

**Gordon, Linda. *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction*.  
Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999. Pp. xii, 416.  
Maps, black-and-white illustrations, index. US\$29.95 (cloth)**

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Xu Yinong builds upon the scholarship of G. William Skinner, P. Wheatley, and F. W. Mote while walking us through primary sources and eyewitness accounts from official histories, gazetteers, poetry, prose, and fiction.

The author argues that Suzhou's history as a cultural and economic region is distinct from that of imperial capital cities such as Beijing but is representative of regional cities. As such it provides a framework for broadening our knowledge of China's "complex urban history." Founded in 514 B.C as the capital of Wu state during Eastern Zhou's multi-state conflicts, Suzhou became an important economic centre and administrative city only in the ninth century. The medieval urban revolution that began then and continued into the thirteenth century witnessed the breakdown of the official marketing organization, the decentralization of trade and commerce, and the emergence of many small and intermediate towns with economic functions. With rice becoming more dominant in food crop production, and with the adoption of water conservation and new techniques and tools, Suzhou's agriculture became more commercialized, and inter-regional trade flourished along the extensive network of canals, streets, and bridges. The tremendous growth of the silk industry and the extensive use of the Grand Canal were matched by cultural and political success, as seen in the high numbers of degree-holders from Suzhou. The city survived a serious setback caused by the exile of elites and higher taxes in the fourteenth century. Two centuries later, Suzhou's population of a million was living in "China's richest, most urbanized and advanced region." But in the eighteenth century, demographic pressure and rapid economic growth weakened the canal and transportation system, and in the 1860s, when the Taiping Rebellion devastated the city and destroyed more than half its population, Suzhou's leading economic role was overtaken by Shanghai.

Xu Yinong indicates that despite political and economic upheavals, Suzhou's form has generally remained stable over time, with the most notable change being the removal of the inner city walls in modern times. The main streets, bridges, and canals have the same names and the walls enclosing the site have been there since the seventh century. The heavy sense of authority of the past and the weight of tradition dictated the frequent rebuilding of these urban structures. Although Suzhou, like other Chinese cities, was multifunctional, its foundation was administration. Thus the city's construction, cosmological layout, bridges, canal system, and city walls symbolized central authority and the state's presence in the social and political order as represented and upheld by the government offices and officials. Xu observes that while geomancy (*feng shui*) influenced the siting of capital cities, villages, gardens, tombs, and homes, the administrative staff did not use it as a guiding principle in the construction of form and space in the city because the city was not a private property but the extension of the central administration.

Citing the data on Suzhou as a representative administrative

unit, Xu Yinong argues that Chinese urban history is important in its distinctiveness from Western urban history, where "corporate identity" and an "urban-rural dichotomy" prevailed. Defining corporate identity as the influential political power of merchants or the private sector, consciousness and identity with the city, along with ideas of emancipation and liberty, Xu asserts that no premodern Chinese city demonstrated the presence of corporate identity. Europe's concept of free citizenry and the civic square had no equivalents in premodern Chinese cities, which were characterized instead by "extreme diversity and high integration," devoid of the urban-rural dichotomy of Western cities. Instead, the "urban-rural continuum" prevailed in Chinese cities, as indicated the cultural and economic activities involving both cities and the countryside, the absence of strictly urban or rural festivals, the lack of contrast between rural and urban architecture, and social division based more on class and occupation than between city and countryside.

In sum, Xu Yinong's reconstruction of the historical development of Suzhou is a welcome contribution to both Chinese and Western urban history. The volume's attractive presentation and numerous illustrations and maps provide additional documentation and a visual feast of historical geography.

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This account of child adoption and "child stealing" in Arizona in 1903 is a story of borders crossed and strictly maintained on the American mining frontier. Exploring this incident as it unfolded, Gordon's book details the ways in which gender, class, race, culture, nation, and religion interacted in complex ways, as a group of orphans brought to the Southwest to be adopted were quickly abducted into new families, with the aid of the law, and later, the blessing of the state. This immensely detailed and rich account of the orphan abduction is a fascinating read, all the more dramatic to us because its final sanctification by the United States Supreme Court seems outrageous to our twenty-first-century sensibilities.

The orphans were the sons and daughters of poor New Yorkers, sometimes single or unmarried mothers, often Irish immigrants, who were placed in a foundling hospital run by the Sisters of Charity. Accompanied by a male agent and nurses, three Sisters transported fifty-seven charges across the country to the southwest, to what was supposed to be a better life for children barely considered "white" because of their Irish origins. They were to be adopted by Catholic families in the growing twin copper towns of Clifton/Morenci. Because the adopting families were Mexican, a group of local white (largely Anglo) townspeople

mobilized to put a quick stop to the adoptions, as soon as the train rolled into the local station. This mobilization, though offered aid by local law enforcement, was very much orchestrated by white women, including both Anglos and "Latin" European immigrants, who claimed that putting children in Mexican homes—supposedly poor, dirty, and immoral—was akin to child abuse.

A vigilante action was organized, with the aid of the local sheriff, and many of the children were removed, in two stages, and given to white families, both Catholic and Protestant, from various class backgrounds. The Sisters and a priest, narrowly escaping tarring and feathering, fled back to New York with a few of the remaining charges, and despite the efforts of their lawyers to regain the abducted children (though not to return them to the adoptive Mexican families), both the state and federal courts ruled against them. The courts agreed with the white town matrons, claiming that placing these children with Mexicans would have grossly endangered them, thus justifying the vigilante action as moral and necessary.

In some ways, this is not so surprising a tale, given the legal and social underpinnings of racial segregation and racism in the United States. What makes the book work well as a scholarly study is Gordon's careful attempts to contextualize this conflict with detailed descriptions of the social, cultural, racial, and class contours of life in these Arizona towns. Layer by layer, she looks at work, religious life, culture, and family, trying to connect them in order to make sense of the events. She takes pains, for example, to explore the ways in which notions of whiteness and race were not always predictable or simple. The local parish priest, for example, was of French origin, and therefore had trouble understanding the racial hierarchy in the town; unlike the Anglos, he saw social differences among the Mexicans, based on religiosity, class, and culture. The Mexicans, often immigrants from Mexico's north, sometimes disappointed him with their anticlerical views; moreover, they ascribed to the idea that one's whiteness was enhanced as one climbed the social ladder, an idea quite unacceptable to those who considered themselves the "true" whites in the town. And Mexican women, Gordon suggests, may have wanted "lighter"-skinned children as they were seen as more American, thus potentially enhancing a family's status.

The system of racial designation also shifted over time, with a three-tier hierarchy—white, then Latin "white" immigrants, then Mexicans—gradually being pressed, especially by American whites, into a more clear-cut binary one, of civilized whites versus uncivilized Mexicans. To many of these complexities were added those of class, as the miners were not all Mexican, though in times of intense class conflict the racial boundaries between workers could become more, not less severe, sometimes aided by unions averse to organizing Mexicans.

Gender was also a key theme in the abduction story. At least three groups of women, all with some relationship to maternalist ideas and practice, were central to the events. First, there were

the Sisters, who initially appear above reproach—save for their later failure to challenge the racist suppositions about Mexican Catholic families. For those who have read other research on the extremely punitive treatment of women in Catholic founding homes for unwed mothers, one wonders if a close look at the New York institution might have produced a slightly different account of their motives and methods.

Second, Gordon argues that both the Mexican and Anglo women were influenced by maternalist ideas about women's role in protecting children, either on a personal or social basis. But maternalism stopped short at racial boundaries when the white mothers vigorously denounced the Mexican women as inadequate mothers, by any standards of decency. Early in the book, Gordon questions the view that "race" trumped other divisions, such as religion and class, in this conflict. Yet, by the end of the book, one feels inclined towards this very conclusion. One can hardly imagine any other outcome, given the white women's campaign of denigration against working-class Mexican families. Gordon's attempts to portray the Anglo women somewhat sympathetically, as females who also wished to "advance women" and resist male dominance, might leave some readers unconvinced.

Finally, another thread in the book is the construction and reconstruction over time, of history and memory. The Mexicans understood their American experiences in part through their own cultural and economic histories in Mexico. The abduction itself was interpreted through the prism of a recent divisive and traumatic strike in the town. The courts re-interpreted the events in light of their own racist suppositions, and a later rendition of the abduction, collected largely from whites during a 1930s federal works project, claimed the abduction "saved" children from being callously sold. In many of these versions, as Gordon points out, the recurring theme is the absence of any Mexican versions of the orphan affair.

The book is structured in alternating sections. On the one hand, a narrative of the events moves dramatically to the climax of the story. On the other hand, interspersed chapters put a brake on the action, offering contextual notes about the conflict. There are sections, for instance, on vigilantism, copper mining, race, and apartheid. These contextual sections are sometimes so thickly and densely detailed that one actually longs to simply move back to the narrative and get on with the story. Indeed, one unfortunate outcome of such an academic and detailed book may be that it won't reach a wider, popular audience for whom the story—particularly in a year when a Cuban child has been "abducted" by American vigilantes—could have a wider impact.

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