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Great Call Of China (S.A.S.S.)



Synopsis

Chinese-born Cece was adopted when she was two years old by her American parents. Living in Texas, she's bored of her ho-hum high school and dull job. So when she learns about the S.A.S.S. program to Xi'an, China, she jumps at the chance. She'll be able to learn about her passion - anthropology - and it will give her the opportunity to explore her roots. But when she arrives, she receives quite a culture shock. And the closer she comes to finding out about her birth parents, the more apprehensive she gets. Enter Will, the cute guy she first meets on the plane. He and Cece really connect during the program. But can he help her get accustomed to a culture she should already know about, or will she leave China without the answers she's been looking for?

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Customer Reviews

Cynthea Liu lives in Chicago, Illinois.

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“Are you ready?”
Kallyn

shouldered a small backpack and popped open her umbrella. Cece looked up at the Wall.

“Yeah, I’m ready.” Kallyn and Cece steadily made the climb. The steps became much steeper, and the path narrowed. Higher and higher they climbed, the gap between them and the rest of the students widening. Cece caught her breath and looked up, unable to see where the stairs ended.

“Just think how good you’ll feel when we make it to the top,” Cece, Kallyn said. Just how good will it feel when I get to the top? Cece thought. By far, this was one of the hardest things she had ever done. If she could climb to the highest point of this section of the Great Wall, she could do anything. Tomorrow’s trip to the orphanage would seem like nothing.

“We’re almost there,” Kallyn said. Cece looked up again. She could do this. She had to do this. Finally, Cece was only steps from the last tower. She had just five steps left. Four. . . Her body filled with anticipation. Three . . . two . . . She took the last step, and relief washed over her. Cece looked all around her. She felt like she was literally on top of the world.

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For my daughter Clara.
Live strong.

Application for the Students Across the Seven Seas Study Abroad Program

Chapter One

Cece and Alison flipped through a pile of jeans at Macy’s. Cece was looking for a pair to replace her worn-out boot-cuts. She needed something new and fresh for her trip to China. Alison held up a pair.

“Size four, right?”

“Perfect,” Cece said, taking the

jeans. It was the last item on her list, and the mall would be closed soon. "I'll try these on and then we'll be done." Cece headed for the fitting rooms with Alison trailing behind. "I can't believe you're leaving me tomorrow," Al said. "How am I going to survive the summer without you?" Cece walked into an open fitting room and closed the door while Al waited outside. "Beats me." Cece hung up the jeans and her purse. "I guess you and Eugene Derkle will have to keep each other company." She grinned, then tugged off her skirt and put on the jeans. She was thrilled to spend a summer without Eugene, her manager at Six Flags. He was the kind of guy you caught picking his nose. Like all the time. "Don't remind me," Alison said. "His knee socks will be the end of me. Are you sure you have to go?" Cece zipped up the jeans and observed herself in the mirror. Not bad. The slim cut made her look even taller. "Yes, I'm sure. The S.A.S.S. anthropology program is great. I'm really excited about it." That, and there was no way she was going to suffer another tourist season in Texas, stuffed inside a hot toll booth. She turned and looked over her shoulder to check the rear view. The jeans made her butt look round, perky even. Excellent. "What about your mother?" Alison's voice filled with hope. "Is she having second thoughts? Maybe canceled your plane tickets?" "Ha, you wish." Cece turned and checked the front again. "But I do think she wants to plant a tracking device under my skin before I go. Do you know how many times she's told me to be sure to e-mail? To not forget my calling card? Blah, blah, blah. . . Lately, Mom's smothering problem had gotten worse, as if that was even possible. It wasn't like Cece was going to be gone forever. It was just one summer, halfway around the globe. No big deal. "You know why she's worried, right?" Al's voice got low. "It's not like she doesn't know about your special plans." Cece opened the door. Al was leaning against the wall. "Hey, those jeans look awesome." Cece pulled her in and shut the door. "Wait a second. How do you know she knows?" Al frowned. "Please. Don't all moms figure out stuff like that? She's got to have some idea you're not going to China just to traipse around ancient ruins and study fossils."

Both the series' description and this individual book's description gave off a definite whiff of Teen Chick Lit, and this man's man has something of an allergy to Teen Chick Lit as far as you know. One reason is that it is fairly easy for these kinds of books to go off the deep end either into absolutely routine fluff: boys, clothes, boys, makeup, boys, school problems, boys, etc., until you

want to claw your face off, or to the opposite extreme of the overwrought Serious Issue where the Teen Angst is laid on so thick that not even a mop and bucket can soak it all up -- you are going to need a bilge pump. Not that I'd have any reason to know this, man's man and all that. It's just what I've heard. Fortunately, Ms. Liu rather nicely balances the fluff with the serious here, providing not too much of either. On the one hand there's a cute boy, and Cece anguishes quite a bit over whether he notices her, why he notices her if he notices her, whether he likes her, whether he likes her roommate instead, etc.; on the other hand there's the Serious Issue: an adopted child seeking information about her birth parents, which is made somewhat unusual by involving an adoption of a baby girl from China. This juxtaposition keeps the story from dragging. If you should start getting tired of the teen love, it turns out to be time to take another step on the search for birth parent truth, and the same is true in reverse. Now, frankly, I had no doubt that the "love" story would be brought to a happy conclusion -- I believe it's the law in Teen Chick Lit. However, Ms. Liu kept me guessing to the end about Cece's quest for truth; it was never clear that she would find out what she wanted to find out or that she would like what she found. I also liked the way Ms. Liu played around with stereotypes; the Prada-wearing, Gucci-toting, Asian Brat Pack member with the rule about never dating Asian boys turns out to have a lot more depth (and character) than expected by the end. In fact the only sour notes in this symphony of words occur in the area of politics, my particular bailiwick, and I don't even think they were Ms. Liu's fault. Frankly, I'm amazed she got ANY criticism of the PRC past the gatekeepers at Penguin because unlike criticism of Nazi Germany or the United States prior to the last election, criticism of the PRC is not something likely to attract universal agreement at a mainstream publisher. The trouble is that in the perhaps necessary bending over backward Mrs. Liu was forced to go through, a few clanks were struck that I feel compelled to respond to. "As far as Cece knew, one of the goals of communism was to eliminate oppression." According to whom? The communists? It would be more accurate to say that one of the goals of communism was to eliminate OPPOSITION. "Like the government's family policies, it was another of those issues Cece didn't quite understand." Only if she was TRYING not to understand, or more likely, those with responsibility for teaching her didn't WANT her to understand, or even more likely, the author was trying to slip a criticism of Tiananmen Square past the thought police, both PRC AND PC. Not to put too fine a point on it, the PRC has been a brutal, vicious, totalitarian dictatorship from the moment of its birth. Those who insisted on disputing that BEFORE Tiananmen Square were fools, those who insisted on disputing that AFTER Tiananmen Square were far worse. Of course not even evil governments commit evil all the time, and even the most evil, for example the Nazis, have been falsely accused of things they did not do. However, there's really not

that much question about the (admittedly unintentional) evil results of China's one-child policies. That's because while it is correct to say that: "there is little data to measure,' therefore... conclusions must draw from anecdotal evidence, and that is the truth."that is NOT because "abandonment is illegal", but rather because the PRC government that could conduct studies or allow others to conduct studies either refuses to do so or refuses to release the results. In the face of that neither objectivity nor the scientific method require us to say, "No data? No problem!" nor require us to even tacitly join the coverup chorus, "There's nothing to see here; move along; these aren't the droids you are looking for." This lack of data makes it difficult to measure the scope of the problem as well as to separate out other contributing causes, like the traditional preference for baby boys, but it also means we needn't accept with even less evidence the claims that a combination of brutal crackdown, easing of the one-child policies, and the Chinese people's growing recognition of the value of baby girls has put the problem on the road to solution. I'd like to believe it has, but I don't.

Note: This appears to be an interesting series. There are clearly a number of obvious similarities, including the apparent requirement for a soul-crushing pun in the title: Westminister Abby (S.A.S.S.) Getting the Boot (S.A.S.S.) Spain or Shine (S.A.S.S.) Pardon My French (S.A.S.S.) The Sound of Munich (S.A.S.S.) Heart and Salsa (S.A.S.S.) Now and Zen (S.A.S.S.) Swede Dreams (S.A.S.S.) Girl Overboard (S.A.S.S.) The Finnish Line (S.A.S.S.) When Irish Guys Are Smiling (S.A.S.S.) French Kissmas (S.A.S.S.) However, the fact that almost every one has a different author makes it less certain to me at least that they will all be of similar quality. Unfortunately, this series is apparently too culturally conservative in its portrayals of teenagers to be carried by sophisticated Chicagoland bookstores (no sex, no drugs, no smoking, hardly even any drinking) so that if I ever want to try any others, I shall have to special order them, sight unseen.

How refreshing! A teen novel where everyone isn't obsessed with clothing brands and sex! In the Great Call of China, the main character, Cece, who's an adopted teen, has more important things to focus on. She wants to learn more about her heritage, maybe even find her birth parents! Reading Cynthia Liu's enthusiastic depiction of Chinese culture, as well as the intersection of Chinese and American cultures, made me want to hop on a plane tomorrow. I especially liked reading about the Terra Cotta Warriors in Xi'an. Liu's secondary characters in the book deserve a shout-out; my favorite was Jessica, a Chinese-American who struggles to follow her own dreams instead of her parents' demands. Great read for teens and girls who think there's more to life than Juicy Couture and losing their virginity. A YA novel with real substance.

This book is a bit of a mixed bag -- mostly very good. I enjoyed the descriptions of China and I learned much about the culture and history of China. The tale of adopted Cece's search for her history is touching and well written -- a pleasure to read. I was less impressed by the more typical teen fare included in this book -- descriptions of how Cece's butt looked in her jeans, for example. I'm wondering if that's the story the author really wanted to tell or if this was necessary tailoring for the S.A.S.S. series (it's the only one in the series I've read, so I don't have anything to compare it to). I'm an older reader, not the target audience. I'm guessing older tween and teen girls would enjoy this even more than I did.

"The Great Call of China" is one of Cynthea Liu's best books! The character Cece is a wonderful teenage girl that searches for personal answers in the country of China. The story was well written and I had a hard time putting the book down (which is a good sign). The author's writings reached deep into my emotions which made me laugh and cry. Five stars all the way!

As a parent of two daughters, both adopted from China as infants, I eagerly read this book. Initially, I found it informative, realistic and authentic in terms of the main character's quest for answering questions about her identity, as she embarked on a trip to China. I had assumed this 'search' was to be based on the realities of Chinese adoptees and the information they may or may not be privy to if inquiring about the circumstances of their adoptions. It is illegal in China for parents to abandon their children, hence, there are babies left in public places - train stations, public squares, the doors of many orphanages. Typically there is no information whatsoever - as parents relinquishing their children would be severely punished if their identity was revealed. Hence, as the girl's 'search' for a birth parent and it's subsequent outcome were revealed, I was shocked and so disappointed to see how utterly unrealistic and "hollywood-like" it was. You are doing a disservice to a large number of Chinese adoptees currently living in the US (and elsewhere). This story, while having some redeeming qualities, lost total credibility when the main character 'found' her birth parent. Shame on you! This is not real life for Chinese adoptees and is a damaging fairy tale.

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