many key factors. Kay Johnson and her co-researchers Huang Hanbing and Wang Liyao consider the “one-child policy” as the most important factor leading to the revival of female children abandonment and slightly female infanticide in the 1980s that has largely declined since 1949 due to the social, political stability, improved economic conditions and the rise of women’s social status. However, they do not rule out other factors, such as “the remnant feudal thoughts” that valued males and disparaged females among a minority of peasants in remote areas.

Besides limiting the family-planning policy as the only cause of female children abandonment and infanticide, The Dying Rooms also contains a dominant, ahistorical narrative of “coercion” upon Chinese women in a static, totalitarian Chinese society: forced abortion, sterilization and abandonment of baby girls. Again the film treats the family-planning policy and its implementation as the direct and only cause. Mosher describes how women have been locked up, incarcerated, and their husbands have been arrested until the wives were given abortions, and how these women often had abortions and sterilizations “without their knowledge or permission” when they were receiving other treatments. What he describes may have happened during the most severe years of the family-planning policy implementation in the 1980s, but the number of such events greatly reduced when the second chance of reproduction was given to rural couples, and largely disappeared in the 1990s. However, Mosher’s

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16 Dorow, Transnational Adoption, 168.
description in 1995 without mentioning *when* it happened is particularly misleading as it leads Western viewers to see the family-planning policy as static and ever unchanging, and Chinese women as forever victimized.

As Chinese women are continuously portrayed as victims and second-class citizens, female children as a group are naturalized as “unwanted” in the film. While the anonymous Asian demographic scholar in *The Dying Rooms* remarks that before 1949 baby girls could be given away or abandoned, and during famines, female infanticide was not uncommon, Western scholars such as Mosher, gives an ahistorical account: “Little girls were plunged into a bucket of water before they had a chance to draw their first breath.” His words are supported by the Chinese interviewees. A middle-aged Chinese immigrant adoptive mother tells how she and her mother were mistreated in her paternal grandmother’s house. The female journalist who comments on Mei Ming continues to state that girls in Chinese countryside are “maggots in the rice”—some died of hunger, some were picked up by gangs and become beggars, and only lucky ones could be sent to the orphanages. While she makes these remarks, a dirty-clothed little girl appears on the screen, begging money from passengers. The journalist also gives a partial observation of how starting from birth, girls and boys are treated differently by parents, who, in her account, will celebrate boys’ birth with fireworks, but “[birth of] girls never.” In her words, not only the orphans, but all female children in China, are in pathetic, miserable conditions, which reinforces the notion that being born a female in patriarchal China is unfortunate, and that these poor girls could be “saved” and cherished only through adoption.

The Western media such as the film also helps reinforce a widespread notion that almost all the children adopted by Westerners were girls, so only girls were suffering. There is no mention in current research of the percentage of adopted Chinese boys and girls in the United States in the post-Cold War decade, but one statistics focusing on gender ratio of adopted children from 1999 to 2013 might provide some hint. The intercountry adoption statistics provided by the Bureau of Consular Affairs in the U.S. Department of State shows that during this period amoi
71,632 adopted children from China, 11 percent (7,925) were boys.\textsuperscript{19} It is, therefore, safe to say that there were a large number of boys adopted to the United States. Although it might be less-grounded to conclude that the gendered Western media generated adoptive parents’ choices of female Chinese orphans, there is definitely a correlation and interplay between the two. That is to say, the Western media’s gendered representations affected adoptive parents’ choice of female orphans when they decided to adopt from China. The adoptive parents’ choices, and the subsequent presence of a large number of Chinese girls in white families, in turn, reinforced the message the U.S. media has been conveying—obligation of “rescuing Chinese orphan girls.” On the one hand, as Toby Alice Volkman accounts, until the wave of Chinese adoptions there had never been another group of transnational adoptees that arrived in the U.S. “in such large numbers, in so few years, of roughly the same age and largely the same gender.”\textsuperscript{20} On the flip side, in the Western media and in adoption promotion materials only female orphans have often been singled out as waiting to be “saved.” Some adoptive parents recall that they decided to adopt their daughters from China when they saw “a photo of a Chinese adopted girl in the paper.”\textsuperscript{21} Linda, the white adoptive mother I mentioned in my introduction, once told me that she only wanted to adopt girls, because “they were suffering.” Such gendered representations reflect and reinforce China’s image as backward and patriarchal. Dorow observes that the sex of the abandoned and adopted children triggers a gendered cultural explanation that draws on the conventional Western perception of China as a patriarchal, backward society where women and female children are forever victimized.\textsuperscript{22} The gendered master narrative of abandonment emphasized by the Western media further perpetuates the long-held Western perception of China.

In addition to the condemnation of the family-planning policy, the narrative of coercion of women and the narrative of abandonment of female children, the British


\textsuperscript{21} Dorow, Transnational Adoption, 48.

\textsuperscript{22} Both the notions of the “engendered cultural explanation” and of “master narrative of abandonment” come from Dorow's research, see Dorow, Transnational Adoption, 175-176.
films, particularly *Return to the Dying Rooms*, accuse the Chinese government of systematically and deliberately abusing and neglecting orphans in the state-run orphanages. Besides repeating the sensational scenes of the orphans and opinions given by both Chinese witnesses and the Western experts, *Return to the Dying Rooms* departs from its earlier version by heavily relying on the investigation of Human Rights Watch/Asia about the Shanghai Orphanage, and stresses that the Chinese government has left orphans to die as a policy of controlling its population in the orphanage. Two Chinese witnesses, Doctor Zhang Shuyun who worked in the orphanage for five years and Ai Ming, an adult orphan who was raised in the orphanage, provide the strongest evidence, both in oral testimony and photographic documents. They describe how staff in the orphanage abused and deliberately neglected orphans. They also give a detailed account of “summary solution”: the orphanage’s policy of “deliberately starving selected orphans to keep the number of inmates down to a certain level.” The Human Rights Watch officials condemn that “summary solution” was “systematic and institutionalized murder.” Their accusations are further supported by the photographs Ai Ming has taken in the past few years. Orphans in the pictures are lying on the bed, lifeless and scruffy, but all of them are nearly naked, their clothes rolled up to their upper chest. The female genitals are exposed, but one orphan, whom a *Los Angeles Times* article on January 9, 1996, reports as a boy, has his sex organ concealed, as if showing his male genital would undermine the idea produced by the Western media that only female orphans suffered.23

By accusing the Chinese government of its deliberate policy of neglecting and starving orphans, the film and the collaborating human rights officials continue to produce the anti-Communist ideology inherited from the Cold War. Wu Bangguo, the then municipal party secretary of Shanghai and later the Vice Premier, is particularly singled out by the human rights officials, both in close-ups at a Communist national conference in the film and in the talk show program *The Dying Rooms Debate*. Wu is referred by Jonathan Mirsky to be a member of the Politburo of the Chinese

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Communist party and one of the most powerful politicians. According to Mirsky, Wu suppressed and covered up the investigation by dictating that the Communist party would “destroy professionally and politically those who have done the investigation (of orphan neglect).” Mirsky explains that the reason for such suppression was that the orphanage had been taken over from the Catholic Church by the Communist government, and that the care in the Catholic days had been far better than that was given by the Communist government, so the government had to cover up the scandal to save face (and presumably to stabilize its Communist regime). In the eyes of Mirsky, and of his fellow Western human rights officials, protecting the face of the Communist government and stabilizing its regime play an important role in its suppression of the investigation. The neglect of orphans in the orphanages is thus represented in the Western media as being inherently associated with the Communist government.

Mei Ming’s clip is chosen again as the epitome of orphan neglect, but unlike the _Dying Rooms_ which blames the orphanage staff for neglecting the child, in _Return to the Dying Rooms_ the child’s miserable image is closely related to the accusation of the Chinese Communist government and thus becomes the most powerful vehicle to convey the anti-Communist ideology of the Western media and human rights officials. After a lengthy close-up of its scrawny, naked body, the camera turns to Mei Ming’s wailing face, which is immediately followed by the voiceover of Blewett who reports that the Chinese government claimed their earlier footage to be vicious fabrications. As she says so, the shortened official Chinese statement is presented on the screen, but the background is the Chinese national red flag fluttering slowly. The moving red flag and the still words make a contrast to draw viewers’ attention and remind them of the “red” characteristics of the official denial. The sequence soon shifts to the statue of Mao Zedong. Mao is shot from below, so he looks down at viewers while standing with one arm akimbo and the same arm holding his coat. With such angle the camera makes him appear big and threatening as a Communist dictator, echoing his Cold War image in the Western representations. Here the neglected child Mei Ming, China’s official denial of the accusations, the red flag and Mao’s statue are connected to
convey meanings to viewers: Mei Ming’s pitiful image being shown right before the official statement makes China’s denial not credible to Western viewers, and the fluttering red flag, and Mao’s statue signify that such neglect is inherently rooted in the inhumanity of Communism. In this sense, through the outcry over Chinese orphans, the film reveals its anti-Communist attitude towards China.

In the two films there are a group of Chinese witnesses who appear as strong evidence to convince Western viewers that the situations for orphans in state-run orphanages were miserable and the government was abusive. Both films are conscious of inviting Chinese witnesses, such as the woman journalist, the Chinese immigrant adoptive mother, Zhang Shuyun, the doctor who worked in Shanghai Orphanage and Ai Ming, the adult orphan from the same orphanage. Zhang and Ai Ming speak Chinese while the journalist speaks English with a strong Chinese accent and frequent grammatical errors. These voices, as well as their experiences in the orphanages or professions as a journalist or a doctor, together with their Chinese identity, provide what Wendy S. Hesford and Wendy Kozol label as their “authenticity” and “truth” in Western representations of human rights abuses in third-world countries.24 Hesford and Kozol observe that since the 1980s, women’s human rights discourse emerged powerfully with the United States signified as liberator, and that human rights activists have resorted to “testimonies and other truth-telling discourses” as evidence of human rights abuses.25 The Chinese witnesses thus become important representatives of “authenticity” and “truth” to be used in the media war against China. Stuart Hall argues that cultural identity is a “production” always constituted within representation.26 Thus it might be safe to say that the presence of the Chinese witnesses is part of the “production” within the Western representations of China, Chinese women and female orphans in order to create “authenticity” and “truth” that are necessary to convince Western viewers and construct the image of China as a living hell for women and female children.

25 Ibid., 4-8
The Chinese witnesses also join in what Ming Dong Gu calls Sinologism, or knowledge production about China by using the “Western-superiority complex”—“Western-centric ideology, epistemology, methodology and Western perspectives”—produced by Westerners and joined by some Chinese and other non-Western people. Gu explains how some Chinese look at their own culture and government with the “Western-priority complex”:

Sinologism is characterized by two opposite tendencies, one tends to idealize, patronize, and exaggerate the value of things Chinese, while the other tends to criticize, dismiss, and devalue things Chinese in terms of a teleological model derived from studies of Western materials. Although the two tendencies come from opposite directions, they share one common ground: Western standards must be upheld as the yardstick by which Chinese materials are to be evaluated.\(^\text{27}\)

Although Gu claims that his theory applies more to academia or intellectuals, whom he considers as the major force of producing knowledge about China, the “Western-superiority complex” has been deeply ingrained in ordinary Chinese people’s mind as a result of semi-colonization by Western powers in the past century. Chinese people thus play an active role in the ideological production against China, and Western intervention is seen as the only solution to the problem of orphans.

The orphanage doctor Zhang Shuyun fully exemplifies this group of Chinese people. She fled from China and applied for political asylum from the U.S. government. She turned to human rights organizations, as she wanted “all the people in the world who believe justice prevails to know about this (neglect and abuse in the Shanghai Orphanage).” She welcomed foreign adoption and donation, but felt that it only “saved” a small number of children from mistreatment and starvation to death, and that “this alone cannot change the Communist Party’s policies towards orphanages,” so she hoped to call the attention of the whole world to “stop the Chinese government from persecuting the orphans.”\(^\text{28}\) It is worth noting that by saying “the whole world” she is actually referring to the West. In her logic, the problems in the Chinese orphanages could not be solved by Chinese, and only

\(^{27}\) Gu, *Sinologism*, 6-7.
\(^{28}\) “I Have the Need to Try and Save these Orphans,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 6, 1996.
Westerners, through adoption and political intervention, could “save” the neglected and abused orphans. Therefore, by joining in the Human Rights Watch/Asia in its condemnation against China as a way to “save” the orphans, she also partook in producing the image of China as a living hell for the orphans.

While *Return to the Dying Room* was first aired in Britain on January 9, 1996, Human Rights Watch/Asia launched its attack simultaneously in the United States, which soon spread to the news media. On January 6, it started with an article “U.S. Rights Group Asserts China Lets Thousands of Orphans Die” in the *New York Times*, followed by its own publication *Death by Default* the next day. Soon mainstream newspapers responded. *Los Angeles Times* echoed with an article, in which the headline “China’s ‘Model’ Orphanage Serves as Warehouse for Death” is illustrated with a cartoon: a black skeleton is holding a white naked female Chinese infant. His left arm is holding the infant’s head, but his right hand squeezes the child’s two legs, making them disproportionately thin and small compared to the head. While the infant looks miserable and painful under compression, the skeleton displays a sinister smile on his skullled face, mouth wide open and big teeth shown. The skeleton himself is even scarier. Sitting on a typical Chinese stool, his upper body is much larger than his lower limbs. One side of his body exposes his limb bones, but the other side shows a zipper from shoulder to waist, implying that he is covered with a black overcoat associated with death. Compared with his black body, his head is white and again disproportionately large, which makes him monster-like. Under the cartoon the article details “summary solution” as selecting children for death by neglecting them in dying rooms where malnutrition and dehydration would claim them but the orphanage staff could do away with the responsibilities for the deaths. The article then comments that Human Rights Watch/Asia “offers a horrifying look behind China’s wall of official propaganda into an important part of its ‘Socialist’ welfare system” which was actually “gruesome,” “grizzly” and “sinister.” The combination of the cartoon and the text makes a typical example of Western media representations of female orphans neglected to death in the state-run orphanages: if the whole skeleton represents the

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Socialist welfare system, his black body on which the female orphan is held can be a metaphor of the dying room where the orphan is left to die. The title uses the word “model” with multiple meanings, too. First, it refers to the Shanghai Orphanage, implying other orphanages in the country would follow or situations would be worse, since Shanghai is the richest city in China. Second, the institutionalized neglect of orphans is the model of Socialist welfare system in China, indicating that under the Communist leadership and the socialist economic and welfare system what happened in the Shanghai Orphanage is normal and typical. In this sense, the article and the cartoon are not only critiquing the phenomenon of orphan neglect itself, but also against the Chinese political and welfare systems.

Another article “On My Mind: Death for Chinese Children” in the New York Times on January 9, 1996, went further. It attacks the “atrocities,” “brutality” of Chinese Communist regime with the crime of destroying freedom, murdering orphans, oppressing religion and enslaving laborers. But the author A. M. Rosenthal seems more irritated at the appeasement of the Clinton Administration for the “theoretical trade profit” from Chinese business. “Do we still have the right to mourn (for Chinese orphans)?” he asks sarcastically. He asserts that U.S. people and leadership had known for decades that every Chinese Communist regime has used forced abortion and starvation to control its population, slave laborers to maintain its economic system, as well as torture and prison to maintain its political power, but in order to get a little profit for American business, the U.S. Government and Western society have sold their rights to mourn the orphans. In the Sino-U.S. trade, Rosenthal continues, the profits mostly went to China, which used its increased economic powers for increased political powers, so the Clinton Administration had “betrayed not only orphans and women forced to abort but the principles and safety of our democratic society.”

Here Rosenthal not only attributes the death of Chinese orphans to the population control policy of the Chinese Communist government, but associates it with the Sino-U.S. business, and imagines that doing business with such “sinister,” “atrocious”

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Communist regime, the Clinton Administration was endangering the U.S. safety and democratic principles. This article offers an example to demonstrate that in the post-Cold War decade there was still a strong anti-Communist tone in U.S. media representations of Chinese orphans. It should be noted that Rosenthal was an editor, reporter and columnist of the New York Times since 1943, had written numerous articles about Cold War issues, and had visited quite a few former Communist countries, including a Soviet GULAG camp in 1988. Hence it is natural for this article to bear such a strong tone of the Cold War anti-Communist ideology. And his irritation towards the Clinton administration’s trading democracy for profit further reveals his Cold War thinking pattern of Capitalism opposing Communism, as in his logic, what the United States should do was to sanction the Communist country for the sake of Chinese orphans rather than doing business with it.

Counter-narratives from China and Escalated Western Media Attack

In the media war and ideological confrontations between China and the West around Chinese orphans and allegedly China’s human rights violations, China issued a challenging voice. Right after each wave of Western media attack in the name of Chinese women and orphans, the Chinese government responded swiftly to provide counter-narratives and even counterattacks, such as release of the rebuttal film A Patchwork of Lies, inviting Western correspondents to visit the targeted orphanage and holding press conference, and even criticizing the human rights issues in the U.S. Yet each time, China’s response met heavier coverage and escalated attack from the Western media. Under the powerful, dominant Western hegemonic criticism and condemnation, the alternative voice and challenge made by China largely submerged. I demonstrate in this part how China made its own voice heard to the West and how powerful the Western hegemonic critical voices were.

Two months after The Dying Rooms was aired, China released a rebuttal documentary The Dying Rooms: A Patchwork of Lies to prove that The Dying Rooms is indeed a “patchwork of lies” and that the so-called “dying rooms” did not and were not allowed to exist in China. Unlike The Dying Rooms in which all the state-run

orphanages look the same—old, dark and grim, *A Patchwork of Lies* presents the same orphanages with far brighter color, spatial courtyards and rooms, as well as some taller buildings. While in *The Dying Rooms* almost all children in the orphanages are either left alone or filmed behind iron bars that resemble incarceration, *A Patchwork of Lies* displays a long sequence of children living happily and freely together under tender care from caregivers. In a bright classroom, a young woman teacher is teaching a room of toddlers to sing. The toddlers, both boys and girls, wear the same new clothes and clapping hands together. A crippled little girl is practicing with a walking aid under the protection of a caregiver. A healthy girl in white dress is dancing while circled by a group of same-age boys. Another two scenes show that almost each orphan has a caregiver to look after him or her, feeding milk and dressing him or her. Clearly the Chinese film intends to give viewers an opposite picture to counter the accusations of *The Dying Rooms* by demonstrating that all their orphans are given enough care and attention, and these orphanages are well-equipped and well-staffed, though the voiceover acknowledges that some orphanages are still “under standard” due to financial difficulty. The film is also gender-conscious not only in that both boys and girls appear on screens but also in demonstrating how girls are cherished and loved. The most salient example is a well-dressed young girl held by a happy old woman and encircled by a number of adults.

*A Patchwork of Lies* then focuses its attention on challenging *The Dying Rooms* by interviewing orphanage staff members, who recall how *The Dying Rooms* was made in the orphanages and provide accounts and witnesses to dispute it. One of the places in dispute is the “dying building” that Blewett portrays in her film. In *A Patchwork of Lies*, staff members tell a different story. They recall that the British filmmakers arrived and separated in the late afternoon, one talking to a staff member and asking her to look for the director, and the other walking around and filming with a hidden camera, as it later proved. The staff doubts that whether the filmmakers, with the intention of looking for abuses and without effective communication with the staff, could be free from their own prejudice while shooting the film. The big room in which the Western filmmakers filmed the empty cribs and concluded as part of the
“dying building” was actually a storeroom in which old empty beds and packages were stored, according to the staff. The scene of a white-coat staff closing the door, interpreted by *The Dying Rooms* as closing a dying room since “eighty or so babies ended up here,” is explained in *A Patchwork of Lies* as simply closing the door to get off work that day.

The biggest controversy is over Mei Ming, the iconic image of deliberate neglect in the state-run orphanages. *The Dying Rooms* introduces that Mei Ming is left inside a room to die and that even the staff refuse to enter the room. However, *A Patchwork of Lies* again gives a totally different account. The very staff member appears in the Chinese film, saying that she was actually stopped from entering the room by the two foreigners. She also accuses Blewett of unclothing and exposing the child in the open and cold air for fifteen or twenty minutes. The staff member says she protested and tried to stop Blewett, who did not listen to her. The staff member was even angrier that the two British filmmakers simply left after the shooting “with the child still undressed and uncovered.” The dispute between the two films over Mei Ming reveals that both the British filmmakers and the orphanage staff member accuse each other of treating the child with neglect, and construct their own image as being concerned about the child. While the miserable conditions of the child, as seen in *The Dying Rooms*, refutes the orphanage staff member’s suggestion that the child was not neglected, the British filmmakers’ action of stripping off the child’s clothes only to film the emaciated body and their forgetting to dress and cover the child after filming indicates that they might not be as concerned about the child as they claim to be, and that to them Mei Ming is more a piece of evidence to support their charge than a neglected orphan.

Further controversy between the two films is about Mei Ming’s sex. *The Dying Room* claims Mei Ming is a girl and makes him/her a representative figure for Chinese female orphans abused, but the child’s genital is always concealed and viewers can hardly tell the sex of the child. However, according to different people interviewed in *A Patchwork of Lies*, including the police officer who found him/her, the doctor who treated him/her and the staff member who cared for him/her, Mei
Ming is actually a boy. It is clear that both Chinese and Western media focus on Chinese orphans’ sex in their confrontation. While it is difficult to prove China’s claim that Mei Ming is a boy since no more evidence is available and Mei Ming died four days after he/she was filmed by *The Dying Room*, the British filmmakers’ opposite assertion is also questionable as the child’s genital is always concealed, which goes against the filmmakers’ earlier claim of checking the sex of each orphan they filmed. Representing Mei Ming as a girl matches the overall imagination of the Western media that constructed China as a living hell for women, female orphans and female children as a whole. From the China side, by disputing such assertion the Chinese film makes a strong claim that *The Dying Rooms* is really a patchwork of lies.

*A Patchwork of Lies* is also quick to present dissenting voices from Western adoptive parents and adoption organizations. Mats Akelarsson from a Swedish adoption organization is interviewed by a telephone, saying that among more than 130 families who have been to China and adopted children through their organization, many have reacted and thought “it was an unfair picture that has given [to]……China.” Britt-Mare Nygren, chief-executive of Sweden-based Family Association for Intercountry Adoption, appears on the screen and explicates how a biased film could be made: “If you have good things over there and you don’t look at it. You just record the bad things. It is easy to do with a camera. [As for] the English movie, I can go to a lot of countries and take the same pictures.”

However, China’s efforts in this documentary did not stop the critical Western voices. Rather, it stimulated a bigger wave of reactions from the Western media. The second day after the Human Rights Watch published its report *Death by Default*, China responded by denying the accusations and inviting twenty journalists to visit the targeted orphanage, but the U.S. newspapers were not convinced. *Washington Post* commented the next day that the tour “left more questions unanswered and appeared to confirm some aspects of the Human Rights Watch reports.”

paragraph that he “represented an institutionalized system found in China’s state orphanages that has resulted in thousands of unnecessary deaths.” To demonstrate Jian Xun’s representativeness of the institutionalized system of neglect in the orphanage, the editor inserts a large picture, at the center of the article, of the boy lying lifeless on the bed with his emaciated arms and legs tied to the metal frame of the bed.\textsuperscript{33} The journalist tour is mentioned later, but is apparently overshadowed and reputed by the sensational report of the boy. Both articles also mention how the conditions “appeared” good: the classrooms and wards were clean, bright and warm, supplied with toys and other items, and children were quick-responding. Yet the U.S. media was not swayed. “China suffers a credibility gap,” \textit{Los Angeles Times} followed up the next day.\textsuperscript{34}

China was reported to be not only untrustworthy but also retaliatory to its own people. On January 18, \textit{Washington Post} reported, with a big headline “Orphanage Doctor Says Kin Arrested,” that the orphanage doctor Zhang Shuyun’s brother was arrested in Shanghai, and was charged by the Chinese officials with “trying to subvert the government.” “The charge carries a minimum sentence of 10 years in prison and can result in the death penalty,” the doctor tells readers.\textsuperscript{35} The Human Rights Watch/Asia adds that Zhang’s brother was himself an official in Shanghai Municipal government and a Communist Party member. Therefore, the Communist China is depicted in this article as not only revenging the kin of Zhang, the truth revealer in the logic of the American media, but also retaliating against its own Communist kin.

Before the Sino-West media war died down, the United Nations Human Rights Commission that was to be held in Geneva in April, 1996, infused new fuel to the war over Chinese orphans. Right before the UN Human Rights Commission was reported to be about to “consider a resolution criticizing China,” the U.S. media found in early April that China not only reaffirmed its own position but started a counterattack against the U.S. human rights practices. According to a \textit{Los Angeles Times} article on April 4, 1996, China released a report “White Paper on the Situations of Children in China” the day before, admitting “much room to be improved” in rural education and


\textsuperscript{34} “Inhuman Neglect in China’s Orphanages,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, January 10, 1996.

care of the disabled, but again strongly denied the allegations of Human Rights Watch/Asia that thousands of Chinese orphans had died of China’s policy of systematic neglect. While the Human Rights Watch report experienced wide criticism and questioning from adoptive parents and agencies in both the United States and Europe, the White Paper report was seen as being “one part of the government’s effort to put the most positive light possible on China’s human rights situations at Geneva conference.”

On the same day, China showed another part of its effort by waging the same human rights discourse against the United States. China Central Television reported, by citing an academic report, that more than one million children in the United States were neglected. There was also wide media coverage in China about other human rights problems in the United States, including sexual abuse and AIDS. On April 20, Los Angeles Times reported that China had launched a wider media campaign focusing on the videotaped beating of Mexican illegal immigrants by Riverside County police officers in California. The news was repeated in televisions stations and leading Chinese newspapers. Chinese commentators cited the beating as an example of U.S. hypocrisy in that it attacked China’s human rights practices while its own law enforcement agents were engaged in “violence against unarmed civilians.” An editorial in People’s Daily commented that the United States had always labeled itself as an exemplar of human rights and censured developing countries for their human rights conditions, “but this time they outdid themselves.”

More criticism of U.S. police violence was covered in Chinese media. A law professor Liu Wenzhong was shown to comment on the Riverside beatings as a case of “barbaric racial violence and a serious infringement of Mexican citizens’ rights.” He also reminded readers of the 1992 Los Angeles Riots, and of the widespread instances of white police brutality toward black, Hispanic, Asian Americans and American Indians, proving that the U.S. was a country where racism thrived. The news attack from China also spread to English readers. In the English-version China

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37 Ibid.
Daily, there was a cartoon in which a fat white policeman was holding a bloody nightstick, and shouting through a paper-rolled horn “Human Rights Report!”

The talk show program in British Channel 4, *The Dying Rooms Debate*, functions as the miniature of the overall Sino-West media and ideological war over Chinese orphans. In the show, a Chinese woman made a loud and clear countering voice in the debate but her voice was soon submerged in the sea of Western criticism. The program was held on the same day right after the airing of *Return to the Dying Rooms*. Debaters included filmmaker Brian Woods, *Times* Magazine editor (East Asia) Jonathan Mirsky, director of Information and External Relations of United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Stirling Scruggs, Elizabeth Croll, professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies in Britain, Philip Bake, a lecturer of law and Campaigner for human rights in China, and one Chinese speaker Lulu Langtree, a certified woman doctor who worked in Beijing before immigrating to Britain. In the debate, Philip Bake urges China to give “positive responses” such as publicizing its internal information about the orphanages. “We look to you (China) to do something positive,” he repeats loudly. By doing so, he assures, China would be praised instead of being criticized by the West. Hearing this, Lulu Langtree cries out immediately “Why do the Chinese always have to listen to the West?”

Langtree also raises a point totally opposite to the narrative of coercion held by the human rights officials and the Western media. She asserts the family-planning policy has actually brought numerous benefits upon Chinese women as they do not have to have five or six children as their mothers did. They thus have time for social activities, production, more training opportunities and better education. Her viewpoint is supported by Elizabeth Croll, who claims that the policy also benefits girls with more attention from parents, higher living standards and better health and education conditions. Langtree continues to challenge the Western male debaters, “Do we think women in the UK or the US have choice even without any ‘one-child policy’?” But soon her questioning is evaded by the male Western debaters who insist that they are talking about China’s problems specifically, and the criticism continues.

39 “China Blasts U.S. Human Rights Record.”

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The debate reveals several points conveyed by the Western media in the bigger Sino-West ideological confrontations over Chinese orphans. First, China should obey what the West tells it and respond “positively” in order to earn “praise” and avoid “criticism” from the West. China has given responses in various forms, as discussed above, but the West was not satisfied because the responses China gave were not as “positive” as required by the human rights officials. Second, China did make an alternative, challenging voice that could be heard in the West, but such challenging voice, represented by Lulu Langtree here, is soon inundated in the bigger waves of Western criticism. Langtree as a Chinese woman is disempowered in the debate held by the Western media in which the majority of the debaters are male Westerners condemning China in the name of Chinese women and female orphans. Similarly, in the Sino-West media war over Chinese orphans launched by the West, China was clearly in a disadvantaged position as its far stronger opponents were wielding what Ming Dong Gu calls the Western Standards of what is good for women and female children as the yardstick by which Chinese counterparts were to be evaluated.40 Langtree’s identity as a former Chinese woman doctor enables her to know more about the real Chinese situations of women and female children than any Westerners in the debate and the media war. However, these situations did not conform to the Western standards, and was, therefore, unable to stop the West from criticizing and producing knowledge about China by using the Western-centric ideologies and perspectives. But still, China did take advantage of the platforms—the debate and the Western media—to make a challenging voice.

**Dissenting Voices from the West**

In the media war about Chinese orphans, there were also dissenting voices from the West to challenge the condemnations made by the British films and Human Rights Watch/Asia, and/or to express their sympathy and support to China. These voices

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40 Gu’s theory of Sinologism treats the whole package of Western standards as the West-superiority complex, but in this thesis, the Western standards refer to the Christianity-based standards for women, such as forbidding abortion and encouraging conception and reproduction. The particularities of non-Western countries, such as China, are thus not taken into consideration when Chinese women and female children are victimized in the Western media. For instance, issues like the feudal remnants of son preference and the Chinese national policy to curtail the population and to rid poverty, do not conform to the Western standards. See Gu, *Sinologism*, 6-7.
were made up of different sources, such as adoptive parents, adoption agencies, and television reviewers. They refused to take the condemnations against the Chinese government for granted and held sympathetic, supportive attitudes toward it, in which they both inherited and unsettled the wartime and Cold War narrative of rescue and obligation. While some still saw Chinese female children left to death or homeless, and that only through transnational adoption these children could be “saved,” others, especially the perspective adoptive parents, were frightened that such condemnation of China would irritate the country and close the door of adoption for them. So to many adoptive parents, adoption from China is not an act of rescue, but of fulfilling their desires for making families and becoming parents by adopting Chinese orphans.

Two *New York Times* television review articles express their doubts after watching *The Dying Rooms*. On January 24, 1996, a reviewer Walter Goodman comments that it was possible to be touched by the pictures of the sickly children in the film, but the same possible to “withhold a judgment” that the Chinese authorities neglected orphans to die as a national policy. “That is not an expression of faith in the beneficence of China’s rulers, just an acknowledgement of a want of solid information,” he questions. Goodman also points out that the film had its “weakness” as the filmmakers drew too much attention to “its own good intention in journeying thousands of miles in search of the worst orphanages the country could offer.”

His questioning is echoed by another reviewer, Patrick E. Tylor, who accounts that finding dying rooms was not easy for the filmmakers: “In the first orphanage they visited,……they found no evidence of such dying children. After much further travel, the crew had to admit that the dying rooms were ‘more elusive than we had had expected’ but that ‘we knew they were out there.’”

The reviewers notice that the British filmmakers had very deliberate intention of looking for abuses and neglect in the Chinese orphanages, and that accusing China of exterminating orphans as a national policy was not well-grounded, yet they are also quick to claim their neutral position in the media war by stating that they did not hold faith in the benevolence of

“Chinese rulers.” In other words, they do not claim that the film’s allegation of the Chinese government’s deliberate neglect of orphans as false, but they need more evidence and information to prove such allegation.

However, another group, American adoptive parents, was eager to express their support for China. They complicated the whole issue by flooding both Washington and Beijing with letters, generating a backlash against the Human Rights Watch. The Human Rights Watch publication was reported to have “hit like a bomb” in the community of adoptive parents and prospective parents of children from China. Some parents criticized that the report was “limited in scope and possibly outdated.” When the report came out, a waiting parent, Barbara Lanstaff’s heart “fell,” and another prospective parent Smith was “panicked.” They were worried that Beijing would take punitive action, for instance, ending international adoption. Soon, the adoptive parents’ fear of delay, coupled with their passion to adopt Chinese orphans, launched “a writing crusade” by faxing letters of support to the Chinese government. There were so many faxes that Chinese officials requested the writers to stop, saying that the outpouring was clogging the fax machines.43 The White House was also flooded with letters from the parents to defend the Chinese government and oppose U.S. support for human rights resolution against China at the forthcoming UN Human Rights Commission meeting in Geneva. Adoptive parents holding their Chinese babies were also reported to be giving press conference all over the country.44

The Western adoptive parents’ supportive attitude toward the Chinese government is worth noting. Their support for China was largely out of their fear that China would be angered and suspend transnational adoption. Several reasons may account for such fear among perspective adoptive parents. For one thing, current research shows that many people in the West turned to transnational adoption when infertility and difficulty of domestic adoption precluded their likelihood to be parents. Crystal J. Gates, for instance, finds that since the 1990s the developed countries saw increased infertility among families. At the same time, the number of children

available for domestic adoption decreased due to a variety of reasons such as more single women choosing to keep their out-of-wedlock children and the prevalence of birth control usage and abortion.\textsuperscript{45} Those who chose to adopt from China had to meet highly restrictive requirements, according to the 1993 Procedures to Adoption Law, of age, marital status, financial conditions, occupations, and police records. Even if they met all the requirements, they had to accept strict investigation to verify their qualifications, which means it might cost them more than one or two years to go to China and pick up their adoptee children, besides money they paid in the process of adoption. Second, China’s adoption policy experienced change or suspension, which further increased fear among waiting adoptive parents. For instance, in 1993, only one year after the Chinese Adoption Law opened the door for transnational adoption, China suspended the practice for ten months as a result of increasing cases of illegal adoption and smuggling children out of the country.\textsuperscript{46} Therefore, the attacks launched by the Western media and Human Rights Watch/Asia against the Chinese government made the waiting adoptive parents upset, which indicates that adopting Chinese orphans in the 1990s became more a necessity of family making for many Americans than a humanistic obligation and action of rescue represented in the U.S. media. In this sense, these responding adoptive parents disputed the narrative of rescue and obligation that was generated in wartime and had continued all through the Cold War era.

Adoption agencies also responded actively, and the media war spread to confrontations between agencies and Human Rights Watch/Asia. The adoption agencies, after several years of close contact with Chinese orphanages and government officials, became another strong opposing force against the British films and the Human Rights Watch/Asia condemnations. Janice Neilson, executive director of World Association for Children and Parents, a Seattle-based adoption agency that helped arrange adoption from China, comments that he has found “the opposite of


\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
what is described in the report,” and that to blame another country is hypocritical. Faced with such criticism and other sharp remarks, the Human Rights Watch organization broke its silence. It labeled these criticisms “naïve.” On February 21, Holly Burkhalter, an adoptive mother and Washington director of Human Rights Watch, wrote an article in *Washington Post*, warning adoption agencies and parents that their support of Beijing had reduced the public pressure on the Chinese to “make needed reforms in their welfare institutions for those who will never be adopted—the sick, the unattractive and the handicapped.” She criticizes the “collaboration” between the Chinese government and the adoption agencies in the United States to produce the backlash against Human Right Watch, by saying that the former had contacted the latter to write positive letters to local newspapers. She also attacks waiting adoptive parents who wrote “an avalanche of mails” for fear that the negative publicity about the orphanages would cause a slowdown or cessation of adoption in China.

Burkhalter goes on to urge the whole United States to act on behalf of Chinese orphans. President Clinton and the United States, she suggests, should take the lead at the U.N. Human Rights Commission to condemn China’s neglect of its orphans. She appeals to American churches, synagogues and book groups or offices to “organize a letter-writing campaign” on behalf of Chinese victims. She further suggests that adoption agencies press for full access to China children in state-run orphanages. Burkhalter’s article indicates that she takes the United States as the liberator of women and female orphans in China. In her logic, in order to fulfill the task of liberator, the whole United States, the government and people, different organizations and offices, should take collective actions to condemn China, and “save” Chinese orphans by forcing China to loosen its adoption policy and give full access of its institutionalized children to Western adoptive parents. Burkhalter is not the only human right official who demands China to let go more orphans for adoption. Another Human Rights Campaigner, Philip Bake, in the talk show *The Dying Rooms Debate* discussed above, also purportedly taught China how to get praise rather than criticism

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from the West: loosening foreign adoption policy by allowing Westerners to adopt two children at the same time and allowing those under thirty-five to adopt. Such a stance reinforces the narrative of rescue and obligation held by the Western media, revealing the Western logic that since China was not able to take care of its orphans, it should open its door wide open and make all orphans available to Westerners.

Burkhalter’s criticism to adoption agencies and their collaboration with the Chinese government met direct challenge from agencies. Soon Filis M. Casey, an executive of an adoption agency in Wellesley, Massachusetts wrote a letter to Washington Post expressing his disagreement over “many of the points” made by Burkhalter. Based on his visits to many orphanages in China he comments that the Human Rights Watch/Asia report did not reflect those involved in Chinese adoption in recent years, and that the report’s “implication that there is an official policy allowing children to die through inattention is false.” He also proves conditions had been “vastly improved” in the orphanages where the staff were committed to offering a “safe, healthy and loving environment,” and that Chinese government also had “demonstrated strong commitment” to the care and protection of its orphans. At the end of the article, he suggests that encouraging adoption efforts to “provide homes for the homeless orphans” was more important than criticizing “what may have occurred in the not-so-recent past.”

49 Casey tries to prove in the letter that the support from adoption agencies to the Chinese government was not out of the alleged collaboration between them and the Chinese government but because of the fact that conditions in orphanages have greatly improved with both the efforts and commitment of the government and orphanage staff. However, his words also reveal his idea that more efforts from Americans should be put to transnational adoption to provide homes for the homeless orphans in China. His response echoes the dominant narrative of rescue and obligation that Dorow considers as a complementary justification of adoption from China, which belies the truth that what the adoption agencies were concerned about was making profits out of the orphans rather than orphans themselves.


50 Dorow, Transnational Adoption, 175.
Conclusion:

The wide-range media war against China over Chinese orphans in the post-Cold War decade demonstrated different characteristics from its Cold-War version. Not only mass media on both sides participated, but ordinary people such as American adoptive parents and adoption agents were involved in the media war against or for China. The anti-Communist ideologies against China over Chinese orphans, generated in the wartime and Cold War media representations, continued but the Western media employed different weapons: narrative of suburban, middle-class nuclear family during the Cold War, and accusations of China’s family-planning policy and governmental neglect in the post-Cold War decade. One thing in common was the same narrative of obligation and rescue originated from WWII. Yet in the Cold-War era, both boy and girl orphans were “rescued” from Hong Kong; in the post-Cold War decade, only girls were “lucky” enough to be “rescued” as a result of the gendered media coverage that gave prospective adoptive parents an impression that only girls in China were suffering.

The most prominent feature of the post-Cold War media war over Chinese orphans is the emergence of multiple voices, from China as well as Western adoptive parents and adoption agencies. China resisted by not only rejecting the Western accusations but also pointing out the human rights problems in the U.S. Put in a disadvantaged position, China managed to take advantage of the Western media as a stage and have its challenging voice heard by the West. Yet the Western hegemonic criticism was too strong and powerful, and with Western standards of what was good for women and children wielded as a yardstick to evaluate Chinese situations, China’s response to the condemnations was never positive enough to quiet the critical voices from the West.

The multiple voices from adoptive parents and adoption agencies complicated the media war by showing sympathy and support to China. However, several things were emphasized in these alternative voices. First, Chinese orphan girls needed a home and more efforts should be made by the Western adoptive parents and adoption agencies to provide them with homes. Therefore, the narrative of obligation and
rescue that both Laura Briggs and Christina Klein discussed in their analysis on Cold-War adoption from Asia, as explicated in Chapter One, continued among adoptive parents, adoption agencies and common readers in the 1990s. Second, condemnation against China for neglecting and starving its orphans as a governmental policy would do more harm than good as China might respond by closing its door of adoption to Western parents. The adoptive parents who supported China, therefore, converge with those who condemned China to demand more Chinese female orphans to be accessible to Western parents. In this sense, the dissenting voices also echoed the narrative of rescue and obligation, revealing the power relations between China and the West—China as a poor country unable to take care of its orphans ought to give Western adoptive parents full access to the orphans. In the 1995-1996 media war against China over institutionalized orphans, there were critical voices and supportive voices, but it seemed, seen through the Western media, that the only way out for China was to allow more orphans available for Westerners.
Chapter Three
Mommy Near, Mommy Far: Imagining Chinese Birth Mothers

“What does my daughter’s birth mother look like?” “What would she do if she were here?” “What am I going to tell my daughter about her birth mother?” These are the questions pondered by almost every adoptive mother. Compared with domestic adoption and transnational adoption from other countries in which birth parents might appear suddenly and claim their children, Chinese birth parents usually abandon their children secretly and seldom appear ever since, as abandonment is illegal. However, they never disappear in the mind of adoptive mothers. Even if some adoptive parents avoid talking or thinking about the unknown Chinese birth parents, they might encounter difficult moments when their adopted children ask questions about their birth parents as they grow older.

In this chapter I explore how American adoptive mothers, most of whom are white, imagine China and Chinese birth mothers through a classed, gendered and raced lens. I conduct a close reading of, first, children’s books written for Chinese adoptees, including Rose Lewis’s I Love Your Like Crazy Cakes (2000), Frances M. Koh’s A China Adoption Story: Mommy, Why Do We Look Different? (2000), Carol Antoinette Peacock’s Mommy Far, Mommy Near: An Adoption Story (2000), and Nancy D’Antonio’s Our Baby from China: An Adoption Story (1997), and then, journalist Karin Evans’s 2000 national best settler, adoption memoir The Lost Daughters of China. These books, written by white women authors, all of whom are adoptive mothers themselves, not only contain imaginations about China and Chinese birth mothers, but narrate adoption from different perspectives. Most of the children’s books selected, for instance, minimize the presence of birth mothers but emphasize adoptive mothers as loving caregivers and permanent home providers. On the contrary, Evans’s adoption memoir pays exclusive attention to the China side, situating the birth mothers in a patriarchal society that persists in contemporary China and resists any changes. Altogether, these cultural works reinforce the dominant idea that the
abandoned babies in China need a secure, permanent home only the United States can provide.

One common theme shared by all these books is the construction of heteronormative, middle-class, white adoptive family with clear demarcation of mother and father’s role. Except for one book, *I Love You Like Crazy Cakes*, which features a single mother adopting her daughter in China, all other books state that both the adoptive father and mother went to China to complete the adoption process and bring the baby back to the U.S. However, they all emphasize the major nurturing role of the adoptive mother in the child’s life by illustrating how she embraces and takes care of the child and guides her on the way of learning about adoption, her birth mother and birth culture. The image of the white father, however, often appears in family albums or adoption administrative process, indicating his place in the heteronormative family pattern. Even the single mother in *I Love You Like Crazy Cakes* has a big heteronormative, extended family consisting of her parents as well as her siblings, their spouses and children, and the single mother’s maternal role is fully illustrated in the book.

Another common feature of the books is the first-world feminist narratives constructed in the adoptive mothers’ imagination of Chinese birth mothers. These books, especially Evans’s memoir, reveal how first world feminists concern about women and female children in China and represent them as forever victims who are regarded as not being able to represent themselves. These books imagine the birth mother in a desperate situation of facing the difficult moment of giving up her baby girl all by herself, while her husband, family and the whole society are represented as patriarchal oppressors. One characteristic of the first world feminist imagination of third world women is a refusal to recognize “the conditions that structure women’s lives in various locations.”¹ Evans’ memoir typifies such characteristic. For instance, due to her refusal to consider China’s situation that most Chinese people agree that the family-planning policy was the only solution to curtail the huge population and rid poverty in the 1980s and 1990s, Evans interprets people’s support for the policy as

evidence that patriarchy is deeply rooted in people’s mind and thus further perpetuates
the victimization of Chinese women and female children.

Through a textual and visual reading of these books, I argue that the white
adoptive mothers represent birth mothers as victim-heroines and adoption
collaborators and employ the narrative of “the right match” between the adoptive
parents and the child in need-based adoption from China. These tropes both reinforce
and dispute the narrative of coercion and narrative of rescue that are dominant in the
Western media. Furthermore, these books represent China as a perpetually dark,
feminized, patriarchal society that resists any changes happening in contemporary
China, and the United States as an affluent, free and humanitarian home-provider for
the abandoned Chinese children. A central theme of this chapter is to explore how the
images of China, of Chinese women and of the United States have been constructed in
these books.

Minimizing the Birth Mother

All the books studied here imagine Chinese birth mothers, but books written for
Chinese adoptees in the post-Cold War decade tend to use a softened tone and
minimal words in depicting the birth mothers’ predicament of giving up their
daughters. A key characteristic of children’s books is that the text is illustrated with
full pages of exquisite, eye-catching pictures, and usually the pictures occupy much
more of the visual space than the text. Children’s books also tend to use simple but
affectionate language with a joyful tone and a happy ending. The books discussed
here all address the issue of how adoption and the existence of a birth mother might
bother the children and undermine the relationship between the white mothers and
their adopted children, but they all end with a happy result in which the adoptive
mother and the daughter reclaim each other and their love deepens. Four children’s
books written by white American authors, Rose Lewis’s I Love You Like Crazy Cakes,
Frances M. Koh’s A China Adoption Story: Mommy, Why Do We Look Different?
Carol Antoinette Peacock’s Mommy Far, Mommy Near: An Adoption Story, and
Nancy DÁntonio’s Our Baby from China: An Adoption Story are illustrative examp
In these books, the white adoptive mothers function as emotional guides to their
young adopted children on their way of learning about their birth mothers, their lost past in China, and the reasons why they were adopted to the United States. In doing so, the mothers narrate their adoption by minimizing the birth mothers, omitting birth families, and underscoring their own white, middle-class maternal image. These books, therefore, construct the Western, white, middle-class, heteronormative nuclear family as the appropriate form of household and environment for the children, and as a signifier of U.S. affluence, freedom and democracy.

What is prominent is the common presence and absence shared by the four books. There are no depictions of home or family in China. Not only is there a lack of images of the adopted children with their birth family, there is also an absence of ordinary people’s family life in China, echoing the Cold-War U.S. media representation that in China families have been dismantled by Communists. On the contrary, all the books emphasize, both in words and pictures, how the American adoptive mothers cherish and love them, and how their other new family members, including relatives and friends, greet and welcome them. Each book also contains the image of a warm home with a spacious living room, or nicely decorated children’s bedroom filled with toys and a cozy bed in a typical U.S. modern suburb. Through the contrastive representation, these books continue the Cold-War narrative of white, middle-class family in which the image of the United States is constructed as the benevolent caregiver and permanent home-provider for the homeless children.

Except for Mommy Far, Mommy Near which pays much attention to the imagined birth mother, the birth mother in the other three books is either absent, or only briefly mentioned; but the image of a loving and caring adoptive mother is the common theme. Our Baby from China and I Love Your Like Crazy Cakes are both written in the first person in the adoptive mother’s voice. While the former has not mentioned the birth mother at all, the latter has only several sentences about her: “I held you tightly, kissed you softly, cried. The tears were for your Chinese mother, who could not keep you. I wanted her to know that we would always remember her. And I
hope somehow she knew you were safe and happy in the world.”

These loving words and others in the book show the white adoptive mother’s sympathy towards the Chinese birth mother and appreciation for the opportunity to love and care for the cherished baby. While such appreciation counters the narrative of rescue and obligation dominant in the U.S. media and commonly held view that the adoptee babies are lucky and should be grateful to the adoptive parents and the United States, it also portrays these white, middle-class women as kind-hearted and humanitarian.

Another book, *A China Adoption Story*, also briefly mentions the birth mother, with only one illustration of her image. The book depicts her as a young rural Chinese woman sitting alone on a chair, holding a baby and looking afar. While other pictures in the book are all bright and colorful, this picture uses grim, dark colors, suggesting her sadness of having to give up the baby. Under the picture, the adoptive mother tells her story:

Your mom in China was very young when she had you. And, for many reasons, she couldn’t take care of you. But she loved you very much and wanted you to have a loving family who would care for you. Your mom knew that the orphanages found families for many children like you. So she placed you at an orphanage, knowing they would care for you and find a family for you too.

This paragraph uses “for many reasons” to explain why the birth mother could not keep the child and provide her with a family. She is also imagined as deliberately putting her daughter in the orphanage with the purpose of finding a family for her. The adoptive mother thus convinces the daughter that she was not “abandoned” but “placed” in the orphanage so that her adoptive family could find her. While the adoptive mother emphasizes love and protection of the child from the birth mother, her presumption that the birth mother wanted the child to “have a loving family who would care for you” echoes the narrative of coercion dominant in the U.S. media—that the birth mother was not able to keep the child and thus was forced to give her up.

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While most of these books foreground the white, middle-class heteronormative families, they also make a contrastive indication that China not only does not have families, but also is a patriarchal and feminized society where women are left alone to face their difficult moments of giving up their female babies. Most of the books include both adoptive parents who go to China to pick up the adopted child. *A China Adoption Story* and *Our Baby from China* contain pictures of both adoptive parents meeting Chinese officials and applying for adoption certificate and passport. They also present several family albums including both parents and the child, or the newly formed nuclear family joined by the white grandparents, uncles, aunts and/or cousins, all white except the adopted child. Even the single-mother adoption story of *I Love You Like Crazy Cakes* mentions that the child is welcomed by her new grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. In contrast, in the adoptive mother’s imagination of the birth parents, while the birth mother is only succinctly mentioned, the birth father is completely absent in these books. None of these books makes a single mention of him, nor is there any illustration of him, as if he never existed at all. Any other family members in the birth family are totally forgotten, as well. Such absence suggests that the birth mother is considered to be left alone to face the desperate moment of relinquishing the child. Dorow asserts that the foregrounding of the (female) sex of the abandoned child engenders a “cultural explanation” for abandonment that “reinscribes a China that is backward, feminized and patriarchal.” The complete disappearance of the birth father or any male birth family members also reinforces the age-old Orientalist perception of a feminized and patriarchal China.

Besides an absence of family and birth parents, the books also situate China in an archaic social context. Two books start the adoption stories with “once” or “once upon a time” in the style of a fairy tale. *I Love Your Like Crazy Cakes* starts with “Once upon a time in China there was a baby girl who lived in a big room with lots of other babies.” The illustration is an orphanage room with many cribs, each shared by two babies, and three nannies are taking care of them. All the babies are girls and the

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5 Dorow, *Transnational Adoption*, 176.
text points out that “each was missing something—a mother.” Similarly, Our Baby from China starts with “Once there was a little girl named Xiangwei (SHAN-way). She lived in China with a group of girls and boys who didn’t have mothers or fathers to love them.” By using such a fairy-tale style, the books narrate adoption by imagining the adopted child in a fairyland. In this narrative China shrinks into an ancient, imaginary, ahistorical setting rather than the country related with the child’s birth culture and citizenship.

Put in this archaic setting, China is then represented as a rural, backward, old, faraway country with rich heritage culture and beautiful scenery but lacking in modernity. In Our Baby from China, the page presenting the modern New York city is juxtaposed with the next page about China—represented by misty mountains and waters of Guilin, a well-known scenic spot. The following pages display historic places in China: the Forbidden City, the Great Wall, the Lama Temple, and a color-fading three-story building, where the orphanage is located. A China Adoption Story pictures China as the oldest country in the world with “very, very amazing” culture and many millions of people. Then the illustrations show, again, the Great Wall and the Forbidden City. Rural Chinese people are also shown to match the ahistorical, backward China depicted in the books. An old scholar wears a long, traditional robe and writes Chinese calligraphy at an antique table. A country woman squats on the roadside and feeds a baby with chopsticks. Caretakers in the orphanages are painted wearing home-made cloth shoes and handmaid-like hairstyle typical in an old Chinese film. The books were published at the turn of the twenty-first century, yet through the books adoptive mothers transmit to their adoptee children a message that China is a static, quaint place with “both cultural beauty and cultural backwardness.”

Why is Chinese cultural heritage emphasized in these books? Toby Alice Volkman explains that due to the absence of the birth mother’s body, “the longing for

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6 Lewis, I Love You Like Crazy Cakes, 1.
8 Starting from 2001, Chinese adoptees could be granted American citizenship once they arrived in the United States, but prior to that, they still held a Chinese passport and a green card to stay legally in the country.
9 Dorow, Transnational Adoption, 176.
origins” is thus displaced onto “the body of the nation and its imagined culture.”

It is true that the birth parents usually disappear after the children’s abandonment and almost no clue could be found since it is illegal to abandon children in China. However, the emphasis on Chinese heritage culture accompanied by a downplaying of modern China and absence of almost anything related to the child’s birth family also reflects what Ming Dong Gu observes in his theory of Sinologism as the conflicting images of China in the Western knowledge about China. China in the Western perception, he argues, takes polarized forms: the benign one of admiration, appreciation, and idealization, and the malignant one of exoticization, denigration, and demonization. Over the centuries, according to Gu, the West’s view of China has always oscillated from one extreme to another, between the idealistic kingdom in which people were living in peace and harmony, and the living hell where rulers were Oriental despots and people were nothing but slaves, and such oscillation also extends to the present China. The oscillation may occur between different groups of people who idealize China and those who demonize China, and also between the perceptions held by the same group of people towards different aspects of Chinese culture and society. For instance, among Western people there is conflicting phenomenon that many of them admire Chinese cultural heritage and embrace Chinese children, but they also tend to envision the country as patriarchal and portray the Chinese government as despotic and totalitarian. “In China they don’t like girls, do they?” “What a lovely baby, it’s just too bad she’s a Communist.” These are the commonly heard responses from the American public.

In contrast to the general disappearance of birth mothers and total absence of birth fathers, all four books lavish much more attention on the adoptive mothers who are depicted as loving, caring and patient to the children. Neither of these books is longer than forty pages, but each contains at least six or seven pictures in which the adoptive mother is hugging, kissing, or embracing the adopted child. For instance, *Mommy Far, Mommy Near* depicts the adoptive mother reading stories for the child.

10 Volkman, *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*, 96-97.
12 Volkman, *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*, 89.
Elizabeth, playing games with her, taking a walk with her, hugging her and comforting her. In *I Love You Like Crazy Cakes*, one picture shows that the adoptive mother bends down to kiss the sleeping child’s little hand, and another shows the baby falling into sound sleep on her breast. The harmonious mother-daughter relationship is particularly demonstrated through the picture of the mother feeding the baby with a milk bottle. The mother is holding the baby who drinks milk quietly in her arms. She opens her mouth while looking at the baby attentively, as if saying sweet words to her. The light yellow room generates a warm, cozy atmosphere. In the middle of the room the adoptive mother, wearing a blue night-robe, is seated in a light green armchair. Her yellow fluffy slippers are stepping on a green rug, and around her feet scatter toys and dolls for the baby. On the left side of her armchair, a lamp is on, emitting warm, yellow light. In a word, the image of the mother holding the baby in her arm fits perfectly into the comfortable surroundings of the room, making a loving, homely picture of American middle-class family life.

While situating the mother-daughter relationship in the comfortable, middle-class homes, the books make these homes a strong signifier of the American affluence, modernity and humanitarianism. Except for *Our Baby from China* which is mainly about the adoption process and what the family experience in China, the other three books all take American suburban homes as their setting for the story after adoption. *A China Adoption Story* starts with the illustration of a four-year-old adoptee Laura Shu-Mei lying on the colorful rug in the spacious sitting room and looking at pictures in her family photo album. Her little cat is sitting quietly nearby, looking at the pictures, too. Not far, her white mother, wearing a pair of glasses, is sitting on a yellow sofa and writing, signifying this is a middle-class family with a good educational background. Then the rest of adoption story is told by Laura’s mother in the same room. In *I Love You Like Crazy Cakes*, the whole book is illustrated in warm, light bright colors except for one picture of the simple, white Chinese orphanage room. The young mother first appears wearing pajamas and sitting in her cozy home writing under a lamp emitting warm light, a cup of coffee on the orange table. After meeting her baby girl in China and returning to the United State:

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the child is immediately welcomed by friendly neighbors with colorful balloons and boxes of presents. Put in her own room decorated in reddish pink, the child is awaited by numerous toys of various kinds. In these illustrations, finely decorated rooms, welcoming neighbors, well-educated adoptive mothers and friendly accompanying pets combine to create an ideology that the United States is a rich, peaceful, humanitarian country which is able and willing to provide the homeless Chinese children a comfortable home.

More than contrasting the absent Chinese birth mothers and caring American adoptive mothers, the books also employ the narrative of “the right match” between the adopted child and the adoptive mother to assure adoptee readers that they are adopted into the right family. After describing that each girl in the Chinese orphanage “was missing something—a mother,” I Love You Like Crazy Cakes states in the adoptive mother’s voice that “far away across the ocean was a woman” who “was missing something, too—a baby.” After meeting the baby, the mother “was so happy that I cried the moment I took you in my arms, …you cried, too.” The illustration of this page shows the white mother holding the baby in front of her. They face each other and both have tears in their eyes, suggesting that a long-separated pair of mother and daughter finally reunites. By expressing that “I had been waiting for you my whole life” and “I knew we belong together,” she continues to show how she and the child are made for each other. A China Adoption Story tells a similar story: the adoptive parents wanted “a very special girl,” and one day the adoption agency called and said there was “a very special girl” waiting for a family. Looking at the picture of baby Laura, her mother assures Laura that she is “just right” for them. With the narrative of “the right match,” the books try to help the adoptee children build up a sense of belonging in the family on the one hand and naturalize the adoption on the other.

In the narrative of “the right match,” however, the image of the birth mother is totally erased from the child’s life, as if she never existed. Previous research finds

13 Lewis, I Love You Like Crazy Cakes, 1-6.
14 Koh, A China Adoption Story, 12.
similar narratives are used to guarantee the child’s legitimate and “smooth transfer from birth to adoptive mother.” For instance, some adoptive parents employ the metaphor of a “red thread,” which Dorow labels as “a supernatural explanation” between them and the child even before they are officially matched. A “red thread” is traditionally used in Chinese folk stories to romanticize the predestined relationship between a man and woman in love. Transplanting the same trope to adoption, the adoptive parents emphasize that the child is meant to be adopted by their family. To meet such ends, some adoptive parents treat the birth mothers only as a surrogate tool from whose wombs “their” babies are born. In an adoption documentary *Found in China*, an adoptee girl Kai calls her birth mother “tummy mommy,” as if the significance of her birth mother only lies in the womb. Similarly, journalist Karin Evans, in her memoir *The Lost Daughters of China*, quotes an adoption agent’s words that “We say that maybe these babies grew in the wrong stomachs, but now they have found the right parents” to claim that she and her adopted daughter are “the right match.” Some adoptive mothers even imagine their application and waiting time as “pregnancy.” For example, Evans claims that when she was twenty-two month “pregnant,” she finally received a phone from the adoption agency, notifying her to go to China to meet her future daughter. In this “pregnancy” trope, the trace of the birth mother is totally erased. Through these narratives, the adoptive mothers convince their adopted children that they are made for each other.

Going hand in hand with the narrative of “the right match” is another narrative that homeless children wait for childless parents, which both reflects and negates the narrative of rescue and obligation dominant in the U.S. media representations. As discussed earlier, this is exactly what the adoptive mother in *I Love You Like Crazy Cakes* tells her adopted child. Similarly, in *Our Baby from China* the adoptive mother tells her child how sad she and her husband were because they did not have children, and they went to China to adopt the child because they heard in China many children needed families. In *Mommy Far, Mommy Near* the adoptive mother tells Elizabeth

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15 Dorow, *Transnational Adoption*, 194.  
16 Evans, *The Lost Daughters of China*, 159.  
17 Ibid., 46
that she was too old to have a baby before adopting Elizabeth. In her ethnographic study on American adoptive parents, Dorow finds that “saving” Chinese children was usually not the first reason parents gave for adoption from China, but it served as a complementary justification. Some parents she interviews asserted that they adopted to “help a child in need,” or that children in China needed homes.\footnote{Dorow, Transnational Adoption, 50-54.} Emphasizing that a baby in China needed a family therefore echoes the narrative of rescue and obligation among adoptive parents. However, admitting that the adoption is based on need—a family needed a child—also refutes the same narrative as it emphasizes that the child is adopted more out of the necessity of family formation than the sense of mission to “rescue” him/her.

The books also touch on the issue of race in transnational adoption. Dorow observes that race and racial difference haunt adoption from China in different stages and different ways, and that a claim to the child’s cultural identity in relation to her imagined past and future is most often a strategy through which adoptive parents negotiate racial topographies.\footnote{Ibid., 206, 231.} Jay W. Rojewski and Jacy L. Rojewski assert that racial differences are inherent in transracial adoption from China, and that the ways in which adoptive parents deal with these differences are critical factors in determining a child’s long-term adjustment and sense of identity. They also criticize a phenomenon among some adoptive parents who are “color-blind and minimizing the emphasis on race and racial differences in the family,” since avoiding racial issues would perpetuate racism.\footnote{Rojewski and Rojewski, Intercountry Adoption from China, 118-119.} Current adoption literature also shows that even if parents never talk about the racial differences, adoptee children may have the awareness in their early age. The adoptee documentary Somewhere Between records Haley, one of the four teenage adoptee girls, starting to ask why she was not as white as her bigger sister when she was only four years old. Research also finds that 63 percent of interracial adoptees have told their parents about a racially-related incident. Most parents, however, chose to downplay such incident.\footnote{Ibid., 121.} Rojewski and Rojewski,
therefore, encourage parents of Chinese adoptees to identify racial issues in order to help them understand and cope with race-related problems they will inevitably encounter in their lives.22

In two books, *Mommy Far, Mommy Near* and *A China Adoption Story*, the adoptive mother discusses with the child the issue of race through their different appearances. To be sure, race as a social construct is more than a matter of appearance, but most current research on transnational adoption from China addresses the issue of race and racial difference between white parents and Chinese children in terms of appearances. “Is the kid yours?” is a common question faced by white adoptive parents from strangers in public who wonder about the external difference between the parents and children. Tessler, Gamache and Liu mention that the often insensitive questions and comments like this contain “racial innuendos.”23 In *A China Adoption Story*, four-year-old Laura suddenly realizes, when looking at the family album, that she has a different appearance from her parents. “Mommy, why do we look different?” she asks immediately. Her mother picks up the opportunity to tell Laura that she was born in China where people have the same color of hair and eyes as Laura, but soon she shifts Laura’s attention to the “old and amazing” Chinese culture.24 Like adoptive parents in Dorow’s research, *A China Adoption Story* treats the race issue within the family by strategically turning to the child’s birth culture, and suggesting that being born in a country with such a rich cultural heritage could be a source of pride for the child. In the “race-cultural matching,” however, the trace of birth parents and families, as well as the real and contemporary China, is further erased. The “race-cultural matching” also normalizes whiteness by suggesting that the child’s brilliant birth culture could balance her disadvantage of not being white like her adoptive parents. More important, this “race-cultural matching” downplays the racial discrimination the child might face in her future. Dorow finds in her research that for white families, especially those celebrating cultural plurality, “the fun fare of Chinese culture sometimes became a way to deflect the haunting of racial formations.” She also cites

a Chinese American’s observation in a meeting organized by FCC (Families with Children from Children) that some white parents were more interested in Chinese food and dance than inviting a speaker on the history of discrimination against Asians in America.\textsuperscript{25} In \textit{A China Adoption Story}, Laura’s mother takes the same strategy of evading the race issue through her praise of Laura’s birth culture.

Unlike \textit{A China Adoption Story} in which the child first raises the question of looking differently, in \textit{Mommy Far, Mommy Near}, it is Elizabeth’s adoptive mother who initiates the discussion of the issue. One day, the mother asks Elizabeth if their eyes are the same when they are playing a game named “look,” as accounted in the voice of Elizabeth:

“Look” means I lay down on my mommy’s tummy. Our faces touched. I waited until hear my mother’s heart thumping softly, like a drum.
“Look,” I said. “No songs, no kisses. Just look.”\textsuperscript{26}

By looking into each other’s eyes, they feel love from each other, which can offset any external differences between them. After Elizabeth realizes their difference, the mother guides her to find the similarities between them: their smiles are the same, and their love for each other is the same. Another time, after Elizabeth feels hurt by the fact that she has a birth mother who gave her up in China, she and her adoptive mother play the game again:

\begin{center}
\begin{quote}
We Look. No songs, no kisses. Just look. 
In a deep voice, I say, “My mother,”
Just as deep, my mommy says, “My daughter.”
And we hug, as tight as can be, me and my mother, who is very near. \textsuperscript{27}
\end{quote}
\end{center}

The game “look” functions differently in this scenario. By looking at each other closely Elizabeth and her adoptive mother face the problem of abandonment together. By looking into each other’s eyes and hugging each other as tight as they can, they also reclaim each other as mother and daughter. In short, unlike Laura’s mother in \textit{A China Adoption Story}, Elizabeth’s mother in this book employs the strategy of love:

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\textsuperscript{25} Dorow, \textit{Transnational Adoption}, 235, 240.
\textsuperscript{26} Carol Antoinette Peacock, \textit{Mommy Far, Mommy Near: An Adoption Story}, Illustrated by Shawn Cost Brownell (Morton Grove, Illinois: Albert Whitman & Company, 2000), 5
\textsuperscript{27} ibid., 29-30
\end{flushright}
love conquers racial problems, shortens the distance between them, and strengthens
the mother-daughter relationship that might be severed by the mention or even
presence of the birth mother. However, like the “race-cultural matching” strategy
taken by Laura’s mother, the strategy of love between the adoptive mother and the
adopted child bears the same tone of evading the race issue the child will have to face
in the white community in her future.

**Imagining the Birth Mother**

While most of the children’s books minimize the presence of the birth mother,
one of the four children’s books, *Mommy Far, Mommy Near*, and Karin Evans’s
adoption memoir *The Lost Daughters of China* give much attention to her through
imagination. At first glance these two books differ in both genre and audience.

*Mommy Far, Mommy Near* as part of the children’s literature, targets adoptee children,
but *The Lost Daughters of China* is a memoir written for adult readers. However, they
share several similarities. In both books, the birth mother is portrayed as “both victim
and heroine who did the best thing for their child in difficult circumstances.”28 Both
books also represent her as the adoption collaborator by imagining her being present
in the process of the adoption and expecting her child to be adopted by the American
parents. The narrative of victim-heroine and of adoption collaborator are the direct
extension of the narrative of coercion and of rescue and obligation in that they
foreground both Chinese women’s victimized status and their agreement that the U.S.
is the only benevolent rescuer of and permanent home provider for their abandoned
children.

*Mommy Far, Mommy Near* portrays the birth mother through the imagination of
the child Elizabeth, the older of the two Chinese adoptee girls in the white family.
When Elizabeth is told by her adoptive mother that she had another mother in China
who grew her in the tummy, she starts to imagine her birth mother. Among the sixteen
illustrations of her imagination in the book, her birth mother appears five times.
Through such imagination, the book portrays the birth mother as a victim-heroine and
adoption collaborator through gendered, classed and raced lens.

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As the adoptive mother explains to Elizabeth about her birth mother, the anonymous Chinese woman is first pictured as a saddened, poor woman who was forced to give up baby Elizabeth. Like the other children’s books, the adoptive mother assures Elizabeth that her birth mother loved her and wanted to keep her very much. But unlike *A China Adoption Story* which gives a vague explanation of “for many reasons,” Elizabeth is told that she was relinquished because China made a rule that one family could only have one child, and that there was another baby before her in the family. By saying so, the adoptive mother suggests that Elizabeth’s abandonment was caused by the Chinese government which left the birth mother with no other choice but to give up baby Elizabeth. She also depicts the birth mother as a loving and heroic figure who did “the best thing she could” by bundling baby Elizabeth up snugly and leaving her where she could be found and taken care of. Elizabeth then imagines her birth mother as a young, Chinese country woman who is gazing down at her bundled, sleeping baby. The woman’s face is full of sorrow and her eyes are swollen probably due to crying too much. Such illustration not only depicts the birth mother as a victim of China’s family-planning policy, but also represents her in the tragic, heroic moment when she had to abandon her beloved daughter in order to give her a better life.²⁹

As the adoptive mother proceeds to recall the process of adoption, the birth mother is illustrated as being present in the same room and witnessing how the adoptive parents happily embrace baby Elizabeth. “I was so happy. I cried and cried. Daddy and I held you very tight,” the adoptive mother describes to Elizabeth the scene of the adoption.³⁰ The illustration of this page demonstrates a smiling white couple holding a baby girl in a room, and behind them, a sorrowful Chinese country woman is standing at the door. While the white couple wears comfortable, casual clothes, and the adoptive father looks like a scholar, the Chinese woman wears

²⁹ The heroine-victim narrative of Chinese birth mothers echoes a long-standing representational convention in U.S. popular culture, as commonly seen in some Weepies’ melodramas in the 1930s and 1940s, such as *Stella Dallas* (1937). However, the heroine-victim image of Chinese birth mothers complicates the narrative in the U. melodramas in that Chinese women are depicted as being forced to forego their children due to the relentless implementation of the institutionalized family-planning policy, as I have argued in Chapter Two.

³⁰ Peacock, *Mommy Far, Mommy Near*, 16.
bigger-sized loose trousers and a pair of cloth shoes, and her shirt sleeves roll up to her elbows, indicating her status as a poor, rural laborer. She stands still with a saddened face, but her eyes focus not on the adoption scene but down on the floor and hands lay crossed on her belly, as if to avoid facing the moment in which her baby is transferred to the more affluent white couple but she can do nothing except to acquiesce what is happening. In the picture there is also a Chinese passport, an airline ticket and an airplane above their head, symbolizing that the child is being adopted and will fly to the United States with her new white parents. The juxtaposition of the white adoptive parents and the Chinese birth mother transmit classed, gendered and raced message about transnational adoption from China and power relations between the adoptive parents and the birth mother. The well-educated, middle-class, happy white adoptive parents are privileged by their economic capital to fly to China and bring the adopted child back to the United States, contrasting with the sad, poor Chinese country woman who has to powerlessly forego the baby. The white couple and the single Chinese woman also indicate that the United States is heteronormative and family-based, but China is a family-less, feminized and patriarchal country where women are left to struggle with the forced abandonment alone.

Two other pictures also juxtapose the birth mother with the white mother or her family to further compare the two in raced and classed terms. The first picture illustrates the moment when Elizabeth first hears that she has two mothers. She sits up in the tree, looking afar, while the faces of her two mothers loom among tree leaves. The white adoptive mother is positioned right above Elizabeth in the upper middle of the picture, smiling and gazing at her with gentle looks. The birth mother, however, is marginalized at the upper left corner, her face saddened and eyes avoiding looking at the child directly, as if feeling guilty for giving her up. The second picture illustrates the moment when Elizabeth feels she has lost her (Chinese) mommy. Her adoptive mother sits on the bed, holding Elizabeth and comforting her: “That mommy loved you, Elizabeth. And I love you. And Daddy loves you. And Katherine [younger
adoptee sister] loves you. And Penny [the dog] loves you.” Hearing these words, Elizabeth imagines herself at the center of all who love her: a smiling white daddy, a sweet Chinese sister, a hugging white mother, a snuggling dog, and a sad “that mommy” far away. Love from “that mommy” is placed in the past while that of the others is in the present. Although both mothers appear in the picture, her white adoptive mother can put Elizabeth on her lap, hugging and kissing her, but the birth mother is once again positioned far away from her, both spatially and temporally. This picture thus demonstrates that motherhood is closely related to race and class: the child shares the same appearance and blood with her birth mother, but the one who has the right to claim her is the white, middle-class adoptive mother. Such a striking contrast denaturalizes motherhood based on blood ties and re-naturalizes motherhood based on choice made by those who have racial privilege and economic capital.

The categories of race and class play out more saliently in two scenes in which Elizabeth suddenly comes across a Chinese woman and a little Chinese girl of her age in the playground, whose appearance seems to bring Elizabeth’s imagined birth mother to life. The Chinese woman, though in the United States, is illustrated as a country woman wearing coarse cotton clothes and shoes. Her sleeves are rolled up, and feet are bound—a typical image of a Chinese handmaid incorrectly represented by the Western media (in actuality only daughters from wealthy families had their feet bound in feudalist China). Elizabeth told herself that her Chinese mommy “would look just like her.” She waves to the woman who does not even notice her. Her adoptive mother notices sad Elizabeth and carries her home. The page is illustrated with two pairs of mother and daughter, walking away from each other, and the Chinese country woman contrasts the middle-class adoptive mother wearing green sweater and casual white pants. As the Chinese pair turns smaller, the image of the white mother holding Elizabeth becomes bigger and stronger. By including a living pair of Chinese mother and daughter, Mommy Far, Mommy Near addresses the important question of how the adopted child would react if her birth mother really

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31 Peacock, Mommy Far, Mommy Near, 24.
32 Ibid., 13.
appeared. This scene also exposes the vulnerability of motherhood based on transnational adoption in such situations. However, by imagining the birth mother as a country woman in contrast to the middle-class white adoptive mother, the book foregrounds the adoptive mother’s racial and class privileges and perpetuates the image of Chinese women as poor and lower-class.

While in all these illustrations the birth mother is portrayed as a grieved and powerless woman who has to abandon her child and let her be adopted by the American adoptive parents, another illustration pictures her as a happy, free-willed collaborator of the transracial family formation to guarantee the child a better life. To legitimize the mother-daughter relationship made of adoption, Elizabeth’s adoptive mother often plays with her the “adopt game” by affirming that “You are my child. You are my own. I love you forever. I adopt you now.” These words give Elizabeth a message that she was born to be adopted, and adopted by this white mother. Her imagination here is illustrated with different stages of her birth mother’s life—as a country-girl student, as a labor worker sweeping the floor, as a bride, and as a mother holding the newly born Elizabeth, looking trustingly and pointing at the adoptive mother and bigger Elizabeth. The smiling birth mother seems to be speaking to baby Elizabeth, “See, that is your adoptive mother. She will give you a happier life.” Through such illustration the birth mother is imagined not as a tragic victim who has to abandon her baby, but as a happy young mother who chooses that her baby to be placed into the hand of the white adoptive mother in order to give her a better life. The representation of a collaborator birth mother, therefore, convinces adoptee readers that they were not abandoned but transferred from the birth mother to the adoptive mother out of love, and that the United States is the only country where they can have a happy life.

The narratives of victim-heroine and of collaborator through imagination of the birth mother are further seen in Karin Evans’ adoption memoir *The Lost Daughters of China*. Unlike *Mommy Near, Mommy Far*, Evans’s book shifts attention from the adoptive mother to the birth mother in a dark, patriarchal society. The book

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33 Peacock, *Mommy Far, Mommy Near*, 16.
interweaves two story lines: the process in which Evans adopted her two Chinese daughters, and the introduction of Chinese society and culture related to foreign adoption, including the family-planning policy, the dire situations birth mothers might have experienced in abandoning their babies, and the larger social, historical context, which is why the book is often taken as a secondary source for scholarship in transnational adoption from China.\textsuperscript{34} It is also considered as an invaluable guide for prospective adoptive parents. A national bestseller in 2000, the book is characterized as “an unforgettable account of the red thread that winds from China’s orphanages to adoptive families around the globe.”\textsuperscript{35}

Echoing the narrative of coercion dominant in the Western media, the Chinese birth mother is depicted in this book as having no choice but to abandon her baby secretly. Evans’s depiction of the birth mother of her first adoptee daughter, Kelly, typifies the group image of Chinese women under such a predicament. Evans speculates all possible identities the birth mother could have: factory worker who would lose her job if the baby (probably her second) was found; university student or teenager runner whose unexpected pregnancy and birth could incur punishment from her family and discrimination from society as a face-loser, or a “birth guerilla” member who fled the hometown authorities to have her child. In this speculation, while the situations of the factory worker and the “birth guerilla” may be caused by the family-planning policy and its harsh implementation by the local authorities or factory management, the university student and the teenager runner exemplify young unwed mothers under the oppression of both face-conscious families and patriarchal society. Evans thus paints a dark picture in which Chinese women, whoever they are and under whatever situations, are suffering from various layers of oppressions at different stage of their lives.

Evans also creates a vivid scene of how the birth mother gave birth to Kelly and how she abandoned the baby——issues adoptive parents are commonly concerned,

\textsuperscript{34} For instance, both Toby Alice Volkman and Sara A. Dorow cite from Evans’ memoir when they discuss the origin stories of baby abandonment in China. See Dorow, Transnational Adoption, 178 and Volkman, Cultures c Transnational Adoption, 101-102.

\textsuperscript{35} Evans, The Lost Daughters of China, back cover.
through which she represents the birth mother as a victim-heroine under the double pressure of the relentless family-planning policy and patriarchal social norms. The preface of the book cites Chinese American writer Anchee Min’s letter to all “the lost daughters of China” that those women who were forced to abandon their daughters “wander like ghosts,” sneaking around the locations of abandonment and looking for traces of their daughters.\textsuperscript{36} In her book, Evans then envisions herself having a ghost talk with Kelly’s birth mother, a beautiful, young country woman. In the narrative, the woman was married, and her husband was expecting a son, so she did not even tell him the existence of the girl, though she herself wanted to have a daughter. She secretly gave birth in a girlfriend’s place but was forced to move out when the baby was only one month old. Having nowhere to go and running out of money, she had to give up the baby by leaving her where the baby could be easily found.\textsuperscript{37} In the ghost-talk, Evans sums up most of the Western media depiction of the Chinese birth mother through the image of one Chinese powerless peasant woman who had to face the heartbreaking moment of relinquishing her beloved daughter all by herself. Besides the oppression from the authorities, she had to evade even her husband, a man who treated her only as a son-making machine. Evans thus constructs the image of the birth mother as a victim of both the family-planning policy and her patriarchal husband, and as a heroine mother who was brave enough to give birth to the baby but was forced to abandon her in order to save her. Through such construction, Chinese women are represented as under multiple oppressions of the family-planning policy, of her family and of the dark, patriarchal society.

More than a victim-heroine, the birth mother in Evans’s narrative is also a collaborator of her daughter’s adoption by Americans, and through such narrative Evans not only rationalizes adoption from China but also represents the United States as the savior of lost daughters in China. Evans continues to envision that the birth mother knows there is an orphanage in the city, and sometimes buses come with American parents to get the babies, so she hopes her daughter would be picked up by

\textsuperscript{36} Evans, \textit{The Lost Daughters of China}, xv.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 213.
one of these foreign parents, and some years later, a young girl who looks like her may appear getting off one of the buses (and looking for her). “But I know it’s just a dream,” the birth mother says in the ghost talk. In this story Evans imagines that having the abandoned baby adopted by American parents becomes a beautiful dream for the birth mother, who seems to be sure that only American parents can give her daughter a better life. Adoption of the child is thus legitimized through the imagined consent from the birth mother, and the United States is also represented as an ideal home for her child.

In order to strengthen her narrative of adoption collaborator, Evans also describes another unknown woman who, she assumes, attempted to thrust a baby into her hands in Guangzhou. She came across the woman in the evening of her second day in China to adopt Kelly. The young woman, whom Evans describes as desperate and aggressive, stopped Evans on her way and thrust a silk bundle to her while saying something rapidly that Evans could not understand. Unable to know the woman’s intention and afraid of getting into trouble, Evans refused her firmly, but afterwards she kept wondering whether the woman meant to give her a baby. “Was she a young mother trying to get her child to safety by literally putting her in the hands of a foreigner?”38 Evans asks in the book. Such speculation reveals that not only does Evans believe the child would be safe if put in the hands of Westerners but also assumes that the woman eagerly and desperately hoped to have her baby adopted by Westerners. Through the incident, Evans depicts this woman as another collaborator in transnational adoption by Americans. Hinted in the narrative of adoption collaborator is the assumption that these desperate birth mothers consider the United States as the only safe place for their babies and that only white adoptive parents would bring their babies a secure, comfortable life.

Evans further strengthens her narratives of victim-heroine and adoption collaborator by situating Chinese woman and female children in a de-historicized dark, patriarchal social context. She describes China as “a nation of lost daughters,” where female babies are found everywhere and every day, and where there is an “epidemic

38 Evans, The Lost Daughters of China, 67.
“of abandonment.” When asked why she adopted from China, she replied, “Because a little girl is waiting for us there.” In this answer, she depicts China as a country full of babies waiting for someone to come and pick them up for adoption. Not only baby girls but Chinese women in her accounts, both historical and contemporary, were/are faced with “unrelenting hardship.” Similar to the British films, the Western media and human rights officials analyzed in Chapter Two, Evans advocates for Chinese women and female children, but her advocacy is rather different from the former. The human rights charges and the newspaper representations center more on how the systematic neglect of the Chinese government and its family-planning policy caused the high death rate in the orphanages, female children abandonment and coercion of women. Evans’s book, however, attributes the cause more to the deep-rooted patriarchy in Chinese society that she believes is persistent even in the present times and resists any changes. She cites thoughts of ancient Chinese philosophers such as Confucius and Mencius to support her statement that in such a severely patriarchal society, discrimination against women and female children is systemic and persistent. Thus her illustration of China’s patriarchy is based on both familial and societal levels, and she carefully connects the past with the present by demonstrating how patriarchy extends into contemporary women’s lives. In her view, once married, women in China historically had to face “a whole new set of trouble” including being treated as a household slave under the complete control of her mother-in-law and being required to reproduce a male heir as the crucial business of her husband’s family. Those who failed to give birth to a son failed the family and may be cast aside while another woman would be invited into the family to take her place. In such an account, a woman’s most personal part of her life and her right of reproduction are represented as being violated by her husband’s family and even the whole clan. Evans continues that even today harsh treatment of women from her husband’s family does not change. The husband may turn a cold shoulder to her if she

39 Evans, The Lost Daughters of China, 8.
40 Ibid., 22, 79.
41 Ibid., 34.
42 Ibid., 91-92.
43 Ibid., 93-94.
fails to produce a son.\textsuperscript{44} Not only the whole family and clan, but the Chinese state is represented as having a long arm to reach into a woman’s reproductive life: A woman needs permission for conception and if not given the permission, she has to face forced abortion and sterilizations, and her womb will be monitored continuously.\textsuperscript{45} While what Evans describes was largely true for women in the 1980s, she fails to mention that usually both husband and wife faced the hardships together. Male sterilization was quite common in those decades, and even if it was women who were suffering, husbands, many if not all, were usually supportive. By emphasizing only women as the oppressed and categorizing their husbands as the co-oppressors of the state, Evans represents Chinese women as the single bearer of hardships and the helpless, pitiful figures in the quagmire of patriarchy.

In this sense, this book typifies the trend of first world feminist concerns about Chinese women’s well-being. Scholars have long been critiquing the trend of first world women’s victimization of third world women. Joan Wallach Scott argues that whenever Iranian theocracy is mentioned, emphasis is always on “the plight of women in head scarves, veils and burqas,” which becomes the “quintessential sign of backwardness.”\textsuperscript{46} Melani McAlister asserts that in American cultural representations, the political nature of Islam “creates a particular gender ideology, which insists that women are limited to the private sphere, the servants of men.”\textsuperscript{47} Wendy S. Hesford and Wendy Kozol contend that images of Afghan women in American cultural representations such as National Geographic convey the rhetoric of rescue and politics of pity, and signify role of the United States as a liberator as well as its “goodwill and charity.”\textsuperscript{48}

In the Western feminist attention to Chinese women, the same trend is prominent. Jinhua Emma Teng observes that since 1970s and 1980s, the image of Chinese women in Western literature has been generally characterized by

\textsuperscript{44} Evans, The Lost Daughters of China, 94.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 107.
\textsuperscript{47} Melani McAlister, Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, & U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945 (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2001), 230.
\textsuperscript{48} Hesford and Kozol, Just Advocacy?, 4.
victimization, “a condition seen to be universal and timeless for Chinese women.” She critiques that assumptions about Chinese women are based on an essentialist understanding of “women” and of “China” (which means women are essentially imagined as victims when associated with China), and there is little consideration of differences in time, age, class, region, ethnicity or age. Teng uses one example from a book *Women in Chinese Society* written by Margery Wolf and Roxane Witke: in the discussion of “the Chinese attitude” toward sexuality, the book weaves together information from a 16-century novel, an ethnography of Hakka villages in contemporary Hong Kong, research on women workers in the PRC, and a fiction from the 1920s and 1930s. Teng criticizes that such a synthesis is not only ahistorical, but also lacking any considerations of class, regional or ethnical differences.49

Evans’s memoir exemplifies such a trend of first world feminist construction of Chinese women as victims in an imagined static, patriarchal China. Not only portraying the Chinese society as forever patriarchal, she also puts the family-planning policy into her discourse of China’s patriarchy. She cites American anthropologist Susan Greenhalgh to show the lament among Western feminists that it is hard to find anyone, not even feminists in China, who openly criticizes the family-planning policy. “This is very troubling for me as a Western feminist,” says Greenhalgh, “you have to understand, on life-and-death matters, it is not a good time to be female in China.”50 Such comment reveals the attempt of some first world feminists to advocate for Chinese women who, in the minds of these feminists, are not able to represent themselves. By citing the comment, Evans echoes the Western feminists who refuse to consider that Chinese people may willingly support the policy based on a common view that the policy is one, and perhaps only, effective way to bring down the huge population and fight off poverty partly caused by the vast population. Scholars such as Inderpal Grewal, Caren Kaplan and Minoo Moallem maintain that feminists “must understand the material conditions that structure women’s lives in various locations,” and recognize “various intersecting social

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50 Evans, *The Lost Daughters of China*, 122.
relations.” Failing to have such vision, Evans and some first world feminists, therefore, are problematic in their simplistic, condescending advocacy for Chinese women and female children.

To strengthen her construction of Chinese women and female children as forever victims, Evans draws upon works of several Chinese American women writers, which raises the question of what role these writers play in the first world feminist perpetuation of China as a patriarchal society and how the mainstream culture responds to them. Through Anchee Min’s letter to “the lost girls in China” used as the preface to the book, Evans sets up the tone that Chinese women are cultivated to suffer as presents, companions, kitchen-hands, bed-mates and baby-making machines. It should be noted that adding Min’s letter into the book might not be Evans’s choice, but the publisher’s. If that is the case, it still reveals that mainstream American culture uses Min’s identity and presumed authority as a Chinese American writer to selectively construct China as a static, patriarchal society. Evans also specifically uses the autobiographical stories of Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* and Pang-Mei Natasha Chang’s *Bound Feet and Western Dress* to bolster authenticity in depicting a patriarchal Chinese society. She cites the words of Kingston’s mother about how easy it was to kill a newborn baby by midwives if it was a girl, and Chang’s great-aunt’s words that “in China a woman is nothing.” Chinese American scholars such as Sau-ling Cynthia Wong and Frank Chin have long problematized the use of autobiographical form by Kingston, Amy Tan and Chinese American women writers alike as a symptom of subjection to the Western desire. Wong also criticizes the “Amy Tan phenomenon,” which she attributes Tan’s popularity and success to compliance with the ideologies and demands of the

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52 Evans, *The Lost Daughters of China*, xiv.
53 Ibid., 95-97.
dominant culture through mediating and repackaging the Orient for a white readership. Evans’s citation of Chinese American women writers provides an example of how such autobiographical writings may be used by mainstream culture to continue victimizing Chinese women. As discussed in the introduction, the social status of Chinese women in the twentieth century, especially after the founding of new China in 1949, has risen tremendously, though there is still a long way to go before they can have complete equality with men. Women have been enjoying equal opportunities for education and employment. China is also one of the countries that have institutionalized equal pay for each work between men and women. However, these new changes are largely left out of the Western attention. Rather, the feudalist and outdated family stories written by these writers are widely circulated in the mainstream readership that refuses to admit any changes happening in contemporary China. Citing these works and contextualizing her daughter Kelly’s birth culture in a forever patriarchal society, Evans’s memoir typifies how selective Western mainstream culture is in constructing the image of Chinese women and female children as forever victims.

Evans’s citation of the Chinese American women authors also reflects how these writers, assuming the position of first world women, converge with mainstream literature in representing Chinese women for the Western readership. Yuan Shu argues that, by creating the figure of “no-name woman,” Kingston never critiques patriarchal values but positions herself as a privileged first world woman in speculating upon the tragedy of “a third world subaltern woman who cannot represent herself and has to be represented by the first-world feminist writer.” It is not my interest here to discuss how these writers assume the first world women’s position in representing Chinese subaltern women, as it has been fully analyzed in previous research, but it is important to note how the mainstream literature converges with these Chinese American writers in such representations. The convergence creates a powerful discourse in which old

fragmented family stories have been written by Chinese American women writers, who assume authenticity and authority, and then renewed by mainstream writers who continue to produce cultural forms that stereotype female Chinese people and perpetuate China as a static and patriarchal society.

Evans acknowledges the efforts of the Chinese government in improving women’s status but considers such efforts as being a failure in the deep-entrenched patriarchal society. In this way, she complicates the simplistic condemnations the Western media and human rights officials make against the Chinese government for causing hardships of women and female children. Like the Western media and human rights accusations discussed in Chapter Two, Evans criticizes the Chinese government on its alleged coercion of Chinese women. For instance, she comments that the Communist party state gives the government the right and power to interfere in the most personal aspects of women’s life. Yet she does not consider the Chinese government, its family-planning policy and implementation of the policy as the major cause of women and female children’s sufferings. She affirms that in 1949 when the Communist party came to power, female infanticide was on the wane, and there were attempts to improve women and female children’s social status, such as outlawing prostitution, child marriage and concubines, and inviting women to join the work force and political realm. However, she concludes such efforts as short-lived and a failure due to disasters, population control policies, and most importantly, the age-old patriarchal social system that has strong roots and resists changes. For example, she compares what is “on paper” and “in practice” to explain how the governmental efforts of protecting rights of women and female children through laws in the 1990s have failed in the “age-old restraints” that have fallen upon women for ages.57

She also traces the family-planning policy and its wide support among Chinese people as part of the patriarchal influence. She notes the change in the family-planning policy from what the Western media describes as the static “one-child policy” to the revised “more-than-one-child policy” in the mid-1980s, but she comments that the revision gave “a nod of official approval” to the age-old bias that

57 Evans, The Lost Daughters of China, 123-124.
boys are so important that families with girls deserve another chance to have a son, meaning that China’s patriarchy is not just entrenched in people’s mind, but is officially supported by the government through legislation.\textsuperscript{58} She is surprised that even demonstrators in the Tiananmen Democracy Movement conceded to the legislation and execution of the family-planning policy. Her surprise reveals her belief that the wide support of the family-planning policy among Chinese people and lack of criticism from political demonstrators reflect the deeply-rooted patriarchy in China. In other words, China is such a backward country in which people, including demonstrators, are not even aware of how the policy and the patriarchal system are harming Chinese women. Evans thus draws a dark picture in which China’s patriarchy in governmental legislation and in people’s mind, has been and will continue to oppress Chinese women and female children.

**Conclusion:**

The four children’s books and Evans’s memoir are all written in the post-Cold War decade, the same period as the human rights publication and Western media coverage of Chinese orphans analyzed in Chapter Two, and they display similarities but also more differences in the ways of representing Chinese women, female children and China. These books echo the narrative of coercion and of rescue dominant in the Western media and human rights condemnations, and they add more interpretations and narratives through imagining Chinese birth mothers. Included in the discourse about birth mothers are narratives of victim-heroine, of adoption collaborator, of “the right match” between the adoptive parents and adopted child, and of need-based adoption. These narratives combine to narrate adoption in a way that constructs the image of China as a static, dark, patriarchal and feminized society and the United States as a free, affluent and humanitarian home-provider for the homeless children from China.

The children’s books foreground white adoptive mothers as loving and caring mother figures while minimizing (except *Mommy Far, Mommy Near*) the presence of birth mothers and completely disappearing birth fathers as well as any other trace of

\textsuperscript{58} Evans, *The Lost Daughters of China*, 117.
family life and modern China. In this process, the narrative of white, middle-class family that has been dominant since the Cold War era becomes the same prominent in these books to signify the heteronormative American family pattern. The biggest difference between the use of the white, middle-class family narrative in the two periods lies in the emphasis by the children’s books of nicely decorated suburban homes, which not only contrasts the children’s original situations in China as homeless, but also constructs the United States as an affluent, free and humanitarian country.

Unlike the U.S. media discussed in Chapter Two which takes the family-planning policy as the only cause of women and female children’s suffering, Evans’s memoir provides a systematic account of how China’s patriarchy persists into contemporary China and resists changes despite the efforts of the Chinese government. In this account, Evans and some first world feminists show their concerns about and efforts to represent Chinese women who, in their minds, are not capable of representing themselves. Evans’s drawing on works of several Chinese American women writers also reflect how mainstream culture may converge with these writers in perpetuating Chinese women, female children and China in a way that caters to the Western readership.
Conclusion

Transnational adoption from China is a significant research area that intersects with issues of race, gender, class, ethnicity, nationalism as well as the relations between culture and politics. This thesis analyzes U.S. cultural representations of transnational adoption from China during the Cold War era and post-Cold War decade with the purpose of exploring what images of China, of Chinese women and female children, and of the United States are constructed and what ideologies play out in these representations. Two points make the thesis depart from current research of adoption from China. First, analyzing adoption from the perspective of cultural representations is a new angle not touched by most other researchers, who mainly conduct their research by using anthropological, sociological and psychological methods. This perspective offers me a lens through which I can explore how U.S. mainstream culture takes Chinese orphans and adoption from China as an apparatus to produce ideologies, such as anti-Communism, the narrative of rescue and obligation, and the American white, middle-class families as a trope of U.S. democracy. More important, this perspective helps demonstrate that these ideologies extended from the Cold War era to the post-Cold decade, and continued to construct the image of China as being static, patriarchal and lacking in modernity.

Second, my thesis restores the prominence of the history of Cold War adoption from China that has long been overshadowed by the mixed-race adoption from other Asian countries, such as Japan, Korea and Vietnam, during the same period, and by the bigger wave of adoption from China starting from the end of the Cold War. Adoption from China during the Cold War era is seldom noticed by scholars of adoption from Asia, and most scholars who study adoption from China start their research from the late 1980s or early 1990s. However, both Catherine Ceniza Choy’s study on ISS records and my research on U.S. newspapers during this period find that adoption from China through the Hong Kong Project in the 1950s and 1960s enjoye high publicity in U.S. news media. By focusing on this period I traced the genealogi
of the narrative of rescue and obligation dominant in the representations of adoption from China. In addition to this narrative, I demonstrated in Chapter One that in the Cold War media representations, the narrative of Red China persecuting Western missionaries and that of the American white, middle-class family worked together to construct the image of China as a totalitarian country dismantling families, orphaning children and persecuting Western missionaries who are represented as the sacrificing caretakers of Chinese orphans, and the image of the United States as a humanitarian permanent home-provider for Chinese orphans. I further argued that in these two narratives, white, middle-class women are the central figures, either as missionaries showing love and care for orphans in China or as adoptive mothers embracing orphans adopted to the United States and providing them with permanent homes. These women partook in what Kaplan labels as “the Empire of affections and heart,” and “the Empire of the mother” and became an essential part of U.S. empire building in Asia.

While I have given enough credit to U.S. representations of Cold War adoption from China, my focus in the thesis is on the post-Cold War decade. This period witnessed that China became the second largest sending country of orphans to the United States, with about 30,000 Chinese orphans, most of whom were female and adopted by white families, appearing in the United States. Both Chapter Two and Chapter Three focus on this decade, but the former analyzes U.S. media representations of orphans in Chinese state-run orphanages, and the latter inquires, through a close reading of four children’s books and Karin Evans’s adoption memoir, how white American adoptive mothers imagine Chinese birth mothers. As in Chapter One, my enduring theme in these two chapters is to look into how China, Chinese women and female children are imagined through these representations. In Chapter Two, I argued that the U.S. media represents China as a living hell for women and girls under the ruthless implementation of the family-planning policy. The narrative of women being coerced to abort, sterilize or abandon their female babies is striking in these representations, and anti-Communist ideologies still play out, though not as dominant as in the Cold War period. In both Chapter Two and Three, I also claimed
that the narrative of rescue and obligation persists in the cultural forms, but prospective adoptive parents and adoption agencies in Chapter Two and adoptive mothers in Chapter Three also dispute the narrative in various ways. Prospective adoptive parents in Chapter Two flooded supportive letters to China when it was condemned by the U.S. media and U.S.-based human rights organizations, which reveals that their adoption was more out of a desire to form transnational families than the mission of rescuing Chinese orphans. In the adoptive mothers’ imagination of Chinese birth mothers, which I analyzed in Chapter Three, more alternative narratives emerge, including the narrative of victim-heroine, of adoption collaborator, of the “right-match” between the childless adoptive parents and homeless adopted children. Some of these narratives echo the narrative of rescue and obligation and of coercion by portraying birth mothers in an impossible situation of abandoning their children in order to save them, and some refute these narratives by foregrounding the choice of need-based adoption.

My thesis also contributes to the scholarship of adoption from China by giving a more complete account of China’s family-planning policy. The policy is considered by the U.S. media as the only, direct cause of a large number female children being abandoned and ending up in state-run orphanages. By inaccurately using the term “one-child policy,” the U.S. media fails to see that the family-planning policy was subjected to change according to different situations in China. In fact, the “one-child policy” in its strict sense only existed in a short period of time from 1980 to 1984, after which period, the rural areas started the “one-son or two-child policy.” Besides pointing out that the family-planning policy was evolving rather than static, I also demonstrated in Chapter Two that it was used as a vehicle by U.S. media to convey its anti-Communist ideologies, and in Chapter Three, I argued that the family-planning policy is represented as a legislative support to China’s patriarchy which, according to Evans, persists in the contemporary time and resists any changes. Evans also interprets the wide support of the policy by Chinese people as a proof that patriarchy is deeply-rooted in people’s mind. By demonstrating that the family-planning policy was not the only factor that caused parents to abandon their female children in Chin
I then argued that some birth parents chose to, instead of being forced to, abandon their children.

Another contribution of the thesis is that I have looked, specifically in Chapter Three, into the issue of first world feminist concerns and representations of Chinese women who are considered as being unable to represent themselves. I further argued that in the feminist representations of Chinese women, U.S. mainstream culture, typified by Evans’s memoir, converges with some Chinese American women writers, such as Anchee Min and Maxine Hong Kingston, by citing the outdated autobiographical stories told by these writers to perpetuate China as patriarchal and Chinese women and female children as victims.

The thesis ends in 2001, the year when the 9/11 event happened, but it does not mean that the post-9/11 period is not worth studying. In fact, cultural representations of transnational adoption from China in the twenty-first century display more complicated characteristics that require more space than this thesis and call for specific academic attention. After 9/11, both Sino-U.S. relations and images of China in the American media have undergone tremendous changes. The interplay between transnational adoption and politics, economy as well as Sino-U.S. relations also shows different characteristics. One example is that China’s Communist color fades and turns to be more Capitalist, during which process, China emerges as the “manufacturer,” “supplier,” and “market” of babies “made in China” as much as it appears as the world’s factory. It is thus significant to explore how representations of adoption are associated with political, economic relations between the two countries and how representations of adoption influence or shape the overall Sino-U.S. relations in the twenty-first century.

This thesis also calls for academic and cultural attention to be paid to Chinese adoptees. Although many adoptees from China who entered the United States during the post-Cold War decade have grown into their teenage or early adulthood, not much research has been conducted on them.\footnote{Academic attention on Chinese adoptees is only given by several scholars like Richard M. Lee as well as Rich- Tessler, Gregory Adams and Gail Gamache. Lee argues that adopted children and their families negotiate th-
adoptees by the U.S. mainstream culture is far from enough. There are only two documentaries *Found in China* (2007) and *Somewhere Between* (2011) featuring teenage Chinese adoptees. Cultural forms analyzed in this thesis, especially the children’s books I focused on in Chapter Three, raise the question of how adopted children, growing up by watching or reading them, may react towards their birth country, birth mothers and their abandonment. It is important, therefore, for later researchers to turn to adoptees themselves and hear what they think and talk about these issues, and to examine how the popular cultural forms influence them, and in what ways they defy what they have read and heard from both their adoptive parents and the mainstream media.

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ethnic and racial realities through their historical and racial experiences. Tessler, Adams and Gamache focus on children’s ethnic identity. They find that adoptee children were more likely to show their preference for identifying as white than as Chinese, and that the privileged economic status of their adoptive families made them feel they have more in common with white children than with other Chinese American children. These studies are illuminating, but the adoptees’ own voices and their subjectivity are largely neglected. See Rich M. Lee, “Overlooked Asian Americans: The diaspora of Chinese adoptees,” *Asian Journal of Counseling* 13.1 (2006): 51-61; Gregory Adams, Richard Tessler and Gail Gamache, “The Development of Ethnic Identity among Chinese Adoptees: Paradoxical Effects of School Diversity,” *Adoption Quarterly* 8.3 (2005): 25-46.
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