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The One Who Won

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The One Who Won

2022

Jeanna Polisini

“The most tragic thing for a nation is to have no memory. When the One-Child Policy is over and people can have all the children they want, the memory of the One-Child Policy will be lost.” - Peng Wang

I am an adopted Asian American with an Italian last name who was raised in the Jewish faith, Though it has taken me most of my life to be proud of my identity and background. I was lucky to grow up in Thousand Oaks, California where I had a very stable and loving childhood. I lived in the same house for 18 years and I graduated high school with the same kids I started with in Kindergarten. From elementary to high school, I wanted nothing more than to simply fit in with my peers. Hence, I had no interest in opening up about my background and talking about my adoption story. It was not until my time at Chapman that my curiosity was sparked.

During my Sophomore year, the documentary, *One Child Nation*, completely opened my eyes to the policies responsible for so many Chinese babies being adopted. Created by Nanfu Wang and Jialing Zhang, the documentary uncovers the violations of human rights, kidnappings sanctioned by local officials, tragedies of abandoned newborns, and testimony from victims of the policy. Wang also weaves her experiences as a new mother and firsthand accounts of her family members navigating these unprecedented times.

For my senior thesis exhibition, I created an autobiographical installation to explore my adoption story and the role The One-Child Policy played in my life. The full immersive installation takes place upstairs of the Guggenheim Gallery, where the walls are covered with yellow, medical waste plastic bags to symbolize the discarded lives of millions of Chinese girls, all abandoned or sometimes killed. I stamped approximately 1,000 yellow plastic bags with the medical waste symbol, as well as the English and Chinese translation of “medical waste.” This aspect of the installation alludes to an artist, Peng Wang, featured in *One Child Nation*. Wang photographed fetuses in these medical waste bags that were thrown into piles of garbage. His art practice consisted of gathering fetuses and preserving them in order to emphasize the fragility of life.

My intention is to confront the inhumanity of this horrific policy alongside my adoption story. Until policies personally affect someone’s life, many people do not think twice about the other country’s problems and their repercussions on a global level. This exhibit educates viewers about a policy they almost certainly have not considered. The Chinese government implemented the One-Child Policy in 1980 and it did not come to a halting end until 2015.

Juxtaposing the yellow trash bags, there is a 16-foot long and 7-foot tall wooden sculpture in the middle of the room, which houses a timeline of 24x24 inch photographs. This timeline illustrates how my life unfolded and humanizes the statistics of the policy. A majority of the photographs are from my family’s trip to China in 2000 such as the orphanage, the police station many babies were left at, and my caregiver at the orphanage. The rest of the photos are highlights of significant moments in my life like my 10-year reunion with the adoption group, my Bat Mitzvah, and high school graduation. The visual timeline starts with my baby photo and concludes with a photo of me from 2021. Depending on where the viewers stand, they can either

view this timeline from past to present or present to past. Viewers are also able to walk through this photographic sculpture and physically insert themselves into these moments of my life.

At the top of the stairs, there are filing organizers filled with yellow folders that contain *New York Times* articles that date back to 1979, the year the policy was first introduced before officially being implemented. In front of these folders sits a sign stating “Please take ONE home.” Everyone is welcome to take a folder to further digest the information at a later time. The other five articles are from 1989, 1985, 2002, 2015, and 2021 to give viewers more context and details about this historical time period. I highlighted key phrases in these articles, which further emphasizes an overload of the color yellow.

The last piece to this installation consists of 11x14 inch vinyl stickers of my adoption papers. The red stamp is my Chinese name and covers the name printed on the adoption papers. They actually put a different child’s name and birthday on these papers, which I find comical. While I know these documents do not define who I am today, the act of stamping my name is an act of reclaiming the adoption papers.

Despite China’s goal of curbing their population of over a billion people, the policy stripped women of their rights as they were forced to sterilization and abortion. Baby girls were primarily aborted or put up for adoption since China’s traditional culture has influenced its citizens to value sons over daughters. Unfortunately, this just created an age and gender disparity as China’s older generations are shrinking and the younger generation is increasing. China continues to struggle with population and eventually implemented the Two-Child Policy and a Three-Child Policy. Even though women are now allowed to have more children, these other policies are all for the benefit of China’s government.

This project is not only about confronting my past, but exposes China’s inhumane government and advocates the detrimental effects of the One-Child Policy. Even though overpopulation continues to be a pressing environmental issue, women’s reproductive rights should not be dictated by authoritarian control. As a result of this need for control, human lives are degraded and ultimately just become another statistic in history.