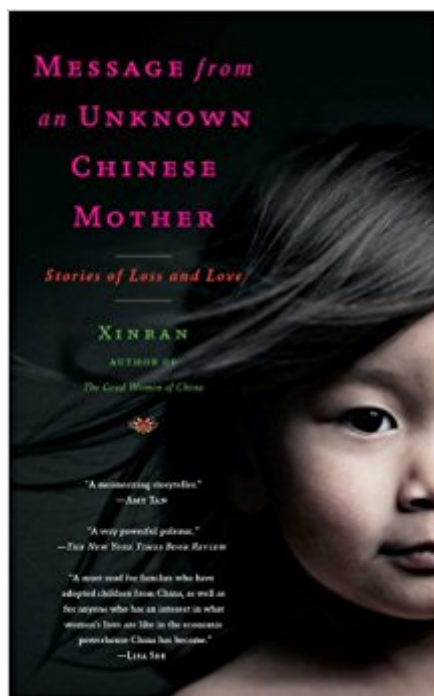


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# Message From An Unknown Chinese Mother: Stories Of Loss And Love



## Synopsis

Now in paperback one of the most stirring accounts of the lives of Chinese women since Wild Swans – “full of heart-rending tales – shocking, simply told – a very powerful polemic” (The New York Times Book Review). Following her internationally bestselling book *The Good Women of China*, Xinran has written one of the most powerful accounts of the lives of Chinese women. She has gained entrance to the most pained, secret chambers in the hearts of Chinese mothers – students, successful businesswomen, midwives, peasants – who, whether as a consequence of the single-child policy, destructive age-old traditions, or hideous economic necessity, have given up their daughters. Xinran beautifully portrays the “extra-birth guerrillas” who travel the roads and the railways, evading the system, trying to hold on to more than one baby; naïve young girl students who have made life-wrecking mistakes; the “pebble mother” on the banks of the Yangtze River still looking into the depths for her stolen daughter; peasant women rejected by their families because they can’t produce a male heir; and Little Snow, the orphaned baby fostered by Xinran but confiscated by the state. For parents of adopted Chinese children and for the children themselves, this is an indispensable, powerful, and intensely moving book. *Message from an Unknown Chinese Mother* is powered by love and by heartbreak and will stay with readers long after they have turned the final page.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Xinran (*Good Women of China*) collects the heartbreaking stories of Chinese women forced to give

up their baby girls because of the one-child-only policy or feudal traditions that prefer boys, in an oral history written for those abandoned daughters. Speaking with midwives, students, businesswomen, adoption workers, peasants, and "extra-birth guerrilla troops" (people who live on the lam eluding the system so they can have more than one baby), Xinran is compassionate and remarkably adept at getting her interviewees to open up about their most painful memories: how some mothers were forced to put their babies up for adoption or abandon them at hospitals, orphanages, or on the street, and how they've seen newborns drowned or smothered at birth. She shows how outdated traditions, modern policies, and punishing poverty spur the abandonment of so many female infants, and an abnormally high suicide rate for women of childbearing age. This is a brutally honest book written for those relinquished children, so that they will know how much their birth mothers loved them and how--in the words of one mother who gave up her daughter--"they paid for that love with an endless stream of bitter tears." (Mar.) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

**\*Starred Review\*** The author of *The Good Women of China* (2002) now offers a gut-wrenching account of Chinese women forced to give up (or worse) their daughters in the 1980s and 1990s because of China's one child policy. Implemented to control China's booming population, the law led to the abandonment and murder of countless female babies, as many families stood to lose land if they didn't have a son to inherit and manage it. Formerly a popular radio personality in Nanjing, Xinran sought out the sad stories of women whose daughters were taken from them after birth. And not all the families who gave up their daughters were peasants struggling to hold onto their land. Xinran was horrified to witness a father doting on his young daughter on a train, only to abandon her hours later. Xinran gives Chinese women who lost their daughters a voice in this powerful volume, laying bare their raw pain. This eye-opening work is made even more shocking by how recent most of these women's stories are, even as Xinran counterbalances the heartbreak with letters from families outside China who have adopted Chinese babies. --Kristine Huntley --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

As an adoptive China Mom, I found this book riveting and heart breaking. I am glad that Xinran gave voice to the mothers in China who have relinquished their babies due to government policy and old family pressures. It broadens the general explanations many of us were given as we went through the adoption process. I've always told my daughter that her birth parents did not have the freedom

of choice to keep her, and we've talked about the familial, economic and government pressures they faced. I've also sent mental and spiritual messages to her birth mother around what we think is her birthday, hoping she'll somehow feel the vibes reassuring her that "our" daughter is happy, healthy and safe. I have always given my daughter's birth parents the benefit of the doubt and thought of them as desperate, not cruel, and perhaps still yearning for her. Now that my daughter is about to graduate college and will be free of the pressures of study, thesis, and classes, I will offer her the choice to read Xinran's book if she wants to learn more about the many possibilities of her birth story. Thank you Xinran.

Xinran's book *The Good Women of China* was an excellent in-depth look at women in her native country, especially around the time of the Cultural Revolution, but also including some contemporary women. I was particularly drawn to this new book about women in China who have given up their precious baby girls (either by infanticide, abortion or abandonment) because I'm an adoptive mother of a wonderful now-fifteen year old girl from China. The book is painful to read, there's no getting around it. We adopted our daughter when she was three. She remembers China. She was raised in a loving environment in an orphanage from the time she was four days old. Her initial grief (and there was a lot) was about leaving the life she knew at the orphanage. The welfare institute was very poor, but the children were well-fed and loved. I don't think she's yet dealt with the grief of being left on a road for someone to find. We have been to her hometown twice, once during the two-week adoption period, and once when we visited China on our own independent heritage tour. It was helpful and moving for me to read Xinran's perspective on this deeply emotional issue. This book, along with Karin Evans' *The Lost Daughters of China* are two of the best writings about this issue. Also, the anthology *Shifting Balance Sheets* from Wising Up Press (put it in the search box) has a large section on adopting daughters from China--rendered in poetry, fiction and nonfiction.

This book recounts the personal stories of Chinese women who have lost their daughters. As a Chinese radio journalist, the author interviewed women from all over China to gather material for the radio program she hosted. The author found that many women shared stories of heartache, remorse, and guilt over the baby daughters they never saw grow to adulthood. The book can be emotional as it chronicles some tough topics, including gendercide and gender inequality in China. For parents who are facing questions from children they adopted from China, this book is something you should read to learn more about country, the status of women in China, and other issues. One

of the many points the author attempts to show is that just as your child has questions about his/her biological mother, the Chinese women who gave up children wonder where their children are and whether they have found mothers who love them. The author does a good job outlining the inner anguish felt by mothers who were separated from their daughters; these sentiments might be beneficial to share with adopted children who ask questions like, "Why did mommy give me away?" All of the stories are unsettling. A former midwife tells of her pricing structure and the cost to deliver a highly prized boy over a girl and the preparation of a pot of water that could, depending on the baby's gender, be used to cleanse or dispatch a newborn. There is the account of the woman who cannot view a birthday party because of her past deeds. There is the story of the couple that had ten years to provide a male heir but all their pregnancies produced girls, leaving them to decide what to do with their daughters. These are only a few of the stories within the book. The author discusses why Chinese families frequently prefer boys over girls. These reasons can include laws that prohibit females from inheriting property, traditions that require a son to care for aging parents, preferences for males who can work the land, and policies limiting the number of children a family can have. The author also highlights the treatment of mothers who bear daughters. Women, according to the author, are frequently subjected to years of verbal, emotional, and/or physical abuse and left without any standing within the community. Many are so consumed with guilt over the daughters that were killed or abandoned that they attempt suicide. The author outlines the various ways that a baby girl can be eliminated when unwanted by a family. If not selectively aborted, she may be drowned or smothered within moments of birth. Baby girls who do not meet these fates, may be abandoned, perhaps in the countryside, to fend for themselves. In addition to the stories of women who were separated from their infants, the book includes sections on letters from mothers who adopted Chinese children, Chinese adoption laws, and the incidence of suicide among the Chinese. Overall, the book is well-written. There were instances when additional footnotes or editing would have been beneficial. On more than one occasion, a reference is made to a topic that is not to be discussed or explained for several pages. One such occurrence was in the beginning of the book when a reference is made to MBL. The reader finds out several pages later that MBL stands for Mothers' Bridge of Love which is a charity established by the author to help Chinese women who have lost children, Chinese children who have been adopted and may lack an understanding of their cultural background, and children living in destitute conditions in China. In addition, sometimes the author's own commentary is drawn out. The author frequently takes several pages to express her surprise or anger over a story. While I recognize that the author is the medium for transmitting the stories to readers, I frequently just wanted to read the stories in the book and process them

without the author's shock. I felt her expanded commentary sometimes detracted from the anguish and sadness of the women profiled and the book's overall themes. There were times when I was reading this book that I just wanted to say, "Stop. Let this end" Eventually, as books do, the stories ended but my mind kept going and processing. This is not the type of book you forget about and is worth a spot on your "to read" list.

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