

BOOK TALK

Barbara Demick on the One-Child Policy and International Adoption

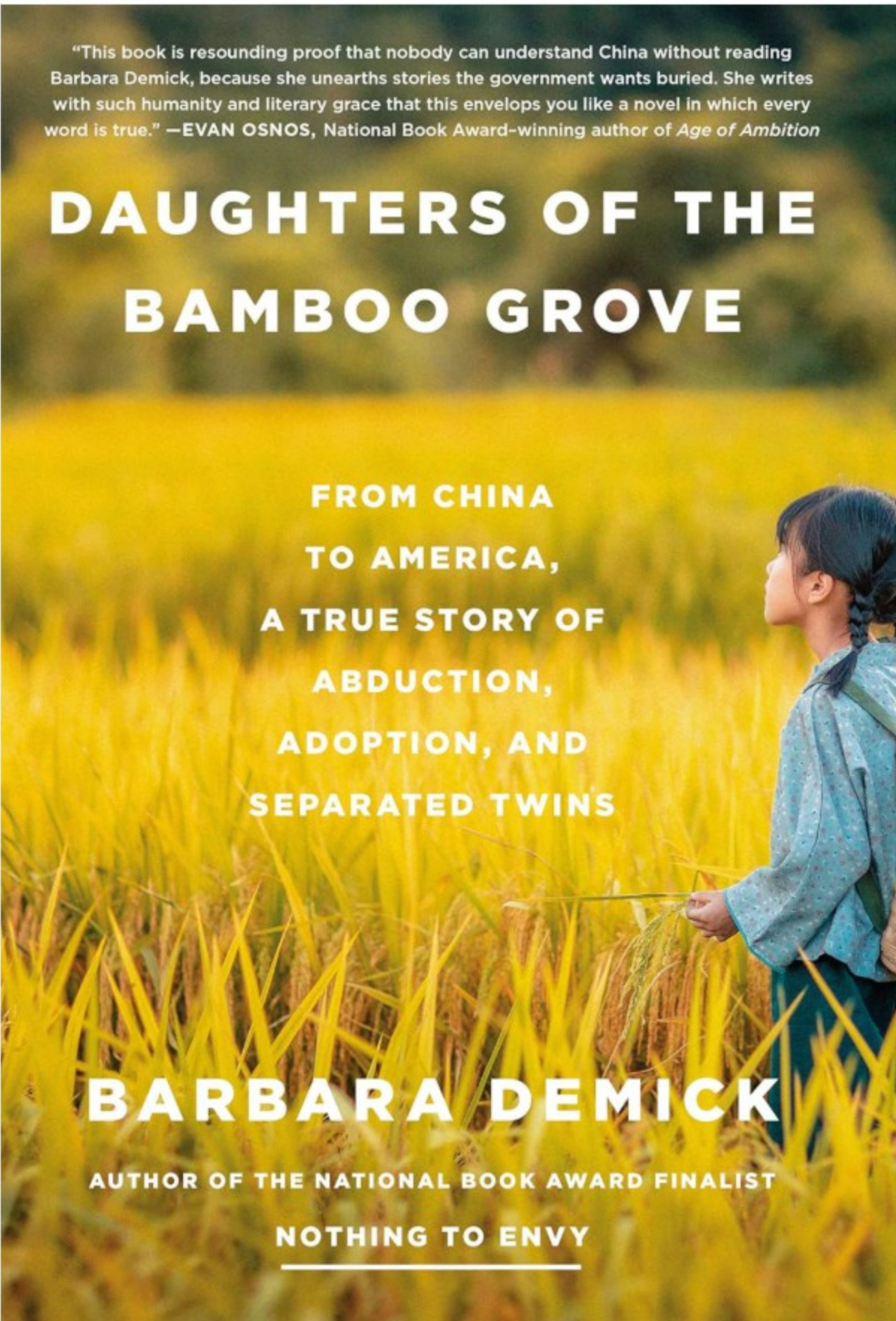
The foreign correspondent talks about her new book on child trafficking and the adoption market in China, and the story of twin girls separated at birth.

EDITORS — MAY 27, 2025

SOCIETY



China’s international adoption program, which ran from 1991-2024, resulted in 160,000 Chinese children, 95% of them female, being adopted by international families. Barbara Demick’s latest book, *Daughters of the Bamboo Grove: From China to America, a True Story of Abduction, Adoption, and Separated Twins* (Random House, May 2025), tells the extraordinary story of the program through the lives of two twins separated at birth, Shuangjie and Esther. The book, a portion of which was [excerpted](#) in these pages last week, follows Demick as she tracks down Shuangjie’s missing sister, who was abducted by family planning officers in their mountainous Hunan village as a baby. After Demick locates Esther living with an evangelical family in rural Texas, she chronicles their relationship through their eventual reunion. The narrative delves into the heart-wrenching story of twin sisters torn apart by China’s one-child policy, the complex socio-political landscape of China, and the emotional and ethical dimensions of international adoption.



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Last week, we were delighted to host Barbara Demick for a conversation with Emily Feng, former China correspondent for NPR (who we were also delighted to [host](#) and [excerpt](#) in March) at Asia Society in New York in honor of AAPI Heritage Month. Their discussion of international adoptions broadened to touch upon questions of identity, belonging and the human elements of U.S.-China relations:



“ Good and evil sells. It was illegal to abandon a baby, but you were also penalized for having too many babies, and orphanages couldn’t directly accept them. ”

Speakers



Barbara Demick is an author and foreign correspondent, who was based in Beijing for *The Los Angeles Times* from 2007-14, and in previous postings covered Korea, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. She is the author of *Nothing to Envy* (2010), which won the Baillie Gifford Award, *Eat the Buddha* (2020) and *Daughters of the Bamboo Grove* (2025). Her work has also won the Overseas Press Club’s human rights reporting award.



Emily Feng is an award-winning international correspondent for NPR covering China, Taiwan and beyond. Previously a foreign correspondent for *The Financial Times*, she lived in Beijing from 2015 to 2022, and then Taiwan from 2022 to 2024. Recipient of the Daniel Schorr Journalism Prize and the Shorenstein Journalism Award, Feng is the author of *Let Only Red Flowers Bloom* (Crown, 2025). She lives in Washington D.C.

The video of this talk was also published at [Asia Society](#). ■