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INTRODUCTION

China has long fascinated me. With four thousand years of history, the Chinese have given the world one of its major civilizations. Five years ago, I stood on the Great Wall and marveled at this triumphant feat of engineering, a precise assemblage of earth and stones that rises from the hills in a massive show of strength and beauty for 5,500 miles. Each small section of the wall is impressive, but my eye couldn't help but travel its visible distance, tracing the endless castle wall, with its fortress watchtowers placed at exact intervals, as it winds on and on through the countryside, as seemingly long as Chinese civilization itself.

The wall was built to keep invaders out of a country that preferred to be left alone. For the vast majority of its history, China was her own world, a self-sufficient land that sent no envoys abroad. To learn China's secrets, traders had to make the arduous journey to Asia, but they were well rewarded for their efforts. The Land of the Dragon is credited with an impressive list of the world's inventions including paper, gunpowder, the compass, print and moveable type, India ink, porcelain, silk, steel, kites, and on and on.

In the past two decades, China has given the world her most unique gift, her daughters. From behind the Great Wall, China has sent forth thousands of tiny female ambassadors. In 1991, the U.S. State Department reported that American families and single parents adopted 61 Chinese infants and toddlers. Word quickly spread that healthy infant girls (and a few boys) were available for adoption, and the United States soon led the world in Chinese adoptions. At its height, in 2005, 7,906 American adoptions of Chinese females took place. Overall, approximately 150,000 babies and toddlers were adopted from China in the last twenty years, with roughly half now living in the United States.

Most are familiar with China's one-child policy, implemented in 1979, to arrest overpopulation. During the twentieth century, China endured

disastrous famine and poverty. During the Great Leap Forward, *thirty million* people starved to death. It's a statistic I can't completely comprehend: it's simply too large. This era of starvation devastated China. To feed all of her people, China had to drastically reduce her population.

Boys carry the bloodline and family name in China. Sons take in their aged parents while daughters care for their in-laws. Without a son, aged Chinese parents risk becoming destitute and homeless. If only allowed to have one child, survival and cultural preference dictate that it must be a son. Those couples that dare defy the policy by having more than one child suffer reprisals such as loss of jobs and homes. Hence, 150,000 Chinese girls growing up around the globe, in the United States, Ireland, England, France, Australia, Spain, the Netherlands and elsewhere. China's daughters are living in twenty-six countries worldwide, a global expatriate community comprised of members who did not choose to leave their homeland.

Of course, now China is realizing how valuable girls are. Who will the sons marry? There must be grandchildren to carry on the family name and honor the ancestors. The one-child policy is loosening; couples in some areas are allowed to pay a variable fee to have a second child. Most significant, China's tenacious attitude regarding gender inequality is at long last losing its grip. Many urban couples desire, even prefer, girls, citing the loyalty of daughters. Modern China is experiencing phenomenal development and has a great need for employees, men and women, to replace her aging workforce. In the current economy, daughters can provide for a family just as well as sons. There has also been an increase in domestic adoptions since the growing middle class is able to afford adoption fees and the costs of pediatric care. Some have speculated that the one-child policy may be completely dissolved sometime in the next decade.

Not surprisingly, the number of Chinese babies eligible for international adoption is diminishing. In 2009, Americans adopted 3,001 babies from China, a decrease of 66% since 2005. The wait for a baby, at one time less than a year, is now several years, causing couples to have to update expensive adoption dossiers. As a result, couples and single parents are looking to other countries for more rapid adoptions.

Still, approximately 75,000 adopted Chinese children, more than 95% of them girls, are now naturalized American citizens. Roughly 15,000, a full 20% of the adoptees, are growing up in a two-mile radius on the upper west side of Manhattan. The rest are coming of age in other cities, college