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Sentimental Journey: Transnational Adoption from China and Post-World War II U.S. Liberalism

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

Literature

by

Emily Cheng

Committee in charge:

Professor Lisa Lowe, Chair
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2007

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University of California, San Diego

2007

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Sentimental Journey: Transnational Adoption from China

and Post-World War II U.S. Liberalism

by

Emily Cheng

Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

University of California, San Diego, 2007

Professor Lisa Lowe, Chair

Sentimental Journey argues that adoption from China is a critical cultural site in which the confluence of U.S. national ideologies of multiculturalism and the dominance of family in politics and the U.S. global role is made visible through sentimental narratives about home and kinship as they intersect with the U.S. role in the world at the turn of the 21st century. I address a set of interrelated ideologies through which the

adoption of these children is popularly understood: U.S. benevolence in constructing the child as a welcome immigrant subject (and China a friend), human rights, multiculturalism, and consumerism. At the core of my treatment of the U.S. imagination of China is the mediation of the U.S. - China geopolitical relationship through the trope of female citizenship.

The four chapters of the dissertation, which address novels, memoirs, photography, television, and news media, suggest that these cultural representations provide a window on the changing dimensions of race relations, family formation, and gendered citizenship in the U.S. I examine how these contemporary cultural works represent the Asian adoptee as a highly visible subject upon whom the contradictions of U.S. liberalism, multiculturalism and neo-imperialism play out.

Sentimental Journey argues that the construction of the Chinese adoptee as the contemporary liberal subject par excellence comes about through the privileging of female citizenship in contemporary sentimental politics and proposes that female citizenship is at the core of understanding adoption as a mediation of contemporary U.S.-China geopolitics with origins in the Cold War. While the representational figure of the adoptee herself represents the promise of the assimilated Asian female immigrant figure, I examine how adoption is a locus around which female citizenship is held up as ideal citizenship. I also address how white womanhood gains a moral valence through motherhood in the construction of the adoptive family.

Introduction

Adoption from China is part of an unprecedented upsurge in transnational adoptions beginning in the early 1990s from formerly communist and third world nations by westerners. China has been the largest country of origin for children adopted transnationally by American parents, alongside nations such as Russia and Guatemala. Since 1991, American parents have adopted almost 60,000 Chinese children, almost all girls, and about 6,500 in the year 2006 alone. Most of the adoptions from China are transracial (with white adopting parents), and about 95% of children adopted are girls. The adoption process costs between $15,000 and $25,000, including agency fees, travel to China to complete the adoptions, and a required donation to the Chinese state orphanage system. Adoption from China accounts for about 15% of transnational adoptions by Americans each year.[1]

Sentimental Journey argues that adoption from China is a critical cultural site in which the confluence of U.S. national ideologies of multiculturalism and the dominance of family in politics are made visible through sentimental narratives about home and kinship as they intersect with the U.S. role in the world. Through an analysis of a variety of literary and visual cultural narratives, I argue that adoption from China mobilizes a discourse of benevolence that mediates U.S.-China geopolitical relations in the 1990s to the present day. I address a set of interrelated ideologies through which the adoption of these children is popularly understood: U.S. benevolence in constructing the child as a welcome immigrant subject (and China a friend), human rights, multiculturalism, and

[1] Bureau of Consular Affairs, “Immigrant Visas Issued To Orphans Coming To The U.S,” United States Department of State, http://travel.state.gov/family/adoption_resources_02.html.

consumerism. At the core of my treatment of the U.S. imagination of China is the mediation of the U.S. - China geopolitical relationship through the trope of female citizenship. Given the gendering of the adoption practice, in which almost all the adoptees are girls, the child signifies the differentiation of China from U.S. democracy through the axis of gendered equality and rights.

The longer history of transnational adoption is part of a process of important transformations in U.S. policy and ideology during the unprecedented U.S. military, political, and economic presence in Asia after WWII. The new wave of adoptions from China is the largest since transnational adoptions began in the aftermath of World War II and takes place in the post-Cold War period with the opening up of nations in terms of information, capital, and the movement of bodies. From the early 1950s to the 1970s, over half of the children adopted transnationally by American parents were from Asia, and South Korea was in fact the country of origin for the greatest number of children adopted by American parents.[2] The contemporary adoptions differ from those of war orphans, from Japan, Korea, or Vietnam, in that these earlier orphans were the direct effect of U.S. militarism and imperialist ambitions in Asia.[3] In solving the problem of these children, the U.S. performed its benevolence in redefining the violence of imperialist aggression in terms of benevolence. China specifically has loomed large in the U.S. imagination as a site of great possibility, though never an object of U.S. occupation in the way that Japan, Vietnam and Korea were.

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[2] Howard Altstein and Rita Simon. *Intercountry Adoption: A Multinational Perspective* (New York: Prager Publishers, 1991), 3-4.

[3] For example, the Gerald Ford launched "Operation Babylift" days before the "Fall of Saigon" in April 1975. With the involvement of missionary and humanitarian organizations, this operation airlifted over 2000 children out of Vietnam. See Shirley Peck-Barnes, *The War Cradle* (2000) or Thomas Bass, *Vietnamerica* (1996).

Since the early 1990s, one of the ways in which the rise in transnational adoption from China has been brought to the attention of the American public at large is through popular cultural works. From commercials by companies such as John Hancock and American Express to television shows such as the HBO series *Sex and the City* and Comedy Central's *The Daily Show*, Americans have been made aware that increasingly, multicultural families are formed with the Chinese babies often represented as invigorating the American family. The four chapters of the dissertation, which address novels, memoirs, photography, television, and mainstream news media, suggest that these cultural representations provide a window on the changing dimensions of race relations, family formation, and gendered citizenship in the U.S. These contemporary cultural works produce the Asian adoptee as a highly visible contemporary subject upon whom the contradictions of U.S. liberalism, multiculturalism and neo-imperialism play out.[4]

In my analysis of female citizenship and the gendered adoptee, I foreground the centrality of sentimental mode in the cultural works that I explore. Historically, the sentimental mode has been associated with women's stories and the private sphere. While the large number of girls in Chinese orphanages is often attributed to a "traditional" Chinese preference for boys that is manifested in China's so-called "one-child" per couple regulation, China's family planning policies of the late 20th and early 21st centuries are foremost tied to China's modernization.[5] Thus, the representations of the adoptee in terms of U.S. benevolence towards women and children that appears in the sentimental discourses of immigration, human rights, and multiculturalism I discuss are

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[4] See Lisa Lowe's *Immigrant Acts* for an extended discussion of the history of Asian American subjectivity and racial formation in the U.S. Adding to her argument, I propose here that the Chinese adoptee is the contemporary Asian American figure par excellence.

[5] Susan Greenhalgh, *Governing China's Population*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.

also narratives that attempt to resolve anxieties over China as an economic competitor. Having recourse to the underlying logic that American citizenship welcomes the very subjects least wanted in China helps to reaffirm American moral superiority. I situate adoption within Asian American immigration more generally and address the gendered benevolence that extends towards Asian immigrants.

While the American history of sentimentality delineates a relationship between race and gender in the context particularly of 19th century abolitionist movements this dissertation contributes most specifically to works that examine the politics of sentimentality in the context of U.S. imperialist ambitions in Asia. The space of family and domesticity that is mediated and protected through the cultural mode of sentimentality provides a model for forging affective bonds across difference and therefore is a universalizing mode that seeks to create affective community based on a sense of shared humanity such that those with power come to feel for, and include the socially marginalized and oppressed. This dissertation draws upon the work of scholars who have shown how the politics of sentimentalism is performed through this privatizing function. The impulse to transcend race is particularly important in expansionist ideology, given the claims of benevolence in U.S. exceptionalism.

During the Cold War, popular culture used the mode of sentimentalism in accordance with the U.S. cultivation of geo-political allies in Asia as a counterpoint to the Communist enemy. East Asia, and China, especially, has long occupied a special place in the American imagination and understanding of its core values. In *Sentimental Imperialists*, James C. Thomson, Jr., Peter Stanley, and John Perry claim sentimentalism as our national ethos in Asia. They propose that "Americans have repeatedly felt a need

to prove themselves and test their civilization in Asia. As if by witnessing there what we wish to believe of ourselves we might discover conclusively the meaning and justification of our national life" (18). U.S. economic interests in China enacted in the unequal trade agreements and foreign concessions and U.S. military interventions in East Asia after World War II were fueled not by the assertion of U.S. political and economic power but by benevolence, according to these authors. For them, "if Americans were, as a group, imperialists, their inexhaustible fuel was sentiment."[6]

Caroline Chung Simpson has suggested that the 1955 Hiroshima Maidens project that brought young Japanese women disfigured by the atomic bombs to the U.S. to undergo reconstructive plastic surgery was ideologically meaningful because of the trope of middle-class domesticity so central to Cold War politics. The practice was framed as a form of "moral adoption" and the women were housed with middle-class American families with white "mothers" representing an ideal of domesticity. She writes that "the proof of America's right to a unique preeminence in the world of charged international relations was often found in the portrayal of a pure and protected American domesticity, guarded by the nurturing maternal forces that were presumed to flower there." [7] However, this philanthropy was not only a demonstration of American benevolence toward its former enemies but "was also driven by the profound need to recharge ideals of American femininity and domesticity" (123).

While the contemporary adoptions I discuss do not have this overt correspondence with state imperatives (one argument for helping these women was to do

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[6] James Thomson, Jr., Peter Stanley, and John Perry, *Sentimental Imperialists: The American Experience in East Asia* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 311.
[7] Simpson, Caroline Chung, *An Absent Presence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 123.

so before the Russians did), the present situation relies upon this legacy of sentimental politics for U.S.-Asia relations that are embedded in issues of domestic race and gender politics. Alongside partriarchal discourses of U.S. modernity that deploy an orientalist impulse to feminize and objectify a subordinated "east" and the masculinized foreign policy of the Cold War and on, I consider the role of white womanhood in supporting national imperatives towards China and East Asia. Mari Yoshihara addresses early 20th century white women's participation in Orientalist discourse by representing and performing Asian women as both a contribution to "inscribing gendered meanings to Asia" and as a means "through which to become part of a dominant American ideology and to gain authority and agency which were denied to them in other realms of sociopolitical life. By embracing Asia, women gained material and affective power both in relation to American society and vis-à-vis Asian subjects."[8]

In the context of contemporary adoption, I examine the privileging of white womanhood in forging the multicultural family. Similarly to the bolstering of white femininity and the American home in the 1950s, the present situation provides an energizing of whiteness as properly multicultural, and the white mother as the heroine and agent of the multicultural and modern American family, and nation. Christina Klein's work on middlebrow culture and the importance of the sentimental representations of family formation to the Cold War mapping of global integration provides a model for the

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[8] Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 6.

methodology of reading popular culture as intimately tied to U.S. politics at home and abroad.[9]

While some sentimentalized narratives of adoption may suggest the progressivism of the purportedly apolitical, privatized space of family, in this dissertation I also call attention to the liberal modes of racial thinking that a critical analysis of the gendered and infantilized position of the adoptee brings to light. Situating the desirability of adoption from China in the context of historical constructions of China and Chinese migration, Sara Dorow finds in her sociological study of adoption from China that "parents imagine their and their children's relationships to China through the traces of a long history of "trans-Pacific flights" of people, idea, and sentiments."[10] However, in contrast to other Chinese migrants, in being welcomed into white American homes, "Chinese adopted children leapfrog into the national interior across boundaries of kinship, class, nation, and race" (39). My focus is on the power of the American family to provide a model of multiculturalism and equal relations across difference and for the privileging of the space of domesticity as a metonymy of the contemporary nation. I examine discourses of adoption in relation to liberal constructions of race and nation that position the Asian immigrant in a narrative of social and legal inclusion into the nation and the universality of liberalism by emphasizing her transformation into a liberal individual.

According to David Theo Goldberg, liberalism, as the political ideology that guides modernity, "is committed to *individualism* for it takes as basic the moral, political, and legal claims of the individual over and against those of the collective. It seeks

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[9] Christina Klein, Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
[10] Sara Dorow, *Transnational Adoption: A Cultural Economy of Race, Gender and Kinship* (New York: NYU Press, 2006), 38.

foundations in *universal* principles applicable to all human beings or rational agents in virtue of their humanity or rationality. In this, liberalism seeks to transcend particular historical, social, and cultural differences."[11] Furthermore, the central paradox of liberalism's underwriting of the universality of modernity is that "the more explicitly universal modernity's commitments, the more open it is to and the more determined it is by the likes of racial specificity and racist exclusivity" (4).

Sentimental Journey argues that while the adoptee herself represents the promise of the assimilated Asian female immigrant figure, adoption is also a locus around which female citizenship is held up as ideal citizenship that is figured relationally to racialized citizenship. The construction of the Chinese adoptee as the contemporary liberal subject par excellence comes about through the privileging of female citizenship in contemporary sentimental politics and understands female citizenship to be at the core of understanding adoption as a mediation of U.S.- China geopolitics with origins in the Cold War. I focus on how other female figures are shown to be included in the nation through their relationship to the adoptee, and how white womanhood gains a moral valence through motherhood in the construction of the adoptive family. In the multicultural logic, the Asian American woman has long been privileged as feminized model minority figure; I thereby also focus on the prominence of Asian American women writers in supporting (or at times contesting) the dominant national narratives of adoption discourse.

While the liberal individual is defined through rationality, the racialized and gendered other (in the body of the child and the space of China) comes into modernity

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[11] David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture* (Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 5.

not through the capacity to reason but through the capacity to feel, and to be an object of feeling. In this sense, I focus on sentimentality as the particular cultural form and moral valence of liberalism that gives meaning to the adoptee and the adoption process in the narratives I discuss. Through the mode of sentimentality, other figures such as the white mother and Chinese immigrant women too are transformed into liberal subjects. In this formulation, the adoptee is a figure who may also unmask the benevolence of liberal inclusion of immigrants and women through her embodiment of historically sedimented U.S. fantasies about China and U.S. domestic racial exclusions.

While the choice exercised in constructing non-biological and transracial forms of family through adoption may be celebrated in popular discourse, the symbolic importance of family as a space of reproduction and protection of national ideals such as multiculturalism and freedom makes the privileging of the middle-class white family in the 1990s and reinvestment in family as the symbol of the nation in the post-9/11 context an important backdrop for this discussion. The cultural mode of sentimentalism is significant in capturing the importance of affect and domesticity in giving meaning to the transracial adoptive family. Sentimentalism involves the crossing of barriers and even the transcendence of difference in constructing private, affective relations. Liberal sentimentalism has "been conventionally deployed to bind persons to the nation through a universalist rhetoric not of citizenship per se but of the capacity for suffering and trauma at the citizen's core"[12] Sentimentality characterizes the ways in which "different types of persons" are interpellated into the U.S. nation on equal terms as feeling subjects, and are in fact humanized in this process; persons are "hailed by the universalist (but really

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[12] Lauren Berlant, "Poor Eliza," *American Literature* 70:3 (1998): 636.

national icon) of the person who loves, suffers, and desires to survive the obstacles that bind her or him to history" that is found in the sentimental aesthetic (637). Sentimental politics presuppose the universality of private feeling, though an argument I develop in this dissertation is that the racial difference of the adoptee continues to contradict claims to the universalized affective domain symbolized by the family.

Sentimental Journey begins with the transition from a missionary to secular liberal paradigm for U.S. benevolence towards China in the 1930s and addresses the loss of interest in positive images of China and Chinese people with the Cold War and turn to other areas of interest in making allies in East Asia, particularly focusing on Japan and Korea. The opening up of China in the early 1970s also marked the opening up of American public interest to self-representation by Asian American writers. I discuss the trajectory of Chinese American women's writing as an important legacy to consider in understanding contemporary adoption. The first two chapters are more closely connected in their development of the discourses of humanitarianism abroad and U.S. race and gender politics at home. The second chapters connect these topics explicitly to the post 1990s U.S. – China geopolitics and the emphasis on the rights coupled with privatization via capitalist markets.

Chapter One addresses U.S. hegemonic interests in the humanitarian discourses that underlay military and political interventions in the region in East Asia after WWII by focusing on Asian orphans. I examine Pearl S. Buck's pioneering work on the welfare and adoption of the "Amerasian" orphans borne of U.S. military personnel and Asian women during the occupation of Japan and the war in Korea. Hailed as the foremost fictional interpreter of China for the pre-WWII American public, Buck translated her

influence into postwar humanitarian work that held up family as the guiding trope for American geopolitics in Asia. I analyze two novels, *The Hidden Flower* (1952) and *The New Year* (1968), about mixed-race orphans from Japan and Korea, respectively, and Buck's newspaper and magazine articles about adoption. Central to my argument is the confluence of Asian immigration and U.S. humanitarianism in Buck's rhetoric; she posits herself as an "immigrant" by virtue of her upbringing in China and the adoptee as a parallel immigrant figure such as herself. Breaking with the missionary impulse in which she came of age, Buck models a feminist and secular liberal paradigm for turning to the orphan into an American adoptee that provides a precursor to the discourses of liberal inclusion in adoption at the end of the 20th century.

Chapter Two addresses the work of bestselling Chinese American authors Amy Tan and Anchee Min, both of whom are known for their woman-centered portrayal of Chineseness in relation to the U.S. I have chosen to discuss these writers because both have entered into discourses of adoption by using their authority as literary known for their portrayal of family and China. Amy Tan's introduction to a book of photographs meant to elicit aid for a non-profit organization that provides services for children in Chinese orphanages, connects the discussion of humanitarianism in Buck's era to the present day. Min's introduction to a popular book about the experience of adopting from China and her appearance in an informational video directed at prospective adoptive parents takes up the legacy of the authority of the immigrant figure who models the successful assimilation of the Chinese other to the extent of becoming a spokesperson for U.S. liberal superiority through its promise of inclusion. Tan's and Min's roles suggest the similarities between U.S. liberal benevolence enacted abroad and towards Asian

Americans and Asian immigrants willing to submit to the strictures of U.S. multiculturalism. I emphasize their "domestication" of U.S.-China geopolitics and U.S. cultural politics through the importance of the trope of family (Tan's mother-daughter bonds and Min's portrayal of the impossibility of family sentiment in China) in both their literary works.

Chapter Three engages the genres of sensationalism and sentimentalism in representing the orphan and the adoptee in the 1990s context. With the heightening of the rhetoric of human rights in U.S.-China economic and political relations in the early 1990s, this chapter examines the narrative of rescue of the child. As this discussion fundamentally questioned the suitability of China for membership in a Western ethical community but left unquestioned the U.S. as an ethical exemplar, the logic of rescue enacts gender particularly as the site of difference between China and the U.S. In the treatment of girls that is supposedly inherent to Chinese culture, this rhetoric requires the U.S. to appear as a space of gender equality that is performed through the narratives of adoption in the white mother as the heroine. It is the family structure that ensures rights of women and children in a privatization of social and political life. This chapter also extends the discussion of rights and family in the context of adoption to a larger consideration of the limits of sentimentality as the basis for rights and sentimental storytelling as a means of establishing relational understanding and affective community across difference. This chapter addresses news media representations and two literary thrillers, Barbara D'Amato's *White Male Infant* (2002) and David Ball's *China Run* (2002).

Chapter Four explicitly brings together Asian American immigration, multiculturalism and consumerism in narrating contemporary adoption from China. With the displacement of the social by the market that the neoliberal paradigm aspires to, the privileging of consumerism in forging identity takes the form of a cottage industry of adoption related products and travel. I argue that consumer culture in the representations of adoption make possible a rhetoric of choice by which the ability to choose one's family and even one's identity enacted through neo-liberal choice. In my discussion of some of these commodities that support the multicultural family alongside a reading of Gish Jen's novel *The Love Wife* (2004) I examine this economic narrative of the nation of abstracted choice underwritten by the logic of the coupling of freedom and capitalism in relation to another economic narrative of the nation: that of the immigrant American Dream. In so far as the adoptee appears alongside the figure of the immigrant and can herself be considered such a figure, Jen challenges the liberal narrative that hails the immigrant, as discussed in Chapter Two, precisely by addressing the complexities of the changing geo-political ground and China's growing economic power in its policies of market liberalization. In this context the U.S. claims to moral supremacy as the destination of liberation break down.

Chapter One

Pearl S. Buck's "American Children": Adoption and Humanitarianism in Post-WWII America

> Of course, one concerned American cannot do it alone. But she does not expect to do it alone. She has confidence in her own people. She knows that when Americans are faced with a problem, they solve it. They may not solve it through government or through veterans' organizations, but they solve it themselves. Somewhere in this great, beautiful, generous country of ours there are people, individuals all, who will solve the problem of the half-American children in Asia.
>
> - Pearl S. Buck[13]

Pearl S. Buck, the popular American literary figure and philanthropist, made her name writing about China for an American audience and then spent most of her career working on humanitarian projects that connected Asia and the U.S. Of particular interest in this chapter is her post-WWII work on behalf of "Amerasian" orphans in Japan and Korea and advocating for their adoption by American parents. Buck brought her fundamental belief in the core values of American liberalism to bear on her feminist and anti-racist approach to the plight of the "Amerasian" child, a term which Buck herself coined in her novel *East Wind, West Wind*. Her work for these children represents a post-WWII form of liberal humanitarianism that found currency in the context of U.S. ascendance to superpower status. Her "secular humanitarianism," as dubbed by biographer Peter Conn, was an important non-missionary form of American benevolence

[13] Pearl S. Buck, "American Children: Alien by Birth," *Ladies Home Journal,* November 1964, 36-40.

that accompanied the rhetoric of U.S. exceptionalism from empire despite its empire-building projects in Japan and Korea in the latter half of the twentieth century.[14]

This chapter examines the construction of a genealogy of American liberal humanitarianism in regards to East Asia and transnational adoption from East Asia in the latter half of the twentieth century through the figure of Pearl S. Buck. Buck's advocacy for adoption of Asian children provides a model for understanding the contemporary burgeoning of transnational adoptions and a humanitarian language on which contemporary transnational adoptions from China have relied. Buck's model of adoption, which espoused the terms of U.S. liberalism, is related to but distinct from adoptions based in missionary or religious ideals, such as the adoptions performed by Harry and Bertha Holt during the Korean War. Even though Buck's adoption work did not directly involve China, she represents a legacy of ways of understanding China and Chinese people that is relevant in contemporary adoptions. As the foremost interpreter of China for a whole generation of Americans beginning with the publication of *The Good Earth*, which stands as one of the bestselling novels of the 20th century, Buck's representations of China were unmatched in their influence. I argue that Buck's role as a "popular expert" on China and East Asia made her a significant voice for characterizing American popular understanding of Asia and Asians, and for how to understand Asian Americans within a model of liberalism.[15] Asia has long been a proxy site through which American democracy could prove itself; in connecting the Amerasian child in Asia to American

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[14] Peter Conn, *Pearl S. Buck: A Cultural* Biography (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
[15] Michael Hunt, "Pearl Buck – Popular Expert on China, 1931-1949," *Modern China* 3:1 (January 1977): 33-64.

militarism and masculinity, Buck makes clear the importance of Asia to America's understanding of its power and democracy.

It is my argument in this chapter that the adoptee serves as an exemplary migrant figure through which other marginalized figures can be incorporated into the nation. This chapter suggests the connections between adoption, Buck's humanitarianism, and the liberal subject position of Asian Americans in contemporary multiculturalism. An examination of Buck's creation of an idealized Asian/American subject through her writings, particularly those about adoption, helps us understand this contemporary racialization of the Asian American as an immigrant model minority who makes possible the multicultural adoptive family that is the larger concern of this dissertation. If the Asian American immigrant has been historically racialized in opposition to the American citizen, then Buck's adoptee is not properly an immigrant, but is a figure whose social and political inclusion into the nation is a right of birth, and whose spatial separation from the U.S. is the bar to inclusion that must be surmounted. In so far as the adoptee is an immigrant in Buck's framing, though, he is an exemplary figure through which she imagines a liberal subject position for Asian Americans.

In the quote with which I began, Buck announces the establishment of the Pearl S. Buck Foundation in the article, "American Children: Alien by Birth," published in the *Ladies Home Journal* in November 1964. In this article Buck appeals to the American mythos of the self-made "individual" and invokes the American qualities of generosity and practical action to urge others to follow her lead as a humanitarian activist. She positions herself as a patriotic leader, "one concerned American" speaking to "her own people." How can we understand Buck's strong statement of her own Americanism

towards the end of her life in relation to her earlier use of self-narration as both Chinese and American as the basis for her humanitarian action? This chapter argues that in narrating her own identity as both Chinese and American to position herself from a unique location of being within, yet outside, mainstream American society and values, Buck writes herself as another exemplary "minority" figure who is able to claim the rights of American citizenship. Buck in fact performs her status as an ideal assimilated "immigrant" figure in her work to welcome others into the American body politic through her writing and humanitarian work. Her work on behalf of the adoptee posits the child as a parallel "immigrant" figure such as herself.

This chapter begins by outlining the significance of China to Buck's interest in American racial and gender equality that allows her to turn her attention back to East Asia as an advocate of adoptions of mixed-race children of American military men in Japan and Korea. I locate Buck's rhetoric within the emergence of a U.S. secular, liberal structure of feeling by situating her alongside other prominent missionary children from China who were influential in American thinking about East Asia and the U.S. global role. I then address two novels, *The Hidden Flower* (1952) and *The New Year* (1968), written by Buck about the adoption of mixed-race children from Japan and Korea, respectively. While she explicitly critiques military masculinity and advocates for adoption in her non-fiction works, the novels are revealing as complex sites through which her ideas about adoption, American manhood and womanhood, and race in the contemporary context are narrated and worked out.

Buck's importance as a voice of American liberalism was evinced in her influence on the racialization of Asia and Asians in the U.S. context, and the racialization of Asians

in relation to concepts of American womanhood and manhood. This relationship between international politics of the postwar and Cold War period and Pearl S. Buck's activism gains coherence in Buck's work on behalf of mixed race "Amerasian" children fathered by U.S. servicemen in Asia. I examine this humanitarian work on behalf of orphans in the context of two moments in the U.S. post-war trajectory to superpower: the post-war occupation of Japan and the Korean War. The unprecedented U.S. military, political, and economic presence in Asia after WWII marks a process of critical transformation in U.S. policy and ideology. The Korean War has been understood as the war that consolidated the U.S. as a global military and political power as an unprecedented amount of the national budget was devoted to the military and a standing army was maintained at its conclusion for the first time. And considering the U.S. occupation and reconstruction of Japan as the first project of U.S. hegemony in the Asia Pacific in the latter half of the 20th century and Japan's entry into the Western political and economic sphere in this process, I focus on Buck's critique of U.S. militarism, gender and race politics, and international relations at these critical moments of U.S. expansion of political and economic power. I argue that the orphan can be understood as a figure that unmasks the benevolence of U.S. imperialism in East Asia and at the same time as an object of modern American humanitarianism.

In this period of U.S. global ascendance, Buck's work represents an ambivalent liberal critique of U.S. hegemony, specifically through critiques of U.S. militarism and masculinity. Her writings and activism on behalf of the mixed-race children reveals the particular racialization of Asians and Asian Americans in this rhetoric of nominal inclusion that also intersects with particular gender constructs. The emergence of a

postwar humanitarianism represented in her work was imbricated with multiple changes in U.S. society: the rise of second wave feminism, civil rights, and the shift of the basis of interest in Asia from the missionary impulse to a secular liberalism.

Transnational adoption began as bureaucratically organized practice in two phases, first at the end of World War II, when from 1948 to 1953 orphans were admitted to the U.S. under the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, and the second beginning in the 1950s in response to the Korean War. In that first brief phase, 2,318 children were brought by agencies to the U.S., two-thirds of whom were Japanese. Private adoptions grew with the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, which removed the racial bar to Asian immigration, including that of adoptees, and the 1953 passage of the Admission of Orphans Adopted by United States Citizens and the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 allowed several hundred orphans were allowed entry to the U.S. In 1957, amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act removed limits on the number of orphan visas. From 1953 to 1962, about 15,000 children were adopted from abroad by American parents, and about 8,000 of these were from Asia. Of these children from Asia, the majority were from Korea. From 1966 to 1967, Americans adopted 32,000 foreign-born children, about 65% of whom were from Asia, and the majority of these were from South Korea. From the 1950s to the beginning of the 1970s South Korea was in fact the largest provider of children for American adoptive parents.[16]

In her rhetoric about the Amerasian orphans, Buck cast these children as a responsibility that American society needed to acknowledge and act upon in order to live

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[16] Howard Altstein and Rita Simon, *Intercountry Adoption: A Multinational Perspective* (New York: Prager Publishers, 1991), 3-4.

up to its ideals of democracy and anti-imperialism. Adoption was not be an isolated act of goodwill but an affirmation of the fundamental American character of benevolence abroad and equality at home. Buck was a prominent figure in the early history of transnational and transracial adoption. An early critic of race-based and religious "matching," which attempted to ensure social and physical similarity between parents and child to the exclusion of large numbers of potential adoptees and adopters, Buck was a pioneer in advocating for transnational adoptions of Asian children, a practice which was also largely transracial. In 1949 Buck founded Welcome House, the first adoption organization that worked for interracial and international adoptions, and the first to work on behalf of mixed-race children born in the U.S. or in Asia.[17] In the 1960s, Buck worked tirelessly on behalf of the Amerasian children in Asia, propagandizing for her cause in numerous forums: speeches, popular magazines, and fiction and non-fiction books. Based on numerous trips to Japan and Korea, she testified to the degradation of the Amerasian orphans, whom she met in orphanages or in the streets where they were beggars. Frustrated by the restrictive laws on immigration from Asia, Buck established the Pearl S. Buck Foundation in 1964 to provide funds for social programs for Amerasian children in their birth countries. Not only were relatively few orphans able to enter the U.S. but most of the outcasted children were ineligible for adoption because they were technically not orphans.

[17] While Holt International Children's Services, founded by Harry and Bertha Holt in 1956 to help Korean War orphans, was the first international adoption agency in the U.S., I turn to Buck as a figure of secular and liberal humanitarianism in contrast to the Holts whose mission was driven by an explicitly Christian ethos. Welcome House began out of Buck's concern for mixed-race children in Asia, but initially placed mixed-race children within the U.S. and began coordinating international adoptions in the late 1950s.

Looking to China

The incredible success of *The Good Earth* upon its 1931 publication instantly made Pearl S. Buck one of the best-selling authors of the century in this country and one of the most-translated American authors abroad, with her works translated into 144 languages and dialects. *The Good Earth* was the national bestseller in 1931 and 1932 and has by now sold over 4 million copies. Initially mass marketed through the Book-of-the-Month Club, which had itself recently begun in 1926, the novel also became a Hollywood film and Broadway play.[18] In the 1950s journalist Harold Isaacs surveyed Americans about their understanding of China and India and came to the conclusion that "for a whole generation of Americans [Buck] 'created' the Chinese, in the same sense that Dickens 'created' for so many of us the people who lived in the slums of Victorian England." [19] This novel about the rises and falls in fortune of a Chinese peasant introduced to a whole generation of Americans the image of the Chinese people as "solid, simple, courageous folk staunchly coping with the blows of fate and adverse circumstances" (63). In representing Chinese people as fundamentally good, Buck was able to make China and Chinese people matter to Americans and to become subjects of empathy, and later, of humanitarian aid. Winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 1935 and the Nobel Prize in 1938, the first American woman to win, and the only to win both prizes, Buck wrote over seventy fiction and non-fiction books and numerous articles about U.S. and international (particularly regarding China) social and political issues. Even with her decline in selling power and influence during the Cold War, when her social critiques

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[18] The novel recently had another mass market incarnation with its 2004 selection and reprinting for the Oprah Book Club.
[19] Harold Isaacs, *Images of Asia: American Views of China and India* (originally *Scratches on Our Minds*) (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1958),155.

earned her an FBI file, she still appeared on the list of the Ten Most Admired Women in the U.S. according to the 1966 Gallup Poll.

At the peak of her popularity, Buck's influence on popular attention to and understanding of China was immense. Her article, "A Warning About China," cautioning against U.S. support of the Kuomintang leader Chiang Kai-Shek, was published in *Life* on May 10, 1943 and identified by China scholar John King Fairbank as one of three articles that effectively swayed American opinion against Chiang during the Chinese civil war.[20] Buck worked against U.S. state politics regarding the civil war in China and against U.S. sympathy for the Nationalists and supported by the China Lobby in Washington in the 1940s. Buck also translated her literary weight into activism for China; she and her second husband, Richard Walsh, were "active in almost all of America's non-governmental dealings with China" at this time, working to support wartime China relief, and founding the East and West Association in 1941 to encourage education and understanding between ordinary people in the U.S. and Asia, as well publishing the populist magazine *Asia and the Americas* from 1941-6.

Buck never returned to China after her move to the U.S. in 1934. Her life and her work were circumscribed by the U.S-China relationship of international Cold War politics. Buck's life ended just at the moment of the establishment of relations between the U.S. and China; in 1971 Henry Kissinger visited Beijing, and the PRC was recognized and admitted to the U.N. Buck's hopes of traveling to China as part of Richard Nixon's 1972 trip were dashed when her visa application was rejected, not

[20] Cited in Peter Conn, 273. The other two articles, both published in the summer of 1943, were by New York Times journalist Hanson Baldwin in *Reader's Digest*, and T.A. Bisson in *Far Eastern Survey.*

surprisingly considering Buck's outspoken opposition to China's communist party. The letter accompanying her visa rejection suggested the scope of the changes in U.S. – China relations in her lifetime, and her own relationship with the Chinese state, as it accuses Buck of an "attitude of distortion, smear and vilification towards the people of new China and their leaders."[21] Buck therefore died in 1973 having witnessed but not participated in the "opening" of China to the West.

Scholars have divided Buck's life and career into two periods that are demarcated by changes in her interests and activities and global geo-political changes. In the first period, her immediate fame with the publication of *The Good Earth* made her into the foremost "popular expert on China" from 1931 to the Cold War, and in the second, was known for her Cold War humanitarianism. With the "loss" of China to communism in 1949 and the prevailing Cold War climate, interest in sympathetic portrayals of China and Chinese people lost popular currency, and Buck largely turned to writing about the U.S. and other East Asian nations as the concerns of her fiction and non-fiction writing from the early 1950s up to her death in 1973. Despite her awards and early critical praise, particularly for the verity of her portraits of China, Buck nevertheless had been belittled by the literary establishment for her popular subjects and writing style for years. Critical appraisals of her work took on even harsher tones in the post-war period as she was squarely dismissed as a "woman's writer" with her increasing focus on feminist themes in her novels.[22] In this later period, Buck's influence went into decline, and she focused more on her humanitarian works, primarily regarding mixed-race orphans of war in East

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[21] Pearl S. Buck, *China Past and Present* (New York: John Day, 1972), 172.

[22] For instance, a review of the 1946 novel, *The Pavilion of Women*, in *Newsweek* deemed it to be "technically excellent," but limited in scope to the provincial issues of "a woman's novel, by a woman, about a woman all women will understand" (cited in Conn, 303).

Asia.[23] At the same time, the mainstay of her authority, that is her expertise on China, eroded as the production of knowledge about East Asia became of interest to the U.S. government as a Cold War project; the pre-WWII writings by missionaries and other amateur writers who had traveled to Asia that had largely constituted American knowledge about Asia were superseded by the institutional imperatives to study Asia in light of U.S. national security. In the fight over China policy in the 1940s, Buck found that her ability to bring politics "down to the level of the comic strip" enabled her to engage audiences but did not affect government policy significantly.[24] In turn, she advocated a populist humanitarian activism that, as suggested by the quote with which the chapter began, depended upon the actions of understanding and sympathetic individuals.

Despite Buck's physical separation from China for the last four decades of her life, this chapter offers as a central argument the need to understand Buck's humanitarian work for the mixed-race orphans in East Asia through her experiences and fame as an authority on China specifically. Her ability to portray China in her non-fiction and fiction writings and her identification of herself as both authentically Chinese *and* American were the bases of her status as a public authority on China and her humanitarian work particularly regarding Asia. Rather than re-affirming the periodizing divisions in Buck's career, this chapter focuses on the continuities of her core belief in American liberalism throughout her life, and the significance of her work of representing and imagining an

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[23] Michael Hunt identifies the year of the "loss" of China as the boundary of Buck's authority on China. In his article, Robert Shaffer identifies the early 1950s as the transition in Buck's career, from radical politics to less political work. See Robert Shaffer, "Women and International Relations: Pearl S. Buck's Critique of the Cold War" in *Journal of Women's History*, 11:3 (Autumn 1999): 151- 175.
[24] Conn, 258.

Asian American subject within this logic. For instance, even at Buck's most "radical," such as her vocal hopes that WWII would be a moment for making potentially radical gains in civil rights, her appeals also made claims to universal equality that assumed the moral superiority of the U.S., as Colleen Lye has noted.[25]

Throughout her life, Buck continually deployed her experience of living in China as a rhetorical strategy to preface her social critique of the U.S. and offer an idealized vision of the potential of America to live up to its democratic ideals. For instance, Buck herself provides a kind of thesis for the role of China in her humanitarian vision. Presenting herself as an "immigrant" approaching her native-born land of the U.S. with fresh eyes, Buck provides a "Chinese" basis for sentiment in her 1954 autobiography:

> I had… been learning about my own people. Life in China and with the Chinese had taught me much about human beings, for in ancient countries humanity and human relationships are the primary concern. To know how a person feels was to my Chinese friends more important than anything else about him, for until one knows how another feels no friendship can be established nor business carried on with mutual benefit. I applied this education and its skills to those who surrounded me in my new life, to neighbors and to acquaintances and to the casual contacts of everyday.[26]

Buck's self-fashioned "mentally bifocal" world view both provides a rationale for her humanitarian vision and translates her experience in China into a model for American humanitarianism (57). The concepts of mutual harmony and understanding provide the basis for Buck's calls for helping the Amerasian orphans in Asia, as this harmony that she finds in all East Asian societies is disturbed by American excesses, and yet can teach Americans how to act in a global community.

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[25] Colleen Lye, *America's Asia: Racial Form and American Literature, 1893-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 239.
[26] Pearl S. Buck, *My Several Worlds* (New York: Pocket Books, 1954), 413-414.

Though Buck casts herself as a kind of Asian immigrant whose ability to critique American society and its racialized underpinnings rests on her fresh perspective, certainly the terms on which she might be considered an Asian immigrant confound the embodied experience of a racialized subject position in U.S. history that characterizes Asian American identity. If the "American *citizen* has been defined over and against the Asian *immigrant*, legally, economically, and culturally," as Lisa Lowe writes, then Buck's declaration of herself as both citizen and immigrant reveals not her marginalization, but precisely her inclusion, in the U.S. nation state.[27] Buck's belief in the truth of American liberal democracy and her ability to decide that she "wanted to be an American in the fullest sense of the word," that is to choose to be American, makes her into a prototype of the liberal figure of the immigrant that is commensurable with myth of assimilation into democracy and citizenship.[28]

For Buck to convincingly claim a Chinese and American identity was crucial to her critique of U.S. society based on representing a rhetorically idealized China in relation to the U.S. In her 1941 book on U.S. gender relations, *Of Men and Women*, Buck begins her call for "harmony" between men and women in America with the example of her experience in China and her shock upon discovering the limitations on women in the U.S. Expecting American women to be more strong and present in public life than tradition-bound Chinese women, Buck understood the freedoms of American women as "signs of a free society."[29] Buck writes: "when I returned to my own country to live, therefore, I expected to find men and women really equal – that is that the affairs of the

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[27] Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 4.
[28] Buck, 303.
[29] Pearl S. Buck, *Of Men and Women* (New York, John Day, 1941), 14.

nation, large and small, were carried on by both alike… Surprise followed upon surprise. Where I had expected in a free society to find women working everywhere as men worked, according to their ability, I found them actually less influential by far than women had been under the traditional scheme of life in China" (16). Buck explains that in China the woman's role is in the home, which the woman has made into the center of the "real life of the nation," with such success that the "Chinese woman generally developed into a strong, wise, able human being" (12). In fact "feminine qualities… began to be accepted as the essentials of a civilized people" and the "qualities of the Chinese mind" (12; 13). Her notion of equality calls not for changes in policy but for social changes brought about by individuals coming to a new consciousness of men's and women's roles to attain a true freedom necessary to win the war.

In her use of her experience in China to critique the subordinated role of women in the U.S., Buck's portrayal of the feminization of Chinese civilization also suggests her agreement with popular gendered notions of geopolitical order. In World War II, the reliance of China on U.S. leadership presented Chinese nationalism as a benign force that allowed the U.S. to demonstrate its status as the emergent leader of the democratic world order that continued the long-standing gendering of U.S. geopolitical relations with China, in which China was largely feminized against the masculinized position of the U.S. Historian Karen Leong has written that in the 1930s and 1940s Buck was able to gain a position of power through establishing a "unique marginality" from which to comment on American gender relations by identifying herself as "Chinese," a feminized

cultural label, rather than the political label, "feminist."[30] Buck herself advocated this supposed marginality in order to critique U.S. race relations as well. However, in contrast to an assumption that Buck did indeed maintain a position of marginality, it is my argument that Buck used her experience in China to propose views that could not escape from dominant views of U.S. pre-WWII and Cold War liberalism.

Along similar lines, Buck's writings about racism also benefited from her representations of herself as both Chinese and American and ultimately reveal her belief in the American mythos of being the inheritors of the "westward course of civilization." Invoking her experience as an object of prejudice as a white person in China allows Buck to present her indignation at racism in the U.S. as at once a critique of American society and an affirmation of the U.S. national myths of exceptionalism from empire and foundations in democracy. Buck notes that certainly she had seen "white men cruel to dark people in other places" but was shocked by the discovery of racist violence against black Americans at an exhibit on lynching during an extended visit to the U.S. in 1932. She claims experience of racial otherness in China:

> And I had known so well the horrors and dangers of race prejudice! Had I not, because I was white, suffered from it even in my childhood? It seemed to me, as I listened now to the Negro men and women who explained to me the pictures, that I remembered all that I had purposely forgotten, how as a child I had heard other children call me a foreign devil because I was fair and they were yellow-skinned, and how they had called my blue eyes "wild beast eyes."[31]

The vagueness of Buck's composite representation of the land and space China found in her work as a whole extends to her portrayal of racial thinking in China. The black

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[30] Karen Leong, *The China Mystique* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 55.
[31] Buck 1954, 307.

American's continuing experience of embodied violence that persisted long after the abolition of slavery uncovers Buck's memories of taunts that seem to awaken in her a sense of consciousness as a fellow traveler. Buck's rhetoric that explains race and racial categorization as matters of superficial features and stereotypes foreshadows her writings about racial mixing in her rhetoric about the Amerasian child. Her celebration of the superiority of the mixed-race child as a new form blending the best aspects of the old rests on her embrace of the emerging anthropological work on the social constructedness of race, such that of Ashley Montague. Extending his analogy of the strength of the hybrid seed to characterize the child in terms of racial intermixture (which as we will see downplays the sexual violence accompanying geopolitical dominance, among other things, in understanding the Asian war child), Buck inserts herself into modern discourses of race.[32]

In paving over the incommensurability of the positions of white missionaries in China and black Americans Buck provides a narrative of her own experience that allows her to be a credible commentator on U.S. society. However, this comparison is not able to seamlessly flatten differences between the two situations. Buck claims that "above all, I remembered the day when I had all but lost my life because I was a foreigner, though I had spent my life in China and spoke Chinese better than English" (307-8). What is unspoken in this statement is the slippage between race and nation and between Buck's innocence as a white girl teased by the Chinese children and her status as member of the missionary community whose presence was enabled by the Anglo-American diplomatic

[32] In the novel *The New Year* the protagonist Laura even reads Montague's seminal work in the social construction of race, *Man's Most Dangerous Myth*, and applies the text to the situation of her adopted mixed-race child.

incursions and the threat of foreign gunboats just offshore the Chinese coast. However, even in her explanation of how this awakening helped her decide that she would make the situation of black Americans her primary concern if she returned to the U.S. to live, Buck's rhetoric resorts to the affirmation of U.S. ideals:

> unless we Americans fulfilled our destiny, unless we practiced the great principles of human equality upon which our nation was based, those principles which are our only true superiority, we would one day have to suffer for the sins of white men everywhere in the world… and that we might prove our difference from those white men, whom we were not, we must begin here and now to show, by our actions to our own citizens who were not white, that we and they were one, that all were Americans alike, the citizens of a great nation, the members of one body. (308)

A declaration of U.S. exceptionalism based on its democratic principles, this statement seems to allow Buck to shed her position of abjection as a white girl in China to speak from the position of the "white man" whose duty it is to welcome inclusion of the nation's others as full citizens.

In so far as Buck writes to occupy the position of a "marginal man" in the U.S. who can uniquely work to bring America to fulfill its democratic promise, she characterizes the Amerasian orphan as a parallel figure. Attributed a similar transformative power associated with the marginal, the orphan comes to be in Buck's logic an allegorical figure who represents the possibility for effecting democratic change in the U.S. and through whom marginalized others can gain access to citizenship and social inclusion. She explicitly articulates the Amerasians' status as children who live spatially outside the U.S., but are products of the U.S. In the 1964 book, *Children for Adoption*, Buck characterizes the Amerasian children as "a new breed, without family, without country. Yet it is we who have created them. We have a responsibility, however

much we may deny or neglect it."[33] Echoing Buck's self-representation, these children represent a unique identity that foretells America's future. In her rhetoric on these children, Buck claims the children as American, for not only are they children of American servicemen, but also metaphorically of the whole American nation, of which the soldiers serving in the military intervention are one manifestation. Though the children may be citizen-subjects America has yet to claim, they soon will be included in the "we" that she invokes and will be able to expand American democracy at home and abroad, a process whose narration I will discuss below in my reading of the two novels.

Buck and Other Missionary Legacies

On the one hand Buck's continual reliance on generalizations about Chinese culture and behavior might more generously be interpreted as a strategy by which to universalize and make China accessible to the average American to generate positive images of China. Her universalizing portrayals of China and East Asia translated well into her arguments for adoption from East Asia, as she often framed discussion of wartime sexual politics and the Amerasian child in the abstract and universalizing themes of family and children. It is also true, however, that Buck held many common assumptions with her audience about the U.S. relationship with China, such as the belief in the "American role as a patron of a progressive, democratic China" and a special, non-imperial relationship of friendship with China that was encouraged by the open door notes of 1899.[34] This special relationship was evidenced in the role of the American

[33] Pearl S. Buck, *Children for Adoption* (New York: Random House, 1964), 31.
[34] Hunt, 57.

missionary in China; the vastness of the country and its large population made China a tempting repository of hopes to spread Christianity .

Buck's origins as the daughter of missionaries in China and her eventual rejection of the missionary impulse in her own humanitarian work make her an apt figure through which to begin a discussion of liberal, non-religious humanitarianism in the current adoption scenario. The secularization of Buck's ideas and of American society in general at this moment of national ascendance is a significant lens through which to understand Buck's significance in American self-representations of its role as a liberal world leader.[35] As the missionary impulse in Asia was in decline by mid-century, I focus on the legacy of missionary ideals on Buck's vision of secular humanitarianism that was concomitant with changes in America's global geopolitical role. The paradoxical impulses of secularism, social activism, and religious mission that inform Buck's work differentiate her from the direct missionary involvements in East Asia that characterized much of early transnational adoptions.

While a number of children raised within missionary communities in China rose to positions of power in U.S. thinking about China in mid-twentieth century, whether in government, such as China Hand John Paton Davies, and Ambassador to China John Leighton Stuart, or in control of the media, such as *Time/Life* mogul Henry Luce, Buck became the most famous popular figure associated with China through her maternalist

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[35] For more on Pearl S. Buck's transition form early Christian missionary convictions to increasing liberalism and post-Christian values, see Grant Wacker "The Waning of the Missionary Impulse: The Case of Pearl S. Buck" in *The Foreign Missionary Enterprise at Home*, ed. Daniel Bays and Grant Wacker (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 191-205. She broke with the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, the organization that had sponsored the Buck couple, and Buck's parents in China, in 1933, after a furor arose over her 1932 speech, "Is There a Case for Foreign Missions?" which was highly critical of the role of foreign missionaries in China. Given that Buck was arguably the most well-known missionary of the time, her statements were significant in popular views of the missionary impulse.

and universalized portrayals of China. The daughter of a Presbyterian missionary couple from Virginia, Absalom and Carie Stulting Sydenstricker, Buck was born in 1893 while her parents were on a two-year furlough in West Virginia and was brought back to China in her infancy. Raised within the missionary community in Zhenjiang, she remained in China until her final move to the U.S. in 1934, with the exception attending college at Randolph-Macon Woman's College in Lynchburg, Virginia from 1910 to 1914. In 1917, Buck married John Lossing Buck, who was also in China under the missionary board and would become the pre-eminent agricultural economist of China during their marriage. It was during their travels to rural villages for Lossing's research that Pearl Buck gathered the material for her own portrayal of the rural peasant in her fiction. After returning to the U.S. permanently in 1934, Buck divorced and married her publisher, Richard Walsh. Cutting ties with most of her missionary past, she publicly criticized the foreign missionary project and distanced herself from this community.

Looking at the resonances of Buck's rhetoric with the ideas of other children of American missionaries in China who became influential American voices about China is suggestive in characterizing Buck's insistence on connecting American democracy to East Asia, and most specifically, China. Co-authors James C. Thomson, Jr., Peter Stanley, and John Perry of *Sentimental Imperialists*, assert that East Asia, and China in particular, has always occupied a special place in the American imagination and understanding of its core values. Writing in 1981, they address the quandary of repeated U.S. military interventions in East Asia in the 20th century and what they characterize as the long-held fascination and desire to encounter East Asia in spite of the core national value of exceptionalism from empire that has been manifest in the renunciation of

"foreign entanglements."[36] The authors propose that "Americans have repeatedly felt a need to prove themselves and test their civilization in Asia. As if by witnessing there what we wish to believe of ourselves we might discover conclusively the meaning and justification of our national life" (18). Not only do they characterize the importance of understanding the U.S. in relation to Asia in the latter twentieth century, but the authors argue that U.S. military interventions in East Asia after World War II in fact fueled U.S. benevolence. Arguing against U.S. imperial desires of a "national itch to reshape the world, especially Asia, in their own image," the authors maintain U.S. exceptionalism by concluding that that the U.S. motivations in Asia were driven by benevolence rather than imperialist desires. They write that "America's westward thrust into the far Pacific and East Asia seems also to have had a missionary heart, in the secular sense of the term" and conclude that "if Americans were, as a group, imperialists, their inexhaustible fuel was sentiment" (311). The authors thus frame U.S. geopolitical interests in East Asia through the missionary impulse.

Though Buck opposed U.S. militarism in East Asia, her own vision of U.S. democracy that posited a feminized East Asia (transposed into the figure of the infantilized Amerasian orphan) upheld the same principles of liberal tolerance outlined by the "sentimental imperialists" decades later. In fact, it is would not be surprising if Thompson's interpretive frame was formed through similar experiences as those of Buck, given their mutual upbringing as missionary children in China. "Aunt Pearl" was Thomson's next door neighbor and his mother's best friend in the missionary compound

[36] James Thomson, Jr., Peter Stanley, and John Perry, *Sentimental Imperialists: The American Experience in East Asia* (San Franscisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 2.

in Nanjing.[37] Just as the "sentimental imperialists" suggest that America's work in Asia was that of a "missionary heart, in the secular sense of the term" Peter Conn has argued that the work of Pearl Buck can be seen as that of a "secular humanitarian" and a "secular feminist missionary" who retained the core moral values of her Presbytarian missionary parents (381). If the authors of *Sentimental Imperialists* can be understood to represent a narrative of American paternalism vis-à-vis East Asia, then despite Buck's critique of U.S. military masculinity and paternalism, her reliance on China and East Asia more generally to encourage the U.S. to "mature" into a democracy parallels the bildung narrative laid out by these authors. At the same time that Buck and the authors of *Sentimental Imperialists* both imagine American progress into maturity through discourses about Asia, while the former, as Lowe points out, construct an orientalizing vision of U.S. paternalism in Asia, Buck's reliance on Asia to critique U.S. sexism and racism, and her initiatives to atone for U.S. wars in Asia by adopting Amerasian children into U.S. homes, could be read as weaving a "maternalistic," though still orientalizing, discourse about the U.S. relationship to East Asia.[38]

***The Hidden Flower* and the Occupation of Japan**

As I have argued, though Buck was no longer able to carry out humanitarian projects on behalf of China during the Cold War, her credibility as a spokesperson for social equality in the U.S. always depended upon her authority as a transnational figure with experience of China and the U.S. Similarly, her works on international and domestic

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[37] James Thomson, Jr, "Pearl S. Buck and the American Quest for China" in *The Several Worlds of Pearl S. Buck*, ed. Elizabeth Lipscomb, Frances Webb, and Peter Conn (Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 1994), 7.
[38] Lowe, 107.

issues were always discursively intertwined to conceive of the U.S. in its global role. During the Cold War, Buck's concern with connecting social justice at home and abroad focused on her work on transracial, transnational adoption adoption from Asia. Besides a plethora of non-fiction articles and speeches given on the subject, Buck also wrote two novels narrating the plight of the mixed-race children of American military service personnel in East Asia. Though her prominence as a novelist may have waned in the latter half of her life while her career as a philanthropist grew, Buck continued to write a large number of fiction books (almost 20 novels from 1950 to 1973) that provided financial support for her humanitarian work.

Curiously, neither *The Hidden Flower* (1952) nor *The New Year* (1968), Buck's two novels about Amerasian children and adoption, represent adoption as a trope of transnational family formation according to the narrative of American parents adopting needy Amerasian children found in her non-fiction writing and public rhetoric. Rather, *The Hidden Flower* portrays private adoption as a solution to the problem of U.S. domination over Japan and interracial marriage, whereas *The New Year* portrays the father's acceptance of paternity for his child borne of the Korean War and thus obviates the need for adoption. The common denominator between these two narratives is Buck's insistence on linking a critique of U.S. militarism and masculinity abroad to domestic concerns about racial and gender equality; *The Hidden Flower* addresses connections between the treatment of Japanese Americans and the occupation of Japan as well as the alliance of the figure of the adoptee and postwar modes of womanhood, and *The New Year* contends with U.S. masculinity and femininity in the aftermath of the Korean War.

This novel about an ill-fated romance between Josui Sakai, a Japanese schoolgirl, and Allen Kennedy, a white American soldier stationed in Japan during the occupation, is one of over 20 mass market novels Buck published after WWII to financially support her humanitarian work. The premise of the novel is that Josui and Allen meet and marry in Japan against the wishes of both their parents, move to the U.S., and become increasingly unhappy in the face of widespread racism. Josui places their son up for adoption without revealing his existence to Allen, and both lovers wind up retreating into their families – Allen to his wealthy southern home, and Josui to her elite Japanese parents. The novel culminates in the adoption of their child by Dr. Steiner, a German Jewish refugee in Los Angeles who achieves full womanhood and fights racism through becoming a mother. Published at the height of the postwar mandate for retrograde women's roles and at the end of the U.S. occupation of Japan, the novel demonstrates the inseparability of U.S. race and gender relations at home and abroad in the context of the U.S. postwar project of empire in East Asia.

The Hidden Flower exemplifies not only Buck's ambivalence towards the U.S. occupation in Japan, but also an emergent discourse on transnational adoption from East Asia that celebrates the multicultural promise of the adoptee. Dr. Sakai, and his daughter, Josui, serve as prototypical "model minority" figures in the U.S., though neither can assimilate into U.S. democracy in spite of their privileges of citizenship. The back story is that Dr. Sakai was actually raised in California and worked his way from being the son of Japanese American farmers to become a medical doctor. As an adult he repatriated to Japan with his family when the Japanese internment order was issued. The discrimination the Sakai family experiences in wartime U.S. society and at the hands of American

occupiers in Japan is never resolved. Against the defeat of the Japanese characters' American dreams, however, the Amerasian child, Lenny, is held up as a symbol of the transformation of American society towards racial harmony. This novel imaginatively works through the contradictions of U.S. racial and gender inequality by placing symbolic value on the mixed-race Asian child as a figure of progress and social transformation.

Though Buck is critical of U.S. racism, her work thus nevertheless perpetuates the racialization of Asian Americans through the space of exoticized Asia and displaces them in her work back to their "origin" in Asia, in contrast to the Amerasian child whose proper place is the U.S. Though it is highly allegorical of contemporary American racism, *The Hidden Flower* is an important work through which to historicize contemporary discourses about Chinese transnational adoption, which continue to uphold the orphan as a mediator between Asia and the U.S. while relegating Asian American histories and communities to the margins. In this sense, the adoption of the orphan represents the potential for fulfilling American ideals that cannot be met through existing conditions, such that Buck's critique of U.S. society and intervention abroad ultimately affirms the belief in the U.S. as a bastion of democracy and as a non-imperialist hegemon.

As with much of Buck's fiction, the characters are highly allegorical and are used to play out Buck's social concerns, in this case, the U.S. Occupation of Japan, Japanese American internment, American masculinity, anti-miscegenation laws (which existed in about twenty states in 1952), womanhood, and the Amerasian orphan. In the midst of the Occupation a large number of children of U.S. soldiers and Japanese women were orphaned. These mixed-race children of half-white or half-black parentage were widely

marginalized in their birth countries and presented a contentious challenge to the racial purity of the nation. In the occupation of Japan neither government would accept responsibility. No census of the number of these children was allowed by SCAP (Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers) during the Occupation, but the official census in 1952 estimated that there were 5,013 mixed-race children in Japan, though public fears imagined these numbers to be much higher, reaching to even 200,000 by some claims.[39] The ostracism of the Amerasian children in Japan and later in Korea and their relegation to orphanages or even to street life was of great concern to American humanitarians, including Pearl S. Buck, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller II as well as to American religious organizations and the Department of State. In her advocacy for the adoption of the mixed-race orphans, Buck implicitly agreed with Department of State recommendations that the mass adoption of the mixed-race half-Japanese children to the U.S. would be the best solution to remove the children from languishing in Japan and avert possible anti-Americanism due to the presence of these children. However, these government plans were circumvented by U.S. anti-Asian immigration quotas.

Buck portrays the military and political occupation of Japan as a project of empire, though largely a benevolent one. While some of the older Japanese men in the novel warn that the "United States is only now rising to power" and that "Americans dream of empire," the young Japanese characters, Josui, and Kobori, the family friend Josui's parents hope she will marry, are ready objects of liberalization. Japan's entry into

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[39] Yukiko Koshiro, *Trans-Pacific Racisms and the U.S. Occupation of Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 183-5.

modernity requires an acceptance of American incursions; Kobori looks forward to the end of the Occupation when he will expand his business to the U.S., and Josui, in fact is an American citizen and enjoys the contact with occupying forces who remind her of her happy childhood in Los Angeles. The best model of the modern Japanese woman is in fact American by birth. In the first private meeting between the two of them, Kobori professes to like Americans, and even those who are members of the Occupying forces. His attitude towards American hegemony is one of bemusement. When Josui asks him "What is their task?" Kobori laughs: "It is to make Americans out of us. How impossible!"[40] He is confident of his own success after the war in that he is receptive to collaboration with the Americans and even hopes to do business in the U.S. after the occupation. Kobori has little to say about the occupation, and tellingly, the only problem he mentions specifically is that feels "sorry for… these thousands of little children now sheltered in the orphanages, whose fathers are American, whose mothers are Japanese, and who are therefore orphans" (65).

Kobori names the problem of American paternity and citizenship that plagued government officials in both Japan and the U.S., as Yukiko Koshiro has described. On the one hand, the U.S. government and military discouraged interracial relations and facilitated the father's lack of responsibility for the child by making the declaration of paternity optional and requiring the father to register the birth with the American Consulate to confer U.S. citizenship on the child. On the other hand, the Japanese government recognized Japanese citizenship if the father was a Japanese citizen, or for an illegitimate child of a Japanese mother, if the mother registered the child officially with

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[40] Pearl S. Buck, *The Hidden Flower* (New York: John Day, 1952), 65.

the department of Vital Statistics, which was not done in the cases of an estimated 20 to 30 percent of mixed-race children.[41] The child's family identity is based on patrilineage, so if the fathers (who were not obligated to recognize the children, but could if they so chose) did not recognize the child as theirs, the child would effectively be an orphan in Japan. The Amerasian child is by definition also an orphan, whose misfit with any family structure is also dangerous.

However, in Buck's inter-generational narrative, in which the orphan represents a figure of reconciliation in the future and these young Japanese characters represent hope for international harmony, the older Japanese characters who have personally experienced American racism are opposed to American occupation. The modern youth are set against Dr. Sakai, Josui's father who represents a reversion to insular and ultra-traditional Japanese values in the face of the U.S. structures of domination. Dr. Sakai was raised in Los Angeles and became a successful medical doctor in California in his adulthood, and married a picture bride from Japan. When the executive order for the internment of those of Japanese ancestry was issued, Dr. Sakai became embittered and repatriated to Japan with his wife and daughter. Their son, Kensan, chose to enlist in the army rather than move to Japan and was killed in Italy. Having been confronted with the "notion of a concentration camp," Dr. Sakai's "iron pride had made him return completely to his ancestry," and he strengthened his "determination to be Japanese."[42] Dr. Sakai retreated into the construction of a new life in Japan that enforced his separation from America and Americans, willing himself to take up traditional tea

[41] Koshiro, 180.
[42] Buck 1952, 4.

ceremonies and gardening and even meditation. Buck makes clear the connections between racism at home and effects abroad.

Further, the particular loss to America is that of the model minority, of a man whose "youth had been spent in the busy streets of Los Angeles, peddling the vegetables and flowers that he helped his parents raise" and who then "had worked his way through college and had won scholarships in medical school" (5). Dr. Sakai devolves from being the model minority to an anti-American traditionalist because of America's racist practices. The nation's failure to live up to its promises of equality and democracy lead to this kind of attitude, which is also a national security risk of proportions equal to that of the mixed-race Amerasian orphan. It is this racist failure that the world child can actually remedy. While the orphan is not ready to be integrated into white families, it surpasses the position of the model minority, a subject position that failed to keep the Japanese Americans from turning into the racial and national enemy in World War II.

Perhaps Dr. Sakai can be thought of as the embodiment of the failures of American society to recognize Japanese Americans as full citizens, a plan for assimilation for which Buck outlined in a 1942 speech, "Japanese Americans" originally delivered in 1943 at a rally of the Japanese American Committee on Democracy and published in her collection, *Asia and Democracy*.[43] In this speech Buck explicitly connects the internment of Japanese Americans to the end of the war with Japan. Buck foresees the postwar U.S. occupation of Japan as a time for the U.S. to shape Japan to fit into a global order dictated by the U.S. and identifies the treatment of Japanese Americans as more than a test of democracy at home but as a prerequisite for postwar

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[43] Pearl S. Buck, *Asia and Democracy* (London: Macmillan, 1943).

relations with Japan. In a strange exclusion and inclusion of Japanese Americans from U.S. citizenry, Buck writes that "Japanese Americans… are far closer to us than they are to Japan" and are "indeed American. Let us show them what America is, teach them by our words and our behaviour what democracy means, what justice to all men is, what freedom means for the individual" (91). When "we" have done this, then the Japanese Americans "can be of great service to the democracies" and "will be able, as no one else will ever be to make of Japan a country ready to take her proper place in the new world, the world of freedom for all" (91-2). This "new world," the world dictated by the U.S. will give Japan a proper place to fill the void of their national beliefs: "The Japanese people… will not know how to lead themselves. They will be bewildered and confused by defeat… Democracy is something they know nothing about… New leaders will not be found in Japan. They must be sent there" (92).

Japanese Americans can be included into American democracy but only in particular ways, similarly to the inclusion of Japan geopolitically; in identifying the Japanese American as the ideal individual to teach democracy, Buck simultaneously calls for democratic inclusion of Japanese Americans and maintains their difference by asserting their difference from the normative citizen-subject as well as their closeness with Japan, which was to be a primary assumption for the targeting of Japanese Americans as national enemies. Despite her opposition to internment, she shared racialized assumptions behind it. Writing from a Cold War context, Buck suggests through Dr. Sakai that the U.S. has failed to make use of the Japanese Americans as

model minority figures who could exemplify democracy and that this failure has national security consequences.[44]

Buck's portrayal of the problem of the Amerasian war child also has implications for dominant constructions of American womanhood. Buck's portrayal of the Amerasian child as a problem finds resolution in the adoption of the half-white, half-Japanese child by the woman doctor, Dr. Steiner, in the end of the novel. Buck upholds the concept of the separate spheres in the novel, particularly through Dr. Steiner, who has left all domestic feelings by the wayside in pursuit of her career. Steiner becomes a model of U.S. humanitarianism, by bringing together the immigrant, refugee, and benevolent actor in one character. What she saves the child from is the failure of American masculinity. In the novel, intermarriage is a plot device that allegorizes American race relations. The couple has good intentions of defying norms of race relations, but what ultimately causes their demise is not simply the larger forces of racism and segregation but the weakness of the American man, the same weakness which in the novel is responsible for the birth and abandonment of the Amerasian children to begin with.

The problem of the orphans is suggested in the novel to largely be an American problem and a failure of American masculinity that is played out abroad. As the Colonel says, the problem of the sexual domination of American men cannot be overestimated: "I suppose even the thousands of half-and-half babies would not be the gauge of what really happens. I don't understand exactly why our men seem so – oversexed, let us say."[45] Buck points to the sexual economy that is inextricably intertwined with political and

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[44] On the Cold War origins of the model minority construct, see Robert Lee, *Orientals* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999).
[45] Buck, *The Hidden Flower,* 62.

military occupation, and views this to be a problem of the American man. From the Colonel's point of view the problem is a result of the soldiers' excesses:

> He did not believe in mixing the races. Already there were thousands of half-American Japanese babies, thousands of half-American Chinese babies, just as in India there were hundreds of thousands of half-English Indian babies. It was one of the accursed accompaniments of war and even the Pentagon could not lick the problem. While they were trying to keep America safe for the Americans, the men themselves were undermining the whole idea. (94)

The Colonel understands this to be a transnational problem by linking America's domestic safety to the actions of the men abroad. America's racial order of segregation and significantly, the fiction of benevolent occupation, would be disrupted by the presence of these children. However, it is again not "war" that the passage refers to, but rather, colonial regimes; implicit in this passage is a comparison between occupation and colonialism. This passage echoes actual government reports at this time about the national security risks of the existence of these children.

In *The Hidden Flower,* Buck's critique of the U.S. military occupation rests not so much on the racist aspect of U.S. militarism, but rather on the masculine culture of the military itself. What the Colonel cannot see through is that the structure of domination envelops all the participants, as Allen's decline in his exemplary moral standards is indexed in his attitude toward Josui. Indeed, even though as an individual Allen "disliked being a member of a conqueror race, yet the effects of it had crept into him" as he imposes himself upon Dr. Sakai's household (69). Buck emphasizes that Allen had "been too fastidious to enjoy a prostitute…, yet the subjection of a conquered country had changed him as it changes all men. There are men who feel compelled to force conquered women to submit to them, it is the final phase of war, the completion of personal victory.

He would have declared himself not one of these, and yet he was" (158). However, for Allen the effect of being of a "conqueror race" is not a devolution into overt violence, but rather takes the form of Allen's development of an orientalist apprehension of Josui that manifests in their few months of life together in the U.S. While in Japan, Allen feels himself morally superior to the "coarse louts who went in [to brothels] thirsting and came out boasting" and wishes Josui as an equal partner, a wife (32). Allen believes that Josui "was no Madame Butterfly, he thought, to be loved and left" (33). By contrast, once back in the U.S. and entrenched in his old Virginian family, Allen invokes orientalist visions of Josui, for instance, imagining Josui in his family's southern home where he "did not want her to be altogether American. He would keep her what she was, an oriental treasure" (112). The meaning of this object he wishes her to be is elaborated when they begin their extended honeymoon drive from California to Virginia, and Allen understands Josui to be "the essence of all that was woman, a woman of the Orient, instinctive in the ways of the heart" (143). However much Buck made of Josui's modern womanhood in Japan, in the U.S. context Josui seems to be more exoticized to Allen: "she showed herself Japanese at heart. An American girl would never have so served him. He began to understand why men said it was impossible to love an American woman if one had known a woman of the Orient" (144).

By portraying Allen's gendered and racialized expectations of Josui that are borne out of the institutions of the military and his southern family, Buck constructs the Asian American through her portrayal of the significance of Asia for Americans. Indeed, Buck constructs Asian American identity on U.S. soil as an impossible identity, since Asian Americans cannot escape that ambiguously racialized status of being in-between black

and white Americans. In the plot about the failure of the inter-racial marriage, Allen's attitude toward Josui sets the stage for his failing of her in the U.S., as he retreats back into the provincial setting of his wealthy southern home and neglects her. What Allen fails Josui in is his inability to transcend racial barriers. When told about the anti-miscegenation laws in Virginia, he settles them in New York City. In his southern context, he understands Josui to be an exception because of her elite status as the daughter of a respected physician and her American origins. Indeed, he repeatedly places Josui as being a person of color, but not at all like the southern black population at home. Buck points to the difficulties of racial categorization in a conversation between Allen and his mother:

> "Did you say her blood is entirely Japanese?" she asked.
> "Yes, but she was born in California. Did I tell you that?"
> He had told her, but he wanted to tell her again.
> "Then she looks Japanese?" his mother said.
> "They aren't dark, Mother. I mean they are nothing like the colored people here."
> "They certainly are not white," she said a little sharply. He could not answer this. There was silence between them for a moment. (122)

In this conversation we can see the in-between status of Asians in the American racial order. His attempt to differentiate Josui from black Americans does not make any case for changing the structures of racial thinking. The mixed race orphan thus makes these boundaries fluid. The mother represents an old guard of whiteness in the south intent upon preserving their way of life. Allen, who contemplates living as a man of leisure in the old house, much as his father does, cannot understand the structures of domination in the south or in the occupation of Japan. He views his mother to be similar to Dr. Sakai and wants to prevent their children from marrying across racial boundaries: "It happens

that her ancestors came from some islands in the East instead of the West. She might have been born in England, for example./ Our ancestors came from England," his mother said. "Just a handful of islands," he repeated. "Her father felt just as you do, Mother. He didn't want me for a son-in-law because I am white" (123). Allen thus fails to understand the fundamental incommensurability between the two parents' convictions, in that Dr. Sakai is speaking from the experience of being the object of institutionalized racism, while his mother has been a beneficiary of the violently institutionalized enslavement of black people. In substituting citizenship for race in his framing of Josui as "being born in California," Allen reveals the racialization of citizenship and the racialization of the Asian American as figure of the foreign. Josui's citizenship does not promise full inclusion into the nation, as she tells the unborn Lennie about her decision to marry Allen, "I thought because I was born a citizen here, I was right. But there is a law against you and me, Lennie" (173). Buck makes clear that this law that prevents interracial marriage is a law to protect whiteness and is a law against people of color.

The resolution of the novel with Josui's return to Japan and the adoption of her child by Dr. Steiner represents the vindication of American womanhood as the savior of the child from the weakness of the American man and racism. In an obvious parallel between two persecuted figures, the Japanese internee and the Jewish concentration camp prisoner, Buck ends the novel with Josui's relinquishing of her child and returning to Japan to marry Kobori and Lennie's adoption by Dr. Steiner. Dr. Steiner parallels Josui's father, Dr. Sakai, but the former, as a persecuted refugee of European descent, represents the possibilities for the inclusion of the Amerasian orphan into the nation. The comparison between the two is also central to demonstrating the victory of American

womanhood. Buck falls into the logic of separate spheres in the conception of Dr. Steiner, whose success in her career compensates for her lack of femininity and maternal desires. We can see this in Buck's description:

> Dr. Steiner was short, fat, and quite aware of her own square and ugly face. She bore no resentment toward anyone for her appearance. Early in life she had accepted the course of her life. It was hardly to be expected that any man would want to marry a girl who looked like a primitive hewn from gray rock. She was therefore extremely grateful for her excellent brain and giving up all thought of romance she became a scientist. (192)

She is exactly the kind of woman Dr. Sakai seeks to prevent Josui from becoming in attempting to arrange her marriage, to prevent her from becoming one of the "many women in America who had lost all natural desire" and instead "were absorbed in careers, good enough in some ways but destructive in their effect upon their womanhood" (12). This critique of American womanhood is answered by Dr. Steiner's elevation to motherhood in the end.

However, Dr. Steiner's form of motherhood does not entail her achievement of tender maternal feeling, but rather turns her into a parental medium through which the power of the adopted son will be developed. Portrayed as a gruff doctor totally lacking in feminine feelings or experiences, she contrasts herself to Josui, whom she objectifies as a hyper-feminine doll; she assesses her to be "an extraordinary creature – very beautiful and healthy" (194). In giving up her child to Dr. Steiner, Josui seems to supply the baby for the latter, symbolically supplying the child for the forging of a new world directed by Dr. Steiner. The doctor regards Lennie to be a "world child…, an adventurer, born in spite of all laws and hatreds, a bold child, creator of a new world" (196). With this child, Dr. Steiner not only grows herself, as she develops a maternal relationship but also

envisions playing a role in changing the world, that is in moving towards universal equality. She understands Lennie to "[bring] together in his one small being the whole world!" by virtue of mixed racial status. Using her credibility as a woman of science, to demonstrate that the Amerasian child, contrary to being weak or inferior, is actually superior, as she conducts "tests, including neurological" to find that his intelligence quotient… is the highest I have ever found in a human being of this age" (217).

While Steiner has already been victimized at the hands of the Nazis she keeps Lennie from this fate at the hands of American society:

> she thought suddenly of the little dead babies, starved, killed, bayoneted, tossed into heaps, babies who died because of what their parents were: Jews, Catholics, rebels, the hated, the feared, the despised. She could not bear to know that Lennie saw these memories even in her eyes. He was so sensitive, so wise, in his brain were garnered the gifts of all the world… She recognized him for what he was to be, she the chosen one, weird old virgin that she was… Among all who were lost, this child she had saved (218).

In this quote, we can see the re-articulation of the Christian language of "rescue" in terms of the political over the spiritual and how this exemplifies what I have been calling Buck's "secular humanitarian" approach to adoption. Comparing the Amerasian orphan and the Jewish victims, Buck notes that Dr. Steiner, who, being one-eight Jewish, like Lennie is also a "mixture," has lost all of her teeth in the concentration camps, suggesting her return to childlike status. Given America's role as the leader of the new world order that is symbolized in the unity of Steiner and Lennie, the rebirth of the nation and of the entire world is enacted through the ability of the U.S. to protect and transform the downtrodden and persecuted who are not accepted anywhere else in the world. Through

her relationship to Lennie, Dr. Steiner achieves inclusion as a Jewish refugee and mother into the U.S. nation-state.

Written at the height of Cold War domesticity, the novel departs in several ways from the imperatives of the woman's entrenchment in the home and the suburban nuclear family in significant ways in constructing an inter-racial non-nuclear family. Whereas scholars such as Robert Shaffer and Chistina Klein consider Buck's adoption work in the 1950s within a retreat into the "private, traditionally female sphere of the family" in the face of Cold War domestic containment policies, in *The Hidden Flower* does challenge the nuclear family and traditional domesticity to some extent.[46] Klein argues that Buck's work on adoption can be understood as part of an early Cold War middlebrow culture of integration that used a parental trope to apprehend U.S. foreign policy toward Asia, and to encourage ordinary Americans involved in fighting communism through creating bonds of inclusion between the U.S. and Asian allies. For middlebrow cultural figures family was a lens through which to understand U.S. foreign policy in Asia; the theme and practice of making families across national and racial boundaries could create a sense of political obligation toward Asia.

However, it seems that in this fictional work, Buck's portrayal of adoption and of the mixed-race child orphan complicates claims to her collusion with Cold War domesticity. If we can understand this novel to be fundamentally about the family as a site to maintain and reproduce the nation, the family is certainly denaturalized as such in that this role is not given to "traditional" families such as the Kennedys or the Sakais but

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[46] Christina Klein. *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 178.

rather to the family made up of the Jewish refugee doctor and Amerasian adoptee. Steiner's utilitarian treatment of Lennie, as a test subject to prove the worth of the mixed-race child, turns motherhood into a scientific experiment and an extension of her public life. Though the portrayal of Dr. Steiner may reiterate the logic of separate spheres, her character emphasizes the dominance of her public life working in a field associated with men over her private one. In fact, this exaggeration of her lack of soft femininity carries through to her adoption; in the adoptive family formed without paternity (since the women never tell Allen about the existence of his son and he is absented from the adopted family), Buck flouts the Cold War containment of women's sexuality. In so far as Josui and Allen's return to their respective homes signifies a return to family, Buck drastically alters the Cold War mandate in having the retreat into "family" signify the failure of marriage. Of course, these representations do not seem to actively challenge dominant racial and gender codes, but rather find ways to circumvent them. Significantly, the critique of American masculinity and militarism is quite limited in this novel, as Allen is absolved of responsibility in the plot. Ultimately, Buck does maintain faith in the promise of America and the orphan as a symbol of its future of equality and democracy.

The New Year **and Family Formation After the Korean War**

As we saw in the discussion of *The Hidden Flower*, which was published at the height of Cold War domesticity, Buck's narrative does not wholly embrace the contemporary mandate for traditional gender roles. In contrast, *The New Year* does narrate adoption as family formation and ends with the affirmation of men's and women's gender roles. I argue that Buck does take up traditional notions of family in the

late 1960s not in the defeat by the Cold War consensus, as others have suggested, but rather in response to radical challenges to the status quo of gender politics. Her almost reactionary turn to the security of the family in her discussion of Korean War orphans suggests her strong liberalism that resists radical feminist movements that themselves marked the breakdown of the nuclear family model and regressive gender roles of the postwar period. I focus on these connections between the cultural politics surrounding the Korean War and U.S. gender constructs as the lens through which to read this novel in relation to *The Hidden Flower.* In this novel, Buck continues to rely upon broad generalizations in her portrayal of international and national politics such that the primary difference between the two novels does not revolve around the disparate national settings and historical occasions, but rather has to do with Buck's understanding of gender and race across the two decades.

Buck's views on the demise of the American family at this moment can be seen in her epilogue to the 1971 re-issue of her feminist book, *Of Men and Women* (1941), titled "Women and Liberation."[47] The shift from the original text, which argued for the complementarity of gender roles with total equality is quite revealing. Commenting on feminist movements since that time, Buck is especially concerned about the breakdown of the family, that is, about the belief among young women that "families are out" (207). Making the dramatic comparison to the successful march of Communism in 1940s China, Buck relies on her authority on China again to warn against feminist movements that disrupt the family structure, for when marriage is no longer the norm and children are born out of wedlock without families to care for them, the state must take over. On the

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[47] Pearl S. Buck, *Of Men and Women* (New York: John Day, 1971).

opposite end of the spectrum from excessive state intervention is the statelessness of the half-American children in Asia, who are rendered without family and state by their fathers' abandonment. Thus Buck seems to reveal her core concern about U.S. gender relations through the plight of the Amerasian child in her suggestion that the actions of American men abroad are an effect of but can also influence domestic gender relations and society as a whole.

To Buck, advances in reproductive technologies could aggravate the problem of men's "sex control" in Asia as they are "accustomed at home to girls who use The Pill" (241). If for her the "imbalance" of sexes is a fundamental problem of U.S. society, then to produce "illegitimate" children in Asia is for "our men [to] have taken our problem to Asia" (241). The nature of the intrusion into "Asian" society is the disruption to the family structure, which has "for centuries" held together society; in fact, Buck claims that "there was no such person in Asia as the illegitimate child – not until now" because men and women have always been bound by early marriage, and any children produced by a "man's fancies after marriage" could be included into the family structure through concubinage (241). In this sense the "American problem" abroad to which Buck refers is the problem of the society no longer anchored in traditional family structures.

Ostensibly Buck's 1968 novel, *The New Year*, follows a predictable narrative of solving the problem of the Amerasian child in Korea whose life chances have been constrained by discrimination and resentment towards Americans and Amerasian children in his birth nation. The American father's recognition of his responsibility to make the child his son and thus an American citizen remedies one of the unresolved preconditions that Buck identifies in her call for adoption, that is, the refusal of the

American man to accept his responsibility for the child. The novel rehearses Buck's arguments that the mixed-race children should be recognized as American and allowed to enter the U.S.; in contrast to their lack of opportunity in Korea, they'll "get the best here."[48]

The plotline of the novel is that Christopher Winters, a successful Philadelphia based politician is in the midst of running for the governorship of the state of Pennsylvania, when he receives a letter from Korea addressed, "Dear American Father…" The letter turns out to be from the son he conceived as a young solider with a Korean girl, Soonya, ten years prior. Worried about the consequences for his marriage and his political campaign, Christopher conceals the letter from his wife, Laura. When Laura learns of the child she insists on traveling to Korea alone to meet him. Finding that "Kim Christopher" cannot have a future in Korea, Laura brings him back to the U.S. He lives at a boarding school in New England for months, until the father decides to publicly acknowledge his son after his election victory. It would seem that the woman's active role in the bringing the child to the U.S. and the father's admission of his responsibility both resolve the geopolitical problems of the child and at the same time complete the respective gender roles of the main characters in their new parenthood.

Buck's concern with the role of women is manifested in the novel in the character of Laura Winters, the scientist and soon-to-be mother to her husband's half-Korean son. Laura proves to embody Buck's ideal of womanhood, a strong woman whose successful career in fact enhances her ability to support her husband, making him a better man without challenging his patriarchal authority. Self-conscious about her suitability as a

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[48] Pearl S. Buck, *The New Year* (New York: John Day, 1968), 167.

wife because of her commitment to her career, Laura finds fulfillment through family formation such that becoming a mother leads to her satisfaction as a good wife, a loving mother, and complete woman. A theme that is relentlessly repeated in the novel is that of denaturalizing the association of women with beauty and sentiment in favor of intelligence and strength. Indeed, similarly to the metaphor of the oceanic "bridge creature," an organism that Laura studies as a marine pharmacologist because of its ambiguous categorization between plant or animal, for the Amerasian child, who we are told bridges east and west, Asian and white, and various other dichotomies, Laura herself represents a synthesis of two female types: "beauty and brains" (181). In portraying Laura as both a fashion model and a scientist Buck even rhetorically identifies her as two people in one body, as she is both "Mrs. Christopher Winters, wife of our next governor" and also "Dr. Laura de Witt, the distinguished young scientist" (193).

Laura's achievement of motherhood completes her exemplarity as a woman in the end of the novel. Her motherhood contrasts her to the Korean woman, who is portrayed as weak and exoticized and worst of all as a bad mother. Soonya gladly hands Kim Christopher over to Laura for cash, even raising the stakes by threatening to keep him to work in her brothel. Through the comparison of the women along the axis of motherhood, Buck draws on the longtime feminization of Asia in comparison to the West. In fact, when Laura is confronted with the reality of her husband's former mistress, she abstracts Soonya to a symbolic and geographic level, musing over "Asia who sat here before her now in the graceful shape of a strange and beautiful woman" (103). The threat that Soonya represents through her model of bad motherhood is the emasculation of all of

Asia in making her son a metaphorical eunuch for her trade and keeping him behind her veil of orientalized mystery.

Although Buck sets up the feminization of Asia through this comparison to the American woman, the familial trope also allows her to make a critique of U.S. paternalism in the realms of politics and family alike. On the one hand, Buck's critique of masculinity and the state takes the form of Christopher's perception of the existence of a half-Korean son as a threat from his past, that is, a mistake he made when he himself was a "boy in Korea" and found "some simple, happy human warmth" in Soonya to quell his constant fear of dying (204). On the other hand, this gets resolved when he publicly acknowledges his son at his election party; in making the first speech of his career as governor, Christopher links his position as a father and statesman by declaring his membership in the group of soldiers, who in "those seven countries of Asia where our men are living, fighting, dying today," bear mixed-race children in the course of their service (252-3). Christopher aspires to the presidency, for he believes that he can lead the U.S. in this time of "world tensions, the war in southeast Asia, the strife between rising nations." Similarly to the way in which "a burst of flame in a far place brought flickers of fire everywhere," Christopher's story of military service and paternity is embedded in these transnational tensions, and the personal involvement haunts his current position.

However, Christopher's simultaneous rise to political power and fatherhood does not seamlessly conclude the novel with a positive model of a caring statesman who accepts responsibility for his and his country's actions in Korea and leaves ambivalent his vision of leadership. Referring to contemporary domestic politics, he rants to his wife, "we've had all we need of splinter groups, unions, brotherhoods, national groups, racial

groups, everyone disaffected! They've forgotten to be Americans… Once I am in the seat of power you'll see a benevolent dictator!" (207). Given the resonances with Buck's statements that one failing of American democracy was the instability of leadership with regular elections and her suggestion that something modeled on imperial model of rule of China would allow for the constant leadership of wise men, perhaps we might read this as a statement of a benign national unity. At the same time, the implications of Christopher's vision of domestic unity that organizations representing the disaffected are chipping away at national unity must be read in its disjuncture with contemporary social movements.

The language of Christopher's speech suggests connections between his vision of benevolent dictatorship for Americans and the history of paternalistic American foreign policy in Asia, such as the policy of benevolent assimilation in the Philippines and the claims to a "special relationship" with China. In this regard Christopher's acceptance of responsibility for his son does not absolve him of complicity in American sexual and military power in Asia nor does it imply an understanding of the faults of American policy in Asia. In fact, Christopher's background with which he is introduced as governor as "a man born in our own community, of a family famous in our state and our city [Philadelphia], a man born and educated in the traditions of our people" and who achieved a "distinguished career at Harvard and then as a young lawyer," place him within the community of Cold War political and foreign policy elite that Robert Dean calls the "imperial brotherhood."[49] Dean argues that Cold War foreign policy (particularly decisions leading up to U.S. intervention in Vietnam) was shaped by

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[49] Robert Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001).

networks of patronage that required the cultivation and perpetuation of codes of masculinity over generations through prescribed social experiences: education in particular elite boarding schools and universities, volunteer military service, followed by a career in politics. Given this characterization of Christopher as a member of a ruling elite, it does not seem that the novel ends with a clear resolution of the problem of the Amerasian child and U.S. militarism.

The ending of *The New Year* may seem to portray an overly saccharine and simplistic version of family formation, as Conn has noted, but as we have seen it also retains an unresolved critique of American masculinity.[50] Unlike the ending of *The Hidden Flower* in the adoption of the child by the Jewish refugee, the inclusion of the child into family does not imply the same hope for the future of America to finally live up to its promises of democracy. One major difference is that *The New Year* does not represent adoption, in the sense of the non-biologically rooted construction of a family, but rather a father's acceptance of a child whose only connection is that of blood and not of choice. After Christopher leaves Soonya one month after the baby is born and has no contact with either of them for eleven years he only begrudgingly takes in his son. In spite of Christopher's opportunity to personally atone for his denial of his son, his absolution is only partial as he cannot escape his complicity in the larger structure of dominance of American military power in Asia.

This ending suggests that the breakdown of family that Buck laments in her epilogue discussed above already affects the family in her novel. Though the marriage between the parents is strong, and they now complete their family with a child, the family

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[50] Conn, 366.

unit is not strong enough to overcome the consequences and causes of American domination abroad, as the narrative implies that it should. It is impossible to elide the sexual violence of military occupation that historically accompanied U.S. hegemony in Asia. Though Buck does not address this issue explicitly, it would seem that it is not simply the fact of family formation that might be based on biology that Buck advocates, but rather that she advocates adoption as an action of American based on ideals that represents a conscious choice that brings the nation closer to truly being a liberal democracy.

Conclusion

I recently viewed the website of Pearl S. Buck International, the organization that united its namesake's Welcome House and Pearl S. Buck Foundation projects under one administration in 1992, and saw that it has turned Buck's legacy back to a focus on China. Dedicated to continuing Buck's "commitment to improving the quality of life and expanding opportunities for children, promoting and understanding the values and attributes of other cultures, the injustice of prejudice, and the need for humanitarianism throughout the world," this organization continues to sponsor children in need in foreign countries and to coordinate transnational adoptions.[51] Not surprisingly, the most prominent country featured on their website is China, which is presented as a site of adoption but also as a site of intercultural educational exchange and experience for adults. This return to the original focus of Buck's work on combining her dreams of social

[51] Pearl S. Buck International, "The Programs of Pearl S. Buck International," http://www.pearl-s-buck.org/psbi/default.asp (accessed 23 September 2005).

equality and humanitarian aid toward China suggests the strength of her legacy more than three decades since rapprochement with China and over one decade since the end of the Cold War. That Buck's legacy lives on is a testament to the endurance of her model of secular liberal humanitarianism that she used to shape American understandings of East Asia and encourage adoption as a form of popular activism to help children born in East Asian nations.

Not only does Buck's legacy continue in relation to her humanitarian works and popular understandings of East Asia, but also with regard to representations of Asian Americans in the domestic context. Her influence in shaping the figure of the Asian American was intimately tied to her popular authority on China and continues to have repercussions for the construction of the Asian American as a liberal subject, as I address in my discussion in later chapters on cultural discourses surrounding contemporary adoption from China. The most notorious response to Buck in the context of Asian American discourses was perhaps that of Frank Chin, Lawson Inada, Jeffrey Paul Chan, and Shawn Wong, the editors of *Aiiieeeee!*, which with its 1974 publication was the first anthology of Asian American fiction. In contrast to Harold Isaacs' flattering portrayal of Buck as the person responsible for "creating" China for Americans, the editors write that "for the generations of Asian Americans born and raised since the '20s, the Christian conversion, Charlie Chan, Fu Manchu, Shangri-la, Pearl S. Buck, and the camps, Asian American history, like the Asian and the Asian American, has been and is real only as a product of white fictions and fantasy."[52] Disregarding Buck's efforts to break with her

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[52] Cited in Lye, 292-3.

missionary past, these writers lump her in with Christian evangelists and white constructions of Asian Americans as exotic, mystical, and even dangerous.

Contemporary understandings of Asians and Asian Americans cannot easily escape more sympathetic interpretations of Buck, however, for her immense influence as the actual imaginative "creator" of China, that is, of making China exist and *matter* for Americans, still has implications for apprehending the Asian American as a liberal subject. Contestations over the right to represent Asian Americans and how to do so do not necessarily challenge the tenets of America's universal equality, but have also sought inclusion for Asian Americans into the liberal promise of America, not so differently from the subject position of the Chinese and Asian American laid out in Buck's thinking. At the 1992 Centennial Symposium honoring Buck's birth that was held at her alma mater, Randolph-Macon Woman's College in Virginia, a highlight of the event was the lecture and reading by the celebrated Chinese American author Maxine Hong Kingston. Her lecture credited Buck's representation of Chinese characters as being so honest and sympathetic as to have the effect of "translating my parents to me."[53] She declares that Buck "was giving me our ancestry and our habitation" and "salute[s] Buck for making Asian voices heard, for the first time, in Western literature."[54] Kingston's acceptance of Buck's power to represent China and Chinese people not just for white Americans, but for Chinese Americans as well, suggests the enduring power not just of the content of Buck's representations, but also of its ideological premises in the uniqueness of the U.S.

[53] Cited in Conn, xiii.
[54] *Ibid.*

as a democracy and its promise of inclusion of immigrants, women, and others into its body politic.

Chapter Two

Chinese American Women Writers and Adoption Discourse

The last chapter ended by addressing the legacy of Pearl S. Buck's influential representations of Asia on Chinese American writers, including Maxine Hong Kingston. This chapter picks up on the argument about the liberal construction of Asian American identity in the Cold War context and the connections of the trope of family to adoption and public rhetoric addressed in the previous chapter. I examine the gendered construction of concepts of culture and American identity in representing China and Chinese people in popular Asian American women's writing for mainstream audiences in relation to representations of the Chinese female orphan and adoptee.

I specifically focus on the authors Amy Tan and Anchee Min, both of whom I connect to the Kingston's popularization of the inter-related themes of family, race and culture in Asian American women's writing and to discourses of adoption. Both authors have written introductions to books about adoption and the construction of the Chinese female orphan in need for a Western audience, and like Buck, thereby draw on their status as public figures known for their representations of Chineseness from a U.S. perspective. The construction of the Chinese female orphan in need relies upon their expertise as spokespersons for American liberalism as a space of emancipation from China, characterized by a culturally defined misogyny. The narratives of these cultural "experts" help to frame adoption and the need of the orphan in gendered, culturalist terms within U.S. benevolence. The chapter examines how the adoption discourse is mutually constituted with narratives of gender, race and nation in which the Asian American woman does the work of domesticating China along the lines of U.S. liberalism.

This chapter intervenes in discussions of Asian American (women's) writing by placing these works into the larger context of U.S. domesticity and the changing geopolitical relationship with China. The longstanding position of China in the U.S. imaginary as an exoticized space full of possibility for U.S. expansion has made China important from the early 20th century up through the Cold War, as an emerging world power, and from a contemporary U.S. foreign policy and global economic perspective, as the next capitalist frontier. As discussed in the previous chapter, Pearl S. Buck's work of portraying China and Chinese people as friends of the U.S. in the period prior to and during WWII provided a domesticating model for understanding U.S. geopolitical relations with China and later with Japan and Korea in terms of familial narratives. While Amy Ling situates Kingston's work in the U.S. Civil Rights and Women's Liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s, another context for the publication and popular reception of the novel by white mainstream readers was the political and economic "opening" of Communist China to the U.S. beginning with Nixon's visit in 1972.

In addressing Tan's and Min's recent contributions to adoption discourse at the beginning of the 21st century, I consider their roles in the privileging of the Chinese American womanhood in representing Chinese American identity in relation to China within the context of U.S. relations with China in the past two decades. I emphasize the connections between U.S. politics of a gendered, multicultural inclusion of Asian Americans into U.S. liberalism and the imaginary of China, first through Min's narration of China's Cultural Revolution and then through Tan's narration of Chineseness through the eyes of her postfeminist, upwardly mobile second-generation women characters. Their popularity may be understood as providing a "domestication" of U.S.-China

geopolitics through the mode of family in the last two decades. The alliance of these Chinese American women with white liberalism in the adoption discourse (in the sense of ideology and also their narrative presence in books composed by white adoptive parents of girls from China) suggests their roles in the domestication of the Chinese other, for which the privileged figures are women and children.

Tan's contribution to the rhetoric of rescue and adoption is to give the perspective of an assimilated Chinese American woman, or a model of what the adoptees might become in their adulthood. Min adds the imagination of what life might have been in China by telling what life in China might be like for these girls, in contrast to their freedom in the U.S. It is this transformation of the orphan into an adoptee, or from an "other" into an immigrant figure of inclusion (with the family standing in for nation), that my discussion focuses on. The relationship between these two figures demonstrates the structure of benevolence in the U.S. liberalism and provides a transnationally informed ground for apprehending the adoptee; the orphan must exist for the adoptee to be a model immigrant figure.

Because both fall into the publishing boom of Asian women writers in the U.S. following the groundbreaking popularity of Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976), I begin by situating the particular gendering of the form and content of their work in relation to this earlier precedent. These two authors have often been placed in different categories by scholars, Tan as a Chinese American author, and Min, as a Chinese immigrant author. This chapter examines how both necessarily represent China and Chineseness from a U.S. context and produce China as a feminized space through the lens of U.S. liberalism. Scholars have often written about Amy Tan in connection with

Maxine Hong Kingston. With her focus on the theme of intergenerational relationships, especially between mothers and daughters, that highlights the Chinese American imagination of China, Tan has been written about as the next in line in a tradition of Chinese American writing begun by Kingston. For example, Amy Ling suggests that *The Joy Luck Club* is “in parts an echo and a response and in parts a continuation and expansion of Kingston’s book” published 13 year prior.[55] On the other hand, immigrant writers such as Min have not typically been considered in the context of Asian American writing.

While many scholars of Asian American literature connect Tan to Kingston, I also connect Anchee Min to these authors. Not only does her immigrant autobiography form draw upon the popularity of Kingston’s memoir, but the fact that all three women writers were represented by the same agent, Sandra Dijkstra, provides a material ground in which to consider the commonalities of the basis of their popularity with a mainstream readership. In addition to the fact that writings by both authors appear on recommended reading lists on adoption websites as examples of fiction writing relevant to adopting from China, the numerous points of connection between Tan and Min through their work on adoption suggests the importance of discussing the two together.[56] For instance, I discuss Tan’s introduction to *Mei Mei (Little Sister): Portraits From a Chinese Orphanage* (Bowen 2005) for which Anchee Min provides Chinese calligraphy.[57] Karin Evans provides the afterword to this book and is the author of the bestselling book, *The*

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[55] Amy Ling, *Between Worlds* (New York: Pergamon Press, Inc, 1990), 130.
[56] Chinese Children Adoption International, “Resources: Books,” http://www.chinesechildren.org/Adoption/Resources.aspx.
[57] Amy Tan, introduction to *Mei Mei (Little Sister): Portraits From a Chinese Orphanage*, by Richard Bowen (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2005), 6-9.

Lost Daughters of China: Abandoned Girls, Their Journey to America, and the Search for a Missing Past, for which Min wrote the introduction I discuss below.[58]

Both sets of writers share pressures placed by mainstream publishing and readership upon ethnic writers to represent their "culture." For example, the most widely read and discussed autobiography by an Asian American, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior,* has generated much discussion in Asian American studies, that particularly highlights issues of culture and authenticity.[59] The contestations over Kingston's work in terms of her feminism and representation of sexism in Chinese American families and the authenticity of her narrative brings to the fore contestations over self-representation, responsibility to one's ethnic group, and pressures of mainstream acceptance in ethnic women's writing. The controversy over Kingston's autobiography was largely driven by the gendered politics of ethnic representation that accused Kingston of fabricating Chinese culture and providing a "fashionably feminist work written with white acceptance in mind."[60] As King-Kok Cheung notes, charges made by mostly male Chinese American critics after Kingston's rise of fame that accused the author of "misrepresenting Chinese and Chinese American culture, and for passing fiction for autobiography" were both implicitly and explicitly gendered.[61] Implicitly, because women's autobiographical writing as a genre often portrays subjective and private experience, resisting masculinist objectivity, and explicitly, because these authors,

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[58] Karin Evans, *The Lost Daughters of China: abandoned girls, their journey to America and the search for a missing past* (New York : J.P. Tarcher/Putnam, 2000).
[59] In fact, Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* has been cited as the most widely read living author on college campuses today, as of the late 1990s, according to Sau-ling Wong. This discussion of Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* is indebted to this the arguments of authors in this casebook.
[60] Tong, Benjamin R, "Critic of Admirer Sees Dumb Racist," *San Francisco Journal*, May 11, 1977, 6.
[61] King-Kok Cheung, "The Woman Warrior versus the Chinaman Pacific" in *Maxine Hong Kingston's* The Woman Warrior: *A Casebook*, ed. Sau-ling Wong (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 113-133.

led by Frank Chin and Jeffery Paul Chan, objected to the damage that Kingston caused to their attempt to recuperate and celebrate Asian American 'manhood' against a history of emasculation in the U.S.

More generally, the challenge of Kingston's writing a fictionalized autobiography as a Chinese American woman was that "for a 'minority' author to exercise such artistic freedom is perilous business because white critics and reviewers persist in seeing creative expressions by her as no more than cultural history" (119). While Kingston's text provides a complex narrative about memory and family from the perspective of a Chinese American woman, the debates about the politics of representation surrounding her work are relevant to reading Min's autobiography of a Chinese woman immigrant to the U.S. What differentiates Min's text from Kingston's is its form and content as an immigrant autobiography. Against the backdrop of China's "inordinately strong spell on the white imagination," Sau-ling Wong writes that autobiography became the pre-eminent form of writing in English for Chinese Americans (including both U.S. and foreign-born). This was the genre through which Chinese Americans gained access to the "house of literature" but simultaneously faced the pressures of satisfying the "white reader's appetite for exoticism" (42; 39).[62]

China-born writers have tended to follow a generic format, focusing on one's life in China and ending with arrival in the U.S. with little narration of experiences after immigration. Of the tone and content of these texts, Wong writes that the "author tends to believe the life depicted as representing Chinese life of a certain period of social milieu,

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[62] Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, "Autobiography as Guided Chinatown Tour," in *Maxine Hong Kingston's* The Woman Warrior: *A Casebook*, ed. Sau-ling C. Wong (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 29-53.

and of interest to the Western reader chiefly for this reason rather than for its uniqueness" (39). *Red Azalea* follows this format in that the narrative suddenly ends with the protagonist's arrival in the U.S., however, Min's text departs from typical Chinese immigrant autobiography through her focus on her individuated identity and agency. Her narration of her individualism against the social mileu of the Cultural Revolution serves to narrate her burgeoning liberal identity and fitness for becoming an assimilated immigrant in the U.S. Min's narration of self-identity must be distinguished from Kingston's, however. While Kingston eschews the accommodation to white expectations in her narration of her self-hood that is based in resistance to multiple oppressions having to do with both her Chinese family and U.S. social structures, Min's declaration of self confirms a U.S. liberal structure of feeling.

Situating Amy Tan in Chinese American Women's Writing

In addressing Tan's rhetoric of the Chinese orphaned child and potential adoptee, this chapter examines the intertextuality of photographic images and visual representations in relation to adoption discourse and Asian racialization. I argue that these portrayals also allow for the figure of the Asian and Asian American to be tamed by constructing a gendered and racialized western gaze that humanizes the adoptee as both a sentimental and immigrant subject. Amy Tan's reputation is based on her mother-daughter narratives that imagine China as fundamentally distinct from the U.S. Tan's contribution to the orphan/adoption narrative appears to represent what the adoptee will be like in future, as an assimilated Chinese American in the U.S. Tan writings and active public speaking position her as a voice of Chinese culture that can supplement American

mainstream culture. Critiqued for her orientalist imagination of China as filtered through the personal narrative of family, Tan is an apt candidate for narrating the relationship of the adoptees to their Chinese "motherland" and their new American home.

Amy Tan's reputation as a writer rests on her focus on portraying Chinese American lives through intergenerational narratives, especially between mothers and daughters with emphasis on China as the space of origin. The recipient of abundant popular success and critical acclaim, Tan's books are also frequently recommended reading on Chinese adoption websites. Her first novel, *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), was on *The New York Times* bestseller list for more 8 months and was nominated for the National Book Award and the National Book Critic's Award. Known for her mother-daughter stories that bridge the U.S. and China, Tan has written three subsequent novels, *The Kitchen God's Wife*, *The Hundred Secret Senses,* and *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, all of which have been national bestsellers. Tan speaks of her admiration for Kingston's *Woman Warrior*, saying that "A friend gave me *The Woman Warrior* and I devoured it in one sitting… I felt amazed and proud that somebody could have written this."[63]

The format of the mother-daughter stories that highlights the daughters' perspective of her relationship with her immigrant mother and with the "motherland" of China that the mother represents is central to Tan's contribution to discourses of adoption from China. What makes Tan's literary narratives so significant to the larger discourse of family and the infantilized Chinese other as the object of benevolence and subject of liberal inclusion is her turn to family as a the central mode of experiencing culture and

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[63] Stephen Talbot, cited in Wendy Ho, *In Her Mother's House: The Politics of Asian American Mother-Daughter Writing* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press) 1999.

identity. Amy Ling writes of the trope of the lost mother in *The Joy Luck Club* that with the death of the mother, the relationship with the daughter "ceases to be a battle and becomes a devastating loss… The lost mother is entangled with the story of two lost daughters, who when found and returned to the family become a means of recovering the mother."[64] Through this reunion of family, the "lost mother… develops into a trope of the lost motherland" (132). While Tan's fictional writing couples the recovery of family and the Chinese motherland, in her narration of the orphan, she portrays children severed from family, in a way, rejected by their motherland, who are in need of outside intervention driven by American domestic sentiment.

Tan's writings have been seen as part of a feminist Chinese American literary tradition. Schueller pairs Kingston and Tan as two Chinese American writers who challenge the role of women of color as "objects of representation" even by white feminism.[65] Wendy Ho addresses Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan, and Fae Myenne Ng's novels in a tradition of mother-daughter writing in a larger context of feminist writing. Ho writes in her study of mother-daughter relationships in Tan's stories, that

> the interactions between mothers and daughters are complicated by broader circumstances within and between China and the United States. The relationships are not to be understood as personal stories or psychological dramas simply to be worked out within and between Chinese immigrant mothers and second-generation Chinese American daughters. Rather, these mothers and daughters are precariously and ambiguously positioned in different geopolitical locations, languages, generations and histories that seriously affect their ability to interact with each other and with their diverse communities…. Tan constructs fictional narratives of self that are deconstructed and reconstructed as each mother

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[64] Ling, 132.

[65] Malini Johar Schueller, "Theorizing Ethnicity and Subjectivity: Maxine Hong Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey* and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*" in Harold Bloom, ed. *Amy Tan* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2000), 3.

> and daughter attempts to find spaces to negotiate stronger friendships and alliances as women." [66]

My discussion of Tan examines what happens when the writer steps out of the fictional representation of Chineseness to speak out in public discourse that is directly tied to action through humanitarian donation. Regarding Tan's imagination of China, Malini Johar Schueller writes that in *The Joy Luck Club*, "for the American-born daughters, the Chinese past exists discursively, in language, through the stories told about it by their mothers. Ethnic origins, in other words, are always already complicated by representation" (14). According to Walter Shear, Kingston and Tan can be read together for their shared treatment of the role of women and culture in "old China" and "the new American environment," a relationship characterized by the daughter's conflict with the mother, who is also her primary source of knowledge and connection to China.[67] Yuan Yuan writes that in Tan's novels, the "mothers' experiences in China are generally transfigured into China narratives only after they have lost their reference to China; thus they are related more to the present American situation than to the original context of Chinese society" (353).[68] This emphasis on the American context is crucial to understanding Tan's role in the adoption photography, since she shows how caring about these children is an American trait. The content of these representations mediated through the American context focuses particularly on the experience of gendered oppression in China that is attributed to tradition.

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[66] Ho, 150.
[67] Walter Shear, "Generational Differences and the Diaspora in *The Joy Luck Club*" in Harold Bloom, ed. *Amy Tan*, Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2000, 17-24.
[68] Yuan Yuan, "Mothers' 'China Narrative": Recollection and Translation in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife*" in *The Chinese in America: A History from Gold Mountain to the New Millennium*, ed. Susie Lan Cassel, (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002), 353.

This reputation for "feminist" portrayals of China is what makes Tan such a good figure to portray the adoptee. While some critics applaud Tan's feminism it is useful for this discussion to note as well that Tan has been accused by Asian American cultural critics of self-orientalism and playing into universal feminist themes. As Sau-ling Wong has argued, the "Amy Tan phenomenon must ultimately be situated in quasi-ethnographic, Orientalist discourse."[69] She argues that Tan fabricates details meant to appear "authentically" Chinese, and creates an "oriental effect," a version of Barthes' reality effect. Indeed, Tan's representation of Chineseness is a liberal representation, that depoliticizes its national, cultural and class encounters through a matrilineal discourse palatable to middle-class American readers. I connect Tan's use of the mother-daughter narrative in her novels to the larger theme of family in claiming particular figures into a narrative of nation.

Tan's work in supporting dominant ideologies of multicultural harmony coupled with her perspective of as a Chinese "daughter" especially qualifies her to narrate the child in China. Though her novels are set in the U.S. and China, her two children's books, *The Moon Lady* and *The Chinese Siamese Cat*, take place in China and provide an interesting context for her narration of the Chinese child and visual representation. China and are illustrated by in what identifies as Sheng-mei Ma has discussed these children's books by focusing largely on the illustrations by Gretchen Schields that accompany Tan's text. Citing a close relationship between the images and words, he describes the style as a version of European "chinoiserie." Ma argues that "Schields's exotic China comes to be

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[69] Sau-ling C. Wong, "'Sugar Sisterhood': Situating the Amy Tan Phenomenon" in *The Ethnic Canon*, ed. David Palumbo-Liu (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 181.

authenticated as China by Tan's reputation" which he identifies as promoting a racial essentialism "based on a mystical landscape called China and a hidden yet indestructible Chinese bloodline."[70]

Narrating Visions of the Chinese Orphan

Mei Mei is a book collecting 100 black and white photographs of girls in Chinese orphanages that is sponsored by Half the Sky foundation, an organization whose mission is to provide support to orphanages in China.[71] All the images are taken in orphanages either with, or planned to receive, Half the Sky support, and the book ends with a solicitation for donations for the organization. Almost all the photographs are front views and close-ups, exposing the girls quite intimately to the viewer's gaze. The composition of the photographs with the children's eyes usually looking directly into the camera suggests that we might have access to the interior subjectivity of the child in the image. The photographer Richard Bowen is the adoptive father of two girls from China and a founding member of this Berkeley based non-profit. I would like to focus on Tan's role as a cultural spokesperson who acts as a guide to our viewing of the photographs. Tan's involvement is also a family affair, with her husband, Lou DeMattei, sitting on the Board of Directors. Significantly, Anchee Min provides calligraphy for this book, thus making

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[70] Sheng-mei Ma. *The Deathly Embrace: Orientalism and Asian American Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) 97, 96.

[71] This organization to provide care and nurture to Chinese orphans was founded in 1998 by Jenny and Richard Bowen, following the adoption of their first daughter from China in 1997. Their first programs were launched in 2000 and now employ local Chinese teachers and nannies to provide educational and social programs for young and older children as well as local foster families that raise 4 or 5 children in homes on or near to the orphanage property.

Figure 1: Front cover of *Mei Mei*.

Figure 2: A photograph of 3 girls from *Mei Mei.*

her contribution to the reality effect of this visual text. There are no captions for the images but her calligraphy adorns such text as the title of the book, meaning “little sister,” and the heading for the board of directors of Half the Sky Foundation at the end of the book.

Tan’s introduction, “The Unfinished Story of Our Lives,” draws upon her well-known status as an Asian American women’s voice and her own writings in order to act as a “guide” to our viewing of the photographs. As a voice of Asian American identity within liberalism, Tan introduces the orphan and humanizes her by attributing her a universalized individuality. Her introduction takes the form of a narration of her reactions to the photograph, and in using this first person perspective, she sets up a relationship with the audience by which we appear to get a glimpse into her mind, as we may into the anonymous lives of the orphans. Taking the need of the child as a given, Tan’s job is to humanize her by transforming her into a potential American and adoptee, that is, part of *our* American world. The process by which Tan does so is by showing us how the photographs can help us sentimentalize the girls, for this phenomenon of American caring about and adopting girls from China is a “particular thing that touches our heart” (6).

Tan’s novels situate her as a multicultural voice who adds to the diversity of American character, without challenging the universalism claimed by liberalism. Tan makes use of the privileging of individualism in liberalism, which “seek *foundations* in *universal* principles applicable to all human beings or rational agents in virtue of their

humanity or rationality."[72] Tan's role as an interpreter of the images guides us to position ourselves as viewers in relation to the child as a universal subject, or, as one of us. Similarly to her ability to profess anti-orientalism in her fiction and then deploy orientalist depictions of Chineseness and China in a depoliticized manner, Tan disavows the act of pitying, that is engaging in feeling within unequal power relations, in portraying the orphan. Tan declares,

> And now I am conscious that I am looking at these girls not just through Bowen's lens, but from my own perspective. I must be careful not to fall into either helpless pity or the romanticism that I can rescue them all. I must avoid the ethnocentric gaze of comparing these girls to luckier or unluckier ones. I want to see each girl for who she is. It's impossible, of course. But it's good to ask every now and then: what is the essence of any of us beyond the comparative assessment of others?[73]

She claims a desire to avoid the ethnocentric gaze of relativism, implicitly comparing the girls to the lucky ones adopted by western parents, or the unluckier ones not in orphanages such as these that receive support from Half the Sky. In defining the power relation here as solely being a matter of comparison, of privileging the western viewer on ethnic, cultural terms, Tan avoids consideration of the visual and discursive violence of the white gaze upon the infantilized other.

Tan's introduction to this set of photographs provides a domesticating function that asks us to see the children not as objects but as potential subjects of liberalism parallel to Tan's role as model minority. In her study of the work of white women photographers in the context of late 19th and early 20th century race, gender and U.S.

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[72] David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture* (Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 5.
[73] Tan, 8.

empire, Laura Wexler provides a methodology for studying domestic images that has inspired my discussion of Tan and the photographs of the Chinese girls. She writes:

> Domestic images may be – but need not be – representations of and for a so-called separate sphere of family life. Domestic images may also be configurations of familiar and intimate arrangements intended for the eyes of outsiders, the *heimlich* (private) as a kind of propaganda; or they may be metonymical references to unfamiliar arrangements, the *unheimlich* intended for domestic consumption. What matters is the use of the image to signify the domestic realm… In other words, the character of domestic images is not be defined as a constant element, an essential presence, but as a set of relationships that change according to time and situation.[74]

Bowen's photographs may be considered in the frame of domesticity on the basis of the child as the object of representation, however, what makes them interesting as representations within contemporary domesticity is the context of the familial relationship of China to the U.S. and Chinese Americans in U.S. liberalism. With the help of Tan's narration, we may understand the American family as the basis for philanthropic intervention or for helping Chinese girls in support of the assumption that we have racial and gender equality in the U.S. as well.

Remembering the trope of the mother as culture in Tan's fiction, we may understand the depiction of neglect of these children by their "motherland" as a grave assault against domesticity from which families in the U.S. might be able to save these children. In the time and situation discussed here, the role of the Chinese American woman writer in supporting the work of the white male photographer of Chinese girls is also crucial to the process of domestication and naturalization of the legacy of the paternalism of U.S. relations with China. Similarly to the way in which the privileging of

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[74] Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 21.

the "innocent eye" of the woman photographer allowed for the domestication of ideologies of U.S. imperialist goals, the point of view of the assimilated Chinese American woman both attests to the photographer's claims to the neutrality of the camera and contributes her own claims of objectivity. Though Tan's reputation has been made on her voicing of the particularity of Chineseness, and this is presumably the reason she has been chosen to write this introduction, her narrative is notably devoid of any mention of cultural, racial or national particularity for these children. Instead she abstracts the children as individuals possessing an essential interiority so that we can even imagine them as young American children in that some "look like typical trick-or-treaters," or recognize a "Chinese version of American careers expressed in childhood: a princess, a petticoated cowboy, an Indian chief" (Tan 8). Reading the text and images intertextually, Tan's authority as a Chinese American author of mother-daughter narratives specifically brings these images into a domestic realm through the trope of family, but also through a national domesticity signified by multiculturalism.

Crucial to the domestication of these images is that the sentimental relationship cannot be based in "pity" and must be differentiated from images of human rights violations that clearly objectify children living in squalor and compel feelings of rescue by those with the power to do so.[75] Instead, Tan's introduction insists on the anonymity of the child and points us rather to their abstract need. The images of the girls are all similar in composition, showing the girl usually looking directly at the camera and either a close up or full body shot. The background of the "seamless" drape Tan mentions is the

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[75] Hannah Arendt distinguishes pity from compassion, for "pity, taken as the spring of virtue, has proved to possess a greater capacity for cruelty than cruelty itself." Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1963) 85.

same in all the images, taking away the depth of the images and divorcing the girls from their social context. In this way, we are encouraged to view these girls as individuals but, in a way, as all the same. The construction of the girls as all in the same predicament of living in an orphanage in China is what draws them into the ideological frame of U.S. domesticity, for they are all living without the love of family (which in this context is necessary for individual identity formation).

According to Tan, our relationship to the images and children should be characterized by "compassion" (9). Tan's introduction guides us towards understanding the children as individuals who possess an interior humanity that we may access through our gaze. This pose and the list of the girls' names at the end of the book (which are not connected to the actual images so as to protect their anonymity) gives just enough information to humanize the children, but they are also abstracted into figures and objects of need. Their need is portrayed as the lack of the domestic. Tan's explanation that the children we see are too old to likely be eligible for adoption ensures that the image does not activate a relationship in which the viewer sees the child and hopes to "rescue" her. The aestheticization of the photographs further denies such an instrumentalist use of the image and allows viewers to admire the beauty of the images as their primary attribute.[76] This beauty also contributes to the abstraction of the image from the social relations of power that allows the domestication of the child. As Coco Fusco writes of the "cultural and political act of constructing the racial other" in photography, "the exaltation of the racial other's beauty has the incredible effect of reversing the power dynamic between

[76] For example, descriptions of the book on Half The Sky Foundation's website and amazon.com recommend the book based on the beauty of the images.

the viewer and the viewed in the real world: in the fantasy of the photographic encounter, the viewer is 'overcome' by the beauty of the other."[77]

Tan's insistence that these photographs show us what she calls a chance intersection with the lives of these girls where we may glimpse their "essential selves" must deny the mediation of both her narration and the photographic apparatus (7). The power relations evoked by the white, male American photographer taking these pictures of Chinese girls must be denied through an elaborate explanation of the neutrality of his production process. What Tan's narration conceals as the overt level of meaning is that the power of representation and of the racialized and gendered gaze is held by the white viewer and enabled by the problematic race and gender politics of a white American man taking these photographs that arguably objectify the young Chinese girls. Tan goes to pains to explain that the photographer is simply a neutral medium for the true expression of these girls' souls and certainly is not an agent of violence. She tells us that

> he did not intentionally pick the prettiest or the sickliest, the happiest or the saddest. He did not tell the girls to smile and look at the camera. He did not pose them, except perhaps to place some of them on a chair or a stool. The background is a neutral seamless, so that the girls' essential selves might better stand out, unfiltered for the moment by where they live. (7)

Tan begins by insisting on Bowen's neutrality in his lack of interference between the viewer and the real child; indeed, when she names the medium through which our objective view *might* be obscured, she refers not the photographer or the photographic apparatus, but to the location in the orphanage. The girls represented are neither the most

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[77] Coco Fusco, "Racial Time, Racial Marks, Racial Metaphors" in Coco Fusco and Brian Wallis, ed., *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2003), 21.

sympathetic children nor the most evocative of pity, but are simply real children whose natural beauty is visible without props or artifice.

The reason that being able to see the child's essence is so important is to construct her as a potential American. The child's sentimental image shows her lack, of family and of love, that can be filled through adoption. Tan ends her narrative by asking us to engage the photograph as the start of a deeper relationship to this other:

> as with any photograph one might see in a history book or a family album of snapshots, they are portals to another's consciousness in a particular time and place. For as long as we look, we can imagine… We can look and hope to know more. That is the start of compassion, I think…And before we've even finished turning the page, those girls are already part of our lives. (9)

Though these particular girls will not be adopted, we may imagine the children in the same plight they signify in another time and place in a projected future in the U.S.

Tan's narrative of the essential self of the orphan in the photographs that both delimits the boundaries of the other and welcomes her into liberal individualism resonates with the well-known Cold War era photographic exhibition of portraits that sought to universalize the human essence: *The Family of Man.* Roland Barthes has famously written about *The Great Family of Man*, the Paris exhibition of these photographs collected under the direction of Edward Steichen at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and originally shown in 1955 and subsequently circulated extensively in the U.S. and abroad. With its international focus and mass popular reach globally, the 503 photographs represented the work of 273 photographers from 68 countries, and the show was seen by 9 million people in 69 countries in 85 exhibitions. The pictures are collected

in a book version that sold at least 4 million copies by 1978.[78] Barthes' essay is especially of interest in his critique of the universalizing mode, particularly "moralized and sentimentalized" in the metaphor of the "great family" that postulates a universalized "human essence" that unifies people across social differences and historical contingencies in this collection.[79] His critique specifically of the exhibition's abstraction of "birth" as a universal experience projected across the globe is especially helpful to this discussion. He asks, "True, children are *always* born: but in the whole mass of the human problem, what does the 'essence' of this process matter to us, compared to its modes which, as for them, are perfectly historical?" (101-2).

Tan's exhortation to view the child as possessing an individual essence takes up this abstraction of human experience as a means of humanizing the child and bringing her into the sentimentalized fold of universality. For her, the essence must be the means by which we relate to the child. Her introduction does point to the historical conditions of the child's life in the orphanage but with the intent of asking us to imagine her apart from these material conditions, as a proto-liberal subject. Signs of the child being mired in history may appear visually; while many of the children appear smiling or laughing, Tan cautions that life in the orphanage may render children "dull-eyed," "passive and detached, without protest or wariness, curiosity or demands" (8). What she lacks is the humanizing force of family and universal bonds of love: "this is the look of a little girl who has never known that her face is the most beloved of anyone else's in the world, that

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[78] Statistics from Allan Sekula, "The Traffic in Photographs," in *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self*, ed. Coco Fusco and Brian Wallis (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2003), 78.
[79] Roland Barthes. "The Great Family of Man" in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Layers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972 (1999), 100.

her teary needs matter more than anything else, that she has a never-ending supply of hugs she can claim at any time" (8).

Allan Sekula writes that *The Family of Man* exhibit "may well be the epitome of American Cold War liberalism" in that it "universalizes the bourgeois nuclear family, suggesting a globalized, utopian family album, a family romance imposed on every corner of the earth" in which family "serves as a metaphor also for a system of international discipline and harmony"(95). The international exhibitions of *Family of Man* were sponsored directly by the United States Information Agency, and underwritten by corporate sponsors, such as Coca-Cola, and though much diminished in degree, the orphanage images are also sponsored by a group seeking to publicize their cause, in this case, the humanitarian organization, Half the Sky Foundation. Sekula also makes the point that besides universalizing the family, "more so than any other single photographic project," the exhibit "was a massive and ostentatious bureaucratic attempt to *universalize* photographic discourse" (98). In thinking about the implications of the *Family of Man* within the possibilities of photography, he argues that the exhibit is from the present perspective a "virtual guidebook to the collapse of the political into the familial that so characterizes the dominant ideological discourse of the contemporary United States" (101). Drawing on this reading, we may understand the photographs of the orphan, then, to suggest the incompleteness of the family by depicting the children mostly as lone figures looking directly and imploringly at the camera and the incompleteness of U.S. benevolence in allowing these girls and others like them to go without aid. It is only when the family (and nation) are made complete that, to return to Tan's phrase, "the story of our lives" will be "finished."

"To All the Lost Daughters:" Adoption, Immigration, and Chinese Womanhood

Anchee Min's piece, "A Letter to All the Lost Daughters of China," serves as the preface to Karin Evans' study of Chinese female orphans and their journey to the United States .[80] While there are a number of concrete connections between the Tan's and Min's introductions (for example, Min provided the calligraphy for *Mei Mei* and Karin Evans, the author of the book, provided the afterword) and between the two authors (publishing their breakthrough books with the same literary agent), these authors are also connected in their status as model minority voices allied with liberal multiculturalism. This authority hinges on our ability to read their public rhetoric intertextually with awareness of their creative writing, but also, of the generic conventions they utilize to claim the orphan and adoptee within a discourse of sentimental domesticity. While Tan's introduction assumes our acceptance of the neutrality of the camera and conventions of domestic images, Min's "letter" relies on the conventions of the liberal immigrant narrative that uncritically posits the U.S. as the space of arrival into freedom. With her credibility as an immigrant with experience of China, Min provides a complement to Tan in her ability to tell us in more bold terms what the condition of the child would have been in China without sentimental intervention. While Tan's narrative makes the child intelligible as a American subject like herself, Min's construction of the child in need

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[80] Anchee Min, introduction to *The Lost Daughters of China: abandoned girls, their journey to America and the search for a missing past*, by Karin Evans (New York : J.P. Tarcher/Putnam, 2000), ix –xi. Karin Evans' non-fiction book provides an account of adoption from China, in which the author weaves in her own experience of adoption with a wide variety of other texts (oral accounts of adopting, written accounts found in newspapers, adoption agency publications, fictional works, memoirs and academic texts about China). It emphasizes issues of gender and culture in the practice of adoption. It is a highly popular book among adoptive parents and potential adoptive parents.

through its cultural particularity is enabled by her authority as an immigrant writer whose contribution to American domesticity is through her knowledge of and ability to translate the other in China.

Min's autobiography, *Red Azalea*, ends with the moment of her arrival in the U.S., and an examination of her writing in the context of adoption provides insight into her point of view from her cultural location in the U.S. that her autobiography does not address. The letter foregrounds Min's view of immigration to the U.S. as an act that can free the Chinese female subject from her particular suffering that is her unquestioned destiny in China, according to Min's writing. Min's brand of liberal feminism indicates not only a moral imperative for saving non-modern (non-western) women from patriarchy and even death, but it also upholds the U.S. as a model for liberalism, and the successfully assimilated Chinese woman as the model spokesperson for an inclusive U.S. multiculturalism that must be contrasted to Chinese culture as it is translated for the U.S. audience.

Min's self-characterization in this letter as an older version of the young Chinese adoptees coming to the United States is suggestive in situating adoption within immigrant discourses more broadly. Making the connection between her position as an immigrant who lived twenty-seven years before escaping China and the current wave of adoptees, Min represents herself as a spokesperson bridging women in China and the U.S. The life she experiences in communist China stands in contrast to the life of family bliss and freedoms that she envisions for the adoptees in the letter. Min begins her epistolary introduction with a declaration of family positioned against the public sphere of patriarchal culture and state intervention, writing that "we are in battle together. You are

my nieces" (ix). In aligning herself with these girls Min invokes their opposition to state and cultural patriarchy in China from which they are freed by being in the U.S now.

While Min writes about her memory of her life in China for a Western audience in her autobiography, the letter metaphorically allows her to write back to her homeland. Min creates a direct identification with the Chinese orphans, as the addressees of her letter. In fact, her identification is not limited to the adoptees alone, but in the letter *all* Chinese females are considered "lost daughters" of China, for as Min writes, "Chinese women are cultivated to suffer" (x). Min suggests that the adoptee symbolizes the suffering of all Chinese women, and hence, the fundamental inhumanity of the Chinese state and culture. Min aligns herself with these girls through essentialist notions of blood and heritage that reach across the barriers of homeland and diaspora: "for a strange reason I feel connected to you, orphans adopted from China. The Yangtze River runs in our blood, and the time dust of the yellow earth culture frames our bones. The straight lacquer black hair. Yes, we share a lot. Most important, we are all females, Chinese females, the kind an old saying describes as 'grass born to be stepped on" (ix). At the same time, though the ostensible recipients of the letter are the Chinese orphans, it is clear that as the preface for a book aimed at prospective or current adoptive parents it will be adults in the U.S. who will in fact read Min's letter. Articulating a long history of Chinese misogynistic values, Min claims a continuity of life in China that suggests its temporal backwardness.

Min's letter positions her as writing from the space of emancipation that is the U.S. and looking back on the past of China as the yet unfree space signified particularly by the lack of domesticity and sentimental bonds; the contemporary figure of the orphan

represents this oppression, and the adoptee represents the possibility of salvation in the U.S. For instance, in reaction to a news "story about a couple who murdered five of their infant daughters in the hope of gaining a son," she came across while visiting China, Min writes: "I didn't want to return to America. I wanted to help promote education in rural areas. I believe that if only that couple had had education the killing wouldn't have happened. They were peasants and illiterate; they were not in touch with their consciences" (x). In Min's desire to stay in the China and educate the rural people, she invokes her knowledge of affective life and of her conscience that she has acquired in the U.S. over the alienation of the Chinese peasants, whom she casts as typical Chinese "countrymen" (x). Min claims that "as a woman who grew up in China, I identity with [the women's] despair, the despair of being deprived of understanding… The hope is that you are in America and you are loved (xi). Thus Min simultaneously affirms the U.S. as the space of true humanity in its subjects' ability to feel and experience family bonds as well as her self-narration as a having become a U.S. liberal subject. Min's appearance in Evans' text indicates both her ambivalent inclusion into universal sisterhood and her position in relation to the white feminist as an authentic minority spokesperson verifying the otherness of China to the freedoms of the U.S.

Writing the Past of China in *Red Azalea*

Anchee Min's autobiography *Red Azalea* ends with her telling the reader that she escaped from China to the U.S. in 1984. This is the only mention she makes of her status as an immigrant in the U.S. In a sense, though, her story is only beginning, for implicit in this ending is that it is as a Chinese immigrant located in the U.S. that Min is able to write

her own narrative, since she now is a liberal individual in American multiculturalism. This writing of her coming of age in China is necessarily mediated through Min's residence in the U.S. and the context of publishing for an American audience. As Maurice Halbwachs puts it, a collective framework is crucial for the construction of individual memory, that is to say that individual memory must be understood through the present social context and collective memory of a person or group.[81]

I highlight Min's self-representation as an assimilated immigrant who performs her supposed freedom and individuation to write her own story. Her freedom of representation is thematized in her autobiography through the trope of the literary that suggests the scripting and rote performance of state imperatives, characterizing her progressive interpellation into a totalitarian identity in China that lies in contrast to her implicit confirmation of U.S. liberal humanism through her resistance to this script. Indeed, the very act of writing of this book was part of her interpellation into the English language and American citizenship.[82] Descriptions of the author often marvel that the fact that she wrote her narrative in the process of learning the English language makes her literary feat all the more impressive. Turning her life experience into an immigrant narrative is a performance of being American that Min herself highlights. Her description on the website of the Stephen Barclay Agency, which represents her, states that "Min credits English with giving her a means to express herself, arming her with the voice and

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[81] As Halbwachs writes, we must understand that "in reality the past does not recur as such, that everything seems to indicate that the past is not preserved but is reconstructed on the basis of the present" (39-40).
[82] Min description on the website of the Stephen Barclay Agency, which represents her, states that "Min credits English with giving her a means to express herself, arming her with the voice and vocabulary to write about growing up during China's Cultural Revolution" for "'there was no way for me to describe those experiences or talk about those feelings in Chinese,' she has said of a language too burdened by Maoist rhetoric." <http://www.barclayagency.com/min.html>

vocabulary to write about growing up during China's Cultural Revolution" for "'there was no way for me to describe those experiences or talk about those feelings in Chinese,' she has said of a language too burdened by Maoist rhetoric." The process of learning the English language and becoming "American" provides the conditions of possibility for Min's self-expression and demonstrates that Min's act of self- narration must be situated in her process of becoming an immigrant subject in the U.S. Min herself frames her writing through her immigrant experience, saying in a *Chicago Sun-Times* article, "I do think Americans saved me… I think what's happening to me can only happen in America."[83]

Rising to fame with the 1994 publication of her autobiography, *Red Azalea*, which was a 1994 *New York Times* Notable Book and was on the 1995 *New York Times* bestseller list, Min has found critical acclaim and popularity in the U.S. as a voice representing the "authentic" experiences of women in China. She has subsequently published four novels, highlighting issues of womanhood in China in the present and also historically.[84] Shu-mei Shih characterizes Min as "diasporic woman [who] exposes the darkness of China for Western consumption and writes narratives of liberation in the United States and her rebirth as a 'feminist.'"[85] This section of the chapter explores the

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[83] Domke, Ellen. "The Blossoming of Anchee Min; China Native's Book Weaves Her Story, History," *Chicago Sun-Times*, February 27, 1994, Supplement section, 1.

[84] Reviews of her work often cite the "trauma" of life in Maoist China and the cultural and historical "authenticity" of Min's portrayal. For example, an article in the *Chicago Sun-Times* (Min lived in Chicago when she wrote *Red Azalea*) quotes Sandra Dijkstra, her agent at the time: "Anchee has a mission, and that mission is to tell the truth… She is after the truth of the human heart in contemporary China. She cares a great deal about that country, and it has been a pain in her heart that so much promise has gone unfulfilled" (Domke 1).

[85] Shu-mei Shih. "Towards an Ethics of Transnational Encounters, or "When" Does a "Chinese" Woman Become a "Feminist"? in *Minor Transnationalism*, ed. Francoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 93.

connections between the authority Min gains to represent Chinese women to a western audience through her autobiographical writing and the discourse of adoption to which she contributes. *Red Azalea* consists of three major segments: Min's childhood and schooling in Shanghai, her time on the labor farm during the Cultural Revolution where she develops a lesbian relationship with her unit commander, and her training in a state model opera that is her escape from the hard labor of the farm.

Though the content and setting of Min's narrative in China and her immigrant status differentiates her from writers classified as "Chinese American" within the Asian American literary canon, it is a central premise of this chapter that her writing and public rhetoric can only be understood in the context of her status as a resident of the U.S. writing in a Western context. In an article about *Red Azalea*, Wenying Xu writes that the primary characteristic that sets writing by immigrant authors, such as Min, apart from that of Chinese American authors is the former group's personal experiences and memories that cause them to "face crises in reconstituting their identities in America" different from those encountered by Chinese American writers who "write about their memories of the Chinese worlds of their parents or ancestors and about the racial discrimination they experience in the United States."[86] This section of the chapter argues that Min's narrative must be understood within the liberal discourses of race, immigration and Asian American identity within which "Chinese American" authors write as well. It is within liberal multiculturalism that Min's writing enables her to become a cultural spokesperson for Chinese women and girls in both her literary and public persona.

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[86] Wenying Xu, "Agency via Guilt in Anchee Min's *Red Azalea,*" *MELUS* 25:3/4 (2000): 204.

Min's writing must be situated in the context of 1990s U.S. multiculturalism and liberal ideologies of gender, race, and sexuality that saw a "cultural turn" in the debates over reforming racial inequalities.[87] Critic Ben Xu has advocated a reading of *Red Azalea* that understands the narrator as "partially reliable" and of the narrator as inseparable from the author, which requires knowledge of the author herself beyond her existence as the narrator of the text.[88] Indeed, when considering the author within dominant national ideology, we can consider Min as an ideal minoritized citizen whose writings further "the project of imagining the nation as homogeneous [that] requires the orientalist construction of cultures and geographies from which Asian immigrants come as fundamentally "foreign" origins antipathetic to the modern American society that "discovers," "welcomes," and "domesticates" them," as Lisa Lowe has written.[89] This context, which influences and is influenced by popular publishing manifests overtly in the writing of the text, for example, it was reportedly Min's agent who suggested the lesbian subplot to enliven the story for a U.S. audience.[90]

Indeed, this lesbian plot is part of Min's use of the tropes of sexuality and affective bonds that signify the lack of individuation in China (implicitly against U.S. liberal humanism) and her self-narration as a proto-liberal subject going through stages of a burgeoning liberal individualism that sets her apart from others in her story. The

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[87] While multiculturalism may have progressive possibilities for challenging essentialist notions of race, at the same time there is the danger that "the culturalism of multiculturalism threatens to shift attention from racialization to culture and in so doing treat racialized groups as one of many diverse and interesting cultures" (Gordon and Newfield, 79). See Gordon and Newfield's anthology, *Mapping Multiculturalism*, for a discussion of multiculturalism in late 20th century U.S.

[88] Ben Xu, "A Face That Grows Into a Mask: a symptomatic reading of Anchee Min's *Red Azalea*" *MELUS* 29.2 (2004): 161.

[89] Lisa Lowe. *Immigrant Acts* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 5.

[90] This information about Min's agent comes from Xiao-huang Yin's *Chinese American Literature since the 1850s.* p. 171.

reading of sexuality in the narrative is a key site through which the complexities of Min's writing in the context of U.S. liberal ideologies is made visible. Within the logic of her narrative, Min's treatment of sexuality in *Red Azalea* might be understood as a form of progressive western feminism.[91] Larson has interestingly addressed the sexual politics in the text that characterizes a relationship between nation and individual, arguing that Min's creation of a "revolutionary eroticism" and the "privileging of sexuality within human identity" borrows from western modernity and "updates the Chinese revolutionary past" in doing so.[92] At the same time, she argues that Min derives her concept of sexuality from a Chinese context as well; Min characterizes "sexuality under the revolutionary discourse as a kind of mass emotion… Min splits Maoism into two opposite kinds of forces and claims one as the basis of her revolutionary eroticism" (425).

I agree that in Min's narrative sexuality does emerge as a privatized space against the state will to make all life public life and that she does offer this trope as a rationale for her decision to emigrate to the U.S. I would like to ground the tropes of sexuality and affective bonds in the context of the politics of representing Chinese women in the context of U.S. liberal feminism and multiculturalism. Ultimately, Larson's argument takes Min's deployment of the trope of sexuality at face value, writing that the autobiography "project[s] for the reader an unknown future that exists only because the protagonist wants to flee from a sexually repressive – yet complex and contradictory –

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[91] One reading offers the celebratory view that Min's narrative of sexuality presents a challenge or complication to the essentialism and publicization of the private sphere in the western coming out narrative, Min's representation of sex and sexuality engages a "radical fluidity of gender and sexuality" (Jolly, 490). Another approach has been to view take a transnational approach and examine Min's sexualization of the Cultural Revolution through the "representational possibilities" that the degendering of women in official discourse made possible in this era (Somerson, 105).

[92] Wendy Larson, "Never This Wild: Sexing the Cultural Revolutio," *Modern China* 25.4 (1999): 425.

present in China" (425). Of course, it is significant that Min creates an opposition between the state will to make all life public life in China and possibility of privatized, individuated life in the U.S. without overt narration of her experience in the U.S. Instead, she uses a cluster of themes central to liberal humanism to portray herself that demonstrate her qualifications for assimilation in the U.S., emphasizing her agency, desire, and affect.

It is also significant that Min's autobiography ends with her moment of arrival in the U.S. Silence on the interpellation of Chinese Americans into U.S. race and gender ideologies is necessary to Min's narrative of arrival in the U.S. as a moment of liberation and for her ability to act as a spokesperson for Chinese women, as a type of feminist, who resists patriarchy in China, for a mainstream audience. In the paradigm of U.S. multiculturalism, in which newcomers are supposed to be welcomed as equal members of a social and political whole, while retaining difference along the axes of race, gender and sexuality in this instance, Min's ability to tell her past, and break the silence she attributes to her life in China, signals her arrival into U.S. liberal subjectivity.

Performing the Script of the State: Spectacles of Indoctrination

Min's writing of the autobiography allows her to perform her agency in a U.S. context through her narrative of the education of the proto-liberal subject that is constantly interrupted and truncated in China and can only be completed in the U.S. In contrast to her ability to write her interior self, Min portrays the reproduction of Chinese state power through individual bodies, especially those of women, through the trope of the script. While throughout the text state power demands Min's performance as a

burgeoning proletarian subject by following or learning a script, in each of these scenes of crisis Min shows her resistance through her claiming of a private sphere of affective bonds and interior subjectivity. Sexuality and the private space of affect become contested sites which bring into crisis the tension between her agency and the coercion by the state, and ultimately serve to develop her burgeoning identity not as a proletarian, but as a liberal immigrant subject. Within the logic of the autobiography, it is not only Min's suffering and survival of her Chinese education but the narrative recognition that her moments of feeling like an individual in China were false, and in fact scripted by the state's imperative for collectivity, that qualifies her as the narrator to know the U.S. for a space of liberal freedoms by way of contrast. [93]

Min emplots her growth through her attempts at literacy and her suitability for becoming a western subject through her counteridentification with the scripting of life at the hands of the Chinese state. In each section the text provides key scenes that particularly exemplify the representation of the struggle between Min, on the one hand, as a proto-liberal subject in China who desires to feel like an individual who can establish affective bonds, and on the other hand, the state demands to conform that are compelled through public stagings of state indoctrination. The first occurs when Min is asked at the age of thirteen to publicly denounce her teacher and the second is her love affair with Yan, a woman commander at the labor camp she has been sent to. These stagings portray Min's progressive interpellation as a subject in China that seems to wear down her

[93] Wenying Xu has argued that Min's portrayal of her own responsibility during the Cultural Revolution affords her an agency in the U.S. context, suggesting that Min uses "her personal narrative as a way of engaging in a project of empowering herself as a responsible agent in her new world by reconstituting her identity in just the way that is so highly prized in the liberal Western community, acknowledging personal responsibility and guilt" (208).

individual identity, culminating in the final scene in which Min participates in a revolutionary opera of a communist heroine, Red Azalea.

Min's deployment of the genre of melodrama provides a useful framework for understanding this process. The plot unfolds in reference to this revolutionary opera, a state sponsored melodrama, and at the larger level, Min's text is a kind of melodrama that posits the U.S on the side of moral good and Min herself as the heroine.[94] Melodrama has been written about as the mode through which morality is represented; I tie her burgeoning individualism to her relation to the state melodrama, a device in the novel through which she demonstrates the scripting of her life in China and the impossibility of freely expressing her interiority (which Min's concept of agency expressing the intact will of the individual presupposes). The appropriation of the title of the state opera as the title of her own autobiography invites a comparison between her narrative and her melodramatic role. What is celebrated as heroic in Min's melodrama is her ability to exercise her individual will and to develop an interior subjectivity and emotional life, as opposed to the false heroism and mass affect of the state melodrama which compels a performance of state doctrine and a scripted false emotion on the side of the bad, rather than the good.

I will discuss two key scenes in Min's development, one at the opening of the narrative and the other at the end. In the first scene I consider, Min portrays the struggle

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[94] Peter Brooks observes in his seminal work, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, that melodrama is centrally concerned with the moral imagination in the modern era: "Melodrama is… the drama of morality: it strives to find, to articulate, to demonstrate, to 'prove' the existence of a moral universe" (20). The audience's experience of melodrama's "sublime emotion" is crucial to the imagining of moral imperatives, for "morality is ultimately in the nature of affect, and strong emotion is in the realm of morality: for good and evil are moral feelings" (54). It follows, then, that the audience's recognition of virtue and villainy are required for melodrama to achieve its moral function.

between her individual conscience and the public role of the young revolutionary demanded by the state. Still possessing an interior self at this young age, Min demonstrates her fundamentally individuated identity, prior to her alienation from this interiority at the hands of the Chinese state. Min distinguishes herself from the indoctrinating goals of the state and in so doing begins to stage her suitability for liberal subjectivity in the U.S. Through Min's portrayal of the Chinese state as beginning its psychic control of its subjects at a young age, this early scene of the teaching of the elementary school dramatizes the suppression of feeling and individual morality that begins even in childhood. In this scene, the young Anchee is called upon to perform her role as a young communist representative in denouncing her teacher, Autumn Leaves, in front of the whole school for being a "hidden class enemy, an American spy."[95] Called upon to lead a public spectacle to humiliate the teacher and to thereby perform her own indoctrination and encourage the indoctrination of other students through their participation, Min feels a tension between the state mandate to perform her role as a Red Guard, and her sense of moral correctness, as her conscience tells her that "there was no way (she) could picture Autumn Leaves as an American spy" (29).

The mandate to follow to script is so objectionable to Min that she experiences a sensational, physical reaction:

> My mouth was terribly dry. It was hard to bear what I saw. The string of the heavy board seemed to cut into Autumn Leaves' skin. I forgot what I was supposed to do – to lead the crowd to shout the slogans – until Secretary Chain came to remind me of my duty. Long live the great proletarian dictatorship! I shouted, following the slogan menu. (33)

[95] Min, Anchee, *Red Azalea* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994) 27.

Min's embodied experience of suffering upon viewing her teacher's physical suffering highlights the pain of the process of indoctrination and the violent suppression of her feeling of compassion for her teacher and her moral conscience. Chosen because of her passion for studying communism as the leader of the Little Red Guards, Min narrates herself as a mouthpiece of state doctrine: "phrases from *People's Daily* and *Red Flag* magazine poured out of my mouth" (26). In valuing Min's ability to memorize and repeat the lines in the text at will, this form of education through internalizing state rhetoric compels a smooth correspondence between the internalization of the lines of official rhetoric and the official public staging of the state will. Indeed, Min writes that "not for a day did I not feel heroic. I was the opera" (26). At this point in the narrative, Min is still able to differentiate between her moral conscience and the role of the indoctrinated communist subject, and to *choose* duty. Significantly, this indoctrination that captures Min's emotions also takes her away from her family, which she describes in terms of a loving domesticity, for her parents disapprove of the teachings at the school. The internalization of state mandates has not yet captured Min, for she retains her own sense of feeling for others that is kept protected from her state role.

Becoming Red Azalea: Mass and Individuated Affect

The climactic last section of the narrative in which Min trains for the lead role of Red Azalea in the eponymous revolutionary opera relies on a heightening of the dichotomy between China and the U.S. This melodrama written by Jiang Ching (also referred to also as Madame Mao in the text) and staged by the "Supervisor" suggests the dual manipulation of emotion and sexuality in the project of the Cultural Revolution. In

this section, we see that this melodrama is deployed by the state to control the psyche of the people and represents the final stage of Min's portrayal of her gradual loss of self to the demands of the state. Having been sent away from her family to work on a labor farm, Min has already lost her domestic bonds and is now at the lowest emotional point in her life.

The Supervisor appropriates the melodramatic opera and Madame Mao's vision of "(making) women heroines" in Communist China in the service of his own desire to control the feeling of the people. While Madame Mao's goal in the opera stems from her desire to show that "to be born a girl was (not) a shame," the Supervisor is ruled by his desire for power wielded through controlling the cultural productions of the state (287). For him the staged spectacle of the melodrama is "a way to shape (the) minds" of the people (285). The Supervisor's fluid gender and sexual identifications make his symbolic value in representing the encroachment of the public sphere into the private. Addressing his fanatical and radical identification with Madame Mao as a woman, Min writes that she "believed [the Supervisor's] obsession with her, because she represented his female self. Because she allowed him to achieve his dream – to rule China's psyche" (294). The "obsession" of the Supervisor's identification with Madame Mao indicates that in Min's text the staging of the revolutionary melodrama is a perverse co-optation of the sentiments of the Chinese people to uphold and maintain patriarchal state power.

Given the Supervisor's obsession with Madame Mao and his desire to fully control the psyche of the nation, Min's narration of her affair with the Supervisor indicates her complete loss of self as her affective self is fully subsumed into the state appropriation of sexuality through her complete inhabitation of this melodramatic role. In

contrast to Min's relationship with Yan, which represented a sentimentality and sexuality that lay outside of their roles circumscribed by the state, her affair with the Supervisor represents the coherence of her private and public lives. Through the Supervisor's relationship with Min, sexuality becomes centralized as the subject of drama, a theme which has been used in *Red Azalea* to sensationalize the objectification of people and shocking indoctrination into state roles in this text but also provides a space for personal psychic resistance.

In Min's narration of her experience as Red Azalea in this final passage of the text, her subsumption into her scripted role in the melodrama leaves her unable to see through the state demands on the people and represents her lowest point of subjection as the unfeeling Chinese subject she would have remained had she not escaped to the U.S. Enlarging upon the first scene, in which Min performs her role as a student through rote recitation of propaganda, this role as Red Azalea portrays Min's complete embodiment of her state role. At the time, she gets swept up in her belief in her role as the revolutionary embodiment of the everyday woman of China who is made a heroine:

> I looked at myself in the mirror in the makeup room under fluorescent lights. I saw Red Azalea. In her Red Army cap. Spicy eyes. Equipped. Perfectly in control. She carried Yan's determination and the Supervisor's spirit. I believed my makeup. I believed that I was who I was supposed to be. I was creating history... Tomorrow the name Red Azalea will be in the mouth of every person. I am the embodiment of Red Azalea. I am my role. (295)

Min completely inhabits her role here, for when she looks at her reflection in the mirror, she sees the state heroine Red Azalea herself, such that there is no separation between self and role.

Through the narrative device of the melodramatic role, Min draws attention to her critique of the Chinese state as demanding an unfeeling, perversely utilitarian role for all its subjects. Envisioning herself as an actor in "history," Min as Red Azalea will take on her role as the heroine of the state melodrama; at this moment, Min's belief in her embodiment of the spirit of the nation in the figure of the woman, in what is in this context a feminized aesthetic form, will provide a form of education for the people, by compelling their hearts to believe in the nation. However, as we see, it is the Supervisor's fanatical lust for power in which Min is caught up that causes her to delude herself that she is achieving identity with the grandiosity of her state role. Min's portrayal of the total annihilation of herself in her state role provides the culmination of Min's portrayal of the impossibility of individual feeling in China.

Here, the text reminds us of Min's work in claiming a personal space and contributing to the collective memory of narratives in the U.S. Her autobiography allows her to reclaim a personal memory that is valorized over official "history," which in China, is portrayed as the only narrative of the past that can exist. Min offers a critique that this state history is false and manipulative and leaves no room for the individual. Min invokes the popularized opposition between "memory" and "history" in her narrative. Lisa Yoneyama describes one form of this opposition: "Memory has often referred to genuine and authentic knowledge about ordinary people's past experiences, in contrast to official History, which is considered to be a product of power, written from the perspectives of cultural elites, colonists, and other members of the ruling classes."[96]

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[96] Yoneyama, Lisa. *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 27.

Within the logic of the autobiography, Min believes that she has achieved unity between the ordinary person's perspective and that of the state in her momentary belief in the unity of herself, the role of Red Azalea, and the state. However, this unity, and any possibility that the state might recognize the individual, is quickly shown to be illusory.

Moving beyond the narration of the text itself, to considering the larger function of the text and Min's public persona in the U.S., however, we might understand Min's act of writing an autobiography of her coming of age in China as her ultimate valorization of the experience of the ordinary individual possible in the U.S. context. I would also add that this concept (supported by Min herself) also valorizes the false dichotomy between history and memory, when in fact, memory should be "understood as deeply embedded in and hopelessly complicitous with history in fashioning an official and authoritative account of the past" (Min 1994, 27). The interrelatedness of memory and history provide a frame for reading Anchee Min's autobiography; contrary to representing the freedom in the U.S. to write one's own personal history, and therefore the freedom of the individual itself, I suggest that this exercise in self-representation must be considered in terms of collective memory and history in the context of U.S. ideology. Narrating a history of the U.S. as a multicultural nation invites immigrants and others in the U.S. to tell their stories. Thus, the writing of one's narrative of personal experience is a way of bringing this memory into the fold of the larger invocation to confirm U.S. history within the enactment of U.S. power.

Conclusion: Claiming Sentiment

The culminating scene of Min's autobiography in which the boundaries between herself and the mandates of state history have been hopelessly blurred, is only the ending of Min's narration of her memory of her past life. The true ending of the narrative takes us out of the progression of the narration and jumps to the author's immigration to the U.S. Although Min never becomes a melodramatic heroine in the staging of the opera Red Azalea, her successful flight to the U.S. and her writing of her autobiography makes her a heroine of her own narrative, and this time, gives her control over the script. No longer subject to the fanaticism of the male director, Min's journey and gendered interests in her autobiography suggest the vindication of Chinese womanhood in the U.S. Min's triumph of will can be seen in the way that she describes her immigration six years after the demise of the opera: "In six years of severe loneliness and abandonment, my health broke down… In six years I had become a stone, deaf to passion" (305). When a friend (Joan Chen) who had immigrated to the U.S. three year prior offers to help Min do the same, she seizes the opportunity: "Though I spoke not a word of English, though I hated to leave my parents, my sisters, my brother, and to fight for permission to leave would take all my energy, I knew that escaping China would be the only solution. I fought for my way and I arrived in America on September 1, 1984" (305-6).

Paradoxically, Min's decision to emigrate is based on the denial of private life that she has detailed in her story thus far, and will require leaving behind her family, her remaining site of tenuous affective bonds. Because of the impossibility of sentimentally held domestic bonds in China, leaving China means leaving behind her biological family in China; in this act, Min leaves behind as well the reminders of the impossible bonds with her family and enacts her own individuality in leaving. Importantly, the

juxtaposition of the scene of her belief in, and ultimate failure of, her role in the opera *Red Azalea*, and her arrival into liberal subjectivity in the U.S. demonstrates that the melodramatic heroine she might have become is interrupted in time to keep her from being lost in China. This interruption then leaves the potential for the completion of her burgeoning individualism in her new home.

To immigrate to the U.S. and leave behind her family is a sacrifice of sentiment that is worth fighting for. Indeed, if the U.S. is the space of freedom, then Min narrates her qualifications as a liberal subject *par excellence*, for she liberates herself, performing the U.S. liberal ethos of self-sufficiency and perseverance against the oppression of China, coded through her bodily and emotional suffering. Min's writing of herself as a liberal subject in her heroic "escape" serves to fortify the elision of the political realm of public action into a transcendent realm of private feelings. Though set in China, *Red Azalea* was published for a U.S. and western audience and implicitly figures the U.S. as a space of liberalism and modernity against the constraints on the individual in Min's portrayal of her life in China. Through her sensational representation of scenes in which she loses her individualism and thus her humanity in the liberal logic she upholds, Min portrays the impossibility of sentimentally based bonds and feelings in China without overt reference to the U.S. or extended engagement with the larger geopolitical relationship between the U.S. and China during or after the Cold War. It is this authority in representing the Chinese other for a Western audience that gives her a public voice in the U.S.

Min's appearance in the film *Good Fortune* (1998, dir. Corky Merwin) shows her ability to rhetorically connect adoption and commentary on contemporary China more

broadly.[97] *Good Fortune* is an informational video featuring the personal stories of six families with children adopted from China. According to the director's website, the video is "intended for [the Chinese adoptees] when they reach a level of maturity to ask and cope with identity questions. It is for all of our families and relatives to help them understand and celebrate their adoption stories."[98] It is also meant to be a fundraising tool for Chinese orphanages via Families with Children from China and has raised over $50,000 from screenings by organizations and through sales.[99] Anchee Min is featured in the video for her role in accompanying her friend, Michelle Dremmer, to adopt her daughter, Faith. Min is also godmother to Faith.

Min's appearance makes explicit that in her opinion adoption is directly related to a critique of contemporary China and her role as a guide for Americans to understand China through her lens. The narrator introduces Min as a Chinese immigrant to the U.S. who is a bestselling author and a mother to her five-year old daughter. She cites Min's expertise in "knowing the culture, language and the ropes of Chinese travel." Now with a husband and child in the U.S., Min has embraced being American through her own membership in a family, and can now return to China as an insider to help her American friends. Continuing the theme of the coercion of one's psyche in her autobiography and in her "letter," Min shows the liberatory transformation in her thinking in her thinking that she had been suspicious of westerners adopting children from China and attributes this to her "growing up being brainwashed" in China.

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[97] *Good Fortune*. Videorecording. Directed by Corky Merwin. Seattle, WA: Families with Children from China and Merwin Creative, Inc., 1998.
[98] Corky Merwin, "About Good Fortune," http://www.corkyco.com/goodfortune/insidepage.html.
[99] Ibid.

Min's narration parallels Tan's in her role as a guide to our understanding of Chinese history and the treatment of children, though the juxtaposition of her words with those of the narrator also suggests the ways in which Min plays a supporting, insider role to the overall narrative of the video. Much of Min's segment is taken up with her description of her encounter with the foster mother, a woman who is given a house to live in at the orphanage and takes care of about 5 children at a time. Having been a foster mother to Faith for 2 years, the woman had become emotionally bonded to the baby and "was in tears" at having to part with her. She insists on giving Min a bag of dried milk powder for Faith, even though Min tells us that such a gift would surely cost her a month's salary and despite Min's protest that Michelle, the adoptive mother, will have "everything in America" for Faith. At this moment, Min "understood that Faith was loved." Min's particular ability to view the adoption process "with a Chinese eye," as she puts it, enables her special access to understanding the adoption process with the local Chinese workers. When beginning to relay the story of meeting the foster mother, Michelle falters, unsure of the details, and Min steps in. Min is able to translate the encounter with the foster mother into a sentimental story of affective bonding between woman and child. Min's appreciation of family enacted in her life as an American immigrant allows her to tell this story of womanly bonding between herself and the Chinese foster mother, and between this mother and the child. Her ability to translate womanhood between China and the U.S. also demonstrates her critique of authoritarian state patriarchy she now can launch.

The narrative of the film quickly subsumes this story of broken domesticity into a larger story about the problems of life in China. With a cut to a street scene, the narrator

explains that while Min now has "experienced this profound personal involvement within the confines of a rural orphanage…, on a larger scale she also knows the reality of the Chinese government and hopes pressure from the west will help stimulate progress." Indeed, "having lived through the Cultural Revolution Anchee knows firsthand that much of what is reported about its orphanages is really about *China* in general." For instance, the conditions Min and her sisters experienced growing up were similar but worse in degree than those in contemporary orphanages. In a pensive tone, Min opines that the "criticism and comments of westerners" launched through the adoption experience will encourage government reform of orphanages for "abandoned children."

With Min's emphasis on her experience of childhood in China, that she is a "lost daughter" like the orphans who, like them, can gain wholeness through immigration to the U.S., I conclude by pointing out her parallelism to Tan's position as "lost daughter" in a Chinese American context who gains wholeness through liberal multiculturalism. That both represent "feminist" and "Chinese" points of view of having come of age into U.S. liberalism underwrites their contributions to adoption discourses.

Parts of Chapter 2 will appear in *The Journal of Chinese Diasporic Art and Literature*, Emily Cheng, xxx, forthcoming. I am the single author of this paper.

Chapter 3

The Thrills of Motherhood: Narrating Female Citizenship and Human Rights

The unprecedented rise in transnational adoptions by Western nations in the 1990s was tied to the context of "democratizing" nations undergoing economic transition in opening to Western capital with the end of the Cold War. The surge in adoptions from China, Russia, and Romania was also accompanied (and arguably promoted) by the opening of information to the West that fueled growing public attention in media and popular culture to conditions in orphanages in those countries and the impulse of westerners to intervene, through financial and humanitarian contributions, or even through adoptions of individual children. The crisis in Romanian child welfare was the first case garnering Western media coverage and international alarm as news of the large number of children in underfunded state institutions became available in early 1990.[100] Media reports of orphanage conditions China and Russia followed.

This news media portrayal of orphans in need is one of the objects of study of this chapter, which considers the privatization of the geopolitical terrain into the realm of family and sentiment in adoption discourse. Given the heightened attention to human rights in the U.S.-China geopolitical relationship in the early 1990s, and in lesser form through the present, this discussion emphasizes the context of economic, political and social change. The "one-child" policy, to which the large number of Chinese girls in

[100] Many prominent Western newspapers ran articles on this topic, including the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times*, and in the UK, the *Independent* and the *Times*. The groundbreaking series, *Orphans of Romania*, on ABC's *20/20* provided a visual exposé of the deplorable conditions in orphanages and the children they housed. The large number of children in orphanages can be linked to the state control of the population during the Cold War for nationalist goals, for example, in Romania, the 1984 mandate of the Ceausescu regime to increase family size to enlarge the purity of the population, and in China, population control as part of the Chinese Communist Party's national social planning, including the so-called one-child-per-family policy which launched in 1979 to limit the growth of the population.

orphanages and available for adoption by Westerners is often attributed, became prominent in the U.S. as one of several human rights violations that were widely debated in politics and media during the 1990s as signs of China's unsuitability for membership in a Western ethical community.[101] The incidents at Tian'anmen Square in 1989 brought into crisis the linkage of human rights and U.S. economic ties to China, stirring heated Congressional debate over whether withholding most-favored-nation trade status would effectively bring about changes in human rights practices in China or whether expanded economic relations would, in the long term, effect more freedoms and improvements in human rights in China. The 1994 decision of the Clinton administration to delink human rights and most-favored-nation status was premised on the rationale of greater economic engagement in a free market as a means of democratization. According to Clinton, the U.S. could better advance human rights "if our nations are engaged in a growing web of political and economic cooperation and contacts."[102] As Susan Morris points out, this decision to not isolate China and therefore effect democratic change through engagement was also influenced by another desire to not isolate the U.S. in the region and was therefore based on U.S. national interests to maintain a competitive economic position in the Asia-Pacific.

This chapter situates discourses of adoption in this larger geopolitical context through a discussion of the centrality of human rights to U.S. representations of China in the 1990s and addresses human rights as critical to understanding adoption in this period.

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101 In 1979, the U.S. restored full diplomatic relations with China and even granted China Most Favored Nation (MFN) trade status. However, MFN status needed to be renewed annually in accordance with the Jackson-Vanik amendment, which in 1972 linked normal trade relations to emigration and human rights policies of Communist or formerly Communist nations.

[102] Cited in Susan C. Morris, *Trade and Human Rights: The ethical dimension in U.S.-China relations* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing), 2002, 87.

As a public discourse, human rights both created a backdrop and implicit rationale for adopting girls from China but also reveals the ideology of family as a private sphere separate from public discourse. With this logic of intimate connection between rights and the economic terrain, the particular human rights violence that threatens the child at the most extreme is that of turning her into a commodity, or an object. In this context, the human rights representation of the child included interrelated concerns over the treatment of children in state run orphanages in their birth countries and over their vulnerability to a growing transnational market in bodies. In my discussion of media representations and fictional representations of adoption and human rights I assert that the fear of turning the child into an object (either of her initial violation of rights through her abandonment or as a representational object of human rights discourse) can be apprehended through a private terrain of liberal sentimentality at the other extreme.

While the works I examine may articulate adoption as a form of rescue, I argue that this is not a rescue from human rights violations as defined through public rhetoric, but rather rescue in the private realm. This form of rescue centers on American family formation and the family form as a structure that grants and defines rights. This chapter specifically addresses the politics of sentimentality in relation to human rights and narratives of adoption as rescue. I begin by discussing mainstream news media representations of orphans and adoption and the privatization of this geopolitical terrain in the sphere of family and then address two novelistic thrillers that fictionalize news media representations. I also discuss the concept of sentimental storytelling as a means of creating affective community that extends to the orphaned child in Barbara D'Amato's *White Male Infant* (2002). The major section of the chapter considers the representation

of adoption from China through the cultural modes of sentimentalism and sensationalism in David Ball's *China Run* (2002). I explore the heroism of the white mother and the privileging of U.S. female citizenship in the adoption scenario of this novel.

The liberal impulse behind contemporary adoption must be situated in the context of adoptions of earlier decades in which an ethos of private benevolence in bringing suffering children to the U.S. coincided with state imperatives of forming Cold War alliances and vindicating U.S. interventionism in Asia. During the early Cold War adoption from Asia was a forging of family ties that supported U.S. state imperatives in Asia and such that the "hybrid, multiracial, multinational family created through adoption… offered a way to imagine U.S.-Asian integration in terms of voluntary affiliation" of American democracy.[103] My discussion of contemporary adoption draws on the importance of considering adoption in relation to geopolitics that Christina Klein models in studying representations "of the Cold War as a sentimental project of family formation" (159). Even in the absence of the Cold War need to demonstrate U.S. democracy and diversity against a common communist enemy, the contemporary adoptions are no less grounded in state politics and the furthering of friendly relations with the emerging Chinese economic superpower, however, the way in which these adoptions are political is in their very privatization of the adoption act. Such claims to adoption and family formation as individual and intimate acts supports the privileging of the individual in American liberalism. In negotiating the public politics of the U.S. vis-à-vis China, in which human rights had been delinked from economic engagement and had been left to the workings of the assumed collapse of freedom and capitalism, adoption as

[103] Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientialism* (Los Angeles: UC Press, 2003), 146.

a human rights intervention already is positioned in a complex relationship to state imperatives. We may interpret on the one hand the decoupling of adoption as human rights from state policy, but on the other, its coincidence with capitalism. In the texts this chapter examines, we see an overt disavowal of human rights and U.S. state discourse in the imagining of adoption as a private act.

I argue that it is because of the association of economics and human rights in the 1990s context that the adoption rhetoric places a distance between adoption and state and NGO discourses. Rescue in this context is a construct of American liberalism in which the public human rights figuration of the child as a victim of the state and of her culture is denied, for the sense of the child as already a proto-liberal subject easily amenable to her fulfillment of liberal subjectivity as an American is not easily reconciled with her prior abjection, as I discussed in Chapter Two. The sense in which these adoptions are about rescue departs from earlier adoptions in which the rescue of children very publicly demonstrated American benevolence, at the most extreme perhaps, in Gerald Ford's 1975 Operation Babylift in which the U.S. military worked with humanitarian (actually mostly Christian) organizations to save mostly mixed-race children right before the "Fall of Saigon" at the end of the Vietnam War.

This comparison to the Vietnam War might also benefit from a comparison of the symbolic function of the adoptees to that of Vietnamese refugees, who Yen Le Espiritu argues made possible the transformation of the Vietnam into a "good war" in American memory.[104] In her discussion of U.S. media commemorations of the 25th anniversary of

[104] Yen Le Espiritu, "The 'We-Win-Even-When-We-Lose' Syndrome: U.S. Press Coverage of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the 'Fall of Saigon,'" *American Quarterly* 58.2 (2006): 329-352.

the end of the U.S. war in Vietnam, Espiritu notes that the U.S. ascendance as the sole global military power with the end of the Cold War by the end of the 1980s and victory of the 1991 Persian Gulf War allowed the U.S. to forget the "failure" in the Vietnam War in its rise to leadership of a "New World Order" by 2000 (331). The "opening up" of Vietnam and China in this context cemented the U.S. role as a friend to those nations that is relevant to the consideration of adoption from China, for with China's role as "friend" to the U.S. and not a site of direct state censure and intervention, the rhetoric of human rights in media representations of China had diminished by the turn of the 21st century. Similar to the symbolic role of the refugee, the role of the adoptee in media representations allows the U.S. to portray itself as a welcoming home for these Chinese girls particularly through their multicultural incorporation into the nation as I discuss in the next chapter.

While these earlier adoptions therefore were explicitly grounded in state politics and military intervention, the denial of the larger politics of the state as part of the denial of the human rights rhetoric is also enabled through an elision of Chinese modernity (which would require consideration of the state). The abstraction of the violation against the children instead are often abstracted as a fault of misogynist tradition, of which the one-child policy is a contemporary manifestation.[105] Thus the rationale for adopting the girls is not only privatized, through the gendered mode of sentimentality, but so is the understanding of her relationship to China. The overt narrative of rescue would jeopardize the child's ability to become a liberal subject in the U.S., given liberalism's

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[105] For example, the Karin Evans' *The Lost Daughters of China*, a book popular on adoption reading lists, places the one-child policy in line with 10,000 years of misogyny in Chinese culture.

celebration of the individual and the rescue narrative's positioning of the child as an objectified victim, and as I will discuss below, this rationale is an impulse behind the desire to attribute a model of affective bonding between orphanage workers and the child in China, making her amenable to her incorporation in the U.S. into a feeling and loving subject in the family. Because markers of racial difference between parent and child are particularly visible, transnational adoption from China might be understood as particularly emblematic of the intersections of kinship, identity, and citizenship in the U.S. multicultural regime. Its focus on issues of women's and children's human rights reflects the dimensions of gender and race in adoption from China: over 95% of the adoptees from China are female, and the vast majority of U.S. adopters are white.[106]

Saving Adoption Discourse from Sensationalism

Fears for the rights of children tended to focus on the accusations of widespread abuse and profound neglect of children in state run orphanages (especially in formerly closed communist nations). For example, NGOs published a number of controversial reports on the orphaned children in China, focusing particularly on issues of culture and gender in China, such as Human Rights in China's *Caught Between Tradition And The State* (1995) and Human Rights Watch/Asia's *Death by Default: A Policy of Fatal Neglect in China's State Orphanages* (1996).[107] The issue of the treatment of Chinese

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[106] Data on the number of transnational adoptions come from http://travel.state.gov/family/adoption/stats/stats_451.html.

[107] The British Channel 4 documentary, *The Dying Rooms*, also generated public outcry with its clandestine footage of drastic conditions in Chinese orphanages.

orphans under state care was also taken up in Congress a number of times.[108] This U.S.-led scrutiny of rights violations that judges which countries may be welcomed into an economic and political community but may still remain morally and culturally suspect.

While in the case of China with the naturalization of the connection between rights and markets, it is the fear that the people of these non-western nations may not have the moral understanding required to respect liberal principles of human rights that reaffirms their otherness to western ethics. It is in this context that the adoption scenario provides a private sphere through which rights may be understood, for the difficulty in addressing the child as a human rights subject is the fear that she will become viewed as an object and at an extreme a commodity. The tension between adoption as a private act of family formation and markets is evident in the exploitation of children in a traffic in bodies. For instance, Nancy Scheper-Hughes writes that her previous article linking rumors of organ theft to "shadowy practices of international adoption" contributed to the shutting down of an 'orphanage' run by Americans in Recife, Brazil. She notes that rumors of children being kidnapped for the harvesting of their body parts and rumors of poor children being kidnapped for international organ trafficking led Guatemalan villagers to physically attack foreign tourists there exploring the possibility of international adoption.[109] In the case of China, allegations of illegal harvesting of organs most prominently surround executed prisoners, though I discuss below, Ball's novel brings this narrative to bear on the plight of the abandoned child.

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[108] For an example of U.S. rhetoric specifically about human rights and orphans, see United States Congressional-Executive Commission on China, *Roundtable On China's Children: Adoption, Orphanages, And Children With Disabilities.* 107th (2003).
[109] Karen Scheper-Hughes, "Theft of Life: The Globalization of Organ Stealing Rumours," *Anthropology Today* 12.3 (June 1996): 4.

The articulation of the space of family as a private sphere governed by affect against the public sphere of state and NGO politics was particularly centered on the 1996 Human Rights Watch/Asia publication, *Death By Default*, which portrayed extreme abuses in the Chinese state-run orphanage system including severe undernourishment, violence and neglect, and claimed that children were deliberately being allowed to die through starvation or untreated illness.[110] The report focuses on the Shanghai Children's Welfare Institute, "China's best-known and most prestigious orphanage," where it alleges that in the late 1980s and early 1990s, following the surge in the number of abandoned children in the 1980s, the total mortality was as high as 90 percent (2). The report argues that China's neglect cannot be explained by severe underfunding as in the case of Romanian orphanages but that funds were not spent on the needs of the children. It also states that superficial improvements in this orphanage since 1993 have been made to encourage foreign adoptions and that the majority of abandoned children including those with disabilities were housed in institutions under even worse conditions.

Much of the media coverage spurred by this report linked the human rights issues to the practice of adoption by westerners and charged that the treatment of children in orphanages was the most important type of human rights violations taking place in China. What I would like to draw attention to the disjuncture between the private sphere of

[110] This report relied heavily upon documents and testimony provided by Dr. Zhang Shuyun, a physician who worked at the Shanghai Children's Welfare Institute, and found political asylum in the U.S. for her role in criticizing the orphanage practices in China. She also collaborated with the filmmakers of *Return to the Dying Rooms*, the follow up to the Channel 4 documentary, *The Dying Rooms*, which first aired in the UK in June 2005 and aired for the first time in the U.S. in January 2006, a few weeks after the January 6, 2006 publication of the Human Rights Watch/Asia report. The film and the publication were the two major reports on conditions in Chinese orphanages in the 1990s and spurred widespread coverage in mainstream media. U.S. Human Rights Watch/Asia. *Death by Default: A Policy of Fatal Neglect in China's State Orphanages* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1996).

family and the public sphere through the discussion of adoption in this context and how adoption is carved out as a site of progressive politics. For example, the *Newsweek* article, "Leaving Them to Starve," reports on the findings of the Human Rights Watch/Asia publication and reiterates the explanation that the most vulnerable children with the largest presence in orphanages are abandoned girls, "victims of the government's one-child-per-family policy and the traditional peasant preference for boys."[111] While the backwardness of Chinese culture is blamed for indifference to these girls' lives, it is through adoption that Americans can help these innocent victims. A caption to a photograph of an orphanage, tells us that "the lucky few escape to homes in the west." Not only is the West the voice and defender of rights around the world, but the article suggests that the Chinese government might commit a further injustice in denying these children the chance to be saved by westerners.

Against the public sphere of either Chinese or U.S. public politics, Jill Smolowe's article in *Time* magazine, "Saving the Orphans," (January 22, 1996) carves out a private sphere in which adoption takes place.[112] In her first person piece, she takes issue with the report's presentation of widespread abuse in orphanages as "one of the country's gravest human-rights problems" based on 4-year old data:

> As a journalist, I am disturbed by the report's sensationalist tone. As an adoptive parent, I am outraged by its categorical depiction of orphanages as "death camps." Far smaller political squalls recently caused the suspension of foreign adoptions in Paraguay and Ukraine. If China follows suit, some children will lose what at the moment is their best hope for the future.

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[111] Carroll Bogert, "Leaving Them to Starve," *Newsweek*, January 15, 1996, 42.
[112] Jill Smolowe, "Saving the Orphans" *Time*, January 22, 1996, http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,983988,00.html.

Implicit in Smolowe's concern that public censure of China's policies will cause the government suspension of foreign adoptions is that helping children is best left to the private domain of family. Casting the NGO report as "political," Smolowe argues that the private sphere of adoption is the most effective means of "saving the orphans" and thereby rejects the bungling of the issue in public politics. Acknowledging that adoption "benefits only the few," she praises the Chinese government's use of $3000 "donations" required of adoptive parents to improve conditions and treatment at these orphanage facilities.

This belief that conditions in the orphanages are not nearly as severe as portrayed is something echoed by adoptive parents in several articles. This belief suggests a denial in adoption discourse of viewing the child as a victim of human rights abuses, for this characterization dehumanizes her and threatens to turn her into an object, (of not only abuse but through her exclusion from western discourse of liberal individualism). For instance the *Newsweek* article quotes a New York woman who adopted a girl from the Shanghai orphanage who "insists" that her visit to the orphanage showed her that "where my baby came from was good." A *New York Times* article reports that since the publication of the report, many adoptive parents have come forward testifying to the quality of care they found in the orphanages.[113] The article tells us that "for most of these couples, adoption has been a life affirming event of joy, and it seems inconceivable to them that the hands from which they have received the blessing of a child could be guilty of the wretched abuses captured on film and in the documentation of human-rights

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[113] Patrick E. Tyler, "In China's Orphanages, a War of Perception," *The New York Times*, January 21, 1996, Arts and Leisure Section.

organizations." They cite a belief that the caretakers really care about the girls and that the children are being treated as babies would in the west, quoting one adoptive mother who felt that "the caretakers in the orphanages in China, are working as hard as is humanly possible in a third-world situation to take care of these thousands of abandoned baby girls."

Lisa Cartwright has suggested in her discussion of 1990s Western visual media reports on children in orphanages in Romania and China a "correlation between media exposés and actual adoptions."[114] With the sense of a "borderless" economic politics of the 1990s which allowed for the freedom of representations of children in orphanages and the ease with which western parents could travel to help them, the images in the ABC *Orphans of Romania* series that began in 1990 provoked "overwhelming emotion" and a desire to "step in directly to help the children" in some adult viewers (193). Cartwright argues that it is this "death of distance between viewers and child subjects made possible through communication innovations of the late twentieth century" that distinguishes this recent wave of transnational adoption from those of previous decades (198). The tension between the televised children as "emblems of the political mission to recognize the figure of the child as being in need of international protection beyond what its home state could provide" and the child as a commodity in an international adoption market, for which Romania became infamous, is a key factor in the parents' denial that Chinese children are victimized by the state as portrayed in the news articles reacting to the visual and print exposés on China's orphanages. Instead, rescue registers in a personal, affective

[114] Lisa Cartwright, "Images of 'Waiting Children': Spectatorship and Pity in the Representation of the Global social Orphan in the 1990s," in *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*, ed. Toby Alice Volkman (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), *185-212*, 194.

terrain in which orphanage workers feel for the child, as do potential parents who then act to bring the child into the intimate bonds of family.

Sentimental Storytelling and the Rights of the Child in *White Male Infant*

Despite the incompatibility of the logic of rescue from victimization at the public level of the state documented in visual media and the private domain of affect and family articulated in these parents' statements, the intertwining of the public and private in the adoption scenario becomes evident in considering sentimentalism and human rights. American philosopher Richard Rorty's 1993 essay, "Human Rights, Rationality and Sentimentality" interestingly proposes sentimentality as a means for achieving human rights. He assesses the shortcomings of a human rights foundationalism based on the "shared human attribute" of "rationality" that "supposedly 'grounds' morality" to prevent mass atrocities.[115] Instead, Rorty proposes that sentimentality as the basis for relational, contingent, and practical identifications across communities, such that people can "feel *for each other*" and thereby expand their idea of "who counts as a fellow human being," that is, who belongs in one's moral community. The means by which we can do so is through sharing stories; Rorty proposes that human rights culture "seems to owe everything to hearing sad and sentimental stories" (119).

Barbara D'Amato's *White Male Infant*, a novelistic thriller that explicitly deals with the process of storytelling and sentiment in getting people to "feel for each other." The winner of the Mary Higgins Clark Award and the Carl Sandburg Award for

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[115] Richard Rorty, "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality" in *On Human Rights: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures 1993*, ed. Stephen Shute and Susan Hurley (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), 116.

Excellence in Fiction for her previous thrillers, D'Amato tells a story of transnational adoption and traffic in babies set in post-Cold War U.S. and Russia in this novel. From 1993 to 2006 Russia has been among the top two countries of origin (just trailing China for most of this period) for transnationally adopted children coming to the U.S. The novel develops two interrelated plots that culminate in the exposure of the international trafficking of children through Russian orphanages. The corruption of the Russian orphanage makes it ideal for the laundering of children who are being kidnapped in the U.S. and passed off as Russian orphans to American parents willing to pay large sums for their "perfect" child. While this plotline is interesting because of its resistance to a private realm of family and its insistence on implicating the corrupt American businessmen fueled by a demand for families to order, central to the novel is the story of sentimental education through the making of a televised exposé of the lives of global orphans in the 1990s. The novel provides a structural critique of U.S. exploitation and greed in constructing an affective relationship with others and refuses to leave intact the ideology of the U.S. as a democratic global policeman in the 1990s. In this sense it challenges sentimentalism's tendency of calling for a passive response and the privatization of public politics, though ultimately the mode and content of the sentimental film is left intact despite the revelations in the plot.

Gabrielle Coulter, a CNN journalist, is filming the Russian segment of her comparative documentary on orphans in less privileged nations around the world. The human rights approach of Gabrielle's documentary that will be broadcast to a Western audience is precisely that of sentimental storytelling in which she will prevail upon her American audience through words and images to feel for the plight of innocent orphaned

children. Gabrielle deploys the trope of the child as the innocent victim of inter(national) violence in countries at war or in post-Cold War turmoil. In educating her western audience about the "thousands of babies wasting away without parents or love," Gabrielle hopes that their film might "stir the world's compassion" or at least "reach some people's hearts." [116] The visual medium is crucial to her goal of making "a documentary with real emotional power in it, one that will make a difference. One with visual impact" (34).

As Laura Briggs has written, "television and photojournalism have come to rely reductively on two images to stand for the abstraction 'need,' the mother-with-child, and the imploring waif" that privatized U.S. political interests in the context of WWII and the early Cold War.[117] Following the conventions that Briggs identifies in discussions of iconic images of infants such as showing non-white children in outdoor spaces (showing their incompleteness vis-à-vis American domesticity and the home) or showing starving children (abstracting universal suffering from war), Gabrielle's documentary would present such tragic images as close-ups of Sudanese refugee orphans dying in a field and being eaten by flies and then panning over "a sea of starving infants and children" and continuing "until the fields of the starving in the distance looked like dots on the rose-colored land."[118] Employing imagery of the sentimental iconography of the lone child as well of these children as an indistinguishable mass, the film would play with the boundaries between portraying the child as an individual and as an objectified signifier for abstract suffering in the service of sentimental storytelling.

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[116] Barbara D'Amato, *White Male Infant*, (New York: Forge, 2002), 22, 144.
[117] Laura Briggs, "Mother, Child, Race, Nation: The Visual Iconography of Rescue and the Politics of Transnational and Transracial Adoption" *Gender and History* 15.2 (2003): 180.
[118] D'Amato, 142.

Unlike the Cold War politics that "invested the foreign in the domestic and the domestic in the foreign" that Briggs and other scholars such as Christina Klein write about, the sentimental story here does not appear to support a particular objective of U.S. foreign policy. Instead, we might see the public politics being privatized in this context as the politics of family itself, in which, as I discuss above, the possession of sentiment and particularly in its privileged familial form is what separates the U.S. from non-western nations in this texts. It is this importance of family for signifying U.S. exceptionalism as the guardian of liberal rights in the post-Cold War period that has been the framing narrative for this chapter. For instance, getting bogged down with the intricacies of adoption from Romania in relation to its politics with the end of the Cold War, Gabrielle reminds herself that the "point, after all, was the babies… Babies, the documentary had to be the babies, with just a small amount of [political] background" (154-5). This familial politics also includes a progressive racial ideology in which multiculturalism is modeled within the family but also links up to an internationalist multi-ethnic vision of the globe. Having already filmed in "orphanages and war zones" in Russia, Romania, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Guatemala, Gabrielle wants to film in China next because "she believed they needed a taste of each of the world's major ethnic groups, and up to now they had no Asians" (152). The China segment would focus specifically on China as a culture in which "girls were not valued," and by implication, we may interpret its function in the documentary as a representation of Asia as a space bound by tradition and misogyny. In contrast, Americans welcome the "overflowing" girls, for "China had become *the* place to adopt baby girls" (152).

The mediation of this example of sentimental storytelling through the point of view of the journalist and camera crew also calls attention to the "dominance inherent in the act of representation" in the moral politics of portraying the victim of material profit.[119] In the sentimental story of the orphans, the two poles of the moral spectrum are characterized by American domesticity and love on the one end and the unfeeling exploitation of children for material or political gain. Thus, any suggestion that the act of storytelling is associated with personal or professional gain clouds the transparency of this process of "showing" the American viewing public, those in power, how to feel for and be "nice" to the children in need. So moved by the plight of the children she has witnessed after a day of filming at the Russian orphanage, Gabrielle begins "trembling" and feels a crisis of her relationship to her documentary material. In a conversation with Justin, her partner and cameraman, she reveals:

> -I thought of this documentary as the accomplishment that would make my career.
> -And that bothers you.
> - Of course. Because children are dying. And I was trying to build my career on them.[120]

Gabrielle quickly acquiesces her fears to their shared conviction that making this documentary will be their best contribution to helping the children by mobilizing spectators as empathetic benefactors and continues the conversation with the lamentation that "our lives are so easy. We have food and families and a warm place to live. These children have nothing" (48). We may read her statement as an articulation of the feeling that she hopes to instill in her audience members as she imagines the binary contrast

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[119] Karen Sánchez-Eppler, "Bodily Bonds: The Intersecting Rhetorics of Feminism and Abolition," in *The Culture of Sentiment*, ed. Shirley Samuels (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 110.
[120] D'Amato, p. 47.

between the suffering children and a sentimental American domesticity and the direct relationship between the children and the American viewer. Gone is the consideration of the medium of television or her presence as a CNN reporter known for her political reports from “any trouble zone” that she has just been contemplating (47).

Human Rights and the Sentimentality in *China Run*

We may consider adoption from China as an important site that pushes the limits of the politics of sentimentality as a means of expanding human rights. Because of the adoption scenario’s reprisal of racial and gendered difference (and specifically in the case of China, the orientalizing of Chinese women), this site especially brings to the fore the difficulties of turning to sentimentalism with its sedimented U.S. history of retaining privilege across the boundaries of difference that it seeks to transcend. If adoption is embedded within human rights discourse and may at times be understood as a direct intervention into rights violations, the privatization of the intervention is specifically enabled through the gendered and infantile figure of the Chinese female orphan turned adoptee. The relative absence of asylum cases of adults based on flight from reproductive rights violations in China that are approved in the West provides a stark contrast to the large numbers of girls adopted by Western parents and bespeaks the particularity of the child and family formation in feeling for others.

To expand my discussion of human rights and sentimentality as the basis for morality and human community, I would like to return to Rorty’s essay. For him, sentimentality would be a means of achieving a common sense of humanity based on cultural contingency:

> I shall be defending the claim that nothing relevant to moral choice separates human beings from animals except historically contingent facts of the world, cultural facts. This claim is sometimes called "cultural relativism" by those who indignantly reject it. One reason they reject it is that such relativism seems to them incompatible with the fact that our human rights culture, the culture with which we in this democracy identify ourselves, is morally superior to other cultures. I quite agree that ours is morally superior, but I do not think this superiority counts in favor of the existence of a universal human nature. It would only do so if we assumed that a moral claim is ill-founded if not backed up by knowledge of a distinctly human attribute. It is not clear why "respect for human dignity" – our sense that the differences between Serb and Muslim, Christian and infidel, gay and straight, male and female should not matter – must presuppose the existence of any such attribute.[121]

Though Rorty's argument is interesting in its goal of questioning human rights based in rationality, which already has a long history of attributing reason to limited groups in power, what my discussion draws attention to in taking up Rorty's argument for sentimentality is the American history of liberal sentimentality that privatizes the larger realm of public politics. For one to suggest that the categories of difference listed above "should not matter," turning to sentimentality makes sense with its capacity for depoliticization by privileging a private sphere of domesticity governed by affect. Though of course social difference should not correlated with exclusion from legal rights, the leveling of difference without remedying structural inequality is a predominant impulse in the contemporary liberal discourses (such as some strains of multiculturalism in the context of U.S. citizenship) that I critique. In this sense, at stake in my discussion of rights in this chapter and dissertation as a whole is that difference *does* matter.

While one might argue that the rights of liberal citizenship must not be confused with international human rights as instituted in the aftermath of WWII, Rorty himself

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[121] Rorty, 116.

suggests that American liberal democracy is the foundation of the superior concept of human rights culture and thus belies their shared basis in Euro-American modernity (whether defined through reason or sentiment). Just as rationality fails as the basis for human rights because of its function in mapping rationality onto particular racialized and gendered bodies and spaces, as I demonstrate in this dissertation, sentimentality has this potential as well. Putting my discussion of the privatization of a particular human rights discourse into conversation with Rorty's proposal, I note that in considering rights globally, the adoption narrative of *China Run* celebrates the white mother as the feminine hero of liberal sentimentalism whose triumph is enacted through the body of the child, whose ambiguous status as both object and burgeoning liberal subject places her in a tenuous position within U.S. modernity. This representation supports an ontological distinction between enlightened and unenlightened nations and peoples that is bridged by the unidirectional expansion of rights, in this case by assigning tradition and culture to China in contrast to the liberal humanism (signified by sentimentality) of U.S. modernity.

In this section of the chapter, I examine David Ball's *China Run* (2002), a novelistic thriller that portrays adoption and the American family in a private sphere against the public sphere of human rights discourse.[122] Ball is the father of two girls adopted from China. The text engages the 19th century U.S. popular cultural modes of sentimentalism and sensationalism that allowed for individual identifications across lines of race, class, and gender in the context of abolitionism. In dramatizing adoption from China as the "rescue" of "abandoned" female orphans, the novel offers the private realm of family the power of humanitarian "rescue" of orphans not possible through public

[122] David Ball, *China Run* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002).

politics. My interest in reading this novel is to examine how the global geopolitical context of U.S.-China relations is privatized through ideological discourses of feminism and sentimentalism. I argue that *China Run* models a liberal feminism in the figure of the mother as heroine made possible in discursive connections between human rights and China's post-Cold War entry into the global economy.

The thriller form of *China Run* displaces the concept of rescue onto an exaggerated plotline in which the dangerous threat is a concrete manifestation of the state that is distinguished from the norm of the private sphere of adoption, and therefore presents adoption as explicit "rescue" a deviation from the norm. Though the premise of the novel is that a group of would-be adoptive parents flee with their children, the plot centrally focuses on the heroine Allison Turk, who leads them and is ultimately the only one who does manage to escape with her adopted daughter, Wen Li, and her stepson, Tyler, as her family formed through re-marriage and adoption is consolidated through the dramatic narrative. Their flight becomes a series of intrigues with "the Chinese" pursuing the precarious new American family. In the process of the fugitive flight, Allison discovers that the reason for the mysterious exchange of the children at the beginning of the novel is in fact an underground trade in children, in which girls are being sold as wives, or on the private adoption market, or to the international sex trade, or most lucrative of all, to private organ marketeers. In the end, Allison exposes the evil designs of the Chinese officials to sell orphans on illicit markets, and vindicates her actions and her motherhood. Ball's novel provides sensational scenes which focus on the sufferings of the bodies of Chinese orphans and dissidents. The casting of the white American as the heroine complicates the feeling of the audience for the corporeal suffering of the Chinese

characters in the novel in that this relationship is always mediated through the figure of the sentimental heroine. In saving “her” child from the corrupt and threatening Chinese bureaucracy, Turk’s heroism is tied to the domesticity of sentimental themes by highlighting the vindication and construction of U.S. domesticity abroad, and situating herself as the subject of rights.

In the midst of the drama, Turk, reveals a government cover-up of a plot to trade the bodies of the orphans in various human trafficking schemes. Ball’s novel attempts to resolve the complexities of the contexts in which adoption from China takes place into binaries of good and evil and relies on intense emotions that dramatize intimate affective relations. This narrative locates the intersections of liberal ideology, the struggle for human rights, and the sentimentality of the narrative in order to foreground the production of the U.S. as a space of freedom. I argue that the novel re-deploys the nineteenth-century cultural modes of sentimentalism and sensationalism in this twenty-first century adoption plot to represent the resolution of the contradictions of racial difference and the racialized dimensions of the U.S.-China cultural and geopolitical relationship in the “American Chinese” family. Foregrounding Ball’s use of sentimental and sensational narrative modes will allow for an examination of how the themes of domesticity and family inform the novel’s understanding of the relationship between the U.S. as liberal nation and the foreign space of China.[123]

I argue that the novel portrays adoption as a form of human rights action based in bourgeois domesticity that “saves” children through family formation and migration to

[123] “American Chinese” is a term used in adoptive communities to denote the inter-racial and inter-cultural status of the family and is distinguished from Chinese American identity.

the U.S. The story of family as a structure that has power to "save" the child specifically privileges the American mother as the agent of rescue. In the adoption scenario of *China Run*, the white mother's feeling for the Chinese baby demonstrates her humanity, such that sentiment becomes the signifier of humanity and of the liberal structure itself. In Ball's novel, the logic of adoption as rescue identifies China as other to U.S. humanitarianism and liberalism as the Chinese state reveals its illiberal basis in its foreclosure of individual rights, here equated with freedom. The novel's narrative of transnational adoption from China may appear to uphold the promise of U.S. liberalism that all individuals may have access to equality and rights without differentiation by race, or national origin, or gender. Indeed, Ball accepts that liberalism protects the rights of the abstract individual and that the state assumes the power to protect the equality of its individual subjects. In the novel, the American mother performs liberal citizenship through her womanhood and her freedom to act as a liberal subject through her rescue of herself and others in the foreign setting of China.

The mother's demonstration of American liberalism also invokes the spatialization of modernity and culture, as China becomes a space culturally defined through gendered violations of human rights, in contrast to the portrayal of the U.S. as a space defined by liberal freedoms. In a sense, U.S. judgments of China's suitability for expanded trade relations can also be understood as a judgment of China's suitability for modernity. The focus on the treatment of women that results in the orphaned "lost daughters" suggests the vitality of a liberal discourse of identifying non-western nations as non-modern through their adherence to supposedly traditional misogyny. Leti Volpp warns of the dangers of liberal feminist claims that Western minority or Third World

cultures are more sexist than Western liberal cultures and that construct gender subordination as "integral to their culture."[124] Further, these discourses suggest that "only minority cultures are considered traditional, and made up of unchanging and longstanding practices that warrant submission to cultural dictates. Non-western people are assumed to be governed by cultural dictates, whereas the capacity to reason is thought to characterize the West" (1191).

In the transnational adoption narrative discussed in this essay, the danger lies not only in positing the "fact" of women's freedom from subordination in the U.S. as a sign of universality and modernity, against critiques of violence and mass abandonment of girls in China as a "cultural" trait, but in enabling a narrative of salvation that upholds U.S. claims of liberal equality. Such logic denies the roots of China's population control policies in modernity; as anthropologist Susan Greenhalgh argues, more so than simply evincing the coercion of women's bodies, the rationale driving China's population policy "has been about the nation's dreams of achieving wealth, power, and global position through selective absorption of Western science and technology."[125] Generalizations about the status of women in China that rely upon essentialist notions of unchanging traditional beliefs cannot account for the changing role of women in Chinese modernity. These characterizations flatten rural and urban differences, for instance, that cannot account for such phenomenon as the desirability of young women in urban areas to work in particular types of high-paying "pink-collar" jobs offering social mobility in the new

[124] Leti Volpp, "Feminism Versus Multiculturalism" *Columbia Law Review* 101 (2001): 1185.

[125] Greenhalgh, Susan. "Globalization and Population Governance in China" in *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*, ed. Aihwa Ong and Stephen Collier, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 255.

market economy since the early 1990s, such as bilingual secretaries, salesgirls, public relations girls, and fashion models.[126]

Understanding U.S. liberalism as a discourse that underwrites individual rights and transcends difference, section of the chapter proposes that *China Run*, as an example of contemporary popular narratives about adoption, imagines the liberal subject through the use of the cultural modes of sentimentalism and sensationalism. These modes are effective in allowing the Chinese baby to be humanized and written into the U.S. and national body politic, though ultimately, it becomes clear that it is the mother, and not the child, who is the subject of liberal rights in the novel. It is the mother with whom the reader is asked to identify at the level of sentiment, and it is her agency in "saving" the child renders the baby an object in the sensationalized rescue narrative. Indeed, while the mother emerges as the sentimental heroine because of her understanding of family and liberal ideals, at the same time, the child emerges as a figure for the broader dehumanization of the Chinese characters and the nation. These characters are dehumanized because they represent the lack of liberal concepts of human rights.

Sentimental rhetoric and figures are re-deployed in *China Run* through the staging of scenes of pathos and action that establish liberal womanhood (and motherhood) on the side of universal "good." While sentimentalism emerged as a narrative mode in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the historical manifestation of sentimentalism that is most significant here is the mid-nineteenth-century sentimental-domestic novel.[127] These

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[126] Zhang Zhen, "Mediating Time: The 'Rice Bowl of Youth' in Fin de Siècle Urban China," in *Globalization*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 131-154.
[127] Jonathon Elmer writes about how the sensational and sentimental overlap in his study of the function of sensation in theatrical melodrama and written texts in the mid-nineteenth century in the U.S. See *Reading at the Social Limit: Affect, Mass Culture, and Edgar Allan Poe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

novels, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, represented a convergence of feminist and abolitionist discourses. Indeed, the call for abolition was commonly imbricated within the ideology of separate spheres and was associated with a middle class, female readership of novels. In addition, nineteenth century sentimentality was a "set of cultural practices designed to evoke a certain form of emotional response, usually empathy, in the reader or viewer," that functioned through affect and identification that might forge connections across gender, race and class boundaries.[128] The legacy of the horrors of bodies as property and of the breaking of families under slavery lingers in the disavowal of the child as a commodity in the adoption discourse.

In her 1998 article on the sentimental discourses of imperialism and black and white relations since the mid-nineteenth century, "Poor Eliza," Lauren Berlant identifies U.S. liberal sentimentality as a particular subset of sentimentalism that structures a relationship between affect and intimacy and U.S. citizenship and national life. Liberal

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[127] Sentimentalism has origins as an eighteenth and nineteenth century structure of feeling. GJ Barker-Benfield writes about the "culture of sensibility" in eighteenth century England, where sentimentalism was a popular form. See *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992). Another important history of sentimentalism is the U.S. nineteenth century sentimental-domestic novel that sought to produce political effects in the U.S. American body through the embodied and affective responses of readers to the fictional text. It represented a convergence of feminist and abolitionist discourses, and was commonly imbricated within the ideology of separate spheres, and was associated with the middle class and the context of female readership of novels. According to Shirley Samuels, the "culture of sentiment" functioned through affect and identification that might forge connections across gendered, race and class boundaries; a tension lay between identification across boundaries mobilized by sympathy to public reform and a response of passive sympathy that remains in private life. In *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). In the experience of emotional response, the reader or viewer is produced as a sentimental subject in the U.S. national body politic. Of particular interest in this paper is the centrality of domesticity and domestic scenes to the sentimental mode. Through a reliance on the affective power of the "home," sentimentalism was involved in a national project of "imagining the nation's bodies and the national body"(3). I do not mean to suggest that sentiment and the sentimental form are exclusively feminine. For instance, see Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler's *Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999) for a discussion
n of masculinity and affect in U.S. American culture.

[128] Samuels, 4.

sentimentalism has "been conventionally deployed to bind persons to the nation through a universalist rhetoric not of citizenship per se but of the capacity for suffering and trauma at the citizen's core"[129] Sentimentality characterizes the ways in which "different types of persons" are interpellated into the U.S nation on equal terms as feeling subjects, and are in fact humanized in this process; persons are "hailed by the universalist (but really national icon) of the person who loves, suffers, and desires to survive the obstacles that bind her or him to history" that is found in the sentimental aesthetic (637). Sentimental politics then presuppose the universality of private feeling, as the domain of political and public is rendered through private, affective terms: "sentimental politics are being performed whenever putatively suprapolitical affects or affect-saturated institutions (like the nation and family) are proposed as universalist solutions to structural racial, sexual, or intercultural antagonism" (638). However, this appeal to abstract individualism and universality remains "unfinished," as the desire to reimagine the real world in terms of transcendental and universal identifications of feeling cannot suppress contradictions of "relative privilege within the sentimental field of the universal human," which continue to reappear "along axes of apparent national nonuniversality – in zones of class, race, and gender" (643).

It is the maternal figure of Allison Turk, the sentimental heroine in *China Run*, that references the larger structure of liberal sentimentality in the U.S., for the nation's claim to freedom, rights, individuation, and liberal society is premised on the feeling subject, here, the mother who overcomes dangers in China to adopt a baby girl. The reduction of liberal rights to the axis of family sentiment, that is, the freedom to form

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[129] In "Poor Eliza," in *American Literature* (v. 70, 3, September 1998), 636

domestic, sentimentally held family relations, and indeed, the freedom to feel at all, defines U.S. liberalism against China's deficiencies in Ball's thriller. The white woman performs her claim to U.S. liberal citizenship abroad, in her role in the adoption of the foreign Chinese other, and thus suggests U.S. liberalism's transnational reach. The adoption scenario represented in *China Run* harks back to the feminist and abolitionist use of sentimentalism in the nineteenth century, such that the white woman saving the Chinese baby girls recalls the nineteenth-century sentimental heroine who becomes animated as a U.S. liberal subject through her feeling for the "negro" slave.

Alongside the narrative mode of sentimentalism, *China Run* deploys sensationalist rhetoric to depict the illiberal space of China and Chinese life. Shelley Streeby has shown that "sentimentalism generally emphasizes refinement and transcendence, whereas sensationalism emphasizes materiality and corporeality, even or especially to the point of thrilling and horrifying readers" (31). Streeby argues that in sensationalist literature "urban scenes" and "foreign views," thematized a relation between city and empire within the context of the expanding boundaries of U.S. empire. Along these lines, the sensationalist mode in *China Run* underscores the suffering bodies of Chinese subjects. Such a portrayal might evoke a corporeal response in the American reader that situates her within U.S. liberal values and U.S.-China geopolitics and will perhaps move her to the act of "saving" the orphans.

The interdependence of private and U.S. national domesticity, on the one hand, and of the illiberal Chinese state, on the other, structure Ball's tale of sentimental affect that bonds mother and child, sensationalized thrills involving the trafficking of bodies, and adoption. The plot turns on the white adoptive parent's need to complete the U.S.

domestic family, as the Turk family home has been disrupted through a series of failed attempts to have a child, either biologically or through domestic adoption. In contrast, the Chinese setting is depicted as a series of sensational, distinctly non-domestic, non-sentiment laden spaces, often outdoors, suggesting the absence of safe spaces in China. Indeed, the home lies at the mercy of the state, as the total subsumption of family and home into the state represents communist China's major difference from and moral inferiority to the U.S. In *China Run*, the adoption scenario takes place in a gendered private sphere that presumes the female child's ability to experience affective family bonds *only* in the U.S. In this "privatization" of the China – U.S. encounter, the complex social, political, and economic terrain of China – U.S. relations is reduced to site of private domesticity.

Within the narrative logic of *China Run*, sentimentalism at the level of the private family reveals transformative potential and critique of human rights culture, as opposed to the public discourse available to state or business interests. The extreme violation of rights in China is sensationalized to draw attention to China as an enemy of sentiment. As *USA Today* reviewer Carol Memmott puts it Ball's novel "focuses unflinchingly on what Westerners see as the tragedy of China's one-family, one-child policy and the heartless treatment of baby girls. This well-constructed novel won't steer Americans away from Chinese adoptions, but it will open their eyes to a challenging, rewarding experience."[130] Yet, at the same time, Ball implicitly reveals that the U.S. state is also incapable of recognizing the Chinese orphan as a subject worthy of rights. Whereas in the public

[130] Carol Memmott, Family's Trip To China Takes A Thrilling Turn, *USA Today*, August 22, 2002, 4D.

discourse, mothers, as American citizens in China, are legible within human rights culture, in the realm of the sentimental mother-daughter bond, the child evokes pathos. It is her plight that stimulates the intrigue and action. For instance, after the group of American fugitives initially flee from the hotel, Allison calls the U.S. consulate in Shanghai for protection from a stolen cell phone. Speaking to a junior clerk, Allison hopes to request asylum for the children, for feeling that Wen Li is "[her] daughter" transforms the child into a particular individual, who should have the rights accorded an American. No longer a nameless Chinese other, Wen Li should have rights, including the right to family, rather than being a ward of the state, "stuck in an orphanage" (Ball, 61). The novel validates adoption in terms of inclusion within the domain of the family, rather than understanding adoption as a form of commodity exchange, a viewpoint represented by the clerk who advises Allison to "give her back and let them give you another baby" (61). Unlike the public domain of the legalistic rights regime, it is only within the private domain of family that the baby has value as a subject of rights.

Running From China: The Sentimental Heroine and the Adoptee

The close reading of *China Run* that follows addresses the contradictions inherent to liberalism in narrating the U.S. as a global actor on the side of human rights. By focusing on the novel's deployment of the narrative modes of sensationalism and sentimentalism, my reading critically interrogates the discursive site of Chinese transnational adoption through which the Western liberal subject is constituted and justified. Ball's novel posits the family as the exemplary site of human rights. While early in the novel, the family lies in tension with the U.S. state, by the end the U.S. is redeemed

as the space that permits its citizens to form family bonds. The novel conflates U.S. citizenship and the possibility for family formation as the right of U.S. citizens over and against the foreign Chinese threat. Part of this threat is the denial of "family" in China, as suggested by the existence of the "surplus" child.

In the following passage, Ball articulates the disjuncture between the official framing of the child as a "Chinese national" whom the Americans have "kidnapped," a framing based on a legal definition of the child's rights, and Allison's claim to the child as hers, for she feels that Wen Li is already "her daughter" (60). In response to the clerk's explanation that there must be "legal… persecution" for Allison to have recourse to U.S. law, she argues that

> Wen Li was abandoned. They were all abandoned. Stuck in an orphanage for the rest of their lives. That's persecution of a sort, isn't it?
>
> I'm on your side here… (but) you can't possibly hope to evade the authorities. This is China. It's a police state, Mrs. Turk… Hell, (the Chinese) may even throw you in prison. They're not squeamish about that sort of thing. They're not sentimental, either. Break their laws and they'll make you pay…
>
> Allison's heart sank… She'd found a small-minded bureaucrat whose veins ran with regulations, not blood. (61-2)

Allison suggests that the prospect of allowing her "daughter" Wen Li to remain in an orphanage is a form of persecution, and with Wen Li standing in for "all" the abandoned girls in China, she contrasts life under the care of the Chinese state to the U.S. private family, defining the latter as the only desirable form of "life." The opposition between the state apparatus of China (and the U.S.) and the family is made clearer in their differentiation through sentiment, or "blood"; the state bureaucrat's body is metaphorically fed by "regulations," rather than the blood of humanity. Sentiment is what

prompts Allison to flee with Wen Li, and it is also the grounds on which the reader is called upon to feel for the female protagonist and her child. As people without sentiment, "the Chinese" may not be moved by feeling, but neither can the form of U.S. law allow for sentiment. However, by saying that he is "on (Allison's) side," the clerk articulates an opposition between the U.S. and China as nation-states, as does his naming of "the Chinese," which continues to invoke U.S. rhetoric toward enemy states.

A further implication of this passage is that the subject of rights in the novel is not the child, but rather, the white American woman abroad. As Allison Turk is the one who is threatened with being "(thrown) into prison," she is also the subject of the media coverage of the event, and the focus of concern for the international human rights activists. Weaving "news reports" into the narrative from CNN and the Reuters news service about the women as well as the subsequent international protests at Chinese embassies over their safety, Ball portrays an international political drama that emerges out of what Allison views as a moral and private act. Ball writes that the "American networks were full of the story, which had touched a raw national nerve" (183). The story of the adoptive parents has entered into a U.S. national consciousness, not through the conscious reasoning of Americans, but through a collective sensory experience that goes straight to the "nerve." However, the focus of concern in the U.S. and internationally is the legal endangerment of the women, with the children serving as foils for the agency of the U.S. women. Commenting on information released by a "Hong Kong-based rights watchdog group," the "White House… calls for the immediate release of any prisoners on humanitarian grounds" and calls "for restraint, noting the protests that had turned violent outside the Chinese embassy in Paris" as "human rights demonstrators… hurled

vegetables at the embassy" (323). The reports make clear that what is of interest in the public protests and state responses is the legal treatment of the American citizens under an international human rights regime. The salient subjects of internationally recognized human rights are the American "parents" and not the adoptees, thus shifting attention from the adoptee, whose plight ostensibly drives the narrative, to the "parents" and the U.S. liberal family structure they represent. The parents are the only ones who view the child as a subject of human rights.

The relationship between U.S. state discourse, adoption, and sentimentalism in *China Run* is ambivalent. One can see the state attempting to claim sentimentality and family as its proper domain and the family privatized as distinct from the public domain of the state. Fred Pollard, whose sister Ruth is one of the fugitives, clarifies the state attempts to unify itself with the interests of the family. Emphasizing the linkages between international business and politics and human rights, Pollard states on CBS Evening News:

> The one-child policy is just another capricious violation of human rights… The Chinese government's disregard for the sanctity of human life is long-standing. And now my sister and two other women have simply tried to rescue infants from the Chinese torture chambers, and the government has made them criminals… When the Congress votes on MFN next month, I don't think the issues could be clearer. What is most important to our nation? Do we vote for morality, or money? God, or godlessness? Babies, or the butchers of Beijing? (183)

In Fred Pollard's position as both a U.S. Congressman and the sibling of one of the fugitive parents, the state and the family converge as ways of representing the U.S.-China relationship and suggests the symbolic role of womanhood as the bearer of responsibility

of morality. The basis for moral action within both private and public realms in appeals to sentiment and morality heightens the distinction between good and evil in castigating the Chinese government and nation against the liberalism of the U.S.

Though privately Pollard does not support Ruth's decision to flee or to adopt from China at all, his public rhetoric expressed from an official state position reveals the power of appeals to moral and religious virtue in compelling public sentiment and swaying emotion for political action. Citing the plight of the women who are in turn saving "innocent children," Pollard holds up "family values" as a national trope through which to make legible the severity of China's long history of "disregard" for "human life" itself. To ignore such a violation of universal human rights can then only be evidence of cold blood, not dissimilar to China's criminalizing of sentiment, or to the rhetorical equation of "money," "godlessness," and "the butchers of Beijing." The novel deploys sentimentality exactly to represent China as un-enlightened, and to celebrate the human rights culture of the U.S. In fact, the comparison of U.S. and China posits a cultural and national relativism that is indexed *through* sentiment to maintain divisions. Here, sentimental modes of communication hardly encourage feeling "*for each other*" (Rorty, 119, emphasis in original). Indeed, the costs of China's desire to enter the free market betray the non-liberal basis of its modernity in this context.

Congressman Pollard's invocation of the "butchers of Beijing" suggests how sensationalism infuses the adoption narrative as well. The reader is invited to linger on pain and suffering, on the horrifying details of either the victim's suffering, on the criminal's exploits, and on the violated body, all of which represent China as the scene of

horror. Not only do the sensational elements of the novel draw attention to the sentimental pathos of the heroine Allison Turk, but these elements also highlight a distinct non-sentimental basis for subjectivity in China. Through the suffering of all the Chinese characters in the novel under the corruption of the state, the Chinese nation itself becomes sensationalized as a space of degradation. China's need for the intervention of U.S. benevolence is narrativized specifically through the adoption plot. As the novel recounts the sentimental heroine's exploits, figures and rhetorics of sensation dramatize the suffering body outside of liberalism and position these bodies' relation to larger structures of state power, international politics, and the family. Pollard's articulation of the boundaries of sentimentality to associate the U.S. with sentiment and morality against China suggests the limits of Rorty's turn to sentimentality as a non-universalizing basis for human rights. The work of the novel to generate the reader's empathy for suffering in China continues to reinscribe the logic of global divisions of free and unfree, modern and non-modern spaces.

Modernizing China

Counterposed to Rorty's emphasis on the cultural contingency of human rights, China comes to be identified culturally and naturally with the lack of rights. While the previous section has argued that the Allison Turk, the novel's heroine, is the liberal, sentimental subject with whom the reader is asked to identify, in this section I suggest that the adoptee is not just a vehicle through which the American parent can form a family, but that she is the driving force of the family plot and geopolitical drama. It is the figure of the Chinese female orphan that fundamentally invokes debates over human

rights and evokes the geopolitical context of the turn of the 21st century in which adoption from China takes place. In addition to proposing sentiment as the means to achieve human rights through the figure of the sentimental heroine, in *China Run* sentimentality also gives China the potential to modernize and reveals the limits of a relativist notion of rights are revealed at the same time.

In a sense, the narrative of adoption can be understood to be an allegory for Chinese modernity in the U.S. discourse of the Asia Pacific economic boom of the 1990s. Contradictory representations of China as at once a looming global economic power and a nation of anti-democratic social systems suggest that in a culturally, politically, and economically transnational era, China could enter modern geopolitical relationships but not without the resurfacing of reminders of its long-held alterity to Western rights and reason. China may achieve economic modernity but is still seen as non-modern in terms of society based on western rights and reason. In the context of this set of discourses, the figure of the adoptee also symbolizes for Americans the contradictions of the old and new in understanding China. Portrayed as the victim of misogynistic tradition and anti-democratic authoritarian government, the adoptee is also a modern figure who can be redeemed through adoption into the American family.

In the course of *China Run*, a whole set of Chinese people *feel* for the plight of the child and are moved to act to help them, but their lives prove to be expendable as they die for their actions. The fact that these people will sacrifice their lives to help the babies escape and become Americans reaffirms the U.S. as a destination of freedom, and the Chinese subjects as lacking human rights. Through the sensory experience of walking through Lao Ding, the underground orphanage that would have been the fated destination

of the adopted children had the American "parents" returned the children, Major Ma Lin is "humanized" and decides to help the fugitives to safety. Ball describes Ma Lin's reaction to his discovery of the orphanage and the fate of the children as so astounding that he is physically affected: "He spent the next hour in a state of surreal detachment… It was the scale and audacity of it all that took his breath away… Lao Ding was a giant clearinghouse of human flesh." (347-350)

Not only are the adopted children saved from their fate, but through his involvement Ma Lin is also "saved" by the children. The sensational experience of viewing what could have happened to the children shocks him into action. He is now able to recognize the importance of Allison's "determination" to save the baby, for she is a "woman who will die rather than yield" her baby (366). This recognition of the pathos of the child and the imperative to save her "galvanize(s) Ma Lin into action. For the first time in his life, he acted on instinct, against order, against authority" (367). The pathos of the situation causes him to act on the level of his feelings and sensations, and to help the adoptees become subjects of sentiment. Though Ma Lin is redeemed morally in the logic of a narrative underwritten by a culture of sentiment, his execution at the end of the novel for aiding in the escape of the fugitives reminds us that sentiment is anathema to the illiberal Chinese state. Ma Lin's decision to help the family is necessarily a sacrifice of his life for those of the children within the mandates of the state.

Ma Lin may experience sentiment briefly, but he is neither a subject of sentiment nor of human rights. If the novel shows the grave stakes in transporting the child to freedom in the U.S. (it maps both a geographical and symbolic journey, as the plot moves

across the country), the potential modernization of China reaches this limit. The adoption scheme turns out to be good for the Chinese state itself in that exposing the underground orphanage also exposes corruption at the high levels of government. At the critical moment of economic liberalization and changes in the communist rule, the adoption scenario exposes the deputy minister of the state government as the leader of the Black Bamboo triad, the most powerful underground gang in China. Ball writes that "in the midst of communism's death throes, Tong and his kind were helping to criminalize the state apparatus itself" (359). The result of the investigation leads to arrests in three provinces and the execution of the deputy minister, who was also the leader of the triad. To be sure, the triads are remnants of an old China:

> They were the seamy underbelly of China, more powerful sometimes than the government itself. They were ancient secret societies, created originally to overthrow the Manchus. Thwarted in their political desires, the triads turned to crime. Many moved to Hong Kong… The ensuing centuries saw them flourish on both sides of the border as their networks grew worldwide. (329)

The illicit and oppositional social form of the triad predates the contemporary government and still remain as a threat. Here the novel portrays the persistence of archaic traditions in China's present that keep the nation from embracing a modern human rights culture. Even more damaging, the "underbelly" operates beyond political borders, suggesting the threat of the global expansion of anti-democratic forms of social order and business practices that China represents as an emerging superpower.

The transnational adoption drama appears to flout Chinese laws as the American fugitives kidnap the children in the interest of the U.S. families' private, sentimental

bonds. Yet the drama eventually winds up vindicating a larger affective freedom that, in fact, benefits the Chinese state by eradicating some of its antiquated social forms, such as the feudal societies. Nevertheless, the Chinese state remains in a primitive stage in the teleology of freedom: references to a "new China" in the text indicate a process of transformation and modernization that falls short of attaining liberal statehood. The children are the excess of the state, as Wen Li, the only baby to escape, is described as "a child the state didn't want anyway – a baby cast off, like the countless thousands of Lao Ding and Suzhou – children with no names and no future" (366). As the unwanted excess of China's one-child policy, these children have no place or future in China. The novel suggests, however, that their future can be in U.S. Significantly, China's modernity cannot account for these children, as the sea route that Allison, Tyler, and Wen Li take to freedom is the one used in "operation yellow bird," an "underground railroad set up to smuggle dissidents" out China after the Tian'anmen massacre (270). In contrast to the scene discussed above, where abandonment was not grounds for asylum, the importance of saving these children is framed as political act, akin to the emancipation of refugees, within the context of the family.

The bourgeois domestic family, then, justifies the U.S. as the proper space of freedom and rights, and China the antithesis of this. It is not the international pressure that effects the family's escape to freedom, marked by crossing the boundary into Hong Kong waters, then still a British colony, but rather the individual choices of sympathetic people. The reduction of the political and social considerations into individual acts brought about by the pathos of the child (for in the family formation plot it is the child, not mother, whose life is at stake), upholds the sentimental tropes of motherhood and

family as universally human categories. For instance, when Allison reaches a temporary refuge at a monastery, the “abbot” asks her:

> ‘I have heard Beijing radio speak of the criminal Turk… We also receive the BBC and on that radio we have heard of the heroine Turk. It is most unusual to find two women inhabiting one skin. I am just an ignorant old man, so you must please tell me. Which stands now in the presence of Buddha?’
>
> ‘I don’t know,’ she said. ‘I’m just… a mother.’ (337)

The competing claims of the Chinese and British media that consider Allison to be either criminal or hero, are both deferred to her status as “mother.” The sentimental appeal to a feeling relationship takes precedence over public discourses. This appeal to the category of motherhood appears to universalize the ability to feel for the child. Indeed, as Rorty suggests, it is through “sentimental education” that the “little, superficial, similarities as cherishing our parents and our children” that everyone can understand that a common basis for humanity is instantiated. If the radical potential of the aesthetic mode of sentimentalism is the possibility of the reader’s transformation through “identification with alterity,” then the sentimental heroine of *China Run* serves to deflate this potential. The identification with what is foreign is mediated through the identification with the white American mother (648).

This focus on the family serves as a displacement of the psychic and physical violence staged in the sensational scene, from the public domain of international human rights that is intertwined with politics at the level of states, the media, and non-governmental organizations, into individual actions that take place within the private family, for instance, through adoption or the consolidation of the non-biological family.

Both forms of action in response to the endangerment of life in communist China are underwritten by a recognition of who counts as human and what counts as acting as a good human according to a moral register (based in sentiment not reason), which corresponds in the novel to western liberal values associated with the U.S. In particular, the mother's liberal agency in her moral imperative to save the racial other by bringing her into the white family brings to the fore the white woman as the proper subject of inclusion into liberalism, and the U.S. as a liberal state.

In *China Run*, not everyone does have access to universal relationships of family, and in fact, it is the ability of individuals to feel a family bond that sets the American characters apart from the Chinese. While the American woman is able to disengage her identity as mother from the claims of public discourse, there is an inextricability of the state and family in China throughout the novel. For example, when Ma Lin tortures Yi Ling, the Americans' language guide (whose decision to help them escape arises from her own trauma from her state-coerced abortion that denied her motherhood) he injects his subject with drugs to extract information from her subconscious (198). Telling her that he is her "father" and that he would like information about the American women's whereabouts, a metaphoric family relation becomes intertwined with the authority of the state. Wanting to help her "father," Yi Ling says, "You are Ma Lin. My father… Yes Father. You are good… I will help, Father, I will" (196-7). Her (female) submission to the (male) state is staged as a voluntary desire to help her father. This sensational scene of psychic and physical violence demonstrates the impossibility of a bourgeois private domain of the family, and suggests communist state as a perverse patriarchy. Ma Lin glimpses the possibility of becoming a feeling subject when he is moved for the first time

to “tears (that are) real as he held [Yi Ling] close” (253). He is moved to help her, as a means to atone for his estrangement during the Cultural Revolution from his biological daughter. But his execution for his dissident actions at the end of the novel forecloses the possibility of the sentimental subject in China.

Conclusion

Ultimately, David Ball’s adoption thriller affirms the U.S. as the space of human rights and sentimentality in contrast to the unfree space of China. Yet the U.S. achieves this status only within the realm of the domestic; indeed, the private sphere in this novel seems to be the space in which the contradiction between familial bonds and the U.S. state is resolved. Ball suggests that the private sphere is distinct from that of the public, and that the private is in fact a site of resistance to the power of the public sphere of state imperatives. At the end of the novel, for instance, the U.S. government covers up the real events of the families’ “china run” as well as the agency of the women in saving the children as it credits its own actions with effectively saving the families from China. In response to a media question about the U.S. state “instrumental(ity) in helping Mrs. Turk to escape from China,” the “White House Press secretary” implies that the CIA was responsible for her safe rescue, and thus, the state and dominant media appropriate the story for political purposes (374).

If *China Run* is overtly a novel of sensation that calls upon the reader to act, then the appeal to action rests on deeming the media and state untrustworthy and unable to act to save lives. Instead, direct action based on sensational appeal must be responsible for

saving the Chinese female child. Bringing her to the U.S. as part of a family makes her a subject of rights, and is represented in the novel as a form of human rights activism. This activism is not defined as political, as in the organized public demonstrations reported in the media, or in legal and moral claims of the state. Rather, saving the child is an individual action based on private, familial bonds. However, as this essay has suggested, this ability to act, to complete the paperwork and supply the money to convince the Chinese government that one is a worthy parent, is a privilege of particular western subjects and maintains the boundaries of modern/non-modern that lie at the heart of Rorty's relativism. Not only does the adoptee's inclusion into the American family articulate her as a subject of human rights, but the novel further suggests that the effect of the adoption scenario is that China itself may even be able to modernize through sentimentality, rather than through measures at the level of the state or international politics or non-governmental organizations. If the sentimental heroine here in fact stands in for the interests of the liberal state, the U.S. emerges as the space from which the sentimental can be staged, as Allison's performance of sentimental subjectivity in China depends upon her freedoms as a U.S. citizen as she enacts American family formation through her adventures.

Though sentimentalism overtly relies on a logic of separate spheres to differentiate the private and public realms in the U.S., and between the U.S. and China (at the national domestic level), what this essay has tried to suggest is that the ease with which the U.S. state subsumes events into its own narrative demonstrates in fact that conjoining of the private and public in the novel as both are contained by the structure of U.S. liberalism in the novel. While the history of transnational adoption must be

understood through U.S. wars in Asia, in particular, the current wave of adoption from China does not come about through military intervention, but rather in a very specific post-Cold War moment of Chinese economic growth and fears of Chinese threats to U.S. global dominance. By going past narratives of rescue in popular culture can encourage understanding transnational Chinese adoption within the relationship of global geopolitics and domestic race and gender politics.

Parts of Chapter 3 appear in *Interactions*, Emily Cheng, Ege University Press, 2006. I am the single author of this paper.

Chapter 4

Narrating the Multicultural Family: Asian Immigration, Choice, and Consumerism

> I was reminded of the days when having a child of another race was simply a matter of fending off ignorance. How simple that was – how easy to know what was right. When people asked, *Is she yours?* or, *Where did you get her?* I could laugh and feel proud – of myself, of my family. It was a species of vanity… I had had the heart to take these children in, after all. Had I not loved them deeply and well, as if they were from the beginning my own?
>
> - "Blondie," in Gish Jen's *The Love Wife*[131]

Gish Jen's novel, *The Love Wife* (2004), tells the story of the Wongs, a biracial family that is formed through adoption and interracial marriage. This chapter addresses discourses of adoption from China within neoliberal narratives of the American nation in the context of racialized and gendered technologies of power at the turn of the 21st century. While Chapter 3 discussed the human rights narrative that has recourse to a classic theory of liberalism that separated social rights from the economic domain, in which the logic of the sentimental, privatized space of family provided a protection from the market, this chapter takes up these relationships in a different way. This story narrates adoption and family in terms of the privatization of citizenship and national politics. The novel explicitly thematizes the centrality of mass consumer culture to the construction of contemporary subjectivities through its story of an Asian and white mixed race family formed through transracial marriage, adoption and biological reproduction.

Jen's novel refers to a popular discourse of adoption that celebrates the multiculturalism of the family that emphasizes choice of identity, of culture, or consumer products supported by middle-class agency. In connecting adoption to Chinese

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[131] Gish Jen, *The Love Wife* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 132-3.

immigration and the American dream as an economic narrative, Jen's novel explicitly grounds adoption in contemporary issues of family, of the role of whiteness in multiculturalism, and the history of Asian immigration. As a practice that arose in the early 1990s, adoption from China is clearly bound up in the transnational flows of culture and capital of the post-Cold War period. While neo-liberal economic and political policies promoting the global mobility of capital have been in place since the 1970s, I mean to focus on the post-Cold War context of freedom under the guise of U.S.-led neo-liberal capitalism. The increasing disparity of wealth but also the gulf between political and social power for groups of people both on a transnational and national scale are one set of contradictions of neo-liberalism to which celebratory representations of the adoption from China speak.

Comaroff and Comaroff connect the abstraction of rights and privatization of politics:

> As neoliberal conditions render ever more obscure the rooting of inequality in structures of production, as work gives way to the mechanical solidarities of "identity" in constructing selfhood and social being, class comes to be understood, in both popular and scholarly discourse, as yet another personal trait or lifestyle choice. Which is it, like citizenship, is measured increasingly by the capacity to transact and consume; why politics is treated as a matter of individual or group entitlement; why social wrongs are transposed into an issue of "rights"; why diffuse concerns about cultural integrity and communal survival are vested in "private" anxieties about sexuality, procreation, or family values; why the fetus, neoliberal subject par excellence, becomes the of a macabre nativity play."[132]

Adoption from China is a site in which the American family from the 1990s to the post 9/11 period performs a transformative power to resolve not only the contradictions of

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[132] Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, "Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming," in *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism*, ed. Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 15-16.

neo-liberal ideology but specifically of the U.S. role in generating the global violence of dispossession and widespread human displacement. The benevolence of the American family vis-à-vis the Chinese girl brings the privileging of the "fetus" in U.S. morality into a transnational terrain (16). National multiculturalism underwritten by consumption and choice emphasizes depoliticized and privatized concepts of identity that deals with the amplification of class difference with the privatization of social welfare, particularly in the 1980s, by privileging identity and group membership as the basis of political rights.

Alongside to the threat of the slippage of the child between liberal subject and an object in the logic of human rights I discussed previously, in this chapter, I focus instead on the centrality of consumer culture to the liberal discourse of adoption. Consumer culture enables the construction of the child, and the family, as multicultural subjects and the construction of family as a privatized space of morality. I argue that this reliance on consumer culture is temporally bounded in that it is caught up in the contemporary centrality of consumerism to the nation and also in the temporal narratives of the promise of America in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

Family and Consumerism

Before turning to my reading of *The Love Wife* , I situate transnational adoption in relationship to consumer citizenship and the interrelated representations of adoption as an emblem of liberal multiculturalism by discussing popular representations of adoption and family as the site of multicultural progress. For example, a March 2006 *New York Times* article, "Adopted in China, Seeking Identity in America" positions adoption within a discourse of identity formation amid the melting pot that is America. Reporting on the

subculture that has arisen around Chinese/American adoptive communities, including "play groups, tours of China and online support groups," the article frames the experiences of adoptees as a unique form of forging one's own American identity.[133] Using a language of multiculturalism, the article suggests that the American journey is one of identity making and further, of exploration of the self. The article supports this futuristic narrative of becoming in its description of a set of girls who are entering their teens and coming of age: "they are beginning… to explore their identities. Their experiences offer hints at journeys yet to come for thousands of Chinese children who are now becoming part of American families each year" (Clemetson, 2006).

Another *New York Times* article published a year later in March 2007 takes on a more explicitly celebratory tone in representing the cultural, rather than racial, hybridity navigated through the "journey" of self-exploration.[134] "A Chinese Orphan's Journey To a Jewish Rite of Passage" reports on a group of Chinese adoptees in Manhattan who are both Chinese and Jewish, one of whom is celebrating her bat mitzvah on the eve of Chinese New Year. For this 13-year-old girl adopted by a lesbian couple, "Judaism is a religion, Chinese is my heritage and somewhat my culture, and I'm looking at them in a different way… I don't feel like they conflict with each other at all." In both articles, this process of constructing identity involves the whole family, with parents encouraging their daughters to attend Chinese dance class or other cultural lessons. In the case of the girl in the 2007 article, the entire family took up Judaism as their religion as part of their choice of identity in their new families. This article frames its content through the "directive to

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[133] Lynette Clemetson, "Adopted in China, Seeking Identity in America," *New York Times*, March 23, 2006, National Desk.

[134] Andy Newman, "A Chinese Orphan's Journey to a Jewish Rite of Passage," *New York Times*, March 8, 2007, Metropolitan Desk.

welcome strangers" found in the Torah, and ends with the girl's internalization of the "importance of caring for strangers" given that "we have all been, or will be strangers at some point in our lives." The adopted child is a "stranger," who is made familiar through her assimilation into the privileges of upper middle class American life and given the power to welcome others. The version of the adoption narrative presented in the articles implies the expansion of social inclusion to (racial, national and sexual) others in a private sphere.

The popular representation of the Chinese adoptee as a figure of multiculturalism, and by extension, of the adoptive family as an exemplary unit of national benevolence (towards racial others and women) suggests the importance of adoption as an exemplary site in which national fantasies of liberal inclusion are projected and performed.[135] An example of what Lauren Berlant calls the "infantile citizen," the adoptee is narrated in these representations as a model for identification with the multicultural nation.[136] The Chinese adoptee represents the innocence of the "infantile citizen" who gains instant access to upper middle class America. This fulfillment of the promise of the American Dream represents her transformation from a poor child in China, with no family, to a well-off, wanted, and now multicultural child in the new American family. Berlant writes that the "prepolitical child and other infantile and incipient citizens have become so important to public-sphere politics partly because the image of futurity they convey helps fend off more complex and troubling issues of equity and violence in the present" (219).

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[135] The hopefulness that characterizes these representations of adoption are facilitated by the youth of the adoptees; because the adoptions are a recent phenomenon, the children are in their teens or younger and have not been able to address their status from an adult perspective.

[136] Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

The teleology of multicultural progress implied by the adoptive family finds urgency in the present international context and provides a form of imagining transnational harmony that counters both the heightening of family as a site of national political meaning in the post 9/11 context in which American families are what are symbolically under threat in attacks on the nation and the relative lack of concern for socially dispossessed adult figures in China, the U.S. and globally. In so far as the adoptees are transnational migrants, they demonstrate the successful inclusion of others into the U.S. body politic. The reminders of their transnational lives, in this case accessed via Chinese origin as culture through a lens of national multiculturalism suggests the domestication of transnationality, in that other histories and contexts can be accessed through a model of liberal hybridity.

The privatized citizenship critiqued by Berlant in the context of the 1990s privileges the heteronormative family as its locus and referent. Thus, it is crucial to understand the popular representations of the adoptive family as a metonymy of national politics. Bell and Binnie's book, *The Sexual Citizen*, provides a relevant frame for this discussion of progressive politics and the space of family:

> In current sexual rights claims, the struggle to define 'families we choose' bears the mark of this privatization impulse, as if the retreat into family-space is a necessary strategy for claiming citizen status – something that closes down ways of living and loving that don't accord with the model of family, no matter how it is expanded.[137]

Drawing on their discussion of lesbian and gay "marriage," I note that the celebration of the progressive politics within the family negotiates the public/private split not by challenging this construct but by implying that larger structural change may be effected

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[137] David Bell and Jon Binnie, *The Sexual Citizen* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 5.

through individual choice in the private sphere. As Comaroff and Comaroff suggest in the neoliberal context of "millennial capitalism" with which this chapter is concerned, "it is not just that the personal is political. The personal is the only politics there is, the only politics with a tangible referent or emotional valence."[138]

In this context of privatized citizenship, personal self-expression depends on the highly individualized nature of consumption. The coupling of markets and rights I discussed in Chapter 3 is paralleled by the "links of economic power to political power" in the logic of the private consumer citizen.[139] In the case of the news articles above, consumption privileges individual autonomy and symbolizes the child's ability to choose her identity, for instance, naming several products that symbolize the mixing of culture and religion, such as "yin-and-yang yarmulkes, kiddush cups disguised as papier-mâché dragons, kosher lo mein and veal ribs."[140]

Barbie and Adoption

The accoutrements of highly personalized consumption described above reveal the exploitation of difference in marketing consumer goods but also the agency of consumer practices that has a longer history in the United States. Sentimentalism, family, and consumption have been historically linked in the negotiation of individuated and national identities in the U.S., particularly in the so-called feminization of middle-class consumption by the 19th century. Far from suggesting women and families are being targeted by and passively enlisted into capitalism, my discussion of adoption emphasizes

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[138] Comaroff and Comaroff, 15.
[139] Bell and Binnie, 6.
[140] Newman, 2007.

that the feeling of individual agency and choice must be understood in terms of one's identification with a collective, particularly in the context of U.S. multiculturalism. The mutual constitution of market capitalism and middle class personal life forms the backdrop against which adoption discourse and practice takes place.[141] For instance, Lori Merish addresses the connections between sentimental domesticity and market capitalism constructed by 19th century American literature; I draw upon her term "sentimental ownership," a "fantasy of intimate possession that is in fact – like the "free market" itself – produced and sustained by laws and economic policies" in my grounding of individual choice in the larger race and gender ideologies that support consumer culture and national multiculturalism.[142]

In the representations of adoption, the family and the purportedly apolitical nature of familial relations are saturated with political meaning. Motherhood, specifically, has often been seen as a natural relationship outside of capitalism, and until recently, if it has been understood in relation to the political economy it has been in the realm of production and labor, rather than consumption. Even today, motherhood is supposed to be a unique relationship beyond the reach of the marketplace in that it- "stands for 'love,' in sharp contrast to 'money' – a simple but persistent opposition that structures American middle-class cultural values concerning family, parenthood, and child-rearing."[143] Indeed, sentimental (ownership) was supposed to arise naturally from the mother-daughter bond. While discussions of motherhood and capitalism have often centered on issues of

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[141] Lori Merish, *Sentimental Materialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 4.
[142] I also draw upon Elizabeth White Nelson's study of moral market culture and sentimentality in the 19th century in *Market Sentiments.*
[143] Janelle Taylor, introduction to *Consuming Motherhood*, ed. Janelle Taylor, Linda Layne, and Danielle Wozniak (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 3.

reproduction, in recent years there has been a scholarly interest in the politics of motherhood and the politics of consumption that address consumption these works understand consumption as a "site of cultural creativity and political agency, and also (at least potentially of subversion and resistance" (11-12).

A depiction of white motherhood and the transnational imaginary of adoptive families' lives can be found in the "Coming/Going Home Barbie," a doll depicting a white mother and Asian child that Mattel has manufactured specifically for families adopting from China since 2001. The example of Barbie brings to the fore the inter-articulated discourses of multiculturalism, family, gender and consumerism in the practice and representation of contemporary Chinese transnational adoption. Unlike other ethnic and international Barbies in which Barbie herself embodies difference, such as those Ann Ducille writes of, here, it is the representational pairing of the white mother and the Asian baby that connotes racial difference within the family. In being connected to the Asian child, the white mother also becomes "ethnicized" as she has access to another national space, history, and culture.[144]

In supplying the quintessential American icon of white femininity and children's consumer culture exclusively as a gift to adopting families who stay in the White Swan hotel in Guangzhou when completing their adoptions, the corporation constructs the parents and children as potential consumers of their brand. Not only does Mattel gift the dolls by discreetly leaving them in the families' room but it also sponsors a playroom for the children in the hotel. As Mattel uses domestic multiculturalism (along with gender and race) as a category of market segmentation to differentiate and sell its products, the

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[144] See chapter, "Toy Theory: Black Barbie and the Deep Play of Difference" in Ann DuCille's *Skin Trade*.

corporation also provides a representation of the literal and symbolic transnational ties formed through adoption.

At the same time, some consumers (families and parents) value the adoption doll for her representation of bridging difference in the family. For example, two letters to the editor published in the *Boston Globe* following an article on the topic of Barbie and adoption praise Mattel for making such doll, one even calling her an "ambassador from Mattel." Another letter acknowledges that toys "portraying racially blended families… maybe exist for profit or politics, but they still fill a need in my family."[145] Here we can see the writer's sense of individual agency in owning this particular toy and the underlying ethos of privatized consumption as a means of making identity. Though Mattel manufactures thousands of these dolls a year (about 6,000 in 2004), there is enough demand for the toys that over 1,300 people who did not receive a doll or would like an additional one have signed an online petition asking Mattel to make these dolls available for purchase.[146] The approach used by many signers demonstrates how adoption and consumption lies at the intersections of race, class, and gender in American national ideology, for example, some appeal to Mattel to recognize adoptive families as a profitable market segment. However, the language some signers use indicates the divorce of middle-class consumer culture from the larger context of historical and contemporary social relations surrounding Chinese immigration and race. For example, one petitioner (presumably unwittingly) asks Mattel writes that having the Barbie "will be very

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[145] Letters to the Editor, *The Boston Globe*, Magazine, November 7, 2004. The original article by Janice Page was published October 3, 2004.
[146] Consumers also seek out the doll as a multicultural toy that gives meaning to the adoption process and as a positive toy for children. A few dissenting signers actually are writing in protest of the petition and use it as a means to communicate their criticism of consumer culture's role in adoption. (http://www.petitiononline.com/chb/petition.html).

meaningful to all those families lucky enough to adopt a 'little China' doll" such as theirs.

Though consumption may be important normalizing a discourse of rights for marginalized groups in the U.S., it is crucial in this context in enabling the transnational imaginary of the American "way of life" in which the family's concepts of culture, gender and race are constructed.[147] As a national narrative of race that imagines the redistribution of rights and resources, multiculturalism is fantasized by its proponents to rely on the "parallel movement of more equitable representation and resources: to win hearts and minds in the space of our imagined communities, to gain the bread and land for those living in the landscapes of our real neighborhoods," as James Lee writes.[148] With the racial crisis of economic restructuring and dismantling of social welfare of the 1980s, Lee identifies the pressures upon writers of color that "the politics of representation [take] center stage over the politics of resource" (xxviii). Taking up Slavoj Zizek's identification of multiculturalism as "the cultural logic of multinational capitalism," this discussion understands the multiracial and multicultural family formed through adoption to be a key locus through which to examine the conjunctions of the social and the economic domains.[149]

The popular representations discussed above embrace multiculturalism as a narrative of nation at the turn of the 21st century that is no longer weighted by concerns over social equality in the U.S. political economic context. Inderpal Grewal suggests that

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[147] Inderpal Grewal, *Transnational America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), *27*-28.
[148] James Lee, *Urban Triage* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), xiv.
[149] Slavoj Zizek, "Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism," *New Left Review* 5.2 (1997): 28-51.

> Multiculturalism, as it was understood in the United States, was no longer solely a claim on civil rights but now a neoliberal corporate project of selling goods to a transnational consumer culture connecting many national identities. Within this project, multiculturalism also circulated as consumer culture in which immigrants created negotiated lifestyles from the "American lifestyle" that was so much a part of capitalist formation in the United States. (91)

Grewal writes about the "transnational connectivities produced by consumer culture" that connects diasporic Indians in the U.S. to the "homeland" through consumption and the construction of subjects in India positioned vis-à-vis globalized (U.S.) consumer culture in localized ways. While her focus is on migrant and diasporic culture, the connection between multiculturalism (understood as a national discourse of whiteness with various accompanying forms of difference) and the transnational imaginary performed through consumer culture is useful for understanding the neoliberal circuits of adoption and the adoptive family in the U.S.

In the context of the transracial adoption from China, these mainstream representations hold up the family and its quest to construct a transnational, uniquely American identity as a model of a celebratory American "lifestyle" and national multicultural narrative. That race and gender are categories of American identity that have meanings beyond our national borders is explicit in mainstream adoption discourse. Adoption discourse filters transnationalism through domestic multiculturalism and nationalism and contains the transnational in a nationalist paradigm. The "American way of life," that both Berlant and Grewal write of encompasses a relationship between economic, social, political, and cultural domains in which a privatized version of citizenship "rooted in traditional notions of home, family, and community" is deployed in the face of challenges to U.S. domestic hierarchies and concepts of freedom (5). The rise

of "public intimacy" in the 1980s and 1990s conservative politics and war on terror of the 21st century provide the occasion for this ideology mediated through mass and consumer culture.

The Love Wife

The Love Wife explicitly narrates this mediation of national culture in adoption through two interrelated economic narratives of nation: consumption as both a sign of Americanness and as a means through which to fashion the multicultural family and the immigrant narrative of economic upward mobility. Like the *New York Times* articles, this novel thematizes adoption as an experiment in multiracial, multicultural family formation, but it does so in a way that places this teleological narrative of nation in relation to narratives of Asian immigration and neo-liberalism. The Wong family represents an anti-essentialist encounter of race, culture, and heritage in their family formed through choice. In the novel, two maternal figures represent these tensions; the white adoptive mother and the Chinese relative, the so-called "love wife," who is sponsored to live with the family and care for the Asian daughters.

Jen's novel portrays a mixed-race family formed through transracial marriage and adoption. The Wong family comprises Carnegie, the second-generation Chinese American father, Blondie/Jane, the white American mother, Lizzy, the daughter of unknown Asian background adopted in the U.S., Wendy, their daughter adopted in China, and Bailey, the mixed-race biological son. Though Jen portrays this family that embodies the discourse of choice and anti-essentialism, she complicates the celebratory narratives of multiracial family and adoption specifically by situating the concurrent

narrative of immigration and the exclusions of U.S. citizenship. They are also haunted by the presence of the recently deceased Mama Wong, Carnegie's mother who fled Communist China. The circle of kinship also comes to include Lan, whom they sponsor to come to the U.S. as distant relative from China who will care for the children, but who turns out to be Carnegie's sister. She is Mama Wong's biological daughter, and it is a shock at the end of the novel when it turns out that Mama Wong, who always criticized her son's family for not acting and looking "real" as families should, adopted Carnegie in the U.S.

The novel explicitly addresses the story of this family as telling a contested narrative of the American nation. On the one hand, consumer culture enables the framing of adoption as a progressive "choice," and as part of an "American lifestyle" that associates freedom and choice and envisions an American future unfettered by material inequality. The character of Blondie, the white mother, thematizes the "pervasiveness of liberal discourses of 'choice' within feminism, liberal democracy, and consumer culture" that Inderpal Grewal notes (29). The formation of the multiracial, multicultural family created through choice also enacts the revitalizing of whiteness as a type of diversity, a transformation that is mediated through consumer culture. Exemplifying the displacement of issues of race onto culture, the mother represents the belief that identity is something that can be chosen and radically constructed and the construction of "whiteness as cultural" through her choice of family and consumer goods.[150] On the other hand, the concurrent narrative of immigrant labor destabilizes the privileging of individual

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[150] Avery Gordon and Christopher Newfield, *Mapping Multiculturalism*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 79.

autonomy to choose family, culture, and identity that Blondie represents. The adoption of the Chinese girl is also haunted by the legacy of Asian immigration and labor. My reading of the novel also attends to the adoption narrative in relation to historical and contemporary Chinese and Asian immigration and racialization represented by Lan.

Returning to the figure of the infantile citizen projecting a hopeful national future, the adoptive family also represents its temporal narrative of national accommodation of difference through not only transracial family but family formed through volition. Narrating the millennial discourse of racial mixing found in the well-known fall 1993 special issue of *Time* magazine featuring a computer generated woman's face representing the new American melting pot, the novel takes up the language of "The New Face of America" of this issue.[151] This issue prophesied an American future marked by racial mixing and the production of a harmonious American body visualized in the face of a cyborg woman produced by the morphing of several racial types. This woman embodies a harmonious racial addition to the U.S. body politic, in which the merging of racial others creates an almost white looking figure, and as Berlant has written, portrays the reinvention of whiteness as a now ethnic category (205). What the simulated image projects is the future direction of the nation's racial hybridization. Similarly to Buck's characterization of the mixed-race child as the symbol of the American democratic future, this article makes racial mixing the province of family that is to be achieved through intermarriage and procreation.

The novel explicitly locates a national narrative of multiculturalism as a teleology of progress in the site of family and frames the tension between an individualistic notion

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[151] *Time* 142.21 (Fall 1993).

of family as choice and a national narration of family and racial meaning. Jen opens the novel with Blondie's declaration that "our family was, in any case, an improvisation. *The new American family*, our neighbor Mitchell once proclaimed… But for Carnegie and me, it was simply something we made. Something we chose."[152] Blondie's resistance to the neighbor's voicing of a national narrative of race and family is necessary to her view of family as something that can be created and as an intimately individualistic choice. David Palumbo-Liu notes that "resistance to structural critique shows up in most discussions of interracial marriage."[153] Though Blondie resists the connection between family and public discourses, Carnegie's remarks on reactions to their biological mixed race child, Bailey, reveals the centrality of national narratives of race to their family and suggests Jen's structural critique of family and racial thinking through Carnegie's perspective as a racialized subject. According to Carnegie, people respond to Bailey by "thinking he meant something. But what? *The future,* most of them would have said, probably – the kindest way of putting their thoughts."[154] The white neighbor Mitchell declares, "When I look at that boy, all I can think is, Is this the new face of America?" (157). Here we can see the acclimation of whiteness to racial hybridity, in attributing the child a symbolism of the future, and thus articulating a posthistorical denial of the material and symbolic contradictions of U.S. racial thinking in the present.

This unfettered futurity is only grounded in the process of transformation through Carnegie's voice: "No one except for me would have said, *The disappearing past*" (156). This contemplation of the temporal narration of the nation requires consideration of what

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[152] Jen, 3.
[153] David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 106.
[154] Jen, 156.

is being lost and what is being retained in this process. Fictionalizing this denial of public discourse in the family, Jen's portrayal of this "new American family" takes up the national discourse of interracial marriage and reproduction by pushing its limits through the narrative of adoption. Adoption is the exemplary act of neoliberal choice in family formation and is the impetus for the rest of the narrative. As with Buck's portrayal of Lennie in *The Hidden Flower*, Lizzy's adoption represents the birth of the family and is a harbinger of a new national future. It is the decision to adopt Lizzy, and the idea of the non-normative family they would make, that attracts Carnegie and Blondie to each other and leads to their marriage. Summoned to meet this child found on the doorstep of a church in the Midwest because he is the only Asian person in town, Carnegie declares that he will adopt Lizzy and in this speech act feels a pivotal change in his life:

> And so I said the words aloud, and –lo! There they were… A way of really living. Of living bigger. How I liked those words when I thought them; how I liked the hitching of my claptrap impulses to phrases of a certain gallop. *A way to meet life head-on. A way to live my own life*…This baby was bringing us all into the world (64).

For Carnegie, adoption and the ability to choose even the intimate relations of family is a way to break from what he views as the tradition-bound, insular strictures of his Chinese immigrant mother's point of view. The anti-essentialist lineage of family he enacts in adopting an Asian child serves as a break from what he understands to be the burden of biological inheritance. Adopting this child for him is a statement of individualism and of being able to choose his life. This process is self-consciously about the act of narration, as Carnegie marvels at his own words that have changed his fate. By the end of the novel the burden of biological and cultural heritage that Carnegie feels is subverted, as he discovers after his mother's death that he too was adopted in the U.S. However,

throughout the novel Carnegie struggles to resist what he feels as the pressure to be a proper Chinese son according to his mother's "traditional" expectations.

The quintessential American Dream is an economic narrative that demands consent to self identification with a capitalist mode of production. As Lauren Berlant writes, the American Dream "fuses private fortune with that of the nation: it promises that if you invest your energies in work and family-making, the nation will secure the broader social and economic conditions in which your labor can gain value and your life can been lived with dignity. It is… a redemptive story pinning its hope on class mobility." The adoption narrative deals with the contradictions of the American Dream that not all people can experience upward mobility and that this hope of economic advancement provides an alibi for the remaining constraints upon upward social mobility and inclusion into the nation. The narrative of adoption and the celebration of choice in the *New York Times* article suggests that there are no constraints to social mobility, such that the inequalities of American life are erased in this scenario.

At the same time, the economic narrative of immigration/American dream in the novel is an alternative to the narrative of choice and identity underwritten by consumer culture. Jen gives voice to the economic narrative of the immigrant dream, which is itself a temporal narrative of progress whereby the immigrant gains access to individualist and social inclusion in the U.S. through upward mobility. This plotline reprises Jen's concerns with the portrayal of "the dilemmas of American liberal democracy, a house built on 'possessive individualism,'" as David Li writes of Jen's 1991 novel, *Typical*

American.[155] In this novel, this immigrant narrative appears at first to support the national narrative of multiculturalism and inclusion through its temporal and symbolic concurrence, a myth which is laid bare through the adoption scenario. Carnegie recalls a childhood memory of his mother's words as they slowly began their rise out of poverty towards her dream of material wealth through careful real estate investments: "This is a big life… So many people have no story; we have a story. A big life, a big story. Every day going up up up! In a way we are very lucky."[156] Mama Wong's American story also confirms the gendered national immigrant narrative, in which freedom for women is defined by freedom from patriarchy. Indeed, she thanks her husband's death for her success as a businesswoman:

> Sometimes Mama Wong credited my father for her success. If he hadn't left a *so-called nest egg* – imagine. How lucky that he had taken out an insurance policy and then died! But the other hero of her story was America. *Only in America!* was probably her favorite saying (31).

For Mama Wong, the U.S. symbolically takes the place of the husband, for what she desires more than anything is the symbolism and promise of America. America itself is a character in her grand narrative of success and the allure of material wealth and the insulation from discrimination that it brings her. Mama Wong's story of an immigrant trajectory in America also coincides with a national narrative upheld by the contributions of immigrants such as these.

Blondie's marriage to Carnegie reinvigorates her white liberal family heritage; living up to the reputation of her great grandparents' generation of pacifists, abolitionists and suffragists, Blondie achieves political progressivism in her generation through

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[155] David Li, *Imagining the Nation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 103.
[156] Jen, 191.

transracial marriage. This marriage is part of the racial mixing and progressivism that adoption also signifies. Carnegie tells us that Doc Bailey, Blondie's father, "thought that I reinfused their family with immigrant vigor; that I looked forward rather than backward" (76). Adoption and transracial marriage places the family back within the temporal narrative of the nation, forestalling the Bailey's decline of their white immigrant family over generations. Indeed, Blondie reverses from being the "boring" child among the Baileys because she "was making a most original marriage" (76). She cannot help but "fluff up [her] feathers a little" when people praise her for marrying Carnegie, saying "How open to difference!... How loving! How willing to take risks!" (247). These comments reinforce that for Blondie to choose to give up her unmarked whiteness is a commendable choice she has made to enter into the fold of multiculturalism.

Adoption symbolically provides the bridge through which the conflicting economic narratives of American identity are enacted. The concept of choosing one's identity that is mediated through consumer culture versus the immigrant economic narrative of self-possession and a "natural" relation to culture are brought to the fore in the description of the difficulties of acclimating Wendy to her life in the U.S. Not only did the family do "Chinese lanterns and Chinese dragon races and Chinese dumplings…, Chinese culture camp…, subscribe to the *Families with Children from China* newsletter…" "find the girls Asian dolls" and "provide them with multiracial crayons" even going so far as to "balance our checkbook on the abacus" (206). Blondie recollects that she had wanted to move to Chinatown," but Carnegie had "laughed and claimed to hear the voice of his mother," saying, "China-crazy those people are" (206). We can see the humor in the lengths to invent a new tradition to ease the Americanization of the

adopted child, and the emphasis on multicultural identity to ease the contradictions of race, class and gender in American democracy.

The novel shows the importance of consumer culture to representing adoption, as consumer choice comes to be coded as a quintessentially American activity and affords one social and political agency. Mama Wong's perverse consumption of luxury goods is her way of showing that she has achieved success in her story of America and a class status that buffers her from discrimination or from disrespect. Consumption is clearly associated with the invention of new traditions and choice in creating one's identity in the adoptive family; the Wongs make the "classic mistake" of "concentrating the chinoiserie in the adopted children's bedrooms" (206). In Blondie's case, it is a means through which she fashions a multicultural identity. For example, she receives wedding gifts of invented "Asian" products, such as "a trivet made from the character for 'long life'" or an "Asian-fusion cookbook," or a "bamboo desk fountain," and prefers to the gifts from Carnegie's Chinese family and friends, such as "a pair of baroque jade carvings, with ornate rosewood stands," or an "elaborately embroidered tablecloth" (85). The former set of presents serves to bolster Blondie's sense of the revitalization of her identity through embracing Chinese ethnicity. Blondie's symbolism of connections between progressive politics and the economic terrain are further suggested by her profession as a partner in a socially responsible investment firm.

The American Dream and Family

This projected future of the American nation that is suggested in Blondie's feeling of choice in her family and identity is also burdened by the coterminous narrative of

immigrant labor that ground the family in the present and a different vision of the past and future. Mama Wong's story appears to fit into a national narrative of universal access to American belonging through hard work and economic self-possession in which in the contemporary moment this has been achieved. Together with the narrative of adoption and choice of alternative family formations, it appears that this novel takes place in a moment when the trials of the past have been surmounted and that we now live in an era of limitless possibility. It is through situating adoption within another kind of economic and social narrative of immigration and temporality that the novel breaks down this teleological narrative of nation.

The character of Lan, the distant relative/domestic worker, provides the narrative that breaks down this story of the nation as being about progress and the future through an economic narrative of progress and the social integration of the nation through transracial marriage and adoption underwritten by consumer culture. Her position as a nanny to the children and general domestic worker complicates the family relationship in several ways. First, what does is mean that it is her labor that is being consumed by the family in the fashioning of identity? The reason that she has been claimed as a family member is so that she can raise the girls according to Mama Wong's will, which stipulates that the Wong family will only receive the family genealogy book if this unknown relative from China lives with them and raises the girls for an unspecified number of years. Mama Wong's will bequeaths the family book to Wendy, "the only real Chinese in the family" (193). As Carnegie narrates, "we were instructed to sponsor said relative, apparently an orphan, to come live with us as a nanny for an unspecified number of years. Wrote my dear mother: That way the children will at least speak Chinese, not

like Carnegie" (193). Lan, this "orphan" who is in fact in her forties, is being sponsored to come to the U.S. not only to provide caretaking work but also to provide cultural work. For example, she teaches the girls Mandarin, cooks Chinese food for the family, and subversively, teaches them about Chinese values and politics. Lan also provides a challenge to liberal sentimentality by treating empathy and affect as Chinese modes. For her, capitalism is antithetical to feeling; whereas "America is cold," in China people help others and "see not only with your eyes but with your heart" (135; 90). Unlike Buck's evocation of intrinsic Chinese values, Lan's formulations of Chineseness are presented in contrast to her critique of the U.S.

Lan grounds the adoption narrative through her alliance with the girls in the novel and thus connects the immigrant and adoptee. Lan's Chineseness and cultural labor adds value to her work and leads to the complications in the novel over her role in the family. Because Lan's cultural value is also affective work of mothering, she threatens both Blondie as a mother but also her ideological authority over the family in which Blondie pushes each member to embrace multicultural identity. Not only does she win over the girls by serving as a maternal figure to them, but she is also the woman whom Mama Wong has sent as an alternative, "the wife [Carnegie] should have married." This affective impact on the family is derived from Lan's racial likeness to the girls and to Carnegie, and her presence seems to split the family in two. Blondie expresses her worry in an email to her best friend:

> The girls are no longer quite mine… Last night Wendy said, "Lanlan is like us. She just is, I can't explain it. Lanlan understands everything, even if you don't tell her. She can read our minds."… Lizzy says she honestly would not be surprised to find out Lan was her real mother. "Lanlan gets things," she says. (202)

Blondie's fear of losing possession of her daughters suggests Lan's competing claims over the children. A play on the concept of two mothers (the birth mother and the adoptive mother), neither of the two maternal figures in this instance claim a biological relationship to the children. The feeling of a racial bond the girls feel for Lan manifests in an intrinsic, affective communion they feel. Lan threatens the multicultural family structure by threatening to become a stronger, more "natural" mother figure to the girls.

Lan's threat is not only to the intimate bonds of family but to the national narrative of multicultural celebration of diversity that undergirds this family. Lan breaks down the association of these tropes in two major ways: by representing an immigrant laboring figure whose concurrent narrative brings the immigrant narrative of exploitation and racial exclusion in contradiction with the narrative of national progress and voicing other forms of Chineseness rooted in the context of globalization and the changing meaning of the U.S. for Chinese migrants. For Lan modernity is not about the American invention of Chinese traditions and the absorption of difference into a multicultural future but rather requires negotiating the U.S. in both a symbolic and material transnational frame. Lan resists becoming an immigrant, in the sense of buying into the narrative of the American dream and the myth of American exceptionalism. Forced to become a migrant worker in China when the state run shoe factory closes with the shift to the market economy, Lan blames U.S. economic hegemony. Teaching Lizzy and Wendy to distinguish corporate culture from the nation, Lan notes that in China she learned "how American companies wanted to control the whole world. How they sold everyone American things on purpose. It was actually a kind of weapon" (43). The case of China

demonstrates that democracy and free markets are not linked, as indeed, Lan critiques the benefits of the coupling of a rhetoric of freedom and neoliberalism in the U.S.

For Lan, coming to the U.S. is not a moment of ideological liberation but is instead an opportunity to gain agency as an actor in this neoliberal world. Lan's perspective provides a critique of U.S. from outside. When Carnegie offers to sponsor Lan for a U.S. green card, their conversation reveals the changing global status of the U.S. among prospective Chinese migrants. Lan replies

> - People say the big opportunity is not in America anymore.
> - Hong Kong. Shenzhen. Shanghai…
> - America is no longer America, I said.
> - Still America, she said. Just not the only one.
> - Here we have freedom. Don't people care about freedom?
> - Freedom? Individualism? She laughed, touching her hair with her sleeve.
> - Too much individualism. Too much argue here. Chinese people love peace.
> - What about freedom? Is there too much freedom?
> - Freedom is not always so good, she said. Look at Russia. Anyway, other problems too. Too much violence. (290-291)

This conversation suggests that the claims of American uniqueness around the globe, in being a beacon of freedom, democracy, and capitalist opportunity, are being challenged. Lan's claim that America is no longer the only America challenges the ideological basis of the nation, for what she is implying is that the *idea* of America is truly about the economic domain, divorced from its claims to democracy. It is in this sense that the U.S. has rivals, in this case referring most specifically to China, or specific highly transnational spaces within China. Lan's opposition of individualism and peace, and freedom and violence, is telling as well, for she sees that these concepts are underlain by violence and exploitation at home and abroad. These keywords of American liberal ideology that were so important to the Cold War continue to be empty in the post-Cold

War neo-liberal map signified through the changing roles of China and Russia in this passage.

For Lan, America is certainly not "heroic," and citizenship is no longer a coveted promise of inclusion in to the nation. Rather, when Carnegie argues, "Why do I bet that even if they're doing business abroad, they're still hanging on to their U.S. citizenship," Lan quickly replies, "Of course. U.S. citizenship very useful. Don't even need citizenship. Just a green card" (291). Citizenship is reduced to a practical status that facilitates the negotiation of a transnational life and does not require the acceptance of U.S. ideologies of citizenship and democracy. No longer is the U.S. seen as the site of a "better life," but rather, China is the ground in which one's fortune can be found, with legal American residency status. Lan's ambivalence about U.S. citizenship and the meaning of America is played out in her attempt to live a more traditional immigrant story. When her affair ends with Shang, the abusive would-be entrepreneur who wants Lan to be his native business partner in China, she instead marries Jiabao (Jeb) Su, a former professor in China who works as Shang's chauffer in the U.S. Together the new couple move to the Bailey family vacation home in Maine, Independence Island, and open a Chinese take-out restaurant in town.

At first the business is enormously successful, and Carnegie says, "it's the immigrant success story all over again" (322). Soon, however, things start to go wrong, and they incur the nativist antipathy of the townspeople that is played out through conventional rhetoric surrounding immigration and the American character: labor exploitation, property, and hard work. This conflict culminates in an argument that Su has with some of the "locals." This conflict is set up by the fact that the Bailey family owns

the only beach in town and prohibits the local people from using the beach despite the fact that no family member has vacationed there for years. The fact that the townspeople are themselves not landowners and therefore lack access to the American mythos of private ownership of land causes them to become infuriated and pronounce that "foreigners" should never own this land when Su reveals his dream of buying the land from the Bailey family (341). This argument reveals that what is significant about owning property is its symbolism for American citizenship and belonging. Su counters that he is not a foreigner but is in fact a U.S. citizen, to which the most vocal beachgoer responds, "the fact that you're a citizen doesn't make you an American… A citizen thinks this country is about law. But an American knows it is about who is really American" (341).

Realizing that he is an interloper into this white New England community and into their nativist view of American society, Su feels the hollowness of the immigrant story as a materialist imperative. He realizes that he cannot penetrate the traditions of the town; using the local name for the beach, named after the daughter of the previous owner, he tells Lan that now he knows that "Sue's beach can never become Mr. Su's beach… You cannot add one word, no matter how much money you have. A joke! It is truly a joke!" (342). The promise of the American dream of economic mobility and self possession is imploded through the central issues of labor and property, and Su dies the day after from a mysterious fire set to the Bailey property. Before dying, though, Su wishes that he had never become U.S. citizen and had only "taken a green card" so that he "could go back and forth freely. Make a living in America, retire in Shandong" (342). Jen suggests that this Chinese immigrant narrative of the past is still relevant in the present; in this moment of regret, Mr. Su echoes the history of the archetypal Cantonese

sojourner of the 19th century whose plan was to come to the U.S. temporarily, make his fortune, and to return home to China. Unlike the adoptee from the *New York Times* article who models liberal inclusion of the Chinese female child and welcomes other "strangers" into the nation, Su represents the archetypal Asian American "stranger" who suffers racial exclusion from the promises of U.S. democracy that historian Ronald Takaki characterizes.[157]

Lan's inability to access upward social mobility and inclusion into the liberal multicultural nation envisioned by the Baileys reiterates the immigrant exclusion that provides a counterpoint to the teleological story of America. To bring this discussion back to adoption, I argue that this novel shows how adoption takes place within these complex transnational connections I have discussed. By paralleling Lan and the adopted girls, the novel makes the connection between the Chinese (im)migrant and the adoptee. One the one hand, she enters into discourses of multiculturalism and the American Dream in the U.S. On the other, she embraces a "flexible citizenship" as a "strateg[y] to accumulate capital and power" in the changing political and economic conditions of globalization.[158] Part of the lost generation of China's Cultural Revolution, Lan has no family and no job prospects in China, and her American Dream is met with nativist exclusion in the U.S.

The novel ends on an ambiguous but optimistic note, with Lan, Blondie, and the children reuniting in a tenuous moment of "familial" intimacy in the waiting room of the hospital upon the news that Carnegie has survived his open heart surgery. The symbolism

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[157] Ronald Takaki, *Strangers From a Different Shore* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1989), 11-13.
[158] Aiwha Ong, *Flexible Citizenship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 6.

of his broken heart suggests the brokenness of their family as it existed and his heart's ability to be fixed through surgery suggests the rebirth of family along expanded kinship lines. Carnegie's incapacitation at this crucial moment of family recovery further cements the subversion of national family values discourse, for not only is the family formed through choice, and adoption in multiple generations, but the power of the patriarch is further subverted. The ending of the novel may be read as valorizing a model of affect in the family based on an extended model of kinship that subverts patriarchy and the conflict between the two maternal figures. This play on the narrative device of the birth of a child symbolizing the rebirth of the nation at the end of the novel de-emphasizes the importance of childbirth as a metaphor for the future.

Jen's novel refuses to privilege the moment of birth or of adoption as an event easily assimilable to the narrative of national multicultural progress. In a novel so much about the family and children, it is not the arrival of a new child but of Lan that brings into crisis the dominant narration of the nation. The transnational tensions that Jen narrates through the character of Lan are highly relevant to the figure of the adoptee whose infantile status allows her more easily to be projected into a seemless narrative of inclusion of diversity and the dream that she will be able to access the "Chinese" and "American" aspects of her "identity."

Adoption Travel as a "Journey" of Identity

The contradictions of the concept of forging identity in a neoliberal context can be seen in phenomenon of adoption related travel. While I have addressed immigrant subjects, including the different American trajectories of Mama Wong and Lan, whose

travels end in the U.S., the adoption scenario also generates tourists and travelers seeking cultural exchange. For example, the novel's portrayal of the family's adoption trip to adopt Wendy in China demonstrates the embeddedness of adoption in the volatile social and economic context of China's opening to the West. This passage is significant to representing the meaning of China to the adoptee and to grounding adoption within the contested meaning of Chineseness in the adoption scenario. The trip takes on added significance by immersing the whole family in China and serving as a kind of heritage trip for Lizzy. While the family considers Lizzy to be of mixed Asian heritage, her identification with China as a homeland is facilitated through the rise of Chinese adoptions as the emblematic form of adoption of this contemporary rise in adoptions. It is also a return trip for Carnegie to meet extended family in China for the first time. For Blondie it is a return as well, after having spent a summer in Hong Kong as a college student.

Wendy's adoption story in the novel is overshadowed by the signs of the transformation of Chinese modernity. The family obtains few mementos of Wendy's actual adoption, for they fail to get the information of the foster mother and her orphanage clothes are destroyed in a car accident. Returning to the hotel after receiving Wendy at the orphanage, the family's hired car hits a bicyclist and an angry mob forms and flips their car over. It turns out that a local state-run textile factory had shut down that day, leaving the men in the crowd unemployed and blaming American capitalism for their demise. The moment of privatized family formation literally collides with the changing economic and social conditions of China's globalization. This traumatic experience comes to define Lizzy's memory of China. Rather than telling friends at home

about her trip to the Great Wall, or meeting Carnegie's relatives for the first time, or other such conventionally scripted return tourist experiences of China, Lizzy instead recounts the harrowing tale of the car accident as a reference point for any future traumas she suffers. She thus resists the multiculturalist view of culture and heritage, which emphasizes tradition and essentialist notions of identity

A substantial cottage industry has arisen surrounding adoption from China since the early 1990s. The website of Families with Children from China, the largest organization for adoptive families features a section entitled, "The Mall," with over 300 "links to companies that sell things to buy related to china adoption," ranging from companies that provide adoption services, language classes and software, or household products or apparel inspired by Chinese culture that are marketed specifically for adoptive families.[159] A number of links are for travel companies that provide adoption travel services or adoption heritage/homeland travel for families returning to China after adoption.

As I studied this page, the "journey" immediately emerged as the privileged trope for the act of adoption. Drawing on the requirement that adoptive parents travel to China to meet their child and complete the final paperwork for the adoption, the "adoption journey" refers to both the actual experience of completing the adoption in China and also the larger process involved in adoption. This process is both about logistics and the making of meaning within family. Extending the concept, the links on the page market a number of other forms of journeys as well. The journey can be a visual experience by

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[159] Families with Children from China, "The Mall," http://fwcc.org/resources.html.

watching a DVD or it may be an auditory experience, such as that offered by the CD-selling site “A Musical Journey: From the Great Wall of China to the Water Towns of Jiangnan.” More commonly, however, the journey is used as a concept to market accessories and products meant to facilitate the journey of identity and family formation. For example, the website “An Incredible Journey” sells a journal with activity recommendations to be used by children during the visit to China to adopt a sibling. The journey may also be a form of community building, as suggested by “myadoptionwebsite.com,” a web hosting and design service that “allows family and friends to share your China adoption journey every step of the way.” The journey is often highly metaphorical, for example, “A Journey to China” is a website selling “adoption bracelets and necklaces” that “celebrate your adoption journey.”

In this final section, I would like to take up this language of the journey I mentioned in *The New York Times* article with which I began this chapter in order to address the importance of physical and symbolic travel to the formation of the adoptive family and the transnational imaginary in which the family lives. I point to this trope of the journey in the inter-articulation of consumer culture and discourses of choice and identity that I have been discussing. I am specifically interested in tourism and the journey to China that families make, either to complete adoptions or during subsequent heritage or homeland tours and examine the narrative of identity and nation constructed through the tour.

Several tour operators have emerged to offer travel services to China for adoptive families. The largest, Lotus Tours, has provided travel services for about 700 families, with a total of about 3000 people, since beginning the homeland heritage tour programs

in the year 2002. My discussion of the "homeland journey" focuses on the construction of the adoptive families as subjects who consume not only a particular idea of Chineseness and Chinese culture through travel but whose consumption enables the construction of meaning in their everyday lives. Drawing upon studies of modern tourism as fundamentally a visual phenomenon, I address the importance of the visual in the experience of the adoption homeland heritage tour and the construction of what the adoption tour might symbolize through analysis of websites promoting the tours.

John Urry tells us that the "tourist gaze" is socially constructed through situated difference from "non-tourist social practices, particularly those based within home and paid work."[160] Away from her work, the adoption tourist is a consumer of goods, services, and signs whose experience is made possible by a highly developed travel infrastructure. Reminiscent of the European Grand Tour for sons of aristocratic English and American families of the 17th to 19th centuries, now made possible for popular participation by mass tourism, the adoption heritage tour provides a social and cultural education for families seeking to connect to their child's "heritage." Because this experience is discursively constructed through a set of texts and interactions, I address the website of one agency, The Ties Program, to see what kind of expectations and values it articulates about adoption travel to China.[161] I also look at websites because they are examples of a visual practice that constructs and reinforces the gaze of adoption heritage travel.

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[160] John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002), 2.
[161] The Ties Program, "China Ties," http://www.adoptivefamilytravel.com/china.asp.

The Ties Program, which provides “adoptive family homeland journeys” to a number of international destinations has led groups to China since the year 2000. According to their website, their program promises parents that the China trip will be an ”identity building experience for your child, and the bonding experience you want it to be for your family.”[162] The websites promotes the trip as being most importantly about being able to construct individual and familial identity in the U.S. context, through the leisure experience of travel in China. This identity making “journey” is a communal experience made possible through “opportunities to make new friends during our journey, as well as reconnect with past acquaintances. The friendships created on this journey within the group and throughout China are what make this the “journey of a lifetime.” In billing the tour as being not only the about explicit consumption, of sights, food, cultural products, or of the tour itself, the website frames the experience as one of community building and constructing identity through social relationships.

While this language frames the tour as a transformative experience of forging social relationships, the experience of the tour and performing one’s role as a tourist also cements a key moment in the transformation of the child into a western consuming subject. Only through her adoption and her belonging in the American family can she experience China through her difference as a now American traveling subject. No longer a “surplus” child in a Chinese orphanage, she is now able to experience China from the viewpoint of a fortunate outsider who can gaze upon the children still in orphanages, or the people in villages and schools that the website notes can be components of the tour. If the tourist experience is most significantly about one’s everyday life, as Urry writes, it is

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[162] Ibid.

not surprising that the website describes the tour as an opportunity to develop and strengthen social relationships among the adoptive families on the tour, for the collective experience of travel in China strengthens the role of the child as a member of this new American family formed through choice and underwritten by multiculturalism.

Though tour operators offer individualized itineraries in addition to a standard tour, most of the tours seem to follow similar itineraries and experiences. The generic structure advertised is typically about a 2 week trip that consists of trips to famous icons of China's cultural history, including the Great Wall, the terra cotta warriors in Xi'an, hutong (alley) rickshaw tours in Beijing, and a river tour in the Guilin area. The tour constructs an idea of China that has a temporal relationship to the U.S. China is supersaturated with culture and history, and the particular icons that signify these traditions can be consumed by the adoption tourists. While many of the activities of the tour are no different from those on non-adoption tours of China, it is the concept of connecting to one's heritage that imbues these experiences with a personal meaning. Of the "roots trips" Swedish families with Chilean-born children, Barbara Yngvesson writes that "the search for roots assumes a past that is there, if we can just find the right file, the right papers, or the right person."[163]

With the absence of information on adoptee's birth family, the trip instead takes families to the orphanage where the child lived prior to her adoption and if possible, arranges a meeting between caregivers or a foster mother, and takes the family the place the child was found. As Ann Anagnost writes of parents' ambivalence about their and

[163] Barbara Yngvesson, "Going 'Home': Adoption, Loss of Bearings, and the Mythology of Roots" in *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*, ed. Toby Alice Volkman (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 32.

their child's relationship to China evoked during their adoption journey, this "loss of origin must be compensated for by a series of displacements." To do so, "adoptive parents often feel a need to envision and memorialize the loss of an affective bond they would like to think had been there [between birth parents and child]" and translates into a "desire… to project onto the caretaker affective feelings for the child that must also be memorialized in the adoption narrative and maternal archive."[164] To expand upon this discussion, the return to the child's orphanage is a key component of the trip and might be the culminating destination of the tour. Parents might bring photo albums collecting images of the children growing up to give to Chinese caretakers they are able to meet.

Considering the tour as a personal journey that is also highly mediated through constructions of U.S. citizenship vis-à-vis China, the ordering of the trip also positions the experience of China temporally in a narrative of identity formation in the U.S. multicultural nation. For instance, the trip usually involves a stay in Guangzhou, Guandong Province, where the initial adoption took place. The Shamian Island section of the city, a foreign concession area set up after the Opium Wars, is now the location where the adoption process is finalized. Many parents stay at the White Swan Hotel, which was until recently next to the U.S. consulate, and several shops selling products geared to adoptive families are located in the area. The stay on the return trip might involve visits to sites important to the original adoption process, for example, to the photo shop that takes the visa photos for the children or the medical clinic where they were examined as part of the adoption/immigration process.

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[164] Ann Anagnost, "Maternal Labor in a Transnational Circuit," in *Consuming Motherhood*, ed. Taylor, Janelle, Linda Layne, and Danielle Wozniak (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 149.

The visit to this area and the importance of the city as the last point in the adoption process before the families leave for the U.S. or other Western nations also symbolically positions the practice adoption at the heart of Chinese transnationalism. As the region from which most pre-1965 Chinese immigrants to the U.S. came, Guangdong has been central to the transnational migration and imaginary of millions of Chinese people. Guangzhou was also historically the major port city for international trade in South China and the province as a whole has been at the forefront of Chinese modernity and economic reform in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Karen Leong remarks in her study of Chinese American heritage trips to ancestral villages in the province that the transnational ties of diasporic Chinese with origins in Guangdong goes hand in hand with the emergence of Guangdong as the "model for a new national culture, replacing the northern Maoist nationalist narrative with a future-looking, south-centered vision."[165] It is in this context that Chinese government solicits foreign investment and new cultural ideas from overseas Chinese, and weds capital, culture, and concepts of homeland together in its sponsorship of the "In Search of Roots" program that Leong writes of. Such government sponsored programs must be differentiated from the adoption heritage tours run by private sector companies (though they are also similar in many ways).[166]

The tour thus begins with travel from the American home into this space of Chinese modernity and a narrative of transnationalism then plunges the families into a China interpreted as history and tradition. While the tour guides families through the contradictions of forging identity in a neoliberal context, in which urban and rural,

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[165] Andrea Louie, *Chineseness Across Borders* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 49.
[166] Actually the first Chinese government sponsored heritage tour for adoptive families took place in the summer of 2006. Like the "In Search of Roots" program, this program was for persons living in the San Francisco bay area.

modern and traditional differences in are constantly being juxtaposed, the ending of the trip in the orphanage suggests the inter-related experience of China as the past, both at the personal level since this is the first known place in the child's life and at the level of a national American narrative. The return to the orphanage at the end of the trip provides a direct contrast to the return to the family's home in the U.S. and between the past and the future in which the family already lives.

Conclusion

> The sobbing of the weak today is the sobbing of the victims of neoliberal policies. They number billions of people across the world. These are the people who leave their countries. These are the people who cling onto the belly of a plane leaving Africa for Europe, not caring if they are killed in the process, and many of them are. Their desperation is the result of globalization. The question is, will the weak be able to organize themselves to bring about changes or not?
>
> -Tariq Ali, *Speaking of Empire and Resistance*[167]

My completion of this dissertation project on transnational adoption from China coincides with a change in China's foreign adoption policies that places new restrictions which groups of people will be able to adopt children from China. Put into place on May 1, 2007, these regulations include a set of physical and social criteria on the prospective parents, including rule their age, physical health, and marital status (couples must have been married for two years, with no more than one divorce between them, no single parents). Responses to these new regulations have voiced the coupling of discourses of adoption as rescue, China as backwards, and adoption as a right of American parents. The change in rules was seen as a disservice to the girls in need and to American parents who are eager to form families by a number of commentators.[168]

A number of online reader responses to the New York Times article announcing the changes described the Chinese rules as prejudiced or as an example of the global reach of a "communist" regulation of the perfect social body.[169] Others make explicit what is implied in these comments: that the rules don't make sense to them when self-evidently the children would be better off with imperfect families in the U.S. than in

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[167] Tariq Ali and David Barsamian. *Speaking of Empire and Resistance: Conversations with Tariq Ali* (New York: The New Press, 2005) 6.
[168] For instance, see a set of letters to the editor in *The New York Times*, December 27, 2006.
[169] The original article, "China Tightens Adoption Rules for Foreigners" appeared on December 20, 2006, and 148 responses were posted that day in the "Reader's Comments" page of *The New York Times* website. http://news.blogs.nytimes.com/2006/12/19/china-tightens-adoption-rules-for-foreigners/

China. The implementation of these rules in fact becomes a reminder of the very freedom and open-mindedness of Americans that makes the U.S. a better home for these girls, victimized by the "draconian one-child rule" and "traditional Chinese preference for male children."[170] I should point out, as well, that while these readers' comments tended to be emotional, some supported China's right to regulate the adoptions and urged Americans to consider children in needs of homes in the U.S. before turning abroad.

I end with this anecdote to point to the importance of viewing adoption not just in the privatized realm of family but in relation to histories of immigration from China and, in the contemporary context, the vulnerability and mass displacements and migrations of peoples in large parts of the world. In a way, these rules bring our attention to the status of adoption as a form of immigration that is regulated from both the perspectives of the sending and receiving nations. One of my motivations behind undertaking this dissertation was to explore the question of why there is such an emotional response to the plight of "abandoned" Chinese girls and their "journey" to American families, but no qualitatively equal response to the situation of socially and economically dispossessed adults being displaced from homes in China or other parts of the world. For instance, perhaps the most notorious example of the "weak" whom Tariq Ali speaks of from China were the 286 Chinese immigrants attempting to be smuggled into the U.S. aboard the ship Golden Venture when it ran aground in New York City in June of 1993. Ten of these would-be illegal immigrants lost their lives and the incident as a whole was a subject of sensation, in the sense discussed in Chapter 3, in news media.[171]

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[170] "Editorial: China Adoption Rules Too Tight" in the January 9, 2007 *Denver Post*, B-06.

[171] Interest in this incident of mass human smuggling continues in Peter Cohn's 2006 documentary, *Golden Venture*.

This narrative of human smuggling and desperation and the protracted case for asylum (that did not conclude until 1997) that followed that was coterminous with the emerging practice of adoption from China suggests the ideological distance between the two scenarios and the need to consider them together as bound by the same geopolitical context. While the cultural mode of sentimentality mobilizes feeling on behalf of suffering others, in the case of adoption we can see that the construction of the infantile and innocent victim of Chinese tradition (or even of Chinese modernity) allows for the performance of U.S. liberalism at the same time that the narrative of adoption supports the premise freedom inherent in liberalism. The sentimental narrative of adoption itself is not innocent of national ideologies of race and gender, for the privileging of the orphan/adoptee as a potential liberal subject is made possible through the contemporary reinvestment in the sanctity of family and liberal racialization of Asian Americans in national multiculturalism.

In this context, for sentimentalism to be a viable means of expanding rights across difference to those beyond the reach of the trope of family it must take the form of a relational affect that does not reiterate dominance of the space of white (now multicultural), middle class family as the primary means of compelling feeling across unequal relations of power. In contrast to William Dean Howells' caricature of the "passive sympathy" of sentimental response as "tears, idle tears," in 1885, Tariq Ali's voice on behalf of the "victim of neoliberalist policies," used interchangeably with globalization here, suggests that they must shed the tears for themselves in the absence of

sentimental reactions on their behalf.[172] In a world where, as writers such as Ali, have argued, the growing social, legal and political distance between a transnational capitalist class and its others is encouraged by globalization, it is compelling to consider the potential for new modes of social engagement through affect.

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[172] William Dean Howell's novel 1885 *The Rise of Silas Lapham* Quoted in Shirley Samuels.

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