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Children on the Margins: The Global Politics of Orphanage Care in Contemporary China

By

Leslie Kim Wang

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

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of the

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Abstract

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University of California, Berkeley

Professor Thomas B. Gold, Co-Chair
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Since beginning its rapid transition to a market economy in 1978, the People's Republic of China has sought to become internationally dominant. In order to develop human capital and labor power, it has implemented a range of ideologically-driven policies that have been geared towards improving the overall mental, moral and physical "quality" (*suzhi*) of the population. The current criteria for assessing the individual value of citizens have resulted in new lines of stratification being drawn among children. As a result, healthy rural daughters and special needs children in particular are now considered unworthy of intensive investment and face a higher likelihood of being abandoned to state care. However, in an ironic twist of globalization, stigmatized children who were once shut away in state-run orphanages have become major recipients of western aid and child-saving interventions as China continues to "open up" to the outside world.

Based on 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork in two Chinese state orphanages that received financial and medical assistance from western non-governmental organizations, I consider the role that globalization is playing in the lives of abandoned youth. This is occurring in two main ways: by the *exportation* of healthy female children out of the country through transnational adoption and the *importation* of first-world ideologies and practices by foreigners who seek to improve care for the mostly male special needs youth who are left behind. Through interviews and participant observation with western volunteers and Chinese state caregivers, I demonstrate the ways in which defining the "best interests" of institutionalized children is a highly contested process that implicates international power dynamics and differential access to resources.

I argue that foreign-Chinese collaborations in orphanages are complex processes of negotiation, conflict and compromise that highlight the socially-constructed and contextual nature of children's social value. Moreover, these types of partnerships take place on constantly shifting political terrain, rendering them highly unstable and at times even counter-productive for those they seek to help. Ultimately, by bringing children who exist on the margins of society to the center of scholarly analysis, this research provides a new perspective on the human consequences of Chinese modernization in a globalized era.

To Jin Jin, Huan Cong, Le Qi and all of the children in China who have touched my life.
I am humbled by your grace, resilience and extraordinary courage.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Children's Changing Social Value in Globalizing China

It was my first day of volunteering at the Yongping Orphanage near Beijing in the fall of 2006. I had been introduced to this institution by the "Helping Hands Organization,"[1] a local group of western expatriate wives that provided financial resources and flexible volunteer labor to the small state-run facility. Entering the glass doors of the orphanage, my nostrils were overpowered by the odor of sour milk and dirty diapers. In front of me was the baby room, which housed about 10 mostly special needs infants and toddlers. A small boy with a fixed cleft lip repeatedly pounded his head against the metal bars of his crib. An autistic toddler wailed in the corner, his hands strapped behind his back with a piece of cloth. The only *ayi* (caregiver) in the room, a young Chinese woman in her early 20s, did not look up or acknowledge my presence. She was a flurry of movement, silently changing each child's sopping diaper, one after the other in a row. "*Lei*!" (exhausted), she sighed to herself, blowing long wisps of hair out of her face.

I observed Marjorie Lee, the Chinese-American founder of the organization, standing over several *ayi* who were seated on a couch. With a slight tone of desperation in her voice, she implored them in Mandarin, "I know you're tired, but these children's lives are in your hands. Please just do a little more for them!" Xiao Chen, the head caregiver, sat looking uncomfortable with deeply flushed cheeks and an irritated look in her eye. Later Xiao Chen told another Helping Hands volunteer, "Our only responsibility is to make sure that children have food and a place to sleep. If you have a problem with that, then you don't have to come here anymore!"

***

Several months later I began working as a full-time volunteer in another orphanage with the "Tomorrow's Children" infant special care unit in central China. This unit was funded and managed by western evangelical Christians but operated on one floor of a large state-run orphanage. The western group cared for the institution's most disabled and ill children either until they died or were nursed back to health and could be returned to the regular facility.

One afternoon a Chinese doctor brought a terminally ill four-month old boy to the door; his parents had abandoned him at a local hospital. The baby had an enlarged liver, which caused continuous nausea and turned his skin and the whites of his eyes a dark shade of yellow. Cathy—the white British nurse in charge of the unit—took the frightened child to the gleaming examination room, cooing to him in soothing English. She carefully peeled off multiple layers of dirty clothing and the soiled cloth diaper he wore that was held in place by a length of urine-stiffened string. Gently she weighed him, took his temperature, and thoroughly examined his entire body.

Cathy passed the baby to his new Chinese caregiver, instructing her to give him a bath and a feeding. The woman recoiled from the child as a heavy layer of ashy gray

[1] To protect the identities of individuals and organizations I encountered during my fieldwork, all proper names have been given pseudonyms.

skin flaked off his body. Appalled, she asked me in Mandarin, "What's wrong with this child? Is it contagious?" I assured her that he was merely dirty, but this seemed to do little to ease her anxiety. The dehydrated infant eagerly drank an entire bottle of formula, which he promptly regurgitated all over his brand-new outfit. *"Taoyan!"* ("How annoying!"), muttered his caregiver as she went to change his clothes. That evening, the western staff terminated the Chinese woman's employment. As the British nurse explained to me later, "It is our *job* to love these children unconditionally, and a privilege to do so. If someone cannot care for a child in this way, then they can't work here."

***

These vignettes illustrate the contextual nature of children's social value in a global era, a theme I explore through two case studies of transnational collaboration in the care of abandoned youth in Chinese state orphanages (referred to in China as Child Welfare Institutes or Social Welfare Institutes—see footnote for explanation of terminology).[2] Since the 1990s a plethora of scholarly research has been dedicated to analyzing the popular trend of transnational adoptions of healthy Chinese girls by affluent western parents (Tan 2010; Cohen 2007; Traver 2007; Dorow 2006a, 2006b; Johnson 2004; Tessler, et al. 1998; Rojewski and Rojewski 2001). However, little sociological research has been conducted *in China* to investigate the causes of child abandonment or examined the affect that the entrance of first-world actors, resources, ideologies and practices is having on marginalized children being cared for in Chinese institutional settings. This dissertation focuses on transnational negotiations between the Chinese state and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), whose struggles over the lives and futures of abandoned youth mirror larger debates about globalization, gender and human rights.

There is substantial evidence that child abandonment is a significant, albeit unintended, consequence of rapid Chinese state-led modernization of the economy and the population. Although abandoning a child is technically illegal, there are few preventative measures in China, such as infant safe haven laws prevalent in the U.S. that decriminalize the act of giving a child over to state care. Moreover, the crime is typically not punished even when individuals are caught—aside from parents being required to take their child back (Johnson 2004: 68). High proportions of two particular groups of youth—healthy rural girls and special needs children, many of whom are boys—are being cast out of their families. In the process of abandonment, children lose all ties to lineage, kinship and localized identities, which are still essential aspects of Chinese personhood in the present day (Lee 1998). Moreover, I argue that institutionalized children who exist on the societal margins are being completely left out of (or even seen as an impediment to) China's national project of economic modernization.

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[2] In China, the official designation for a state-run facility that cares for parentless children is "Child Welfare Institute" (facilities that care only for children) or "Social Welfare Institute" (compounds that usually include nursing homes, facilities for disabled adults and separate housing for children). All of these state facilities are under the management of the Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs—the branch of government responsible for the children, the disabled and the elderly. Although some scholars object to the negative connotations associated with the western term "orphanage" (Cohen 2007), I feel that it is appropriate and will use it interchangeably with the other two terms within this dissertation.

Modernity in the PRC has been described as a complex set of "discrepant desires that continually replace one another in an effort to achieve material and moral parity with the west" (Rofel 1999: 10). Since the beginning of the era of economic reform (*gaige kaifang*) in 1978, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has sought to become economically dominant in the international arena. In order to develop human capital and labor power, it has implemented a range of ideologically-driven policies that have been geared towards improving the overall mental, moral and physical "quality" (*suzhi*) of the population. The current criteria for assessing and categorizing the individual value of citizens have resulted in new lines of stratification being drawn among offspring. In an unprecedented manner, certain youth are now considered to be more worthy of intensive state and parental investment than others. Yet in an ironic twist of globalization, abandoned children who are highly stigmatized and largely ignored by broader Chinese society have become major recipients of western aid and child-saving interventions as the nation continues to "open up" to the outside world.

By focusing on the lives of abandoned youth who reside in state welfare institutes, I shift the focus away from scholarly discussions of contemporary Chinese family life, which have mostly concentrated on the situation of urban "only" children (see Fong 2002; 2004; Jing 2000). Referred to as spoiled "little emperors" and "empresses" (*xiao huangdi*) doted on by two parents and four grandparents these healthy, well-educated, "high quality" children symbolize the Chinese state vision of modernity. Their bodies and minds are now the norm against which other, less privileged youth are judged. Parents and the state are expending substantial effort in molding this subset of the youth population into future productive laborers. Although popular culture discussions often highlight children's excessive consumption habits or deride parents for "drowning" their children in love (*ni'ai*), these coddled urban youth bear the hefty responsibility of bringing their nation into a glorious future of "socialism with Chinese characteristics."

Terry Woronov (2003: 16) elaborates upon the intimate relationship between developing children's potential and the nation. She argues, "children [in China]…not only represent the future, but their bodies are the site upon which the terms of the national future are being worked out" (16). However, this continual attention to the pressures and pleasures experienced by China's only children tells us solely about the "winners" who are benefiting from the new market economy. My project, on the other hand, seeks to illuminate the *underside* of social transition by examining the situation of youth who are usually shut away from public view. In so doing, I seek to demonstrate that institutionalized Chinese children who exist outside of the more protected realm of family are special objects of regulation and contestation on local, national and global scales.

These youth are a liminal and undertheorized group which is part of the "constitutive outside" of state-sanctioned Chinese modernity, helping to define the center of social belonging through the qualities that they are perceived to lack. Judith Butler (1993) has argued that highlighting the constitutive outside is integral to revealing stark inequities of power that exist between individuals who are highly valued and "abject beings…that do not matter in the same way" (xi). Ultimately, by bringing children who exist on the margins of society to the center of scholarly analysis, I seek to provide a new perspective on the consequences of Chinese modernization processes and the growing interconnectedness of global society.

Global Debates over China's Institutionalized Children

In the mid-1990s western media exposes of dire conditions within state-run orphanages in the People's Republic of China splashed across international headlines. "The Dying Rooms: China's Deepest Secret," a 1995 documentary based on undercover footage taken by three western filmmakers posing as orphanage workers, was shown on Channel 4 in Britain, followed by its sequel "A Return to the Dying Rooms" in 1996. Disturbing images of infants strapped down against their will to high chairs and graphic depictions of severely malnourished, dying children who lacked any kind of medical care shocked the western world. The documentaries were dedicated to an infant girl, referred to by Chinese workers as Mei Ming ("No Name"), a desperately ill child whom the filmmakers claimed was deliberately isolated in one room of a state institution for nearly two weeks until she starved to death.

In 1996 the watchdog group Human Rights Watch/Asia published a similarly-themed (though entirely unrelated) expose entitled *Death by Default: A Policy of Fatal Neglect in China's State Orphanages*. Relying on Chinese governmental documents and eyewitness accounts from two individuals who had worked at the Shanghai Children's Welfare Institute (CWI), it sought to reveal to the international community the "pattern of cruelty, abuse and malign neglect which has dominated child welfare work in China since the 1950s and which now constitutes one of the country's greatest human rights problems" (1). The report charged that within the hidden confines of official institutions—which it referred to as "death camps"—Chinese workers implemented an official state policy of neglect that resulted in overwhelming high and completely preventable child mortality rates from the 1980s through the early 1990s. These rates were estimated at about 50% nation-wide, climbing as high as 90% at the Shanghai CWI. The report contended in no uncertain terms that many Chinese state-run institutions operated "as little more than assembly lines for the elimination of unwanted orphans" (3).

Human Rights Watch/Asia also sought to refute the common western perception that terrible conditions in Chinese orphanages resulted from a lack of fiscal resources in the world's fastest growing economy. The report argued that most facilities were given sufficient budgets and provided adequate staff wages, even bonuses, while precious little was expended on children—whom the document referred to as "inmates." A former doctor at the Shanghai CWI who is now exiled in the United States stated that until the late 1980s it was common practice for certain children to be selected for "summary resolution," whereby food and water were intentionally held from them until they succumbed to acute malnutrition. After death, orphanage doctors would attribute the cause to a variety of often unrelated medical conditions such as mental retardation. Both the report and the documentaries claimed that welfare institutes were filled with mostly healthy infant girls and a smaller percentage of special needs children of both sexes.

These damning media exposes brought intense scrutiny to Chinese orphanages for the first time, stirring foreign outrage and complicating already tense relationships between the PRC and industrialized nations. At the level of international discourse, a battle had begun. An article published in the People's Daily—the official newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party—took a decidedly defensive tone, claiming that the BBC documentary was "fabricated" and the human rights report was "distorted and exaggerated" (http://english.peopledaily. com.cn/whitepaper/13appendix.html).

Additionally, Chinese authorities drew attention to children's human rights violations in the United States. Using publicly available statistics on guns in American schools, high rates of child poverty and the large numbers of youths involved in violent crimes, the statement alleged moral hypocrisy, charging that "Americans who seem to care about the conditions of Chinese children are totally indifferent to the plight of children in their own country" (HRW/Asia 1996b: 10).

Yet even as these harsh words were being exchanged, the Chinese state-regulated practice of transnational adoptions of primarily healthy infant girls by western parents continued quietly and even gathered momentum. In a practice that began in 1992, the Chinese government had allowed thousands of childless individuals from a range of industrialized nations who were over the age of 35 to adopt orphaned and abandoned children. Although parents were technically allowed to adopt a child of either sex, until recently as many as 95% of adoptees were healthy girls (Dorow 2006a). To foreign observers, however, this served as de facto proof that Chinese orphanages were indeed overflowing with countless unwanted female children and added to the western perception of China as a harsh, sexist society.

The negative publicity stemming from the portrayals of horrific orphanage conditions led the Chinese government to completely revamp the Shanghai CWI (which is now considered a "model" orphanage) and to close off access to children's welfare institutes to all foreign visitors for a period of several years. This initial tightening of control appeared to be a face-saving measure that was soon followed by increased state openness to non-state actor involvement with orphan relief—particularly international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and foreign adoption agencies (Keyser 2009).[3] As a result of this influx of foreign resources, orphanage conditions have vastly improved since the mid-1990s. However, the shocking images of "dying rooms" have not been replaced with more current representations of Chinese institutional care and thus remain entrenched in the international social imaginary.

Due to a lack of empirical data, controversial allegations of malign neglect and the intentional starvation of abandoned healthy girls and special needs children in Chinese welfare institutes have also never been resolved. However, this heated global exchange regarding the "best interests" of children is remarkable in demonstrating how ideas about young people are deeply interwoven with notions of national autonomy, identity and global status. As China attains growing recognition as an economic superpower, international discussions about the welfare of its youngest members take on deeper political connotations. As Sharon Stephens (1995) has written, children often serve as unwitting symbols whose lives are debated and contested on local, national and global scales; all too often, their "bodies and minds [are] appropriated as the unprotected terrain upon which cultural battles are fought" (4).

[3] According to Catherine Keyser (2010), an INGO includes "not just formally established large groups, but also any group that is established and funded by foreigners" (52). In terms of orphan care, they range from small private homes that care for as few as 20 children or large entitles such as Save the Children or UNICEF.

Orphanage Care in China: Laying a Scholarly Foundation

Despite myriad international discussions regarding Chinese "orphans,"[4] my project is the *first* systematic, in-depth ethnographic analysis of the lives and treatment of children in state institutions. Other studies have been useful in providing data gathered from individual site visits to welfare institutes or interviews with orphanage officials (see Cohen 2007; Johnson 2004; Shang 2002, 2001; Shang et al. 2005). Building on the findings of these studies, I conducted extensive participant observation and interviews in two Chinese state-run orphanages. While these facilities varied a great deal from one another in ways that I will detail later, they both had an existing partnership with a different INGO that provided western volunteer labor as well as financial, material and medical resources to the children.

Due to the dearth of previous academic inquiry into Chinese orphanages, I seek to lay an empirical and theoretical foundation upon which future research can elaborate. Building on previous studies of children and youth, gender and reproduction (both biological and social) and globalization, I develop a more nuanced understanding of transnational negotiations over the care of institutionalized children in China. My work is guided by two interrelated scholarly objectives. First, I seek to clarify *which children* are found in institutional care and *why they are being relinquished* by their parents during a period of unprecedented economic growth and improvement in the average Chinese standard of living. I will first explain how the state-led modernization of the economy and the population has resulted in heightened societal discrimination against children based on gender and disability. Creating a more precise understanding about which youth are found in institutional care is one important means of addressing how the changing Chinese political economy has resulted in children's increasingly disparate life chances in the contemporary PRC.

Secondly, I will draw upon ethnographic data to provide a more current and accurate depiction of children's daily lives in two different state institutions. Due to issues of access, time constraints or language competency, research on orphanages in post-socialist contexts has been limited. In a discussion of Russian baby homes, the St. Petersburg-USA Orphanage Research Team (2005: 478) explains that "there are few descriptive studies of orphanage environments themselves. Most reports are short first or second-hand narrative impressions and perceptions. While these are useful, they often lack details and empirical data." Specifically, I examine Chinese state-run institutions that allow western involvement as spaces where particular forms of childhood are constructed and often contested as groups differently define the best interests of abandoned youth.

Using extensive observations and interviews, I seek to connect the macro-level of global processes with the micro-level of human interaction to explain how institutionalized children are being affected by two specific and interrelated transnational trends: 1) the *exportation* of primarily healthy rural girls out of China through international adoption to a range of countries in the global north, and 2) the *importation* of first-world ideologies and practices by foreign groups that have partnered with the

[4] I place the term "orphan" in quotes because the vast majority of children in state care are abandoned by their parents, up to 80% according to one official estimate (Shang and Cheng 2006).

Chinese state to care for the mostly special needs children who are left behind in institutions.

My research provides illuminating context to the existing scholarly literature on relationships among gender, child abandonment and the adoption of girls. I have found that although a mixture of fertility regulations, new economic pressures and existing patriarchal cultural traditions have resulted in thousands of "excess" rural daughters being relinquished to state care, within the socially set-apart space of orphanages, gender can operate in surprising and unexpected ways. Healthy girls are able to be "revalued" as desirable objects of international adoption whose transnational migration has assisted the PRC in creating deeper economic and political ties with industrialized countries. This "reversal of fortune" for girls makes apparent the ways that gender can take on new meanings as it becomes enmeshed with other axes of difference and inequality—particularly with health and disability—in institutional settings.

Transnational adoption has also opened up avenues for foreign NGO involvement with orphanages to provide resources and care for children whose physical and/or mental disabilities render them "unadoptable." In her study of American adoptions of Chinese children, Sara Dorow (2006a) argues that special needs children in state institutions "occupy a telling ideological space somewhere between the universal valuing of children and the particularizing value of adoption" (99). These children, Dorow contends, bear symbolic importance as "placeholders of true care—a site for modeling the value of all children equally" (100). Through aiding China's most devalued children, international organizations articulate links with larger transnational projects that seek to inspire Chinese people to care more about the welfare of all of its citizens.

The West to the Rescue?: The Involvement of Foreign Humanitarian Aid Groups

China's embrace of global capitalism has created a narrow window of opening for western NGOs that seek to find solutions for a variety of social ills, ranging from the environment to domestic violence to labor exploitation. Since the 1990s, a substantial number of studies have been conducted on China's growing "third sector," which has launched a heated intellectual debate regarding the emergence of global civil society in the PRC (Ma 2006, 2002a, 2002b; White et al. 1996; Howell 1995; Huang 1993; Wakeman 1993; Gold 1990). Despite this growing interest, foreign NGO involvement with institutionalized children has been largely overlooked (notable exceptions include Keyser 2009, 2006; Johnson 2004).

Abandoned, institutionalized children in China exist at the intersection of public and private spheres, state and civil society, and local and global agendas. Without the protection of familial ties, these youth are in many ways a blank slate upon which competing meanings of personhood are inscribed. Cindi Katz (2008) has written that in contemporary western cultures, childhood is understood as a continual process of "becoming" that is only complete when one reaches adulthood. Because children represent the future, they are a major focus of outside intervention, operating as "a tremendously fertile figuration upon which all manner of things, ideas, affective relations and fantasies are projected" (7).

First-world actors who go to China specifically to work with children often seek to improve the lives of unwanted children as well as to "set an example" for the Chinese

people. They are often influenced by negative western news media portrayals of childhood in China. Online commentator Nathalie Rothchild (2007) charges that westerners are often presented with a one-sided view of childhood in China that inspires humanitarian interest, as well as judgment and paternalism:

> With numerous news reports and documentaries focusing on stories of Chinese parents dumping their babies in filthy orphanages, aborting female fetuses, putting children to work in factories or disciplining them in strict physical training regimes, we in the west have become used to seeing China portrayed as a brutal and bleak place for children…[Western media portrayals] encourage a politics of pity, allowing western viewers to feel both upset and superior in relation to China. Chinese adults are typically portrayed either as cruel child abusers or as hapless victims of an oppressive regime. And the logical conclusion is that they need the west's charity, pity and protection. (http://www.spiked-online.com/index.php/site/article/3946/)

After decades of closure to foreign resources or influences, orphanages are becoming increasingly "transnationalized" through their partnerships with western organizations. In her study of transnational adoptions of children from China, Frayda Cohen (2007) identified three main types of western orphan relief organizations in China: 1) adoption-related, 2) expatriate/overseas Chinese, and 3) missionary. Due to issues of access, my dissertation deals primarily with the second and third categories.[5] Adoption NGOs consist primarily of adoptive parents who are interested in building cultural bridges between their daughters and the Chinese nation, people and culture. They include large, well-known non-profit groups such as Families with Children from China and the Half the Sky Foundation, both of which advocate and fundraise on behalf of children who remain in Chinese institutions.

The Helping Hands Organization, whose efforts I studied, is an example of an expatriate or overseas Chinese-run NGO. These groups tend to be local, grassroots efforts in urban centers run by western expatriates or overseas Chinese (who are primarily western-educated) who reside in China for extended periods. The individuals who found and manage these organizations are usually fluent in Chinese language and cultural practices, and are thus doubly capable of building strong social ties and trust with local state institutions. The groups often rely on the international business community for fund-raising and a steady stream of female volunteer labor. However, due to the transience of expatriate populations, their efforts are often superficial or non-committal in nature.

Missionary orphan relief NGOs—Tomorrow's Children, which I also studied, is an example—tend to be comprised of western evangelical Christians who rely on global church networks for funding and volunteers. These groups typically come to China in order to perform good works on behalf of the nation's most disparaged social groups. Unlike expatriate organizations, faith-based groups are far more committed to being involved for long periods of time. Officially banned from the PRC since 1949, in recent years religious NGOs have been welcomed back by the government and have gladly

[5] I initially began this research hoping to gain access to a Half the Sky infant care center, but the group was wary of my intentions and did not allow me to observe at one of their sites.

stepped into a role of major provider of resources and manpower for the struggling Chinese child welfare system.

"Global Projects" in Chinese Orphanages

In my ethnographic fieldwork with two INGOs working with state-run orphanages in China, I have grappled with the following questions: What effects does the importation of myriad first-world resources, ideologies and practices into socialist institutions have on children's social value? What do conflicts over appropriate standards and practices of care reveal about the socially constructed nature of children's "best interests"?

To answer these questions, I engage with larger theoretical debates about globalization, a term that evokes a number of complex and varied representations of the modern world. Earlier theories of globalization and transnationalism have emphasized the fluidity and unboundedness of new global "flows" of people, money, ideas and practices around the world (*see* Appadurai 1990; Hannerz 1990). Globalization has often been characterized as a contest of wills between domination "from above" by states and multinational capital and resistance "from below" by ordinary, often economically and socially marginalized groups and individuals. Processes of transnationalism have been described as even having the power to transcend national boundaries and liberate local peoples as they engage in border-crossing and develop cultural hybridity. However, as Smith and Guarnizo (1998) point out, scholars should be careful not to portray transnationalism from below as completely emancipatory. Rather, each situation must be contextualized to consider how global processes affect "power relations, cultural constructions, economic interactions, and, more generally, social organization at the level of the locality" (6).

Anna Tsing (2000) also challenges prior views by defining globalization as a set of distinctive *projects*, or "relatively coherent bundles of ideas and practices as realized in particular times and places" (347). Rather than global flows that penetrate and transform local societies, she argues that these projects engage with one other through a succession of "mixed encounters" which come together in ways involving collaboration, dialogue and new opportunities—as well as messiness, awkwardness and opposition. Tsing calls for a more contextually specific "ethnographic study of the global," that pays careful attention to transnational interconnections and the translation of meanings and practices within local settings. In her view, research should not only highlight the success stories of globalization, but should also examine "missed encounters, clashes, misfires and confusions" (338) that can contribute to a richer body of knowledge. Michael Peter Smith (2001) resonates with Tsing's perspective when he argues that the interplay between local and global forces must be contextualized and studied "on the ground in all of their untidy contingencies as various projects get constructed, deployed, accommodated to, or resisted in specific times and places" (3).

Along this vein, my project illuminates the intersection between two particular sets of global projects: the Chinese state-driven project of modernization and western child-saving projects. Ethnographic research is integral to revealing the broader social and political meanings, as well as the deeper cultural and class-based nuances, that underlie transnational negotiations over childcare. As my two case studies will elucidate,

foreign humanitarian aid groups not only provide considerable material resources to struggling orphanages, but also import universalistic beliefs about children's best interests that frequently clash with the views of their local collaborators.

Economically Useful *and* Emotionally Priceless: The Stratification of Children in the Reform Era

Before delving into the specifics of my research, it is necessary to situate this study in the context of Chinese economic transition, gender inequality and the increasing stratification between children in the current period. Since beginning the shift from a socialist to a market economy in the late 1970s, nearly every aspect of Chinese society has been utterly transformed. Over a period of three short decades, the standard of living in the PRC has skyrocketed in many parts of the country—particularly in urban areas, coastal regions and special economic zones. Yet at the same time Chinese society has become increasingly stratified along the lines of gender, class and health.

As in other post-socialist contexts, economic privatization has also been accompanied by political decentralization. The central state has largely retreated from the public sector and in the process eliminated millions of government jobs and a range of previously-provided social welfare benefits (Wong 1998). Expectations of cradle-to-grave job security once offered through the socialist "iron rice bowl" (*tie fanwan*) have completely disappeared and been replaced by individual family responsibility. As a result, the reform era is characterized by an anxious sense of competition over resources—which are growing but still scarce in relation to China's 1.4 billion person populace—as well as family fiscal uncertainty and widening income disparities between social classes.

Following this massive economic revamping, new forms of inequality have cut across Chinese society. Children in particular have been deeply affected by recent financial pressures as parental desires to bear healthy, mentally and physically competent offspring who can provide for them in old age have greatly heightened. Even as capitalism has caused other social norms to transform or fall to the wayside, the Confucian tradition of filial piety (*yang'er fanglao,* translated literally as "raising sons to prevent difficulties in old age") has remained resilient. Although parents now have far fewer children, their offspring still bear the responsibility to respect, support and care for their elderly parents to repay them for the investment they received growing up.

This reciprocal familial relationship has official state approval and was even codified by the Chinese Communist Party in Article 21 of the current Chinese Marriage Law, which states: "Parents shall have the duty to bring up and educate their children; children shall have the duty to support and assist their parents." Moreover, if children fail to perform these duties, parents who are unable to provide for themselves have the right to demand financial support payments from their offspring (http://www.nyconsulate.prchina. org/eng/lsqz/ laws/t42222.htm).[6]

Not only does this "parent-child contract" (Croll 2000) adhere to Chinese cultural values, but it also provides justification for the central government to not provide

[6] This law was first adopted at the Third Session of the Fifth National People's Congress in September 1980 and amended in April 2001. Its formalization through law reflects Chinese cultural beliefs that it is the responsibility of children, rather than the state, to care for the elderly.

extensive social welfare benefits. Liu Fengshu (2008) has argued that in the contemporary PRC, "parental eagerness to invest in the child's future has also been attributed to an increasingly urgent sense that the family is the most reliable 'welfare agency' for its members at present" (416). In other words, childrearing remains the primary strategy for Chinese parents to secure their future livelihoods and old-age support (Ikels 2004). In this insecure environment, children who are perceived to be incapable of becoming productive workers in the future are much more likely to be relinquished. This unfortunate reality points to the socially constructed and context-dependent nature of human value, which challenges taken-for-granted, universalistic notions about the intrinsic worth of children (Malkki and Martin 2003).

In *Pricing the Priceless Child*, Viviana Zelizer (1985) famously elucidated the social factors that led to a major transformation in American children's social value in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Before capitalist industrialization, the worth of offspring was assessed in terms of their labor power and ability to contribute to the household. However, as the U.S. economy developed and expanded new ideologies regarding children as sacred individuals needy of adult protection became prevalent. Over time, normative understandings shifted to view children as "exclusively emotional and moral asset[s]" that "precluded instrumental or fiscal considerations" (1981: 1038). The Progressive Era child-saving campaigns against child labor and in support of mandatory schooling pushed youth out of the public arena and completely into the private sphere of family, emotions and domesticity. As Zelizer explains, "while men's lives became more and more entangled with market considerations, children's lives were gradually severed from market ties" (1981: 1037).

This view of children as economically worthless but emotionally priceless prevails across western societies and has also become dominant throughout the world as a result of globalization, which has "produced a popular vision of what childhood is, and what children should do" (Trask 2010: 105). Western cultures frame childhood as a universally-shared biological and developmental stage, and children as a group with similar needs. This view has been propagated globally through the ratification of international human rights treaties such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Hague Conventions on Children (Howell 2006).

As a result of market reforms, western ideologies about children and childrearing have also filtered into and taken hold in the PRC. As a nation currently undergoing capitalist transformation, China provides a relevant contemporary contrast to Zelizer's historical account. However, the seemingly straightforward transition in understandings about children that accompanied western industrialization is complicated by Chinese cultural norms—particularly the aforementioned norm of filial piety. Unlike the United States at the turn of the 20th century, I suggest, in reform era China children are considered to be both economically useful *and* emotionally priceless. Their value is increasingly assessed according to market principles, with offspring who are perceived to have bright future economic potential seen as more valuable to their families and to the Chinese nation.

Fertility Regulations and Gendered Desires for "High Quality" Offspring

In addition to sweeping economic reforms, since the late 1970s the Chinese government has also exerted increasing influence over the domain of reproduction and families through the institution of wide-ranging birth control regulations (*jihua shengyu*)—particularly the world-renowned "One Child Policy" of 1979. A major motivation behind these regulations has been the Chinese government's desire to create a "high quality" (*suzhi*) population that is healthy, well-educated, cosmopolitan and competitive. In recent years, there has been a proliferation of research on *suzhi,* exploring the connections between modern Chinese state economic/political objectives and population regulation, control and surveillance (Sigley 2009; Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005; Anagnost 2004; Woronov 2003; Bakken 2000). As one integral aspect of Chinese modernization, fertility regulations have rapidly and dramatically reconfigured the population with inadvertently gendered effects.

Since the late 1970s the realm of reproduction has become a contested site inflected with national hope and fear: hope of attaining a dominant position in the global economic order accompanied by fear of falling behind other nations in the capitalist competition (Anagnost 1995). Rapid change and insecurities about the future have overhauled prior understandings about families and children, with the modern Chinese child now a "fetishized object" of parental and societal investment.

The fraught economic context has heightened desires for sons, especially in rural areas; the patrilineal and patriarchal familial system and the lack of an adequate social security safety net has continued the tradition of placing filial obligations on the shoulders of the oldest male child. Historically, sons have been more highly valued than daughters for their labor power and ability to perform ancestral rites of worship while girls have been considered less-related to their natal families due to expectations that they will eventually "marry out" to join their husbands' families. While patriarchal beliefs and practices have been challenged by communist-era campaigns for gender equality, they have never been fully overturned. Hence even now male offspring bring strength and prestige to their families, helping them to secure economic and political resources outside the reach of daughters (Murphy 2003: 601).

As I will explore in-depth in the next chapter, traditional preference for sons has collided with stringent fertility regulations to create unprecedented discrimination against certain offspring. The Chinese government's unselfconscious attempt to modernize the population through policies and ideologies about "high quality" children have led Chinese parents to prioritize bearing and rearing much smaller numbers of "perfect" offspring. The increasingly calculated nature of childbearing has caused privileged urban only children and rural boys to be favored over "excess" rural daughters and children born with physical or mental disabilities; these groups face a much higher likelihood of societal marginalization, either through abortion before birth or abandonment afterward. In this way, birth control regulations and the accompanying ideology of China as a nation in desperate need of raising its "population quality," function together as mechanisms that sort children into vastly different sectors of society with widely divergent future opportunities.

Ann Anagnost (2008) has argued that Chinese parents' need for their offspring to be employable for their entire lifetimes has caused children's social value to be equated with their economic potential. She writes, "In this context, a very different calculus of life chances emerges, in which some bodies have more value than others and in which some

must be sacrificed" (57). Children abandoned by their parents to state care are one group that is being "sacrificed" in the reform era and that helps define the boundaries of citizenship through their lack of belonging in Chinese society.

This study examines China's broad social and economic processes as mechanisms imbued with power to create new forms of personhood and social belonging that are creating new forms of inequality amongst its youngest members. Foucault's (1978, 1979) theory of bio-power addresses how the body politic and individual bodies have become the focus of governmental techniques and regulation. He contends that through everyday practices of discipline, training and surveillance, institutions create docile and productive workers. By ranking and categorizing individual bodies according to ability, the overall economic efficiency of the population increases; in the process, norms are established against which individual capabilities are judged and which people use to judge themselves.

This idea is particularly applicable to the modern Chinese context in which *suzhi* discourse openly promotes the development of personal traits that can contribute to the nation's global economic prowess. As Chinese citizens have increasingly internalized this ideology, the focus has shifted from the state down to individuals who become responsible for cultivating a higher level of "quality" for themselves and their offspring (Murphy 2004). In other words, Chinese governmental modes of discipline, training and normalization of bodies have contributed to the development of new standards of acceptability for children. In a recent Chinese-language survey of orphaned and abandoned children, Shang and Cheng (2006) state,

> In a market economy, people have become "resources" whose value has increased and therefore the economic utility of people has gone up. At the same time, the government's societal and ideological control has weakened. Because there is no relative moral restrictions, those who are considered as having low "economic value" (girls and disabled children), are naturally more likely to be abandoned (35).

In this manner, *suzhi* legitimates a Chinese governmental modernization agenda that simultaneously intrudes into intimate practices of reproduction and child-rearing, yet also makes individuals responsible for their own welfare in the new capitalist economy. For all its importance, high quality is not something that can be attained by all, particularly by the vast rural peasantry who are perceived to be the cause of China's inability to modernize (Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005). Therefore, this modernization discourse plays a central role in ranking social groups, in justifying and reinforcing disparities between segments of the population and in placing differential value on children's bodies.

Defining the Children in This Study

Out of approximately 370 million children in China, an estimated 573,000 are without attachment to parents (Shang and Cheng 2006).[7] This number includes orphaned and abandoned youth in both urban and rural areas—though it may be leaving out

[7] Children are deemed "parentless" if they are orphaned, abandoned or one or more of their parents is incarcerated (Keyser 2010).

250,000 or more unregistered children who do not qualify for state benefits (Keyser 2009). It is important to clarify that my study does not include all "at-risk" or parentless children in China. Rather, I focus on a much smaller subset of children who reside in urban welfare institutes that have collaborations with foreign NGOs. As of 2008, estimates have suggested that approximately 78,000 children were spread across nearly 500 welfare institutes (Keyser 2009). There are a variety of official, non-official and privately-run facilities that care for much larger numbers of street children, HIV/AIDS orphans or youth whose parents are incarcerated.[8] While these groups definitely warrant detailed investigation, due to the highly specific nature of each of their situations, I will not be including them in my analysis.

In a survey sponsored by the Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs, Shang and Cheng (2006) suggest that many, if not most, of the children in urban orphanages actually originate from rural areas. These authors speculate that the children come from China's vast, difficult-to- regulate 100 million-plus person "floating population" (*liudong renkou*). This group is comprised of rural migrant workers who often live on the edge of cities and are more likely than other groups to lack access to prenatal care and to bear children with congenital defects who are then relinquished to state care. In a separate study that focused specifically on eight major state-run children's welfare institutes,[9] Shang et al. (2005) found that while there were different patterns of abandonment depending on region, gender and disability were the major contributing factors leading to children's relinquishment; more than half were girls and 80.5% of the total were disabled. Furthermore, only around 20% of the children were actually orphaned, which implies that most were purposely abandoned by their families (33).

The History of the Chinese Child Welfare Regime

The current transnationalization of orphanage care in China is the latest in a series of different iterations of provisions for parentless youth. In this brief historical review, I will discuss the ways in which over the course of the twentieth century disadvantaged children have been cared for by a variety of different state and civil society groups whose approaches have changed alongside transformations in the larger Chinese economic and political regime. Prior to the founding of the PRC in 1949, the non-governmental sector was integral in providing shelter and services to parentless children. Orphanages at that time were run by private individuals, churches or other charitable organizations—many of which were run by westerners or private wealthy Chinese philanthropists (Zhang 2006).

Children's homes sought to instill positive traits of self-sufficiency and self-reliance into youngsters as a way of developing human capital for the sake of the burgeoning nation-state. Contrary to the contemporary era where abandoned children are considered unable to contribute to China's modernization project, "in the eyes of early twentieth century philanthropists, the disadvantaged child

[8] Estimates of street children range from 150,000 to nearly 600,000. By 2010 there will be approximately 138,000 to 260,000 children orphaned as a result of HIV-AIDS. (Keyser 2010: 47-48)

[9] The surveyed orphanages were located in the cities of Beijing, Tianjin and Shanghai and the provinces of Hubei, Jiangxi, Shanxi, Sichuan, and Heilongjiang.

was…[viewed as] an untapped resource to be mobilized in the grander project of national construction" (Apter 2009: 6-7).

After the founding of the PRC, the government considered social welfare services to be integral to its political legitimacy (Hsu 2009). In the early Maoist period of the 1950s the existing privately-run orphanages were either closed or taken over by the CCP and reorganized as state welfare institutes. A new approach towards child welfare was implemented as the socialist political environment shifted priorities towards emphasizing the collective well-being over that of the individual, which led to beliefs that orphaned and abandoned children would be best cared for in state run institutions (Keyser 2009). As a result, the government took sole responsibility for the finance and operation of children's welfare institutes.

These state-run orphanages—both then and continuing into the present—tended to only be located in urban centers. In rural areas, on the other hand, the state relied on families and agricultural collectives to provide for parentless youth. Moreover, children who lacked any relatives to care for them were eligible for partial provisions from the "Five Guarantees" system (*wu bao*); this was a rural community based protection system still in operation today that provides food, fuel, clothes and health care to the "3 No's"—orphaned children, older residents or disabled people incapable of supporting themselves (Shang 2005). During the Communist era, this unequal distribution of services, resources and responsibility for children mirrored larger regional divides that allowed urbanites to enjoy better education, healthcare and material goods while leaving rural residents to fend for themselves. In combination with a rigid household registration system (*hukou*) that prevented peasants from moving to cities, "China was essentially divided into two separate societies: a privileged urban society and a disenfranchised countryside" (Hsu 2009: 3).

Following the shift to a capitalist economy in the late 1970s, the central state has "retreated" from its monopoly over social welfare, decentralizing provisions and substantially decreasing funding of services (Wong 1998). In the process, the brunt of responsibility has been transferred onto local level governments, individual families and civil society organizations. In 1996 the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the State Planning Commission, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Health, the State Education Council and the Ministry of Communications issued a joint notice requiring local-level governments to take full responsibility for caring for orphaned and abandoned children. Since that time they have been required to provide care, health and educational services and to improve institutional facilities (Zhang and Xu 2006).

The role of the state has shifted from that of main provider of services to regulator (Shang 2005) while financing for orphanages now operates according to the principle of "multiple levels, multiple channels and multiple means" (Keyser 2009: 50). Though previously welfare institutions were prohibited from seeking outside sources of financial support since the 1990s they have been encouraged to develop greater economic self-sufficiency (Shang 2001). Because child welfare cannot be privatized in the same ways that other realms such as healthcare or elder care have been, local-level governments in charge of orphanages have turned to a range of official income-generating endeavors. These include transnational adoptions, donation solicitation and involvement with foreign NGOs—pursuits that reflect the PRC's increasing interconnections with global society.

Fieldsites and Methods

As I explained earlier, the retreat of central government from being sole provider of child welfare services has opened a narrow window of opportunity for the involvement of foreign humanitarian aid organizations. INGOs participate with child welfare institutes in a variety of different ways, ranging from visiting children on a semi-regular basis, to running western-style care units within orphanage grounds to caring for children in separate foreign-run facilities (Keyser 2009). These collaborations appear to be growing in acceptability as China continues to open up to international influences in its rapid process of modernization. In Beijing alone, there are a number of foreign groups that visit orphanages and roughly 10-15 different private foster homes run by western expatriates that employ first-world childcare practices to tend to sick and disabled children from various welfare institutes across the country.

Between November 2006 and December 2007 I spent over 12 months conducting extensive participant observation and interviews in two state-run orphanages, one located on the outskirts of Beijing and one in Henan Province, central China. I also made subsequent follow-up fieldwork trips in December 2008 and July 2009. Both of these institutions had partnerships with western NGOs, and I worked as a volunteer for both of them during my fieldwork. The two collaborations were extremely different in form and motivation.

The Beijing NGO, Helping Hands, was comprised primarily of affluent western expatriate wives whose husbands worked for embassies or multinational corporations. During the main portion of my research I attended monthly member meetings in volunteer's homes and also spent time with each of the "day groups": clusters of between 4-6 women who were organized by one day leader responsible for arranging transportation for volunteers one morning per week. On roughly 20 different occasions I accompanied women out to the Yongping Orphanage, a small facility that housed around 36 mostly special needs children. It was located on the grounds of a larger social welfare institute that also featured a nursing home for several hundred senior citizens and a private-pay facility for developmentally disabled adults (I only conducted research with the children). There I conducted informal interviews, translated conversations, observed interactions between the volunteers and Chinese *ayi* and worked with the children. I visited the orphanage about 20 other times either on my own or with a weekend student volunteer group that I helped to organize.

In addition, I also conducted individual in-depth interviews with 10 Helping Hands volunteers: two were originally from Hong Kong but raised or educated in the west, four were American, two were French, one was British and one was Spanish. I met with volunteers at their homes or interviewed them on the phone for periods of between one and two hours, inquiring about their reasons for living in China, their experiences as volunteers, their understanding of child abandonment and any suggestions they had for improving the lives of institutionalized children in China. Additionally, I conducted an in-depth interview and several days of participant observation with an occupational therapist from the Philippines who had been hired by Helping Hands to work at Yongping.

The second group, Tomorrow's Children, ran a palliative care unit on one floor of a large state institution. It used western medical knowledge and practices to administer to

the orphanage's most severely ill and disabled youth. While the organization was under the ultimate authority of the Chinese government, it had the freedom to create its own care guidelines and to hire, train and fire its own staff. Over four separate research trips totaling three months in length that I took between January and November 2007, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the unit. Though everyone was aware that I was a researcher, I worked as a full-time volunteer, living in the unit and performing a variety of tasks. As I was the only bilingual volunteer, my responsibilities included translating documents, oral translation between western and Chinese staff, helping nannies with childcare, dispensing medication, taking children to the hospital and dealing with Chinese medical practitioners.

Due to the political sensitivity of dealing with illegally abandoned children, it was extremely difficult to conduct formal interviews with either westerners or Chinese workers. Rather, I conducted multiple informal interviews with all eight of the western volunteers (who were American, British and Canadian) present during those periods. These conversations usually took place during breaks or meal times, lasting an average of 30 minutes to one hour. I asked the volunteers specifically about their motivations for coming to China, their opinions on the struggles for authority between the special care unit and the welfare institute and their views of western versus Chinese caretaking practices.

Each day I also spent time in each of the five children's rooms, where I informally interviewed a total of 20 *ayi* in Mandarin in conversations lasting from 10 minutes to one hour. I inquired about their personal lives, experiences caring for sick and disabled children, opinions (and occasional confusion) regarding western childcare practices and their views of general working conditions. I also spent many hours in conversation with the Chinese work schedule coordinator and the constantly rotating staff of cooks and housekeepers. Because of the political sensitivity of issues, I did not tape-record any interviews, but instead transcribed them from memory soon afterward. Later I transcribed and coded all of my written materials, including interviews, observational data and general field notes.

In addition to these two main fieldsites, I also spent shorter lengths of time performing observations in a number of different types of care settings around the country, including six other official state institutions, five private western foster homes and one private rural orphanage run by Chinese Catholic nuns. I supplemented ethnographic work with archival research in Beijing on modernization practices and the changing child welfare regime. It is important to note that China is incredibly complex and varies significantly by region. However, my ethnographic case studies help to generate a deeper understanding of life on the ground in orphanages, as well as address the broader implications of globalization in Chinese society.

The Chapters That Follow

Throughout this dissertation, I explore the ways in which abandoned children's social value is being defined and reshaped by different groups within state institutional settings. Orphanages are understudied sites of conflict and cooperation between the Chinese state and civil society actors that are fashioning a childhood for abandoned youth that is simultaneously global and local. Examining transnational interactions over their

care serves as an important way to view "modernity from the perspective of those marginalized or excluded from the universalizing center" (Rofel 1999: 12)

I explore the broader, historical context of economic reform and "population quality" since the late 1970s in Chapter 2 as a backdrop for the trend of abandonment of healthy "excess" daughters and special needs children to state institutions. I argue that the Chinese state's emphasis on creating a "high quality" population has led to the implementation of stringent birth control regulations and accompanying discourses of children's value that are stratifying the next generation of citizens. In particular, this chapter will discuss recent research on daughter discrimination as well as the reasons for a rise in numbers of disabled and ill children in China, which relate to economic privatization and the lack of a social welfare safety net for families in rural areas.

In Chapter 3 I examine the "reversal of fortune" that global processes are creating for girls and disabled children as they converge within institutional settings. While gender bias is a primary reason why healthy girls are relinquished by their parents, China's opening up to transnational adoption in the early 1990s has caused gender to work in their favor as they have become highly desirable as daughters. Beyond improving the well-being of this group of children and bolstering the national child welfare system, I suggest that the PRC has systematically used transnational adoption to build stronger relationships with a range of industrialized nations and to assert its influence in the global arena. As girls are tracked out of orphanages and into families, special needs children are left behind in institutions where they become objects of western humanitarian aid and intervention.

Chapter 4 is a detailed ethnographic examination of Tomorrow's Children, an evangelical Christian organization that runs a western-style infant special care unit for ill and disabled youth within the grounds of the Haifeng Children's Welfare Institute. I analyze conflicts and negotiations between socially privileged western volunteers who import ideologies of unconditional love and child-centered, individualizing practices of care and the working class Chinese caregivers who have been hired to implement the foreign practices. In this case, I contend that disagreements over appropriate childcare hinged on cultural and class-based understandings of childhood and each group's differential access to social and financial resources.

Chapter 5 focuses on Helping Hands, a group of western expatriate wives in Beijing that provided financial and medical resources and volunteer labor to the children at the Yongping Orphanage. I use a gendered lens to situate and contextualize conflicting understandings about care held by expatriate wives and Chinese caregivers, which complicated the partnership. Privileged western volunteers tended to equate childcare with intensive motherhood and maternal nurturance while Chinese workers reflected the attitudes of the larger socialist institutional hierarchy, equating care solely with the physical tasks of reproductive labor. I found that these divergent understandings of women's work resulted in a deep sense of ambivalence that plagued the collaboration.

I conclude with Chapter 6, where I elaborate upon the implications of the relationship between Chinese modernization, globalization and children's social value explored in earlier chapters.

Chapter 2

Chinese Modernization and the Creation of "Low Quality" Children

> At the dawn of the 21st century, China is full of images of the poster child of the nation's future. Invariably an urban child, it is the planned progeny, the well-educated, well-dressed, healthy, "quality" child who is playing and laughing as it graces the cities' pleasure spots. Elsewhere—never in the same frame—are cultural images of the unplanned child who is not supposed to exist. Usually the offspring of rural migrants in the cities, it is the uneducated, ragged, unhealthy child who is crying or fighting, disrupting social order, and generally polluting the cities' margins. These two images are never seen together, but they belong side by side, for the creation of the planned child—the marker of modernity, the savior of the nation—has entailed the simultaneous creation of the unplanned child—the sign of backwardness, the obstacle that keeps China from attaining its rightful place on the world stage" (Greenhalgh 2003: 196).

In this description of imagery of children in contemporary China, Susan Greenhalgh (2003) evokes a contrast that is also at the core of this study. Since the late 1970s, China's stringent population control program has split children into two oppositional categories of personhood imbued with either entirely positive or entirely negative connotations. Urban "little emperors" (*xiao huangdi*) bear on their shoulders the heavy responsibility of bringing their nation into a glorious future of "socialism with Chinese characteristics," while a much larger number of children with impoverished rural origins and perceived lack of human capital are viewed as a dangerous threat to China's modernization project. The latter group represents the constitutive outside of Chinese modernity, defining the valued core through their existence on the periphery. Greenhalgh urges that more attention must be paid to their lives, observing that "official and scholarly neglect of the unplanned child—its numbers, its socioeconomic plight, its subjectivity—adds to the importance of attending to it" (196).

By "unplanned persons," Greenhalgh generally refers to socially stigmatized youth who live among the enormous "floating population" (*liudong renkou*) of more than 100 million rural-to-urban migrants. These children (and their parents) usually lack difficult-to-obtain urban residence permits (*hukou*), which deprives them of full citizenship rights and a range of social services such as healthcare and education. While migrant laborers and their children have become objects of intensive scholarly concern (*see* Solinger 1999, Li 2001), researchers have yet to focus in-depth on issues relating to the much narrower segment of unplanned youth who have been relinquished by their parents. Unlike migrant children who remain attached to immediate family and kin networks, abandoned children who end up institutions tend to lack known connections to birthplace and lineage—factors that are integral to defining personhood and social position in Chinese society. Not only do they exist outside of the prevailing social order, they are missing entirely from the imagined global future of the PRC.

This chapter provides an overview of recent state-led transformations of the Chinese economy and population that have resulted in a large number of healthy rural daughters and special needs children being abandoned to state care. As China has rapidly

shifted from a planned socialist economy characterized by governmental regulation of production and distribution to a freewheeling capitalist market system, the population has been reconfigured according to state goals of creating "lower quantity" and "higher quality" of citizens. The state and the general public see the nation's future success in the global arena as intertwined with—even wholly reliant upon—the quality of individual bodies and minds. Children are understood as literal embodiments of the future, their mental and bodily health equated with China's global economic and political potential (Anagnost 1997; Woronov 2003).

In this era of neoliberalism, the Chinese state promulgates social Darwinistic ideologies regarding the "survival of the fittest" among nations and among individual citizens, which helps justify increasing governmental control over the intimate realms of family, reproduction and childrearing. As Gail Kligman (1998: 5) observes, reproduction is "fundamentally associated with identity: that of 'the nation' as the 'imagined community' that the state serves and protects, and over which it exercises authority; or that of the family and lineage—in most instances, a patrilineage—in the protection and perpetuation of itself and its name." In postsocialist China, reproduction represents both of these aspects by linking state modernization goals with the patrilineal family structure.

Because reproductive planning is framed as necessary to help China achieve its goals of economic development, ideas such as social engineering (*shehui gongcheng*) and even eugenics (*yousheng*) (controversial in the west due to their infringement on human rights and ties to heavily disparaged race science of the early 20th century) are imbued with positive connotations and enjoy widespread support among the educated classes (Sigley 2009). The eugenic undertones of the government's population project have shaped societal perceptions that modern, "high quality" bodies are those that are economically useful. Consequentially, rural daughters and special needs children—two groups of youth that were already on the lower end of the social hierarchy before the reform era—become "unmodern," losing social value through being perceived as unable to become economically productive in the future.

Foucault (1978, 1980) has written extensively about the interdependence between the promotion of state economic interests and the creation of "docile bodies" in western industrializing societies. He describes how capitalist practices have led to the development of new standards of economic utility that separate individuals into bodies that are "more or less utilizable, more or less amenable to profitable investment, those with greater or lesser prospects of survival, death and illness, and with more or less capacity for being usefully trained" (1980: 172). Through everyday practices of training, measurement and surveillance, state institutions optimize the efficiency of bodies for the sake of economic productivity and capitalist expansion (1978: 138). In the process, certain norms are established against which individuals are evaluated and which they also use to judge themselves. Those who do not fit these standards come to be seen as abnormal.

Foucault's ideas are particularly applicable to the modern capitalist Chinese context in which the discourse of quality (known in Chinese as "*suzhi*") is used to unselfconsciously promote the development of personal traits that will contribute to the nation's global economic prowess. Greenhalgh and Winckler (2005) define discourses not only as linguistic systems, but also as "relatively bounded, historically specific bodies of knowledge that are productive—that is, that *do things* and have *material effects*" (2005:

20, italics in original). In this perspective, *suzhi* "legitimates a modernization agenda" promoted by state authorities that simultaneously intrudes into intimate practices of reproduction and child-rearing, while also making individuals responsible for their own welfare in the new market economy (Murphy 2004: 5).

Below, I outline the state-led economic and demographic changes that have resulted in the stratification of citizenship between children based upon gender and bodily ability, thus increasing their likelihood of being abandoned to state care. First, I will describe the large-scale implementation of population regulations since the late 1970s that, when coupled with sweeping rural economic reforms, has resulted in an alarming increase in the nation's infant sex ratio at birth and widespread discrimination against daughters in the countryside. Second, I will discuss how *suzhi* discourse links children's bodies and health to the future of the nation; this provides ideological justification for eugenic practices and the disparagement of special needs youth, who are viewed as an obstacle to China's project of modernization.

China's Gendered Population Project: The Plight of the "Missing Girls"

Walking through an old apartment complex in Beijing's university district, I spotted an enclosed glass case containing a poster of a smiling Chinese girl in pigtails holding a large rubber ball. Printed above her head in large Chinese characters was a series of slogans:

Care for girls.
All of society needs to pay great attention to girls' healthy development.
Today's daughters are the constructors of tomorrow's society.
Caring for girls protects everyone's future interests.
Bearing a boy, bearing a girl, just let it happen naturally.
Girls and boys both enjoy the same rights.

Below the child's picture were three smaller photos. The first showed a metal scale that had a group of baby boys seated on one side and baby girls on the other; more boys tipped the scale precipitously downwards. The second picture showed a laughing father tossing his happy daughter in the air. The third shot was the most alarming, as it depicted a wedding scene between a Chinese bride and groom in full western attire, exchanging vows before an audience made up entirely of anonymous, identical young Chinese men.

On first sight the imagery and wording of this poster was shocking. Yet as I traveled around the city, into the surrounding countryside, and further out into distant provinces, I saw that this poster and others like it were part of the same governmental "Care for Girls" campaign (*guan'ai nuhai xingdong*). Begun in 2003, this governmental campaign has been attempting to combat pervasive and increasing social discrimination against daughters, which has become most apparent through the astronomical increase in births of male infants and corresponding drop in female infants in China since the early 1980s.

Figure 1: Picture of a tiled slogan in a public park located in a rural area near Beijing that reads: "Girls are also descendents. Bearing a boy or bearing a girl is equally good." (Photo taken November 2006)

Since this abnormal sex ratio at birth first became evident, demographers and economists have conducted numerous statistical analyses measuring its scale (Zeng Yi 2006; Zheng Zhenzhen 2006; Poston 2005; Banister 2004; Sen 1998; Coale and Banister 1994; Zeng Yi, et al 1993; Coale 1991; Johansson and Nygren 1991; Hull 1990, etc). While demographic surveys help to provide a broad understanding of this issue, there has been a noticeable lack of theorizing about how this trend in population reflects Chinese modernization processes as well as growing social and gender inequalities since the beginning of the reform era. This section describes the scope of this predicament and discusses the reasons why in an era of unprecedented economic prosperity, the abnormal sex ratio at birth in China has skyrocketed, leading to the sex-selective abortion and abandonment of *millions* of girls.

Amartya Sen (1998) has argued about the need to differentiate the origins of gender bias—perhaps thousands of years removed from the present—from more contemporary reasons for its continued survival. Therefore, I explain the gender skew in children and corresponding discrimination against daughters in modern China as an evolving socially-constructed phenomenon rather than a static, unchangeable legacy passed down from time immemorial.

Population Regulations and the Creation of the "Missing Girls"

Throughout recorded history China's population has always included fewer women than men, particularly in times of war, famine or natural disaster (Banister 2004). Sons in China have always been more highly valued than girls for their labor power and ability to perform ancestral rites of worship while girls have traditionally "married out" of their parents' household to become members of their husbands' families. In patrilineal, patrilocal Chinese society, male offspring bring strength and prestige to their families, helping them to secure economic and political resources (Murphy 2003). The division of

labor between sons and daughters within households also reinforces the overvaluation of sons. Daughters' responsibilities can be taken over by daughters-in-law, while the work and rites that sons perform cannot be substituted for either by daughters or sons-in-law.

Even when the infant sex ratio at birth (SRB) has been normal, such as during the mid-1950s, the mortality rate of young girls has been much higher than that of boys due to discrimination and neglect of daughters (Zheng Zhenzhen 2006; Banister 2004). Still, the sex ratio did not become an unnatural and lasting phenomenon until after sweeping economic reforms and the institution of the one child policy—two governmental programs geared towards bringing about quick and effective modernization of Chinese society. As Fong (2004) notes, "Rather than waiting for modernization to produce low fertility, the Chinese state has used low fertility as a means to accelerate modernization" (3).

The abnormal SRB relates directly to major Chinese economic and social transitions that began in the late 1970s.[10] During the years following the chaotic decade of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), China began its Four Modernizations program to develop four main sectors of the economy: agriculture, industry, science and technology, and national defense. The program's overarching goal was to transform the struggling nation into a modern and globally competitive socialist society. With industrialization in mind, the state began to view China's vast population and traditionally high levels of fertility as a major constraint on economic expansion. This switch from the pronatalism of the Mao era to restricted childbearing was justified by framing population growth as a crisis of epic proportions. As the government began to embrace scientific reasoning and demographic analysis in the 1970s, reducing the nation's fertility came to be seen as "the essential ingredient for a 'modern' Chinese nation-state's survival, without which plans for national development and security were threatened. Overpopulation was now understood as the imminent threat to national development" (Handwerker 1993: 55).

The government began to institute large-scale birth control campaigns in the early 1970s, dramatically lowering fertility through using a variety of voluntary measures. The "*wan-xi-shao*" ("later-longer-fewer") campaign used financial incentives to promote later marriage, the spacing of offspring at least four years apart and having fewer children overall. Through this and other voluntary measures, the Chinese fertility rate—which peaked around 5.8 children per couple in 1965—dropped more than half to about 2.8 by 1977 (Tang 2005).

By the end of the 1970s, expanding industrial and agricultural production plus limiting population growth became the twin pillars of Chinese modernization efforts. These specific goals were laid out in a series of Five Year Plans with the goal "to quadruple the gross value of industrial and agricultural production by the year 2000 and to keep the population down to about 1.2 billion by achieving zero population growth at the turn of the century" (Smith 2000: 70). In order to achieve the almost inconceivable goal of zero population growth within two decades (which has not yet been achieved), the Chinese government instituted the one-child-per-couple policy in 1979—the world's most stringent fertility regulation. This was adopted as a basic national policy during the 12th National People's Congress of 1982 and continues today in revised form.

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[10] Because other scholars have already provided extensive historical insight into the nation's population program since 1949 (see Greenhalgh 2010; Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005; Handwerker 1993), I am limiting my analysis to the 1970s and after.

Chinese population policies have rapidly and dramatically reconfigured the population with alarmingly gendered effects. Particularly in the years since the institution of the one child policy, the nation's sexual disparity in children has begun to reach extremely abnormal levels. Facilitated by the popularization of ultrasound B technology that enables sex-identification of a fetus after a woman reaches her second trimester of pregnancy, demographers argue that up to *one million* female fetuses are now aborted annually across the country (Zhang Kun, et al. 2005). Perhaps coincidentally, China also manufactured its first ultrasound machine in 1979. Though the government passed laws in 1986 and again in 1993 outlawing the practice of using ultrasound technology for the purposes of sex-selection, there has been a total lack of enforcement (Chu 2001).

In addition to sex-selective abortions, countless female children are informally adopted at the local level, kept by their birth families but never registered with the authorities or just abandoned altogether (Johnson 2004; Johnson, et al. 1998). These children—whose births are missing from official census polls—are known as China's "missing girls." According to demographers, the sex ratio at birth (SRB) for any country under normal circumstances should average between 102-107 males per 100 females born, due to male infants' increased chances of death due to birth defects or illness (Coale 1991). Due to boys' slightly higher death rates, over time the sex ratio declines to roughly 102-107 for ages 0-4, and between 100-106 for ages 0-14 (Banister 2006: 21). Chinese fertility surveys show that while the sex ratio held close to the average in the two decades preceding the onset of the one child policy, in the 1980s and after there has been a startling upsurge in the ratio of male to female births.

Since the first official census was conducted in China in 1953 up until the last census in 2000, the sex ratio of male to female children between the ages of 0-4 has steadily risen. While in the 1953 and 1964 censuses, the sex ratio goes up as children get older (denoting differential neglect of young girls under age 4), for the years 1982 and beyond, the opposite holds true (denoting girls who were probably never born). While there have been no further official censuses since 2000, Zheng (2006) reports China's sex ratio in 2004 as 121.18 boys to every 100 girls (74).

Table 2.1: Sex ratios* of children by age in China, 1953-2000

Age	1953	1964	1982	1990	1995	2000
0	104.9	103.8	107.6	111.8	116.6	117.8[11]
1	105.6	105.3	197.8	111.6	121.1	122.7
2	106.6	106.4	107.4	110.1	121.3	122.1
3	108.6	107.0	106.7	109.1	119.2	120.4
4	109.4	108.7	106.2	108.5	115.0	118.5

* Males per 100 females
Source: Banister (2006: 24)

Certain regions of China—particularly in central and southern provinces—are experiencing birth rates of more than 130 boys to every 100 girls (Li, et al. 2003; Murphy 2003). The 2000 census found that the two areas with the highest abnormal SRB in the

[11] Most other demographic accounts list the sex ratio in 2000 based on the 5th Official Census at 116.9 (Xi 2006; Zhang, et al 2005). It is unclear as to how Banister arrived at the figure 117.8.

nation were the southern areas of Guangdong Province at 130.3 and Hainan Island at 135.6 (Zheng Zhenzhen 2006).

Scholars have made multiple attempts to estimate the number of missing females in Chinese society since the sex ratio first began to become abnormal in the early 1980s. Using 102 males to 100 females as a standard, Sen (1998) calculated that as early as 1992, *48 million* females were missing in China.[12] However, his tabulation attempted to account for all age ranges within the population. Chinese demographers Zhang Kun and Zhang Songlin (2005) focused purely on the abnormal sex ratio between children born in the reform era to estimate that between 1980 and 2000, over 14 million female fetuses were sex-selectively aborted (see Table 2). They approximated that for every boy born at least one female fetus was aborted (48) and conservatively estimated that by 2005, the total number of sex-selective abortions in China had reached 25 million (49).[13]

Table 2.2: Sex ratio at birth* from 1980-2000 and estimated number of sex-selective abortions of female fetuses

Year	*Sex Ratio*	*Est. # Abortions*	*Year*	*Sex Ratio*	*Est. # Abortions*
1980	107.35	216,185	1991	113.48	839,881
1981	107.83	245,966	1992	114.61	880,846
1982	107.63	272,887	1993	115.21	888,661
1983	108.69	369,663	1994	116.59	917,944
1984	108.65	361,840	1995	117.77	1,030,501
1985	108.65	361,840	1996	118.52	973,096
1986	108.47	368,901	1997	120.44	1,047,075
1987	109.12	495,465	1998	122.07	1,113,934
1988	110.11	608,752	1999	122.65	942,628
1989	111.59	752,221	2000	116.86	797,594
1990	111.75	765,541			

*Males per 100 females.
Source: Tongji yanjiu. *"Wo guo xuanze xing rengong yinchan zaocheng de yinchan nuying shu guji" 2005, 11: 49.*

China is not alone in having an extremely abnormal SRB. Other Asian countries, particularly India, Pakistan, South Korea, and Taiwan, as well as parts of North Africa also face a similar dilemma of an abnormally low number of female infants (Das Gupta, et al 2003; Sen 1998). However, China is the only one of these countries with policies restricting child-bearing. As a result, the country now faces the highest SRB maintained over the longest period of time of any nation in the world (Zhang Erli 2005).

[12] Sen's argument regarding China is part of a larger argument he has made estimating that there are 100 million "missing women" across the globe. The major causes of this enormous difference between the sexes, he contends, are gender bias and the comparative neglect of female health and nutrition, particularly in childhood (1998). While his argument is convincing, what cannot be accounted for are countries that have patriarchal structures and gender discrimination but are not experiencing abnormal sex ratios, such as Japan and many Muslim societies (Banister 2004).

[13] Zhang, et al. (2005) argue that the lower number of estimated sex-selective abortions as well as the lower SRB in 2000 can be explained by social factors. In particular, they state that 2000 was the year of the dragon, which was considered to be an extremely auspicious time to bear a child of either sex and thus decreased the chances of abortions for any reason (49).

The Changing Rural Economic Landscape

In addition to population regulations, between 1979-1984 the Chinese government phased in an economic reform initiative in rural areas (where the vast majority of people still lived) known as the household production responsibility system. The former system of agricultural collectives, which had been in effect since 1955 and relied on collectivized land, resource pooling and a work point system, was replaced by a new structure that encouraged private business ventures. Wage incentives were implemented and land was redistributed into individual plots as a way to increase rural production (Banister 1987). Under this new arrangement, peasants became totally reliant on their own labor and that of their children for financial security: "The reforms of the early 1980s dismantled the collective, privatized health care, and virtually abolished the minimal provision for old-age security, making the family once again the core unit of production and welfare" (Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005: 219).

Shifting from collective farming to individual household production did very little to disrupt male privilege, as both systems utilized a compensation system based on manual labor. White's (2006) study of Chinese birth control planning found that the collective work-point system rewarded "labor-rich" households—those with several sons who were able to earn more grain by contributing more manual labor. In the new system, having one or more healthy sons could also make an enormous difference for rural household income. A couple with two working sons could earn about 200 *yuan* more per year than a couple with two working daughters and 400 *yuan* more than a couple with only one son. A couple with only one daughter earned merely 75% of the income earned by two-son families. "In short," White argues, "the immediate effect of the contract system was to reinforce the preference for, and the value of, male offspring" (116).

Due to a rampant sense of fiscal insecurity that has accompanied market transition, lower fertility, swift economic development and rising standards of living in China have done little to erode son preference. Total reliance on individual household production has particularly affected the rural elderly who find themselves vulnerable if they lack sons to support them in old age. While the stipulation that children must care for their parents was written into the 1983 Marriage Law, most rural parents continue to believe that sons, rather than daughters, are responsible for bearing this burden (Potter and Potter 1990). At the same time, traditions of filial piety have been destabilized as younger generations experience more mobility to cities and opportunities for off-farm employment (Yan 2003). While the parent-child "contract" of children caring for elderly parents has diminished, the economic cost of raising children has skyrocketed, causing parents to be more selective and strategic in their child-bearing and child-rearing practices. As a result,

> Parents have intensified their interest in family-building strategies and the management of resource flows to their children in order to ensure and maximize long-term returns…The tension between maintaining the parent-child contract in the face of increased child costs and the bid for smaller families has been resolved by renewing efforts to ensure the birth of sons, for the inter-generational contract is primarily and almost exclusively a parent-son contract. (Croll 2000: 112)

Despite rapidly decreasing filial piety, Pang, et al.'s (2004) survey of Chinese elderly in six rural provinces revealed that parents nonetheless still experience more economic security if they have a son. They found that among elderly couples who only had daughters, 50% live alone, while if they had at least one son, the number dropped to 30% (83). Fears about the future have inspired Chinese parents to turn their attention to bearing and rearing much smaller numbers of offspring who have the most economic earning potential to provide for them in old age, who are overwhelmingly considered to be healthy males. Thus it is clear that new fiscal realities, combined with restricted fertility, have reinvigorated Chinese cultural assumptions that boys are necessary while girls are more expendable. In the logic of the new economy, many parents believe that investing in female children is a costly detriment to their own future livelihoods.

Social Implications of the Gender Skew

Popular discussions in China include myriad predictions about the social consequences of millions of women who will be "missing" from future Chinese society. Rather than focusing on the reasons for the trend, most tend to highlight the plight that *men* will face. Journalistic accounts often predict increased rates of trafficking in women and children while Chinese government publications also tend to focus on the issue of the impending male "marriage squeeze" (*hunyin jiya*). One recent publication circulated by the Chinese Ministry of Population and Family Planning (Xi, et al. 2005) estimates that by the year 2040 there will be upwards of 30 million Chinese men between the ages of 20-49 unable to find wives within their lifetimes. The government tract warns that increased numbers of unmarried men will be harmful to Chinese society because of their "unsatisfied biological needs," leading to a weakening of morals, increased lack of sexual self-restraint and rise in female prostitution (80).

Since intensified male competition for jobs will squeeze men out of the labor market, some will be forced to do "jobs suitable for women, such as pre-school teachers and nurses…which will not be helpful to societal economic and harmonious development" (82). Throughout the rhetoric of this government publication, male interests and their right to stable, married unions and active participation in the labor force are considered essential. Indeed, other than repeated mention of the "Care for Girls" campaign, in the entire publication there is little reference to the fact that the rights of millions of female children are not being defended.

A separate, non-governmental Chinese academic publication states that according to the 2000 census, there are already 4% excess men in the marriage market (Zheng Zhenzhen 2006: 136). Rather than being the result of sex selection, this situation has been caused by better living conditions in the 1970s that brought about a decrease in male infant mortality. Zheng estimates that by the time those males born in the 1990s reach marriageable age, up to 10% will be squeezed out of the marriage market. This trend will disproportionately affect men in poorer, more remote areas of China, thus exacerbating existing social inequalities between rural and urban areas. Although the author is concerned about the likelihood of China turning into a "bachelor society", the analysis takes a feminist stance that society's intense focus on the impending male marriage squeeze is partial to male interests and ignores the root cause of bias against females (131).

While much attention focuses on issues that men will face, population regulations are also having a decidedly negative impact on women of child-bearing age. Millions of Chinese women are caught between the dual pressures of needing to bear a son in order to appease their husband's family and being forced to find semi-legal ways around family planning policies to achieve this goal. One study conducted by the Chinese Women's Federation (*Fulian*) in the 1990s found that the most common source of discrimination and abuse cited by women, particularly in the countryside, occurred as a response to not having yet borne a son. *Fulian* repeated this study in 2000 and found that 6.69% of the 9476 women they surveyed reported experiencing discrimination for not having borne a son, which ranked it the highest out of all issues, including those of employment, pay differences or educational inequities. There is also serious physical danger involved in this quest for sons, as during this process most women undergo at least one abortion after they have reached four or five months of gestation (the general time when the sex of a fetus can be determined through ultrasound).

Finally, demographers also warn that the rapid aging of the population, in combination with highly restricted child-bearing, will lead to the deterioration of care for the elderly. According to the latest data from the Ministry of Civil Affairs, China currently has 134 million people over the age of 60, accounting roughly 10% of the population. However, by the year 2040, estimates suggest that the number of people over the age of 60 will number *400 million*, comprising over 25% of the nation's population (Gu Wentong 2005: 7). Moreover, some fear that if the Chinese government does not loosen its stringent family planning regulations, the workforce and rates of economic growth will not be able to be maintained over the next century (Zeng Yi 2005; Zhang Erli 2005.) Thus it is clear that stringent control over the Chinese population has already begun to have myriad negative, avoidable outcomes for various social groups.

The "1.5 Child Policy" and Official Legitimation of Daughter Discrimination

Through its policies, the Chinese government itself has officially sanctioned son preference and corresponding discrimination against daughters. At the time of its inception in 1979, the one child policy was intended to severely restrict the growth of China's rural peasants, who still comprised 80% of residents. Along with economic reforms, this brought about a contradiction in which the switch to individual household responsibility inadvertently encouraged rural people to not only have more children but also to desire more *male* children as a way to create more labor power (White 2006; Handwerker 1993).

This intense desire for sons in rural China led to a great deal of peasant resistance, defiance of regulations and even violence enacted against birth planning officials (Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005; White 2000). As a result, beginning in 1984 the government began to relax the one-child policy in most parts of the countryside to allow for a "one-son-or-two-child-policy," commonly referred to in China as the "1.5 child policy." This policy requires couples to stop bearing children if their first child is a boy, but allows them to have a second child after a period of several years if their first-born is a girl.

Thus the one-child policy rapidly evolved into a bifurcated system of enforcement for urban and rural areas. The policy has been strictly applied in large cities, particularly

Beijing, Shanghai and Tianjin Municipalities, although it has been loosened in recent years. For rural couples, 18 of 23 provinces have one-son-or-two-child policies, while the remaining five provinces allow two children regardless of their sex (Croll 2000: 22). According to the 2000 census, the majority of women in China live in rural areas with 1.5 child policies. One demographic study found that 35.9% of women lived in areas with strict enforcement of one child per couple, while 52.9% lived in 1.5 child policy areas, 9.6% were allowed to have two children, and 1.6% were even allowed to have three children (Zeng Yi 2006). The Chinese government has also relaxed the one child policy for couples in which both sides are themselves only children, whose first child has a disability and for members of ethnic minority groups. As a result, majority ethnic provinces such as Tibet and Xinjiang have sex ratios that adhere much more closely to normal levels (Guilmoto and Attane 2005). This variability in regulations cause the term "one-child policy" to hardly be used by Chinese people at all; instead they prefer the all-encompassing term of "birth planning" (*jihua shengyu*).

While relaxing the policy to allow rural couples to try for at least one son has appeased many rural residents, it has also officially legitimated gender discrimination at the level of the family and inadvertently encouraged the abortion or abandonment of female children (Handwerker 1993; Johnson, et al. 1998). Tan (2008) concurs, "The exceptions to the population policy from the 1980s allowing couples to have a second child if the first was a girl are an example of the unwitting reinforcement of the belief that not only are sons preferable, but that daughters do not fully count as children at all" (8).

Chinese discussions of the relationship between birth control regulations and the abnormal SRB have also pinned blame on the 1.5 child policy. In a 2005 article Zhang Erli, former head of the Statistics Department of the National Family Planning Ministry (*guojia jihua shengyu weiyuanhui*), vehemently critiques state policies by quantitatively demonstrating the vastly higher SRB and rates of female infant mortality in areas living under the 1.5 child policy. Ultimately Zhang argues that population regulations as a whole must be loosened in order to resolve this dire situation (11).

Zeng Yi (2005) has also found that areas with the 1.5 child policy contribute the most to the gender skew in children. He thus advocates for a "soft-landing" to a *two-child policy* that encourages couples to wait until after the age of 23 to bear their first child, then allows them to bear a second child after an interval of five or six years as a way to lower the abnormal SRB (299).[14] A switch to a two-child system would allow many parents to fulfill their childbearing ideals, which scholars have noted tend to include *both* a son and a daughter. Although girls typically leave their households upon marriage and contribute their labor to their husbands' families, they are valued for giving crucial emotional support to their parents, particularly in old age (Greenhalgh 1993). However, sons are seen as imperative to future economic survival. Johnson (2004) has labeled this sentiment "wanting a daughter, but needing a son."

[14] In advocating for a "soft-landing" to a two-child policy, Zeng Yi advocates for "late childbearing," which would encourage women to begin bearing children after the age of 24. Women should also be forced to wait 4-5 years before bearing their second child. Adjusting the current fertility regulations, in his view, can help avoid or reduce the serious problems of high proportions of elderly people living alone, the rapid shrinking of the labor force, the imbalance of males versus females of marriageable age, and the "high economic and political expenditures for the government to implement the current fertility policy in the future." (286)

Demographers suggest that a shift to a two-child policy could help bring about a more balanced sex ratio at birth. Yet despite the urgings of Chinese academics and grand speculation that the one-child policy be relaxed, in February 2010 it was officially announced that the policy will remain unaltered during the 12th Five Year Plan period from 2011-2015 (http://www.china-wire.org/2010/02/official-one-child-policy-stays-firm-for-now/). Table 3 below summarizes Zeng Yi's demographic findings using figures from the 2000 census. As seen in the table, although sex ratios are unnatural under all configurations of family planning regulation (pointing to pervasive gender bias across the country), areas under the 1.5 child policy account for more than their share of this phenomenon.

Table 2.3: Sex ratios of areas of China according to population regulations, based on the 2000 census

Policy type	1 Child	1.5 Child	2 Child	3 Child
% of population living under policy	35.9%	52.9%	9.6%	1.6%
Regional SRB	111.6	**124.7**	109.0	108.2

Source: Zeng Yi. Zhongguo renkou yu laodong wenti de baogao. "*Lun erhai wanyu zhengce zhuolu de biyaoxing yu kexingxing*." 2005 (298).[15]

Selective Daughter Discrimination: Inequality between Girls

Though girls are being discriminated against on an unequivocally large scale in China, it is also important to bear in mind that not all girls are equally affected. There are

[15] Caveats about data: While this evidence is suggestive of the role of the 1.5 child policy in increasing the rate of missing girls, it is not complete. Ideally, longitudinal data showing that missing girl rates increase by region only *after* implementing the 1.5 child policy would provide stronger evidence. However, it is unclear whether such data have yet been made publicly available. It is also important to address the regional nature of the abnormal SRB, with the highest ratios of boys to girls occurring in certain central and southern coastal provinces. To date there has been no satisfactory explanation for regional differences. Scholars have hypothesized that a stronger focus on patrilineal descent and ancestral genealogy in southern provinces tends to maintain patriarchal norms that reinforce social pressures to bear a son. Murphy's (2004) county-level study in Jiangxi Province found that the disbanding of collective farming in the 1980s allowed for a revival of descent groups across southern China that repaired ancestral shrines and began once again to compile genealogies that recorded only the names of male group members (601).

In certain northern Chinese villages, by comparison, decollectivization and a commercializing economy have encouraged individualism, a rise in youth autonomy and independence from older generations. Yan (2003) argues that this has contributed to a "waning of the patriarchal order" evident through a new trend of young couples who are choosing to bear only one daughter even though they are technically allowed a second birth (200). While useful for illuminating cultural revival and/or transformations in local-level societies, these studies cannot account for national trends or the major disparities occurring *within* the same provinces. As Guilmoto and Attane (2005) have shown, certain counties in Anhui and Hubei exhibit nearly normal sex ratios even though surrounding areas experience skews of up to 150 boys per 100 girls. Thus it is clear that there are a host of complicated economic, political as well as cultural factors that contribute to regional differentiation in birth planning and rates of missing girls.

immense differences in life chances and opportunities faced by female children depending on geographic location and residence permit status (*hukou*). While population regulations have led to extreme discrimination against girls in the countryside, Fong (2002) argues that the one-child policy has actually had the effect of empowering "only" daughters growing up in urban areas. She found that in cities, urban daughters have greatly benefited from the strides made by their own mothers who have been more able to seek out paid employment. When women are able to express filial piety by providing financially for parents in old age, certain patriarchal norms become eroded. Hong Zhang's (2007) ethnographic study of a village in central China has found that young couples appear to be embracing raising only one child, even if that child is a girl. The study found that the increasing cash-earning opportunities for women have raised their value in rural families. While this is a promising finding, the nation's steadily rising SRB demonstrates that this is certainly not the case in most rural areas.

Recent research on the interrelated issues of sex-selective abortion, female child mortality and female infant abandonment in China all concur that the child most likely to be cast out of a family is not only a rural daughter, but a 2nd or 3rd-born daughter. Table 4 below gives the sex ratio of children based on birth order between the years of 1990-2000. While the ratio of 1st-born children adheres close to normal levels, the ratios for 2nd and 3rd children become severely skewed—pointing to differential survival of female fetuses depending on birth order.

Table 2.4: 1990-2000 sex ratios by birth parity

Year	1st child	2nd child	3rd child
1990	105.2	121.0	127.0
1995	106.4	141.1	154.3
2000	107.1	151.9	159.4

Source: Guojia tongjiju bian, *Zhongguo shehuizhong de nuhai he nanren 2005, 18*.

In addition to sex-selective abortion, discrimination against daughters occurs in other ways as well. Li et al.'s (2003) study of excess female child mortality in a rural county of Shaanxi Province also found that discrimination is highly selective. Their survey finds that the children most likely to die from neglect are girls of higher birth order who have a surviving sister. This is usually because they receive very minimal medical care in times of illness—particularly in comparison with sons.

This situation also resembles the trend of female child abandonment. Johnson, et al.'s (1998)[16] pathbreaking research found that the likelihood of a daughter being abandoned differs depending upon whether there is a son in the family. This study of 237 families in central China who had abandoned children found that the vast majority of

[16] To date Johnson et al.'s (1998) study is the only one involving interviews with Chinese parents who have abandoned their children. They provide an in-depth account of the close relationship between fertility regulations and daughter abandonment. However, as the research is quite dated and regionally specific to areas with extremely abnormal SRB; in addition, it does not factor in the high rates of abandonment of special needs children. As a result, this study—which has been heavily cited in the west—has helped to perpetuate the impression that nearly all abandoned children are healthy girls.

abandoned girls were 2nd or 3rd born daughters in families without a son (493). Although a whopping 90% of the children abandoned by parents in this study were female, only 11 of the children were first-born daughters, demonstrating that girls are definitely not wholly abandoned at will but are clearly sacrificed in order to make room for a boy.

Modernization Processes and the Marginalization of Special Needs Children

Thus far I have discussed ways in which rural economic reforms and birth control policies in China have resulted in widespread gender discrimination through the abortion and abandonment of rural girls. However, the quest for healthy sons has also resulted in a less commonly discussed axis of inequality between children that is based on health and evaluations of physical and mental ability. While daughter discrimination is a trend that has been roundly condemned by the state and the general public, there is widespread agreement that children born with any kind of special need (but particularly those with mental disabilities) lack value in Chinese society because they are less able to become productive laborers (Dikotter 1998; Zhou 2002). While developing healthy workers is clearly a logical need for market economies, the disparagement of those who are unable to work is also typical within socialist societies. Kligman (1998), who studied reproduction in Romania under Ceausescu, asserts that during socialism individuals were divided into productive and non-productive categories: "the label of nonproductive member of society consigned them to isolation and neglect as nonpersons…those who did not or could not labor in the interest of achieving socialism were deemed 'parasites' eating away at the healthy, disciplined body of 'the people'" (24-5). Though little has been written about Chinese attitudes towards disability during the Mao era, the workpoint system practically guaranteed that individuals were also split according to physical ability.

Over the years that China has industrialized, the total number of children born has plummeted while the rate of those born with congenital issues has shot up. The government tends to blame this situation on the "backwardness" of rural people who pass down hereditable illnesses because they do not have wide enough "marriage circles" (a euphemism for in-breeding). Population researcher Liang Jimin (2004) estimates that 30% of rural people marry within their own town, 57% within their township and 83% within their county. He writes:

> If we want to change this situation, the market economy needs to be vigorously developed to make hundreds of millions of peasants become mobile. From the basic level of expanding the marriage circle, in this way can we effectively lower hereditary illnesses, and thus guarantee improvement in China's physical quality. (91-92)

Though the actions of individual citizens obviously contribute to children's disabilities, I believe there is evidence that sweeping state-driven changes in China's political economy have played an even larger role in the creation of this issue. Similar to the "missing girls" dilemma, the increase in special needs children is another unintended consequence of economic and demographic transformation.

To provide a broad overview, the Household Responsibility System that decollectivized rural communes in the early 1980s also had the effect of stripping the

countryside of a comprehensive social welfare safety net. Collective funds that were once used to care for vulnerable citizens in the past wholly disappeared, placing the entire responsibility for sick or disabled children on families (Wong 1998). During the same period of time the Chinese healthcare system was also privatized, which had an enormous effect on rural villagers' access to health and pre-natal care. Between 1952 and 1982, all hospitals and medical care were coordinated by the central government, and the Chinese healthcare system gained world-wide attention for achieving enormous improvements.

Thanks to the work of roughly one million "barefoot doctors" (young peasants who received basic medical training and provided healthcare and hygiene lessons in villages), rates of infectious diseases and maternal and child mortality dropped. During the period of collectivization, a health insurance system that was funded through the agricultural commune system covered an impressive 90% of the rural population. However, with the dismantling of rural communes the funding base for insurance fell through, leaving around 90% of China's 900 million peasants totally uninsured (Yip and Hsiao 2008).

As the central government's share of healthcare spending has plummeted, the Chinese healthcare system is now plagued with rising costs that hospitals offset with a range of expensive high-tech services and pharmaceutical sales. This has led to a major disparity in healthcare access that privileges the rising middle class while becoming increasingly less affordable to average or poor citizens; some analysts argue that this trend in China is even more drastic than the much-critiqued American healthcare system (Blumenthal and Hsiao 2005).

In order to receive care at Chinese hospitals, it is standard to first receive a consultation, after which one is required to pay the entire cost of estimated expenses up front and in cash. After treatment is completed, the hospital returns any remaining money. In this system, paying out-of-pocket medical costs can push families with special needs children into poverty. One consequence is that many rural parents bring their ailing children to urban centers to seek out more advanced medical care and end up abandoning them at hospitals, police stations or at orphanage gates (Shang et al. 2005).

Zhang Xiulan's (2006) report for UNICEF on the causes of child abandonment in China contends that the fault lies with the government's total lack of social welfare provisions. She writes,

> Families with children with disabilities can get neither extra financial nor medical help from the government. Welfare services for these families, such as social work and rehabilitation, are simply not available. Any medical treatment for the children…has to be paid for by their own parents. Many parents simply cannot afford to pay the costs of medical care for their children with disabilities (2).

One evening in an informal discussion with two *ayi* at the Tomorrow's Children facility, I asked them why they thought so many children were being abandoned. They both agreed that poverty was the major factor and that parents couldn't afford to treat children's illnesses. One woman elaborated, "And now that people are only allowed to have one child, everyone wants a 'normal' child" (*shei dou yao zhengchang de haizi*), referring to offspring without any physical or mental abnormalities.

In addition to the lack of government aid for families with disabled or ill children, a strong cultural stigma against congenital disease or deformity has historically been interpreted by Chinese people as symbolic punishment for the wrongdoings of ancestors. Qiu (1999) notes, "Given that a defective newborn child is traditionally called a 'monster fetus,' it is not surprising to find little in the way of familial or social support" (30).

Holroyd's (2003) study of parental caregivers of intellectually disabled youth in Hong Kong also explores this cultural bias, arguing that "an imperfect or diseased body or mind is seen as incomplete and without moral standing" (10). Cultural stigma also affects family members who often find themselves isolated and socially marginalized alongside their children. Even more importantly, parents can find it especially difficult to care for special needs youth because they disrupt cultural expectations of familial reciprocity. Holroyd found that between parents and their intellectually disabled offspring, "the 'natural' progression of patterns of reciprocity that flow over into ancestry and birth is neither immediate, in the form of gratitude, nor generalized, in the form of delayed care, with debts never able to be reclaimed" (18). Within China proper, these attitudes, in combination with the lack of government assistance, contribute to the higher likelihood of special needs children to be abandoned.

From "Quantity" to "Quality": Children's Bodies and Chinese Modernity

In October 2007 Jiang Fan, vice-minister of China's National Population and Family Planning Commission, delivered a speech at a conference on the prevention of birth defects. He outlined the rapid escalation in the number of children born with congenital defects across the country in recent years: in 2001 the rate was 104.9 per 10,000 births, while in 2006 it had grown to 145.5 in 2006—a nearly 40% increase over the course of half a decade. According to recent governmental statistics, of the 20 million babies born in China each year, roughly 800,000 to 1.2 million are now born with some form of illness or disability. Only 20-30% of these infants can be cured or treated, while 40% suffer from lifelong problems and the remaining 30-40% die soon after birth. The financial costs to families to care for these children have been estimated to number well into the billions.

This state-sponsored speech drew a direct connection between China's international competitiveness and the quality of the population, calling for increased public awareness about the need to eradicate physical and mental abnormalities in children and the nation's economic viability in the global marketplace. In no uncertain terms, Jiang argued that special needs children are endangering "China's comprehensive national strength, its international competitiveness, sustainable socio-economic development, as well as the realization of our strategic vision to construct a full-scale well-off society" (*China Daily* 10/30/07). The speech was highly publicized in sensationalized terms, with the headline in the *China Daily* declaring "Baby Born with Birth Defects Every 30 Seconds."

The profound eugenic assumptions underlying this speech point to a tightly interwoven relationship between individual bodies and state goals of economic progress in the reform era. Special needs children run counter to earlier state-created definitions of what constitutes a strong "modern" body. Many feel that both families and society would be better off if special needs children were never born (Qiu 1999; Dikotter 1998).

In a proactive effort to prevent "inferior births", in 1995 the government implemented the Maternal and Infant Health Law. Originally named the "Eugenics Law" (it was changed after outcries from western countries) it required couples to submit to an in-depth health examination that tested for serious genetic, infectious and mental disorders or diseases before they were allowed to marry. If a detected disorder was deemed serious, the couple was not permitted to marry without agreeing to contraception or tubal ligation. After receiving years of negative international media attention, pre-marital health checks were made voluntary in 2003 under the guise of protecting individual rights. As a result, very few couples now choose to undergo these invasive exams. While foreign observers have lauded this shift, many Chinese academics now worry that the lack of governmental oversight has led to the large increase in children being born with special needs (*South China Morning Post*, "End of Checkups Fuels Fear of More Disabled Babies", 5/5/2004).

Concerns about disabilities are not new to the reform era—they are a modern incarnation of long-standing governmental and intellectual angst over the health of the body politic and the future of the Chinese nation. As Dikotter (1998) explains, after the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911 intellectuals looked to improvements in science and technology to create healthier citizens and cultivate Chinese civilization and modernity, which they perceived to be completely lacking. They considered scientifically-based eugenic discourses and practices of "selective breeding" that were prevalent in some western societies during the early 20th century as the key to preventing societal degeneration. The struggling nation was often referred in biologizing terms as a "sick person" whose "backwardness" was attributed to the poor physical quality of the mostly rural population: "the strengthening of the population and the improvement of the race were…the essential prerequisites for national survival, an immense effort in which every single individual was meant to participate actively by closely monitoring his or her reproductive potential" (Dikotter 1998: 69).

More specific to children, Fu's (2010) study of anthropometrics (the science of measuring the size, weight and proportions of the human body) uses large-scale official Chinese scientific surveys from the 1930s of children's height and weight to demonstrate how bodily health was equated with national potential. The physical measurement of children created new conceptions of what constituted the modern Chinese body, which was largely viewed as "a body absent of specific weaknesses and deficiencies" (30). Governmental anxiety about deformity and disease led to placing a high value on any indication of positive growth in children's height, weight or chest expansion. Fu asserts, "Where there was positive growth, there was good health, and by extension, a strong nation" (16).

China closed itself off to the outside world after 1949 and eschewed western influence and scientific practices for nearly thirty years, but in the 1970s discussions about population quality were reignited as the country opened up. Akin to the sentiments expressed by their counterparts in the early part of the 20th century, contemporary intellectuals began again to express concern that if China aimed to be considered on par with the industrialized west and Japan, the overall quality of the population needed to be raised (Tang 2005; Mu 1995). Because good health is linked to the nation's productive capacity, ill and disabled youth are seen as not only incapable of contributing to national progress, but as actually impeding it through their very existence.

Suzhi Discourse and the Creation of "Useful" and "Useless" Bodies

How has the discourse of "quality" *(suzhi)* helped to provide ideological justification for the government's interventions into family life and for the large-scale discrimination against special needs children? The direct correlation between raising high quality individuals and China's future global success has helped to justify the need for smaller families and transformed perceptions of children's social value. In an era marked by competition and insecurity, offspring who are perceived as having less economic potential run a much higher risk of relinquishment. As Anagnost (2004) asserts, "The politics of *suzhi* become a struggle for recognition as a body of value, in which some bodies are recognized as having more value than others and therefore more deserving of the rights of citizenship" (194).

As I've explored throughout this chapter, since the late 1970s population has been viewed as a foremost causal factor in the nation's inability to modernize and has been used to justify increased state surveillance, regulation and intervention in childbearing practices. As a result, the national fertility rate has dropped to levels that rival those in western industrialized nations. For example, in 2008 total fertility in China averaged 1.77 live births per woman, lower than both Norway and Sweden (http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN. TFRT.IN?cid=GPD_11). It's been estimated that more than *400 million* births have been prevented in China since the implementation of population regulations (*China Daily*, "Population Policy Will Stay for Now," 3/10/2008). Scholars argue that as the fertility rate has become less of an issue, state goals have shifted towards increasing population quality. As a more subtle form of social engineering, this aspect of China's population program has worked through establishing new, scientifically-based standards that define modern personhood.

Suzhi is a fluid and multivalent term that refers both to the quality of a population (usually expressed in national terms) or of individual human beings. It is focused around quantifiable, changeable (i.e., improvable) human attributes that are measured according to three major categories: bodily quality (*shenti suzhi*), educational/cultural quality (*kexue wenhua suzhi)* and moral quality (*sixiang daode suzhi*). Like its historical antecedents, contemporary quality discourse is also framed in terms of deficiency and tends to be defined as something that is "missing"—"a problem defined by its absence" and proof that "the historical weakness of the Chinese nation can be relocated within individuals" (Woronov 2003: 18).

High quality persons are characterized as cosmopolitan, well-educated, entrepreneurial, innovative, physically fit *and* mentally equipped to compete on the global labor market (Bakken 2000). It is expected that individuals should not only be creative and independent thinkers able to achieve personal success, and they should also use their skills on behalf of others and the nation: "high quality subjects are those who will implement the new economy, bring China into its position of global respect and fulfill its historical destiny" (Woronov 2003: 18). The state promotes the idea that rearing healthy "high quality" children is a *collective* project that will help China achieve its goals of economic and social modernization, which helps to sublimate individual reproductive desires to those of the nation (Dikotter 1998).

The power of this discourse lies in its variable and unfixed nature, governing both thought and behavior. In various conversations I had with Chinese people about what

suzhi actually means, they were generally unable to give exact definitions. "High quality" was associated with education and being "cultured" (*you wenhua*). When I was visiting an orphanage in central China an official approached me after finding out I was from the United States. He told me that his sister who was studying for a master's degree in California had been really impressed that cars stop to allow pedestrians to cross the street, something that he felt demonstrated the higher quality of American society.

In comparison, people I met in China were able to raise myriad examples of "low quality" behavior in China. They discussed a range of ideas and practices, such as believing that boys are better than girls, corrupt election practices, lack of education or uncouth behavior such as cutting in line or public spitting. In fact, during the time I was conducting fieldwork Beijing was attempting to combat bad manners in order to clean up its image prior to hosting the 2008 Summer Olympic Games. It had instituted a large-scale "Civility Campaign" that encouraged the city's commuters to line up in an orderly fashion at bus stations and subway stations. The 11th of each month was designated "Polite Queuing Day" and employed thousands of citizens (who sported satiny red sashes inscribed with the words "It's civilized to line up, it's glorious to be polite") to monitor line-jumping at public venues. An anti-spitting campaign was also implemented, imposing stiff fines of up to 50 *yuan* ($6.50) for those caught spitting in public (*New York Times*, "No Spitting on the Road to Olympic Glory, Beijing Says," 4/17/2007). Chinese people correlated individual behavior with national image and worried that foreigners might think that Chinese people as a whole were of low quality.

Because *suzhi* can continually be improved through external intervention, this helps to justify this type of governmental influence over public behavior, as well as over the realms of reproduction, childrearing, educational and economic practices (Murphy 2004). In the contemporary PRC quality discourse has helped to shape new standards of social acceptability depending on one's potential to become productive laborers who will achieve on behalf of one's parents and the Chinese nation. In line with Foucault's (1985) notion of "bio-power," *suzhi* divides the population into categories of economically useful and useless depending on bodily capabilities and the ability to be trained and disciplined according to governmental objectives. Sigley (2009) elaborates,

> In its most extreme form *suzhi* functions as a measure of human value which, through a commoditization and dehumanization of the body, constructs a hierarchy of worthiness and utility...Most alarmingly of all, it also finds its way into brutal determinations of what constitutes "nonvalue" (or "nonhuman"), thereby contributing to the articulation in the Chinese context of a concept of "life devoid of value" (538-9).

Raising the nation's quality through family planning and developing a strong workforce is seen as necessary for national development. As the next generation of Chinese citizens and laborers, children in particular are integral to this process. Correspondingly, the family has become an apparatus of domination through which children's bodies and subjectivities are shaped and constructed. The market logic that underlies this discourse has been internalized by ordinary people, who feel pressured to regulate and develop their own quality and that of their children above and beyond what is imposed by the state. Thus, encouraging citizens to invest more energy and resources

in fewer children is an extremely effective form of social engineering because it appears subtle and non-coercive (Jun Jing 2000). Rather than people being aware that they are being controlled by an oppressive state, *suzhi* actually "bolsters the government's attempt to cast itself as a modernistic and compassionate regime" (4).

Conclusion

In reform era China rapid change and insecurities about the future have overhauled prior understandings of families, reproduction and children's social value. As stringent constraints on size have been enacted, the modern Chinese child has become a "fetishized object" of parental and societal investment. Anagnost (1997) argues that this has resulted in a societal-wide deepening obsession with cultivating the mental and physical development of offspring,

> the child becomes a repository of stored value against the uncertainties of rapid economic development. Even as China appears to be approaching its long-awaited 'historical destiny' as a modern world power, it also brings great uncertainties about family security and political stability that become focused on the child (197).

The shift to individual household responsibility has increasingly caused children to be considered invaluable economic resources in a time of increased financial instability. In this fraught context, population regulations and their accompanying discourses are having manifold effects upon Chinese society. As parents are encouraged by the state to focus their resources and energy on rearing "high quality" offspring, children are being sorted into advantaged and disadvantaged sectors of society according to sex and health/bodily ability.

As governmental provision of social welfare benefits has disappeared and fertility has been greatly restricted, it has become essential to bear children who have the most projected economic potential. More than ever before, in many rural areas that continue to be structured according to patrilineal and patrilocal customs, having at least one healthy son is considered by many parents to be integral for survival in old age. This has led to an unprecedented stratification of children based on sex. As a result, millions of female children who are deemed as having low economic value are often not being born at all. While this preference for sons is viewed by certain scholars to be a result of Chinese "tradition," I have argued that seemingly traditional preferences have been revived and reshaped by transforming political and economic conditions.

In the contemporary period, understandings of the value of children's bodies have been reshaped and now operate as a powerful mechanism for sorting youth into advantaged and disadvantaged sectors of society depending on their perceived future utility. Unlike rural daughters who are valued for the emotional care that they provide to parents and would likely be kept and raised if there were no fertility regulations (Johnson 2004), disabled youth are often considered to be totally without social or economic value. Special needs children are seen as representing the underside of modernity and a major obstacle to China's global economic progress.

State media warn against the potential harm that babies with disabilities wreak on families and society. One example reads:

> It goes without saying that a baby with a birth defect will greatly diminish the happiness that the addition of a new member brings to the family. The medical expenses and worries about the future of such babies will affect adversely the family's economy and psychology. The increasing number of such newborns will, at the same time, become a heavy burden on social security. (*China Daily*, "Rising Birth Defects", 9/15/2009).

Certain governmental officials and medical experts have even gone as far as suggesting that babies with disabilities be euthanized (Zhou 2002). Such pronouncements reinforce the idea that individual reproductive desires should be sublimated to the goals of the nation. Greenhalgh (2010) asserts that western observers have tended to fixate on the coercive aspects of China's fertility regulations—particularly on the one-child policy of 1978. Yet in so doing they have overlooked the immense ideological influence that *suzhi* has enacted on the population, which works "not so much by oppressing people as by changing who they are—their sense of self, their bodies, their desires and their hopes for the future" (49). As Chinese citizens have increasingly internalized new standards of social acceptability, individuals have come to feel responsible for cultivating a higher level of quality for themselves and their offspring in particular.

The state project of improving population quality is a form of social engineering that is articulating new categories of citizenship and non-citizenship. The creation of new models of social acceptability makes invisible millions of children who fall outside the state-sanctioned norm. *Suzhi* links to long-standing concerns about the future of China and its improvement and is ultimately considered the key to creating a "modern" and "civilized" nation. As such, it marks boundaries between socially useful or useless bodies, which establishes "their eligibility for inclusion in or exclusion from an idealized socialist body politic" (Friedman 2004: 688). Thus, the values embodied by *suzhi* discourse can be viewed as comprising a form of social engineering that is articulating new categories of personhood—literally, the right to become a living person in many cases.

While China's quality discourse is often justified through western science and thus appears objective in its motivations (Greenhalgh 2003b) it also demonstrates the ways in which control, domination and manipulation of population can be used to maintain socialist state power in an unstable period. By creating new standards of social acceptability for children and making individuals responsible for the quality of themselves and their offspring, it "diverts attention away from deficiencies and inequities resulting from structures, institutions, and practices either created, or endorsed by, the state" (Jacka 2006: 41).

As "sites of national salvation" (Anagnost 1997), children embody China's future. Yet, how they are differentially affected and stratified by economic reforms, birth control regulations and state-driven discourses of population remains a vastly understudied topic. Because children live at the intersection of shifting value systems and cultural norms, this

trend helps illuminate the complexities located at the axes of gender, ability, class and changing governmental power in an era of rapid modernization.

Chapter 3

Reversal of Fortune:
Adoption and the Heightened Social Value of Healthy Daughters

On May 10, 2010, the National Public Radio show Marketplace aired a segment entitled "The Dark Side of Chinese Adoptions." The lengthy piece featured interviews with a Chinese grandmother, Chen Zhijing, and her son Duan Yueneng, both of whom were convicted in 2006 of selling 85 babies to a range of welfare institutes in Hunan Province (the actual number of children that they trafficked is estimated to be in the hundreds and perhaps even over 1000). In the late 1990s Chen, a former orphanage worker, would occasionally bring in infants to her workplace infants whom she had found abandoned in public places. At first the orphanage reimbursed only her travel costs, but in 2000 it began asking her to supply more children. By 2005 Chen was earning up to $500 U.S. for each infant; this also happened to be the year that transnational adoptions from China reached their peak, with a total of 14,493 infants sent abroad to 16 different industrialized nations (Selman 2010).[17]

Chen soon enlisted the help of her son Duan, who recruited his wife, aunt and other family members to the baby-selling business. They located a supplier 600 miles away in Guangdong Province with a steady source of "unwanted" female children who had allegedly been abandoned at local hospitals. The group then transported the babies by train to Hunan—sometimes in cardboard boxes—and sold them to six social welfare institutes. As proof, Duan candidly showed the reporter (himself the adoptive father of a Chinese child) official documents, which included orphanage receipts, bank transfers and orphanage logs. These records listed purposely falsified information about children, such as their abandonment locations and the name of the person who found them. Duan had also kept children's adoption papers and had accurate information about a number of foreign adoptive parents, including copies of their passports. He stated matter-of-factly that this was a business had sprung up around foreign demand for Chinese children: "We sold babies to orphanages. Others did, too. They bought them because foreigners wanted them, and then made big profits when the babies were adopted." By this he was referring to the $3000 U.S. cash "adoption fee" that foreign parents are required to pay directly to their child's orphanage, often in crisp $100 bills.

Chinese authorities uncovered these illicit activities in late 2005. In a highly publicized trial, nine of the suppliers and one welfare center director were ultimately convicted of child trafficking and are serving sentences of between one and 15 years. Duan has recently been set free after being imprisoned for five years. Both he and his mother are unapologetic about their actions, asserting that they kept the best interests of these children in mind when they sold them into foreign adoption. Though it was never clear whether the children they trafficked were purchased for profit or legitimately abandoned, in their view they had helped to provide thrown-away youth with extensive

[17] In 2006 the China Center for Adoption Affairs reported having adoption ties with 16 countries: the United States, Spain, Canada, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, France, Australia, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, New Zealand, the UK and Singapore. In 2008 an adoption agreement was made with Italy. (Selman forthcoming).

life opportunities that they otherwise would not have had in Chinese society. Chen stated, "We all had the same purpose: to help orphanages do a good thing."

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This story highlights a transnational process that is fundamentally altering the lives of China's institutionalized children. Since the Chinese government first began allowing foreign adoptions in 1992, over 120,000 children, most of them healthy girls, have been sent to a wide range of western industrialized countries (Selman 2010). This state supervised and regulated circulation of children between Chinese orphanages and western families involves a complicated overlapping of care and children's best interests with practices of commodification in a globalized market. It has also been a key avenue through which globalization has been able to reach into the formerly hidden world of state-run orphanages and opened the way for an influx of foreign resources and involvement.

In Chapter 2 I mapped out a complicated constellation of social, political, economic and cultural factors that have resulted in the large-scale abandonment of healthy rural daughters and special needs youth to state care. Children relinquished to institutions have generally been perceived as lacking the potential to provide financially for their parents in the future or to further the nation's larger goals of social and economic development. As I discussed earlier, in a time of restricted fertility, gender bias and preferences for sons are primary reasons for the abandonment of "excess" rural daughters. This chapter will explore a sort of paradox: seen as less valued than sons, daughters are far more likely to be abandoned, but within the socially set-apart space of orphanages, healthy girls experience a "reversal of fortune" since gender operates in surprising and unexpected ways to make them desirable for adoption. Foreign demand for healthy female children has elevated them from the very bottom rungs of Chinese society to the top of a global circuit, a process which transforms them into modern, "high quality" objects of western love and affection.

In this chapter I continue to investigate the context-specific nature of children's social value, which is transfigured as youths move from local to national and then to global scales of analysis. As the value of girls to families becomes transfigured on an international level, their male counterparts—most with some type of special need but also including some who are completely healthy—tend to remain behind in institutions. These children are positioned and then repositioned within several layers of stratification. First, larger Chinese social processes sort children into valued and devalued categories of personhood, resulting in the abandonment of the devalued. Abandoned children then may encounter global processes that separate them into different groups depending on their perceived "adoptability."

The gendered paradox that has been created by transnational adoption has also been greatly exacerbated by the desire of native Chinese citizens to adopt daughters. Although many westerners tend to assume that issues of bloodline prevent Chinese people from adopting unrelated children, informal practices of child circulation have long played an important role in traditional family formation (Johnson 2004; Wolf and Huang 1980). However, the official opening of welfare institutes to international adoption has also created more legal avenues through which PRC citizens can secure children, which

has somewhat ironically put Chinese families in direct competition with foreigners for the same population of youth.

Beyond the level of the family, transnational adoption is also implicated in China's project of modernization. I suggest that official adoption regulations that have been implemented since the early 1990s mirror the nation's dramatic increase in resources, power and global status. Policies originally favored foreigners and restricted Chinese citizens from adopting as a way to provide resources for financially strapped welfare institutes and to enforce stringent birth control regulations. However, as the total supply of healthy adoptable girls has been reduced (Meier and Zhang 2008), the Chinese government has come to severely limit the eligibility of western parents while facilitating many more domestic placements. Even so, the immensely profitable nature of transnational adoption has provided welfare institutes with great incentive to continue supplying healthy girls to foreigners (often by using any means possible), while Chinese natives can often only adopt children from institutes that do not participate in the international program (http://research-china.blogspot.com/2006/06/ hague-agreement-and-chinas.html).

In this chapter I will trace the global reversal of fortune that healthy girls experience as gender shifts from being a social detriment to an advantage within state-run orphanages. I will also discuss broader implications by exploring how the Chinese state has consciously utilized transnational adoption to improve the lives of abandoned children and provide resources for its decentralized welfare system, but also to further its own economic and political objectives. Specifically, China has capitalized on the popularity of its children as objects of adoption to create deeper ties with the global north. However, I contend that the increasingly tight control that the government has wielded over foreign adoptions demonstrates the nation's growing influence and confidence in its ability to assert itself on the global stage.

From "Missing Girls" to Western Sweethearts

The transformation of Chinese adoptees from "endangered daughters" (Croll 2000) to priceless objects of western love and affection is a well-documented emotional and physical journey. Girls have tended to be adopted by foreign parents whose demographics fit within Chinese state definitions of acceptability: primarily white, affluent, educated, older and married.[18]

Despite the variety of children who reside in state orphanages, the demographic of adopted children has also been quite homogeneous. According to INS Immigration Statistics, in 2006 the composite of children adopted by Americans was 91% female, with 44% less than one year old and 52% between the ages of one and four (http://www. adoptivefamilies.com/china_adoption.php). For reasons that are unclear, adoptees have also tended to originate from the same relatively small number of southern Chinese

[18] One large-scale quantitative study of parents who have adopted from China analyzed in *West Meets East: Americans Adopt Chinese Children* (Tessler, et al. 1999) can be used to sketch the social, race and class-privileged nature of the group. Of 526 adoptive parents who were surveyed, 96% self-identified as white; the median household income was $70,000 (with 21% of households reporting incomes of $130,000 or higher in 1995); the mean age was roughly 43 years old; and all had completed at least four years of college—with 65% reporting at least some kind of graduate study (76). Because adoption regulations have become even more stringent, it is highly probable that these characteristics remain fairly accurate.

provinces, especially Guangdong, Jiangxi, Anhui, Hunan and Guangxi. These provinces are also experiencing some of the most abnormal sex ratios at birth, which correlates to the higher number of abandoned girls in these areas. However, why son preference appears to be stronger in southern China than other regions has yet to be systematically investigated.

Foreign adoptive parents are united through the support group Families with Children from China (FCC)—a non-profit organization that has local branches in all 50 American states, Canada and the UK. On various listserves and at in-person gatherings, adoptive parents engage in endless discussions and debates about every imaginable aspect regarding China and their children, both pre- and post-adoption (www.fwcc.org).[19] Chinese adoptees have been readily accepted into American pop culture, as evidenced by a recent Walmart commercial that features a white mother happily shopping with her Chinese daughter or the character Charlotte on HBO's "Sex and the City" whose series of failed in-vitro treatments inspires her to adopt a "Mandarin child". This trend has also inspired a vast market of services and products geared towards Chinese adoptees, including a range of children's books and myriad personal memoirs written by parents about their adoption experiences and subsequent return trips they have taken to China to search for clues about girls' early histories (Evans 2000; Prager 2002; Gammage 2007).

In addition, because the ranks of adoptive parents include a significant proportion of academics, a plethora of scholarly studies have been conducted to assess everything from children's behavioral adjustment to their new contexts (Bruder et al. 2009; Miller 2005), physiological development (Miller and Hendrie 2000), language acquisition (Tan and Yang 2005; Nicoladis and Grabois 2002), to their racial/ethnic identity formation in white families (Johnston, et al. 2007; Thomas and Tessler 2007; Adams, et al. 2005; Rojewski 2005; Tan and Nakkula 2004; Rojewski and Rojewski 2001). Due to the enormous amount of discussion and media attention that Chinese adoptions have generated, it often seems as though there are huge numbers of adopted girls residing around the globe. Yet this is not actually the case. The following table carefully compiled by Selman (forthcoming) chronologically lists the numbers of children who have been sent to the top six western receiving nations since 1992.

[19] FCC chapters have three main goals: 1) to support families that have adopted from China through post-adoption and Chinese cultural programs, 2) to encourage adoption from China and support families waiting to adopt, and 3) to advocate for and support children remaining in Chinese orphanages in China. (http://fwcc.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7&Itemid=16)

Table 3.1: Adoptions from China, 1992-2009 (Annual totals for top six receiving nations)

Nation	1992-1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	1992-2009
USA	10,383	4206	4101	5053	4681	5053	6859	7044	7906	6493	5453	3909	**74,142**
Spain	n/a	196	261	475	941	1,427	1,043	2,389	2,753	1,759	1,059	619	**12,922**
Canada	2,652	901	697	604	618	771	1,108	1,001	973	608	658	429	**11,020**
NLands	479	210	271	457	445	510	567	800	666	362	365	299	**5,431**
Sweden	484	123	123	165	220	316	373	497	462	314	280	206	**3,811**
France	7	23	57	105	130	210	360	491	458	314	176	144	**2,577**
TOTAL	15,000+	6,128	5,948	7,460	7,753	9,165	11,228	13,404	14,493	10,738	8,753	5,961	**120,000+**

Thus, the transracial and transnational character of adoptive families make them highly visible even though the 74,000+ Chinese children only make up a tiny fraction of adopted children in the U.S. In comparison, the 2000 U.S. census found that there were more than two *million* adopted youth under the age of 18, of which 12.5% were internationally adopted (http://www. census.gov/prod /2003pubs/censr-6.pdf). The only other Asian country that has adopted out more children than China is South Korea. Since 1955 it has sent roughly 200,000 children overseas, approximately half of whom have been adopted by American families.[20] Yet in comparison with Korean adoptees, Chinese girls have garnered a disproportionate amount of media attention. This overwhelming public interest in the lives of Chinese adoptees is likely due to a number of factors, including the rapid speed by which these adoptees have entered industrialized societies, the rise of technology that has facilitated online discussion/information sharing and—perhaps most relevant—the growing awareness and interest in China as a global superpower.

Gender as an Advantage for Healthy Girls in Institutional Settings

Practices of both international and domestic adoption from Chinese welfare institutes have led to a transformation in the social value of healthy abandoned daughters.

[20] Between 1955 and 1998, around 150,000 South Korean children were adopted overseas. Approximately 100,000 of those adopted were sent to American families, while the rest were adopted by European families. During the 1980s and early 1990s In the United States, South Korean adoption accounted for over half of the total international adoptions. This practice solicited negative international attention during the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul. Eleana Kim (2003) notes that adoption had become a business which brought in $15 to $20 million per year and served as a "cost-effective way of dealing with social welfare problems" (64). Facing international scrutiny, the South Korean government began reducing transnational placements and encouraging domestic adoption. Although the nation continues to send children out of the country for adoption, the total numbers have dropped from a peak of 8,837 children in 1985 to 1,080 in 2009 (http://www.adoption.state.gov/news/total_chart.html).

Why are girls so desirable to both foreign (primarily American)[21] and native Chinese adoptive parents? In the U.S., adoptive parents tend to share a general preference for daughters (Baccara, et. al 2010), a desire which also intersects with racialized preferences. Especially in contrast to stigmatized African American children who are available for adoption domestically, Chinese children are considered to be racially "flexible" and therefore more assimilable into white families and broader American society (Dorow 2006b). In comparison, in the PRC the reasons have more to do with gender and family. Specifically, the cultural perception of females as less related to their natal family places them in an ambiguous social position that both contributes to their abandonment *and* allows them to enter more easily into Chinese adoptive families than boys.

Western Child-Saving and the Racial "Flexibility" of Chinese Daughters

Throughout the 1990s China's international adoption program became well-known for having an efficient, predictable process as well as the ability to guarantee a healthy daughter. Although overseas adoptions have been common practice in the U.S. for more than half a century, no other sending country had ever dispatched such a highly skewed population of children; until the past few years healthy girls comprised an estimated 95% of all adoptees. In the early 1990s, "China's difficulty with an overabundance of abandoned female infants correlated almost perfectly with the desire of adoptive parents in the west to adopt female infants" (Luo and Smolin 2004: 604). Therefore the supply of children and the demand of mostly white parents were fairly evenly matched.

Recently scholars have discovered distinct gender preferences among American parents depending on whether children are biological or adopted. By comparing the sex of biological offspring in a family with marriage and divorce rates in the U.S., Dahl and Moretti (2008) found that if they have a biological son, men are slightly more likely to get married (in the event of a partner's pregnancy) and stay married. This provides evidence for the existence of a certain degree of son preference in western contexts, which is a largely male-driven phenomenon that can have severe negative financial repercussions for female-only households.

However, this trend markedly reverses within the realm of adoption. In a recent study of mostly white American parents who seek to adopt a child domestically, economists Baccara, et al. (2010) discovered a measurable preference for girls. While the authors do not fully explain the reasons for this preference, they propose that it may relate to gendered perceptions of boys as difficult and girls as easier to manage. In other words, adoptive parents may "fear dysfunctional social behavior in adopted children and perceive girls as 'less risky' than boys in that respect" (3). A Slate.com article hypothesizes that women might tend to exhibit preferences for adoptive daughters that is comparable to men's preferences for (biological) sons. Since women are also usually the major instigators of adoption, they may make a concerted effort to secure a girl (John Gravois, "Bringing Up Babes: Why Do Adoptive Parents Prefer Girls?", 1/16/2004).

[21] Though China has an adoption agreement with 16 countries, the vast majority of children are sent to the United States. Therefore, this analysis will focus specifically on the American context and does not seek to generalize across the range of western nations that receive Chinese children.

In addition to gender preferences, in the U.S. desire for children is also deeply racialized in ways that are favorable to Chinese girls. For example, Baccara et al.'s (2010) aforementioned study found that mostly white prospective adoptive parents are *seven times* more likely to exhibit an interest in a non-African American baby than in an African American baby. Understandings of children's adoptability depending upon race and origin are socially constructed and create a hierarchy of desirability. Ortiz and Briggs (2003) contend that this is due to the influence of prevalent American societal discourses about poverty and reproduction. These racialized discourses, which have painted low-income blacks as reproducers of a culture of poverty and as irresponsible bearers of "crack babies," have led poor children of color to be seen as "damaged goods" forever tainted by the immoral choices of their parents. In comparison, a separate, more positively-framed set of discourses regarding economic development in Third World contexts tend to portray orphaned children abroad as innocent victims who can easily be redeemed through adoption and being raised in the U.S.:

> Unlike the poor of the First World…whose families are constructed as perverse rejecters of social norms, the rural Third World poor are romanticized as malleable innocents who can take advantage of the opportunities passed up by the dysfunctional domestic underclass. This makes their children the innocent of the innocent—a bare canvas upon which American-ness can be reproduced, an image not just of (adoptive) parents, but of the supremely modern (Ortiz and Briggs 2003: 41-2).

This racialized construction of children's adoptability constitutes Chinese girls as unquestionably deserving of rescue and redemption. Due to their foreign origins, their entrance into white adoptive families is often perceived by parents as a *transcultural* experience—rather than *transracial*, a term that is usually reserved for the adoption of black children into white homes (Wang 2005). Moreover, favorable perceptions of Chinese adoptees are bolstered by the powerful societal stereotype of Asians as hardworking, family-oriented and professionally/academically successful "model minorities." This common understanding of Asian Americans has pushed them into the realm of "honorary whites" (Tuan 1998), which promotes positive attitudes towards adoptees' cultural and racial backgrounds. Regardless of reality, which is always complex and varied, adoptive parents consider Chinese girls to be "innately intelligent and fairly trouble free to raise…and free of problems associated with fetal alcohol syndrome, crack addiction, institutional neglect, and other problems attributed to [those who are] domestically adopted (read black)" (Louie 2009: 305).

Moreover, children's specifically *Chinese* origins make them even more attractive because they are seen as innocent victims of an oppressive communist political regime and "backwards" cultural traditions of son preference. Adoptive parents often have a basic understanding of the gendered impact of the One-Child Policy as playing a major role in their daughters' abandonment, which they sometimes draw upon as justification for choosing China. As one white adoptive father I met while doing pre-dissertation research told me candidly, "It wasn't like we needed another child…but we wanted to make a statement against a policy that's causing some problems." Thus, the idea of saving children from a life of political repression and sexism, in contrast with the

perceived freedom and equality of the U.S., provides ideological ammunition for parents who are considering international adoption.

Moreover, as opposed to poor black mothers in the U.S. who are held to be completely responsible for their children being placed in the foster care system, Chinese birth mothers are often considered alongside their daughters to be powerless victims of discriminatory policies and social pressures that force them to give up their children (Dorow 2006b). As a result of all of these factors, Chinese girls are considered to be culturally redeemable, racially flexible subjects whose difference from white American parents makes them sought-after objects of adoption. In other words, Chinese girls can "not only be rescued *from* their unfortunate conditions abroad, but also absorbed *into* a new life at home. They are at once strange and familiar, different yet knowable" (Dorow 2006b: 364).

The Gendered Paradox of Bloodline in China: Practices of Chinese Domestic Adoption

The widespread visibility of transnational adoptions has led many westerners to assume that Chinese people are not open to adopting non-related children. Yet, China-based research has demonstrated that even though adoption from orphanages has been less commonly practiced (a predicament that relates more to official adoption policies than to parental preferences, an issue that will be explained in the next section), using informal means to obtain additional children has and continues to be a fairly common custom among rural residents. Reporting from a large-scale demographic survey on domestic adoptions, Johannson and Nygren (1991) estimated that during the 1970s there were roughly 200,000 adoptions per year in China, a number that rose to about 400,000 between 1984 and 1986 and to over 500,000 in 1987. By 1988 there were an estimated *six million* adopted children living in the PRC, and adoptions were estimated to account for up to 2.5% of all live births between 1970 and 1987.[22]

Zhang's (2006b) more recent qualitative survey of 425 rural adoptions, most of which have taken place during the reform era, found that the vast majority were arranged through informal social networks: nearly 50% were arranged between intermediaries and 26% between kin. Another 23% of adoptions were of children found soon after being abandoned, while *less than 1%* were adopted from state orphanages. These findings suggest that adoption is a common informal practice utilized by rural couples to fulfill their desires for additional children while avoiding an additional birth. During the 1980s and 1990s a large number of Chinese parents (estimated to be in the hundreds of thousands) were willing to pay enormous fines in order to violate birth planning regulations and adopt children. Johnson (2002) argues that without these practices of informal adoption, "Chinese orphanages would surely have been far more overcrowded and severely stressed than they were" (386). However, Zhang (2006a) notes that although children gain families this way, up to 80% of all adoptions are not registered with the authorities as a result of parents attempting to avoid penalties. Until children are officially registered, they are considered to be "black children" (*hei haizi*) who lack basic rights of citizenship such as healthcare and education.

[22] These estimates end at 1987 because they were based on the two-per-thousand fertility survey carried out in 1988 by the Chinese State Family Planning Commission.

While in the contemporary era informal child circulation has been motivated by state-imposed limits on childbearing, adoption has actually long played an important role in traditional Chinese family formation. By piecing together scattered evidence, scholars have discovered that in imperial times and into the decades prior to the founding of the PRC, both boys and girls were adopted for a variety of different reasons that have shifted alongside social, political and economic transitions. Historians Wolf and Huang (1980) found that in traditional China boys were often adopted by families without sons in order to continue the lineage and to ensure care for parents in old age. Girls, on the other hand, were often adopted in order to "lead in" the birth of a son, since having a child in the household was considered to be an effective way of improving a couple's chances of conceiving. Poor families also adopted infant girls as *tongyangxi,* or future daughters-in-law, who would become wives to their young sons when they grew up. The 1950 Marriage Law, one of the first major pieces of legislation passed by the CCP, expressly prohibited this practice and gave women the legal right to divorce their husbands, which resulted in a flurry of divorces instigated by those who had been adopted as child brides (Zhang 2006b).

In recent decades, particularly after the implementation of the One-Child Policy, females have become increasingly overrepresented among adopted children. Between 1950 and 1969 girls comprised 58.9% of adopted children, but between 1970 and 1987 their numbers rose to 71.3% of the total (Liu et al. 2004). Similarly, in his qualitative survey, Zhang (2006b) found that a whopping 76.1% of children adopted during the 1980s and 74.7% of those adopted during the 1990s were females. A variety of reasons have been proposed to explain this gendered skew in Chinese adoption rates. Stringent birth control regulations provide the most obvious rationale, as "many Chinese parents defy law and policy to adopt, in part because the same policy creates a demand for girls among families who have filled, or overfilled, their quota of births with sons yet still long for a daughter" (Johnson 2004: 126).

Moving beyond state policies, scholars argue that the waning of sons' filial piety in the new economy has led daughters to gain extra emotional significance to parents (Greenhalgh and Li 1994). There are also economic reasons to adopt girls, who are generally more available and less expensive to secure than healthy boys; parents in Zhang's (2006b) study reported paying up to 15,000 *yuan* for a boy but less than 5700 *yuan* for a girl (it was unclear to whom the money was paid). In addition to initial adoption costs, over a lifetime girls are considerably less costly to raise as parents shoulder the burden of paying for sons' marriage costs, including bride price and often the purchase of a new house for the couple to live in.

Perhaps the most important reason for this gendered trend involves issues of patrilineal bloodline. Couples place great importance on bearing their own biological son to carry on the family name while girls are considered to be less related, temporary members of their birth families who will eventually become part of their husbands' line. This causes some parents to express concern that if a son were to find out that he was adopted (something that is usually kept secret within Chinese families in order to ensure children's loyalties), he might return to his birth parents and renege all financial and emotional responsibility to his adoptive parents. On the other hand, there is less concern that girls will become disloyal if they find out who their birth parents are, which may relate to the fact that daughters are expected to eventually leave their families to marry

anyway. Zhang (2006a: 16) suggests that this loyalty may also relate to "the persistently lower status of women in Chinese society and to the lack of opportunities available to women compared to men. With few options available to their daughters, adoptive parents feel confident that they will be loyal and beneficial to their family."

Patrilineality provides a striking example of gendered continuity within vastly different historical, political and economic contexts. The salience of bloodline thus connects past practices of girl adoption in China to the current period. Johnson (2002: 384) elaborates that in traditional China,

> the ambiguous position of females, especially children, in the formal kinship structure and bloodlines made girls more readily exchangeable and hence more 'adoptable' as daughters…this practice may continue to make the adoption of daughters of unknown parentage a relatively easy and acceptable matter for adoptive parents in contemporary China.

Chinese Preferences for Girls at the Yongping Orphanage

The flexible social status of girls in the PRC contributes to their large-scale marginalization and abandonment, yet also allows them to be more easily absorbed into new families. The heightened desirability of girls as objects of domestic adoption became apparent to me first-hand through my fieldwork at the Yongping Orphanage near Beijing. When I first arrived in the fall of 2006, I was surprised to learn that more than half of the children were boys. Until that point I had assumed that most children in state care were healthy females, based on Johnson's (2004) earlier research conducted at the Wuhan Orphanage in central China. She found that throughout the 1980s the number of healthy females in state care dramatically increased as a result of stringent state birth control campaigns. Orphanage workers recalled that between the early 1980s and 1992 healthy girls came to greatly exceed the number of disabled children in the facility; while special needs children comprised an estimated 95% of all children prior to the campaigns, afterward they dropped to less than 20% (18).

Due to the dearth of more recent studies of orphanage populations and my own focus on the "missing girls" phenomenon, I had assumed that every orphanage was filled to capacity with healthy girls who resided alongside a much smaller percentage of special needs children of both sexes. Yet out of the 36 children residing at Yongping, fewer than half were female. These girls were mostly healthy infants and toddlers, although one was autistic and two were wheelchair-bound due to spina bifida. The oldest girl in the unit was a physically powerful teenager with Down Syndrome who helped the caregivers with tasks such as laundry and diaper-changing.

The majority of the children in the facility were boys with some type of special need. These included minor issues that did not affect brain or motor development such as cleft lips and palates; five boys had been born with this condition and all had undergone surgeries to have them fixed. One three-year old was missing fingers on each of his hands and feet and another was born without a right arm. Boys also suffered from major disabilities: two toddlers had Down Syndrome, three had severe cerebral palsy and several others had undefinable mental retardation. However, what was most remarkable to me was that three of the infants and several of the older boys were physically and

mentally healthy. No studies have tabulated the number of healthy boys in state care or addressed the reasons for their abandonment, although Cohen (2007) has speculated that they are being relinquished at higher rates in recent years due to issues endemic to modern societies, such as out-of-wedlock births and prostitution.

Over a period of several months I noticed that the healthy girl babies in the facility were disappearing one by one as they were adopted by local couples. Even though Yongping was not signed up for international adoption, over the span of two years nearly all of the girls left the facility, including those who were already of pre-school age. One afternoon I spotted an orphanage official sitting on a couch speaking to Dang Nian, a shy but highly perceptive, intelligent and healthy four-year-old girl. As a group of boys hovered close by, listening in with obvious envy, the official put her arm around the girl and stated: "You're going to live in a big house. But you better behave, or else you'll have to come back here!" She left soon after and to my knowledge the child was never sent back to the orphanage.[23]

When I returned to Yongping in December 2007 after an absence of several months, I brought with me an American friend's mother who was a trained and licensed clinical nurse. We obtained permission to perform physical examinations on all of the children, and one by one we compiled details about each child's condition, including age, gender and medical issues. This was the first definitive proof I had that healthy girls really were being locally adopted while boys were being left behind: out of the 36 children then in the orphanage, *29* were boys. I was also surprised to count a total of 10 children whom the nurse found to be perfectly healthy, which did not even include those youth who had undergone surgeries and subsequently recuperated. Amazingly to me, amongst the group of healthy children, *seven* were young boys.

The fact that developmentally normal male children were both in state care and were considered undesirable for domestic adoption challenged my own assumptions about Chinese son preference and daughter discrimination, forcing me to rethink the role that gender plays within institutional settings. Although several of these healthy boys had arrived as newborns, when I made my final visit to Yongping nearly three years later in 2009, I was disheartened to discover that they all remained in the institution. Meanwhile, by that time all of their healthy female peers had been adopted by local families.

The International and Domestic Implications of Chinese Adoption Laws

China's first national adoption law came into effect in April 1992 as a response to the increasing abandonment of healthy female children to state care throughout the 1980s and early 1990s.[24] Prior to this time there was no official prescribed route to obtain children from institutions, although throughout the 1980s foreigners and overseas Chinese citizens were granted individual permission to adopt about 10,000 children (Meier and Zhang 2008). While the 1992 policy is famous for opening up the nation to

[23] According to the domestic regulations on adoption, it is legal to dissolve the adoption agreement under particular circumstances (http://www.gov.cn/banshi/2005-05/25/content_849.htm).

[24] Liu, et al. (2004) note that while adoption-related regulations were included in the 1950 and 1980 Marriage Laws and in the family planning regulations of certain provinces in the late 1980s, the 1992 law was the first to regulate adoption on a national level.

international adoption for the first time, it actually applied equally to both foreigners and native Chinese citizens.

At that point the law specified three major stipulations for prospective adoptive parents: 1) childlessness; 2) the ability to rear and educate the adopted child; and 3) 35 years of age or older. These seemingly simple and straightforward requirements were in fact carefully chosen by the Chinese government to serve the dual purpose of encouraging international adoptions while also reinforcing stringent national birth control regulations within-country. Older individuals without children were given preference, which favored westerners for whom being childless in their mid-30s was both commonplace and socially acceptable.[25] Conversely, because Chinese people customarily marry in their 20s and usually begin attempting to conceive a child immediately afterward, most couples have borne their own child by age 35. Therefore, by building upon China's pro-natalist culture which stigmatizes childlessness and places immense pressure on women to fulfill their perceived societal and familial duty to bear at least one child (Handwerker 1993), the age requirement excluded most Chinese people from eligibility. Johnson (2002: 389) critiqued the 1992 Adoption Law's blatant prioritization of fertility regulations over serving children's best interests:

> [The] law was not written with an eye to serving the interests of homeless children in need of families. Instead, the main purpose of codifying these restrictions into law was to provide birth-planning officials with additional regulatory weapons to shore up the one-child policy by eliminating adoption as a potential loophole for those who sought to hide the birth of a child, typically a daughter, in order to try again to have a son over quota.

Another important aspect of the 1992 law was that it did not require adoptive parents to be married. This had little effect in China where single parenthood—particularly unwed motherhood—is greatly stigmatized.[26] On the other hand, by opening up eligibility to unmarried westerners who reside in societies long accustomed to single parenthood, it immediately became known as one of the world's most liberal international adoption policies. As a consequence, thousands of single western women rushed to adopt Chinese children, as did numerous lesbian couples who utilized this legal loophole to their own advantage by having one partner adopt as a single mother.[27]

During these early years, China's surprising openness towards older parents and atypical family compositions, in combination with its seemingly endless supply of healthy girls, total lack of birthparent involvement and efficient process meant that by 1995 it had become the top sending country of adopted children in the world. The process became even more streamlined after the founding of the Chinese Center for Adoption Affairs (CCAA). This agency within the Ministry of Civil Affairs, which was

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[25] While preference was granted to childless individuals, foreigners who already had their own birth children were allowed to adopt children who were older or had some form of special need.

[26] While no official statistics are available on the number of unwed mothers, there is speculation that their numbers are rising alongside more liberal attitudes towards pre-marital sex and women's increased earning power (see Howard French, "Single Mothers in China Forge a Difficult Path," *NY Times*, 4/6/08).

[27] Adoption agencies were also complicit in this practice, as they were required to conduct detailed home studies of each family and chose not to reveal to Chinese authorities that certain parents were involved in same-sex partnerships.

created in 1996 after the negative international attention and controversy provoked by the British "Dying Rooms" documentaries, specifically oversees foreign adoptions and manages care within welfare institutes. The CCAA subsequently standardized guidelines for international adoption, which bolstered the nation's reputation for having a clean program. Despite the enormous amounts of foreign money entering China through adoption, not until the eruption of the baby trafficking scandal in Hunan Province in 2003 were any doubts raised about the legitimacy of China's international adoption program. In comparison, domestic adoptions in the country have lacked clear guidelines, and no formal centralized agency was ever appointed to facilitate them, which created yet another bifurcation between the two processes.

Early Motivations for International Adoption: Obtaining Foreign Resources

In the previous chapter I argued that the policies, practices and ideologies behind China's modernization project have resulted in a multitude of children being illegally relinquished to state care. Yet rather than dealing with the root causes of child abandonment—namely stringent birth control regulations, intensified gender bias and the lack of a social welfare safety net—the Chinese government turned to international adoption in the 1990s as the major way to relieve overcrowded orphanages and garner income for welfare institutes that were struggling due to the decentralization of the social welfare system.

In a study of orphanages in the cities of Nanjing and Lanzhou, Shang (2001) observes that prior to the reform era the Chinese government held a monopoly over the care of orphaned and abandoned children. During the socialist period larger political considerations took precedence over children's best interests and welfare institutes were expressly prohibited from seeking out any other types of financial resources. In recent years the retreat of the central state from public provisioning has resulted in a tremendous decrease in government resources provided to individual families, which has contributed to the relinquishment of children to state care. Moreover, support for local civil affairs departments now held responsible for rearing and educating orphaned and abandoned youth has been slashed even as childcare costs have dramatically increased. Therefore, in the early 1990s welfare institutes were allowed to turn to income-generating activities such as foreign adoptions in order to address this financial gap (262-63).

Care for each institutionalized child—including room, board, medical care and educational expenses—has been estimated to cost each facility upwards of 10,000 *yuan* per year (Luo and Bergquist 2004). In comparison, state financial allowances for orphaned and abandoned youth cover only a fraction of these costs and also vary substantially according to region. According to a recent Chinese news article, children in economically developed cities such as Beijing, Tianjin and Shanghai each receive 3000-4000 *yuan* per year, while those in the poorer provinces of Henan, Gansu and Ningxia receive only about 1000 *yuan* of state support (Li Xiaohua, 10/24/05, "200,000 Children Need More Support").

For cash-strapped local-level governments, it has made logical sense to become approved for international adoption. Although the Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs has not released reliable statistics on this topic, Brian Stuy—an American adoptive father and researcher who writes a well-regarded blog on issues relating to Chinese welfare

institutes and adoption—estimates that roughly 560-575 orphanages scattered across 29 provinces and municipalities send children abroad (personal communication, 6/14/10).[28] The Chinese adoption industry has been extremely lucrative for China's child welfare system. Over the past two decades hundreds of millions of dollars of resources have been poured into the Chinese economy, both through direct adoptions and subsequent foreign donations sent by parents to their children's welfare institutes. Specifically, western parents routinely spend about $20,000 to $25,000 per adoption, which includes the fees paid to western agencies, the cost of a 10-14 day mandatory trip to China at least one of the parents is required to make to retrieve their child plus the $3000 required cash donation to the orphanage. According to a Chinese newspaper expose of the Hunan child trafficking case, 95% of the standard $3000 adoption fee goes directly to the welfare center that provides care for the child while only 5% is given to the Provincial Civil Administration (Deng Fei, *Fenghuang Weekly*, "The Hengyang Infant Dealing Case: Benevolence or Vice?," 4/1/06).[29] Considering that one American dollar has seven to eight times the spending power in China, this has opened up considerable temptation for profit-generation by securing infants through using any means possible.

Stuy has found that orphanages that participate in international adoption are significantly *less likely* to make children available for domestic adoption. In a January 2006 telephone survey, he asked a female Chinese citizen to pose as a 35 year old, childless married woman and ask orphanage representatives whether there were any healthy infants available for local adoption. Of the 32 orphanages surveyed, which were chosen because they routinely send out children internationally, only five claimed to have any healthy infants at all. One of the five asked for a "donation" of 30,000 *yuan*—at roughly $3700 U.S., this was even higher than the required foreign adoption fee. It also highlights the commodified nature of providing children with families as well as the ways in which Chinese citizens are in direct competition with foreigners for the same population of children (http://research-china.blogspot.com/ 2006/01/ domestic-adoption-in-chinas-orphanages.html)

There is no real way to verify whether and to what extent the pockets of orphanage directors and other local officials have been lined by foreign adoption fees, though it is likely that not all of the income goes towards the children. In my travels to five different welfare institutes that participated in international adoption in Henan, Hunan, Jiangxi and Guangdong Provinces, I noticed that each institute's director drove (or was driven in) an extremely expensive foreign luxury vehicle which seemed totally unaffordable on their low civil servant wages. Nonetheless, much of the proceeds do appear to be put towards improving the conditions of care for the children and revamping the general facilities.

Many of the foreign volunteers I talked to who had been working in orphanages since the 1990s remarked upon the vast improvement in conditions that they had witnessed since adoptions first began. The British nurse at Tomorrow's Children

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[28] This estimate is based on the number of Yahoo newsgroups specific to certain orphanages that foreign adoptive families use to correspond with one another and the locations of children's "finding ads" that are placed in local Chinese newspapers, which is the first step that allows a child to become eligible for international adoption (Meier and Zhang 2008).

[29] Translation of the article is available at http://research-china.blogspot.com/2006/10/hunan-one-year-after-part-one.html.

mentioned that when she first began working in an orphanage in Henan in 1998, she routinely came across children who had rope burns around their wrists and legs from being tied down to their beds; to her relief she found that this was no longer common practice. Thus the commodified practice of international adoption has brought about an increase in children's social value, which has resulted in the upgrading of facility conditions and care practices. In the words of one American adoption administrator:

> Care in Chinese orphanages used to be abominable. With the realization that adoption brings in money, now the children are better cared for. The child is 'upped in the food chain.' Adoption puts a price on children that makes them more valuable…valuable to rescue and valuable to take care of (Dorow 2006: 98).

Adoption as a Tactic of International Relations

Beyond providing resources for underfunded welfare institutes, international adoption has been used to China's benefit by serving as a bridge to the west—particularly by strengthening ties with the United States. Luo and Smolin (2004) argue that rather than be embarrassed by its status as a sending country China has instead used intercountry adoption to serve its own national interests and to create more western understanding and awareness. It is highly significant and clearly intentional that the United States (China's largest trading partner) has received the majority of children, particularly during the early years of the international adoption program.

Table 3.2: Total Number of Adoptions from China and Percentage to the U.S. (adapted from Selman forthcoming)

	1992-1997	**1998**	**1999**	**2000**	**2001**	**2002**	**2003**	**2004**	**2005**	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**
TOTAL	15,000+	6,128	5,948	7,460	7,753	9,165	11,228	13,404	14,493	10,738	8,753	5,961
% to USA	70%	69%	69%	68%	60%	55%	61%	53%	55%	61%	62%	66%

Chinese girls entering the U.S. through transnational adoption constitute one of the newest and socially privileged waves of immigration from Asia, facilitated by China's embrace of global capitalism. This modern trend uniquely implicates the creation of families with the globalization and free trade that is increasing communication and cooperation between China and the United States, countries with a historically tumultuous political and economic relationship.

While adoption scholars criticize American parents for believing that children in developing countries would be far better off in the U.S. than anywhere else, in reality many Chinese people share the same view. In a context of overwhelming competition for education, jobs and resources in the PRC, Chinese citizens tend to see the U.S. as a modern land of untold opportunity, which influences their perception of international adoption as a generally positive trend. In interviews with urban Chinese residents, Tan

and Fan (2010) found that many respondents felt that international adoptees were incredibly lucky (*xingfu*) and would undoubtedly benefit from their parents' increased ability to provide financial resources, emotional support, a better education (particularly English-language education). Moreover, adoptees were envied for having the opportunity to grow up in a nation considered to be more socially, culturally and economically advanced than China (331).

An illustration of this perspective occurred during a trip that I made to visit an orphanage in rural Jiangxi Province. During a long drive through the winding countryside a taxi driver expressed to me his view that internationally adopted children are extremely fortunate. He explained that he had a 12 year-old son and a three year-old daughter, for whose birth he paid a fine and was now spending an enormous sum of 10,000 *yuan* (at the time roughly $1250 U.S.) per year in pre-school fees. Lamenting the difficulty of achieving success in China, he remarked, "As long as I could see her again in the future, I would be happy for my daughter to be raised by foreign parents in the United States."

This view of China as a nation of "lower quality" than the U.S. has actually complicated moral understandings of child trafficking for the purposes of transnational adoption. In discussions of the Hunan baby trafficking scandal in 2003, foreign observers were unequivocal in their view that selling children into international adoption constituted a punishable crime. Within China, however, there was considerable debate as to whether children's entrance into foreign families actually served their best interests in the long run and should instead be seen as beneficial. Convicted traffickers Chen and Duan believe that they were wrongly punished for taking part in what was ultimately a "win-win" situation for all parties involved. Foreign parents were able to raise children who were otherwise unwanted, struggling welfare institutes received more donations—at least some of which would go towards improving the care and facilities for children remaining in the orphanage—and children were given a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be raised in a modern country by affluent parents. In the end, they felt that these girls were undeniably better off in the long run, in which case the ends overwhelmingly justified the means.

Later Amendments: China's Global Rise and Adoption as a Marker of Modernity

In April 1999 the Chinese government sought to widen the pool of adoptive parents by dropping the minimum age to 30, which sparked even more international interest in adopting Chinese girls. In actuality this law was geared more towards encouraging domestic placements, representing one of the first major reconsiderations of birth control policies. Not only did the lowered minimum age create more eligibility for childless Chinese couples, but it also allowed those who already had one child of their own to adopt abandoned children from social welfare institutes if their parents could not be located (Zhang 2006b). In effect, this created an important exception to the one-child per couple rule.

Although few Chinese citizens were eligible to adopt from orphanages before these amendments, after their implementation the number of domestic placements climbed significantly and began to vastly outnumber international adoptions at a rate of four to five times. According to statistics from the Ministry of Civil Affairs, in 1999

nearly 32,000 children were adopted from orphanages by Chinese citizens (in comparison with only around 6000 international placements). In 2000 the number of domestic adoptions reached more than 49,000, and in subsequent years it has tended to fluctuate between roughly 35,000 and 40,000 children per year (MCAC, 2000, 2001). These numbers may even be limited by the fact that adopting legally can be a tedious process, as parents need to provide official documentation of their household registration status, marital status, their ability to raise and educate children and proof of childlessness (Zhang 2006a: 5).

In 2001 the Chinese government enacted an amendment that limited the number of adoptions by single women to 5% of the total. This was the first in a series of changes to adoption policy that struck fear into the hearts of thousands of western prospective parents. Western parents often prefer Chinese girls over other types of children; similarly, Chinese adoption administrators also have specific views about the appropriate characteristics of foreign adoptive families. Dorow (2006) found that the process of choosing adoptive parents in China is both heteronormative and racialized, since many administrators consider applicants who are not white or overseas Chinese heterosexual married couples to be "not normal" (*bu zhengchang*); this has resulted in a lower likelihood of being approved for a child (82).

The 2001 law sent ripples through the adoptive parent community with its forceful reduction of the number of gay and single parent adoptions, which up until that point had constituted roughly one-third of all placements (Selman 2009a). The amendment appeared to have been provoked by the Chinese government's increasing displeasure with large numbers of its children being adopted by same-sex couples. Therefore, after nearly a decade of looking the other way, all adoptions to gay parents were officially disallowed. In a statement released by the CCAA regarding these new guidelines, the message was unmistakable:

> The People's Republic of China recognizes only families formed by marriage of opposite sex and does not recognize the legality of homosexual families, and the homosexual families are, therefore, not protected by laws…In terms of the Chinese traditional ethics and customs and habits, homosexuality is an act violating public morality and therefore not recognized by the society. (www.fwcc.org)

Significantly, this amendment also signaled a major shift in international power relations, highlighting for the first time China's ability to pick and choose among prospective parents. Thus, unlike the majority of other sending countries, China began to use adoption regulations to assert its own moral judgments, ensuring that its children were "placed in homes deemed suitable according to Chinese cultural views" (Luo and Smolin 2004: 608).

The 2007 Regulations: Extending Population Quality Beyond China's Borders

Adoption policies were made even more rigorous on May 1, 2007. This time the stipulations pertained only to foreign parents and were exceedingly specific, appearing to some as an attempt to exclude most western couples from eligibility.

The official reason that the CCAA gave for the new regulations was that the supply of adoptable children (e.g., healthy and female) had been reduced through years of adoption and could no longer keep up with rising international demand. These criteria, which are now currently in effect, stipulate the following:

- Must be heterosexual couples married for at least two years. In the case that either the husband or wife has been divorced, the current marriage needs to have lasted at least five years.
- Between the ages of 30-50 (the age limit is raised to 55 in the case of adopting a special needs child).
- Both the husband and wife are fully physically and mentally well and do not have any of the following conditions: AIDS, mental disabilities, any kind of infectious disease, blindness, deafness, inability to use limbs, severe facial deformation, long-term illnesses, organ transplantation less than 10 years earlier, schizophrenia, untreated mental disorders and a body mass index of 40 or higher.
- Either the husband or wife has stable employment. The family annual income must reach $10,000 for each family member, including the prospective adoptee, and the family net assets should be at least $80,000. The family annual income should also not be derived from welfare programs, pensions, unemployment insurance, etc.
- Both partners have received at least a high school education.
- A family should have less than five children in the household, and the youngest one must be at least one year old (exempted for the adoption of special needs children).
- Neither the husband nor wife has a criminal history and are able to demonstrate good moral character. Neither has a history of domestic violence, sexual abuse, abandonment or child abuse (even if they were not arrested or charged); a history of drug abuse or addiction; or a history of alcohol abuse within the past 10 years.[30]

The announcement of these new guidelines, particularly the one related to obesity and body mass index, lit a western media firestorm and incited debates regarding the future of Chinese adoptions. The presidents of the largest chapters of Families with Children from China quickly penned a joint letter of concern to urge the CCAA to rethink its stance. Attempting to assuage any worries regarding international perceptions of China, they pointed out that transnational adoptions have created a deeper appreciation of the country in the U.S.: "When others see the way that our families honor our children's Chinese heritage they learn more about China. All of this contributes to increasing the visibility and position of the People's Republic of China, as well as enhancing awareness of her role in our global future" (www.fwcc.org).

The letter went on to convey tempered disapproval of the stringent nature of the new regulations, which have now disqualified a significant portion of prospective

[30] This list includes only some of the new stipulations. For an exhaustive list, see the CCAA website: http://www.china-ccaa.org/site%5Cinfocontent%5CZCFG_20071031110135606_en.htm.

parents. But most importantly, the FCC presidents expressed apprehension about the emotional impact that these changes might have on already adopted children whose parents would now be rendered ineligible under the new guidelines. They quote one single mother's concerns: "My daughter has such a glowing view of China after our trip this summer. How can I tell her that the Chinese government no longer thinks that I would be a good parent?"

Other more sensationalistic responses attempted to cast doubt on the legitimacy of China's claim of a decrease in the number of adoptable children. In a *New York Times* editorial entitled "The Mystery of China's Baby Shortage," American adoptive mother and author Beth Nonte Russell drew a direct link between the new regulations and China's concern for international face in the run-up to the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics. Based on entirely anecdotal evidence, she wildly speculated that there were probably at least *one million* unwanted females still residing in institutions who would be "left behind by Beijing's new policies—perhaps spending their lives in institutions because of these arbitrary and artificial limits." Russell pointed out that under the new restrictions, both she and Angelina Jolie would not be able to adopt, wryly joking that at least Madonna was still eligible "at least until she turns 50, gets fat…, gets divorced or goes broke" (*New York Times*, 1/23/07).

Russell was probably right to assume that the timing of the new regulations only one year prior to China's Olympic hosting duties was significant, since at that time the government was preparing for an onslaught of international coverage on every aspect of Chinese culture and society. Chinese officials were well aware of the situation that South Korea faced after hosting the 1988 Seoul Olympics, in which the country was heavily critiqued for "exporting its greatest natural resource" through international adoption while doing little to promote domestic placements (Kim 2003). Even so, a multitude of unquestioned, automatic and problematic assumptions that inform Russell's perspective, not least of which is her misconception that Chinese orphanages are hiding untold numbers of healthy girls. It also promotes the false view that transnational adoption is the only hope for girls who would otherwise languish in institutions, presuming inaccurately that Chinese people are uninterested in adopting daughters. This skepticism about reasons for the new regulations maps onto larger American media representations of the oppressive, despotic nature of Chinese communism (Rofel 1999) from which innocent children must be rescued—a view that reinforces American feelings of supremacy over the developing world,

> Important here have been attitudes Americans carry about the superiority of U.S. society over other societies; the economic domination by the United States of other, especially Third World, countries has contributed to and underscored the attitude of many Americans that these children would be better off in the United States than almost anywhere else (Riley 1997: 97).

Despite this and other typically alarmist reactions in the west, there is evidence to suggest that the number of healthy female children has actually substantially been diminished in recent years. The statistics published by the Ministry of Civil Affairs do not give a gender breakdown of domestically adopted youth, but as I detailed earlier in this chapter, from my first-hand observations and discussions with those

who have worked with orphanages for a lengthy period of time it appears that healthy girls are being adopted by local Chinese families in much higher numbers. Moreover, there is some speculation that rates of female abandonment may also have gone down since rising income levels now allow families to pay the fines associated with over-quota children (Meier and Zhang 2008).

Consequentially, the number of children adopted internationally since the implementation of these regulations has markedly decreased. In 2009, only 3,001 children were adopted by Americans, down from a peak of almost 8,000 in 2005 (Selman 2010). As the wait times for adopting a healthy girl have grown to longer than three years, many foreign parents are now switching to the Waiting Child Program—a Chinese state initiative that matches special needs children with adoptive families. According to a recent *Christian Science Monitor* article, up to half of adopted Chinese children coming to the U.S. now arrive through this program ("International Adoption: A Big Fix Brings Dramatic Decline", 3/14/10). Meanwhile, international interest in adoption has continued to surge; in 2007 there was already an estimated backlog of as many as 25,000 foreign applications (www.fwcc.org).

While many observers have tended to focus solely on the severity of the new guidelines and their potential impact on children, I believe that it is imperative to view them in light of China's global project of modernization. It has become clear that as China has become increasingly influential on a global level, foreign adoption regulations have correspondingly been made more stringent. Since its inception in the early 1990s, China's international adoption program has not only placed children in loving families, but it has also served national interests by creating a bridge to the west and bolstering its relationship with the United States in particular (Luo and Smolin 2004).

In recent years the strengthening of the Chinese economy, combined with the subsequent decrease in the number of healthy girls in state care, has placed the PRC in a position of power in relation to western nations whose citizens desire healthy Chinese girls. I suggest that the Chinese state uses adoption regulations as a way to extend its project of population quality beyond its borders by imposing specific standards of mental, physical and economic acceptability onto foreign parents, thereby ensuring that children will become "high quality" cultural ambassadors between China and the west. If these regulations are examined through the lens of the state-driven project of population quality and economic modernization, this concerted effort to seek out only the very highest quality foreign families for adoptees can be understood as serving both the best interests of children and the Chinese nation.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the reversal of fortune experienced by healthy girls in Chinese state-run institutions who are desired as objects of both international and domestic adoption. Although gender bias is the primary cause of the "missing girls" phenomenon and the large-scale relinquishment of rural daughters to state care, gender (along with their relatively good health) becomes an advantage that tracks them out of

orphanages while their mostly male, primarily special needs counterparts are left behind. The global circulation of healthy Chinese girls through adoption to a range of western industrialized nations is a key transnational process that has profoundly transformed perceptions of their social value and stoked western interest and involvement with Chinese welfare institutes.

Gender benefits girls by heightening their perceived "adoptability" in different social and cultural contexts. Within the United States, the recipient of the majority of adoptees, Chinese girls are favored for reasons relating to gender and race. Compared to African American children who are tainted by negative perceptions of their origins, Chinese adoptees are considered to be innocent and culturally redeemable victims of an oppressive Communist regime. Moreover, dominant perceptions of Asians as racially flexible "model minorities" cause the racial and cultural backgrounds of Chinese adoptees to be framed in positive terms, which allows them to be viewed as more assimilable to white families than black children.

The demand to adopt daughters within the PRC has also been growing since the beginning of the reform era, which has placed Chinese citizens in direct competition with foreign parents. Contrary to common western perceptions that Chinese people do not adopt unrelated children, I have detailed the important role that adoption has and continues to play in Chinese family formation. Although citizens have only been able to officially adopt from orphanages in recent years, parents seeking to avoid an additional birth have informally adopted millions of female children since the implementation of stringent birth control policies in the late 1970s. This trend demonstrates Johnson's (2004) concept of Chinese parents "wanting a daughter but needing a son." While it is fortunate that many abandoned girls are finding families through informal adoption, in order to avoid fines a large proportion are not registered by their parents with the authorities and are thus rendered ineligible for state benefits.

Additionally, emphasis on patrilineal bloodline in China leads girls to be seen as less related to their birth families, which ironically both contributes to their relinquishment to state care and also allows them to be more easily assimilated into local adoptive families. Because according to traditional Chinese custom girls will eventually marry out to join their husbands' families, parents are less fearful of losing daughters' loyalties should they find out that they are adopted. Alongside shrinking family size and the waning of filial piety in the current period, girls are also becoming more highly valued for their emotional importance to parents. My observations at the Yongping Orphanage, which documented the exodus of all of the healthy girls from the facility while a number of perfectly healthy boys were left behind, provide clear evidence that bloodline is an advantage for girls in terms of domestic adoption.

Moving beyond the level of the family, the Chinese state has consciously utilized adoption as a way to achieve a number of economic and political objectives. First, the international adoption industry has injected hundreds of millions of dollars into the Chinese economy and rescued a child welfare system that had been struggling as a result of state decentralization. Secondly, adoption has been used to create deeper ties with western industrialized nations and to create more awareness and understanding of the nation on a global level.

Because "China's identity as a sending nation parallels China's identity as a developing nation" (Luo and Smolin 2004: 616), more stringent adoption regulations

have been enacted alongside the nation's extraordinarily rapid increase in economic resources and global influence. China's growing reputation as a world superpower has corresponded with increasingly limited foreign access to its children. I have argued that in combination with overwhelming foreign demand for fewer available healthy girls for adoption, the PRC has used regulations to extend its modernization project across international borders in order to locate western families it deems most capable of raising "high quality" Chinese children. Viewed through the perspective of population quality, the current adoption criteria—which in the U.S. are controversial at best and offensive at worst—are meant to ensure that the material and emotional resources provided to adoptees rival, if not completely surpass, those being invested in China's "little emperors."

Although international adoption has been critiqued for creating opportunities for a variety of corrupt practices and incentives for child trafficking, the exportation of healthy girls out of the country has opened the way for the importation of western resources, ideologies and practices into state-run welfare institutes. Having sketched the broader historical and structural forces that shape the world of contemporary Chinese orphanages, I will now develop an ethnographic portrait of the two sites I studied: the Tomorrow's Children infant special care unit and the Yongping Orphanage. This ethnographic material will help to illuminate myriad types of transnational conflicts and cooperation over the lives and care of children who are left behind in institutions.

Chapter 4

The Consequences of Importing Western Childhoods into a Chinese Orphanage

It was one of my first days as a full-time volunteer for the Tomorrow's Children (TC) infant special care unit in Henan Province. The unit was located on the fifth floor of a large children's welfare institute that cared for about 600 children on-site. Plaques on the walls of the empty lobby attested to its success in the field of orphan care—the central government had deemed it to be a "model" orphanage and it was considered a national exemplar. Nonetheless, as I made my way up the stairs the conditions appeared to be fairly run-down. The walls were gray with grime and the rooms dimly lit by naked fluorescent bulbs that hung down from the ceiling.

It was the end of a freezing cold January, and my breath came out in puffs as I walked down the dark, unheated hallways. I was told that the children in the Tomorrow's Children unit on the fifth floor of the orphanage were sent up from the "dying room" on the second floor, which housed those considered to have the lowest chances of survival. Although I didn't have official permission to roam around the orphanage, I wanted to see the room for myself. None of the busy orphanage staff who passed by appeared to be disturbed or even interested in my presence, so I continued on further and stepped into a neglected-looking room tucked away in one corner of the hallway.

I saw 18 extremely sick, dirty babies and young children laying two to a bed on thin bamboo mattresses. All of the children were wrapped tightly in thick red cotton quilts and at least half had heads that had been shaved on one side. This indicated that they had just arrived from the hospital where they had been given intravenous fluids through the head (a common practice in China). Many of the children were extremely pale and underfed with hollow cheeks and alarmingly sunken eyes; most appeared to be suffering from some form of cerebral palsy.

The entire group was attended to solely by two exhausted-looking older Chinese women clothed in stained white lab coats. It was feeding time and children were drinking formula from bottles that had been propped up on pillows next to their faces. Some of the bottles had rolled off the pillows and out of the children's reach. The caregivers quickly circled the room and picked up all of the bottles, even those that were still half full. As I surveyed the scene I was struck by the eerie silence in the room; very few of the children cried, babbled or made sound of any kind. An emaciated, jaundiced little boy who looked to be about six months old locked his gaze onto mine and regarded me soberly from his bed.

Filled with a host of conflicting emotions, I backed away and continued up the stairs to the brightly lit Tomorrow's Children unit. Stepping over the threshold into the brand-new facility was like entering a different world. A host of freshly painted Disney characters smiled down from the walls at chubby, laughing toddlers who raced around the rooms in baby walkers. Two western volunteers sat on the clean wooden floor helping children play with sensory integrative toys brought over from the U.K. Chinese nannies in matching red uniforms whooshed by to change diapers, give baths or retrieve medicine from the nurse in the sparkling examination room down the hall. That afternoon the little boy I had seen on the second floor was brought up to the unit. I couldn't help but be overwhelmed by a sense of relief that he was no longer in the regular orphanage.

Although he lived for only two more weeks, he was pampered and cared for with imported western practices that transformed him from neglected abandoned child to an object of unconditional love.

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In the last chapter I explored the ways in which global processes of adoption have led to a "reversal of fortune" for thousands of healthy abandoned girls in state orphanages and how their social value has risen in relation to their desirability as daughters, both to foreigners and native Chinese couples. Additionally, I pointed out that China's (somewhat tentative) embrace of foreign adoption has created a window of opportunity for a range of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) to become involved with state orphanages. Many of these groups are faith-based, usually Protestant Christian or Catholic, and since the late 1990s they have donated tremendous amounts of time, effort and financial/medical resources into struggling welfare institutes. As healthy girls are mostly tracked out into families, these groups have tended to focus their attention on improving the lives of the special needs children who are left behind.

This chapter draws upon ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in the Tomorrow's Children special care unit, providing an in-depth case study of the ways in which faith-based international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) are using western ideologies and practices to "revalue" the ill and disabled youth who are both globally and locally less desired as objects of adoption. I found that western volunteers bring with them to their work in China individualistic western ideologies about children and childcare that frequently conflict with the viewpoints and practices of their Chinese collaborators.

Collaborations between foreign philanthropic groups and local state-run orphanages, while few in number, appear to be growing in acceptability as China continues to open up to international influences in its rapid process of modernization. The decentralization of social services has forced local-level governments to "innovate" ways to take care of parentless children (Keyser 2006). As discussed in detail earlier, since the early 1990s declining central government financial support has been accompanied by official income-generating activities, leading cash-strapped local governments to turn to a "multi-pillar system" (Shang 2001) of profitable ventures, including transnational adoptions, donation solicitation and increasing involvement with foreign NGOs.

In and around Beijing alone, there are roughly 10-15 different private foster homes run by western expatriates. They often employ first-world childcare practices to tend to sick and disabled children from various welfare institutes across the country as well as to arrange for their medical care and post-operative treatment. While these youth technically remain wards of the Chinese state, most of these homes operate facilities independent from welfare institutions, setting their own terms of employment with local staff and only sporadically interacting with state authorities.

These western foster homes tend to cluster in the same areas. One such location is Maquanying, a neighborhood on the eastern outskirts of Beijing conveniently accessible to expatriate volunteers who reside in exclusive foreign housing compounds located nearby. The town of Langfang, an hour-and-a-half drive outside of Beijing, is also home to several western evangelical Christian groups that care for primarily special

needs youth. The most notable of these is the Philip Hayden Foundation (not a pseudonym), which was one of the earliest faith-based organizations to set up a foster home in China in 1999. The foundation is considered to be a trailblazer in the field of orphan relief and claims to have received children from more than 20 state orphanages, cared for more than 4000 children, provided more than 3000 surgeries and medical procedures and facilitated the adoption of more than 800 youth (http://www.chinaorphans.org/ aboutus.htm).

Working in the Tomorrow's Children Special Care Unit

During my fieldwork I visited a total of seven western foster homes, of which four were founded and run by evangelical Christians. I first learned about Tomorrow's Children (TC) in the summer of 2005 when I was conducting preliminary fieldwork. A colleague mentioned a beautiful western-style foster home on the rural outskirts of Beijing that provided first-world medical care to a large number of abandoned children. I visited the home for the first time that summer and met the Dunlops, a white Christian couple from Australia who had been originally come to Beijing in 1997 to pursue work opportunities. Within several years of being in China they were "inspired by God's will" to provide care for extremely sick institutionalized children and opened the Tomorrow's Children home in 2003. The wife, Barbara, was a western trained physician and handled all of the children's medical care while her husband Peter dealt with the administrative and financial aspects of their rapidly expanding organization.

The foster home accommodated a constantly rotating group of western volunteers, usually church groups or individuals who had heard about the organization through Christian conferences. When I visited again in the fall of 2006, there was no need for additional volunteers so I stayed at the home for five days as a paid guest. During that time I played with the children, chatted with *ayi* (literally translated as "aunt" in Chinese, but also used more broadly to refer to "nanny" or "caregiver") and conducted interviews with Barbara and other volunteers. The home itself, which was personally designed by Barbara and built with the couple's own savings, was a gorgeous, sprawling two-story structure that included several large children's playrooms, a health examination room, a large cafeteria, volunteer living quarters and an attached outdoor playground. The Dunlops lived in a separate specially-built home next door. All of this sat on 15 acres of land which they rent for about $300 U.S. per month. Barbara told me that she and her husband had signed a contract for 10 years and planned to sign another for 20 more once they had the funds.

Picture of the Tomorrow's Children playground located outside of the main facility (taken by author in November 2006).

The organization's mission has been to provide non-hospice palliative care[31] to children with operable illnesses and treatable diseases who would have had almost no chance of survival had they stayed in an institution. The home was built in order to achieve a variety of interrelated goals, which included providing long-term, home-like care for disabled children under the age of six months, using western medicine to treat and cure children's illnesses, close collaboration with Chinese welfare institutes, employment and training of local staff and involvement with the local community to raise awareness about the needs of abandoned children, providing volunteer opportunities as well as training and support for local foster parents.

The main building accommodated up to 56 children at a time on whose behalf the group used its global contacts to obtain pro bono or reduced-fee surgeries in places with more advanced medical technology such as the U.S., Singapore and Hong Kong. Children who were brought to the home from all over the country and suffered from an extensive range of illnesses and disabilities, including hernias, imperforate anus, exposed bladders, cleft palates, respiratory distress, myelomeningoceles (a type of spina bifida), congenital heart disease and bilateral clubbed feet. Children were often sent abroad for months at a time in order to be prepared for surgery and to recuperate, during which time they were accompanied by a TC volunteer and a Chinese *ayi*. After they were deemed completely healthy (roughly by the age of two or three), they were usually placed on the foreign adoption list. Though the organization could not directly arrange adoptions—which were under the purview of the Chinese Center for Adoption Affairs—I gleaned

[31] According to the World Health Organization, palliative care is "an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problem associated with life-threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification and impeccable assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, physical, psychosocial and spiritual" (http://www.who.int/cancer/palliative/definition/en/). Non-hospice palliative care combines these philosophies of care with curative medical treatment.

through conversations that nearly all of the children were adopted by Christian families in the U.S.

In order to prepare them for their future lives abroad, children were exposed to a variety of western practices. Beginning at the age of two, they began to attend daily on-site English-language "preschool" taught by a full-time female British volunteer. When I sat in on this class a three-year old boy named Michael amazed me with his ability to count to 10 in English and recite the names of shapes and all the parts of the face. Other children sat at tables with their caregivers forming shapes out of Playdough and drawing pictures on Etch-a-Sketches. We finished the class by singing beloved western nursery songs such as "Row, Row, Row Your Boat", "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes" and "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star." Volunteers frequently took children on fieldtrips to the nearest McDonald's. When one toddler was picked up by his new American adoptive parents, he was under the impression that he was going to go to McDonald's and then would return to the *ayi* who had cared for him for two years. His caregiver's last memory was of him waving to her happily out of the back of the car as they drove away.

Bilingual posters instructing caregivers on the proper ways to discipline children. Poster on right states: "Discipline is done out of genuine love for the children." (Photo taken by author in November 2006.)

Chinese caregivers were also trained to employ western practices in their work with children. Rather than scolding or spanking children when they misbehaved, *ayi* were instructed by Barbara to firmly state "No!" in English; this word often emanated from the children's playrooms. Bilingual illustrations on the wall instructed workers on how to deal with a variety of issues that Chinese and westerners tend to handle differently, such as what to do when a child gets a fever or throws a tantrum.

Replicating the Tomorrow's Children Model in Central China

Impressed by TC's Beijing operation, the Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs invited the organization to build similar facilities—providing palliative hospice care for infants with little to no likelihood of survival or future adoption—within the confines of welfare institutes in central China. As Barbara recounted, after reaching the agreement that her group would use its own funds to build and maintain several special care units, but not pay the welfare institutes to operate them (which is often expected of international NGOs), the organization built exact, smaller-scale replicas of its Beijing home inside three different orphanages in Henan Province. At the time, Tomorrow's Children was one of only a handful of foreign philanthropic groups to gain full state permission to operate within a child welfare institute. This was especially remarkable because at the time the government had been limiting and even closing down the operations of a range of western-run NGOs.[32] TC's unique partnership with the Chinese state is to my knowledge the first time western-managed medical units have been housed *within* welfare institutes.

I first learned about the opportunity to volunteer in Henan during my visit to the Beijing home, where I was informed that the largest of the three medical units had just opened within the "Haifeng" CWI and was in desperate need of additional help. I traveled down there and spent a total of two and a half months between January and May 2007 working as a full-time volunteer. Although I spent time in all three units, my richest observations came from the Haifeng facility, which cared for roughly 45 children at a time and employed more than 70 local working-class women as caregivers. Therefore, this unit will be the focus of this analysis.

The Haifeng Special Care Unit

The rest of this chapter draws upon a mixture of participant observation and interview data that I gathered in the TC special care unit in Henan Province to further investigate the ways in which global processes are altering the social value of abandoned children in state institutions. Ethnographic can illuminate on-the-ground transnational negotiations about children's "best interests" (a concept frequently invoked in justifying practices of care). Within the Haifeng facility, even though (and perhaps because) a large percentage of the special needs youth who were cared for did not survive very long, their lives were transformed by imported western ideologies of individualism and belief in children's unlimited potential.

This case challenges commonly held notions of childhood as a universal and ahistorical experience (Malkki and Martin 2003) and reveals it to be a socially constructed, contested and stratified domain that is firmly rooted in local political and

[32] During the time of fieldwork (2006-2007) a range of foreign organizations and NGOs were shut down or had their activities severely limited by the Chinese government. Several western foster homes in the Beijing area were required to return children to their original orphanages. Most notably, China Development Brief, an independent western-run publication founded in 1996 that published articles on NGOs and the development of Chinese civil society, was forced to cease operation of its Chinese language website in July 2007; this effectively disabled the organization. Many speculated that these new stringent governmental limitations were directly related to the upcoming 2008 Beijing Olympics and official fears over intensified international scrutiny.

cultural circumstances. Specifically, I explore the malleability of children's social value and ideas about children's needs by examining the conflicts that arose between western volunteer employers and the low-paid, local working-class and poor Chinese women who were expected to implement the foreign, NGO-established practices. While I found evidence that each side tended to view disagreements over childcare through the lens of cultural differences between China and the west, I argue that cultural differences intersected with divergent *class-based* understandings of children's best interests, which, in turn, informed practices of care. As I will explore further, existing tensions were exacerbated by material inequalities within the unit, including the organization's seemingly limitless financial investment in marginalized children and the obvious socioeconomic disparities between western volunteers and Chinese caregivers.[33]

Fieldwork in the TC Special Care Unit: The Impact of Religion

Although Tomorrow's Children was an openly Christian organization, it had an official policy of not engaging in efforts to convert locals or raise children in the Christian faith. TC volunteers quietly avoided close involvement with groups that employed more controversial practices such as requiring children to pray and study the Bible. Instead, they chose to engage in what Bornstein (2002) has termed "lifestyle evangelism," which involves "the process of living a life in the manner of Christ, providing an example, and showing non-believers Christianity through the life that was led" (p. 11). Through leading by example while not engaging in direct proselytization, the organization was able to continue its close working relationship with the Chinese government.

Nonetheless, volunteers were open about the fact that it was their faith that motivated them to go to China and perform acts of good work that will benefit the "bottom 1%" of the population. A quote from the Bible (James 1:27) served as their inspiration for working with marginalized children: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

From the beginning the organization was aware that I was not Christian, which did not seem to present any major problems in gaining research access. My lack of religious conviction appeared to be overridden by the fact that I could speak Chinese and volunteer full-time during the extremely critical first few months after the opening of the Haifeng unit. For the most part religion was rarely discussed around me, even though "serving God's will" was an integral reason why volunteers had chosen to come to China. During my tour of the Beijing home Barbara pointed to a picture of the head surgeon of a prestigious American medical school who could be relied on in emergencies to catch a plane to Beijing in order to operate on a dying child. Reflecting on his generosity, she added with some incredulity, "and he's not even a Christian!"

[33] In utilizing terms such as "western" and "Chinese", I concur with Hoffman and Zhao (2008), who argue that while there dangers of creating "unwarranted generalization, leading to monolithic comparisons that erase internal differences," carefully qualified cultural categories can be "useful as heuristic devices to illustrate broad cultural contrasts" (p. 3).

Western Involvement with Orphanages as a Sign of Modernity

The Haifeng Child Welfare Institute was responsible for nearly 600 children, at least half of whom resided in local foster homes or boarding schools. Of the children living on-site, 90% suffered from some kind of illness or long-term special need.[34] Children tended to be housed according to disability and severity of prognosis, so that children with cerebral palsy (at least 100 of the children living in the institution) were kept together while developmentally "normal" youth lived in dorm-like settings and left the grounds on a daily basis to attend local schools.

Located in a major metropolitan center of a primarily agricultural province, this CWI received at least one or two extremely ill or developmentally disabled infants daily who had been abandoned at local hospitals or in the surrounding area. The sickest infants—about 15-20 at any one time—were housed two to a bed in what volunteers referred to as the "dying room." As I described earlier, it was a cramped, grimy and depressing room at the end of one hallway on the second floor The agreement between the facility and Tomorrow's Children stipulated that the orphanage doctor would bring the children with the lowest chance of survival up to the special care unit three floors above. The unit then cared for these children until they either passed away or recuperated well enough to return to the facility below or be released to local foster care. This did not always occur according to plan, however, as it soon became apparent that the orphanage doctor was resentful of the existence of the western unit. As a result, he often refused to send children upstairs or instead sent youth who were long-term care cases rather than those who were dying.

Like several other state-run institutions I visited during my research, foreign investment has paved the way for the involvement of a number of western philanthropic groups to donate resources, equipment and personnel. In addition to the help of Tomorrow's Children, a western hospital for the foreign expatriate community in Beijing provided free formula for all babies on a monthly basis, the Gates Foundation sponsored a physical therapy unit for cerebral palsy-afflicted children and provided a large van for their use, a Hong Kong-based group operated a recreation center on the ground-floor and helped to place healthy babies in local foster homes, and an American teacher was brought in on a daily basis to teach English to the older children.

The institute's director stated that he wanted all capable children in the institution to become successful by providing them with excellent educational opportunities. In 1999 the central government designated it to be a "First Level Welfare Institute" *(yiji fuliyuan*) of the province and in 2004 it was named as a "National Progressive Organization" (*xianjin tuanti*). Children were also required to take part in frequent community performances staged in front of the building on all major holidays, which included various kinds of Chinese and western dances (most notably a high-energy solo performed by a silver-clad young man with one leg), a brass band ensemble, individual and group singing and a physical therapy demonstration by a group of children with cerebral palsy and their nurses. The older, able-bodied children all appeared to be in good health; they were instructed to call out "hello" and "goodbye" in English to western visitors as they zoom down the staircase. Older children with cerebral palsy also

[34] Stated in a publication of the Haifeng CWI.

followed a specialized regimen, taking part in daily physical therapy in the adjoining building.

However, as described in the opening to this chapter, the facilities for infants that existed separately from the Tomorrow's Children unit were sorely inadequate and understaffed. Each *ayi* in the welfare institute cared for 6-10 children—many of whom were disabled or had serious illnesses—in 12 hour shifts, seven days a week. Despite its substantial foreign aid, the institution clearly put most of its funds towards those who were able-bodied and deemed capable of rehabilitation while little was invested in the smallest and sickest youth. The grim, overcrowded "dying room" lacked what western volunteers considered to be basic resources such as soap, toothpaste and disposable diapers, let alone a single toy, medication or any kind of medical equipment. One British volunteer described this paradox, "This orphanage is a fantastic place to be if you survive to the age of 4. But up until that point, it's definitely survival of the fittest."

Giving Children a Childhood: Global Ideologies in a Chinese Context

> *Most of the babies whom we have with us have been rejected and would have had difficult and painful experiences. They are helpless and are totally dependent on us to love them and protect them from harm. At ALL times, be gentle with them and treat them as precious creations of God and let them know that they are loved.*
>
> --Excerpt from Tomorrow's Children "Baby Care Policy for Nannies"[35]

Within the confines of the Haifeng CWI, a variety of childhoods simultaneously co-existed. This stratification of children's life opportunities problematizes the concept of "childhood" as a singular, universal and ahistorical experience. Scholars contend that globally hegemonic images of white, western middle-class children influence our understandings of contemporary childhood as a separate, vulnerable and sentimentalized period; in the process, the oftentimes harsh and diverse realities of life faced by many of the world's children are rendered invisible. In fact, children who grow up in non-nurtured, unprotected spaces are often considered to be completely *without* childhood (Thorne 2009; Stephens 1995). Burman (1994: 239) writes about the concept of childhood as a social construction:

> Within northern industrialized societies, childhood is regarded as a period of dependency: lacking maturity, children are seen as in need of nurturance and protection, in need of supportive family relationships and (especially when those are considered inadequate) caring institutions. Uncontroversial as this appears, its historical construction and novelty is sometimes forgotten in the ostensible universality of its appeal. The romantic model of the child is a profoundly modern and western construction.

[35] The baby care policy for nannies is a document available in both Chinese and English on the Tomorrow's Children website.

It bears reminding, however, that childhood in the west has itself undergone fundamental transformations just over the past century and a half. Zelizer (1985) has famously elaborated on the changing social value of American children from "economically useful to emotionally priceless" that accompanied the move to outlaw child labor and introduce compulsory schooling. Likewise, parenting advice in the U.S. shifted significantly after 1930 as medical and technological advances eased earlier concerns over high rates of infant mortality. Expert opinion on childcare changed from a preoccupation with infant health, hygiene and the need for babies to maintain strict and routinized schedules to the need to pay attention to children's intellectual development and individualized emotional needs (Hardyment 2007; Wrigley 1989). Thus, ideologies of modern, western childhood and notions of children's "best interests" which now predominate across the globe (Howell 2006) have themselves emerged quite recently in response to broader patterns of social change.

The Tomorrow's Children organization imports dominant first-world ideologies of childhood into its work with marginalized Chinese children. In the Haifeng welfare institute, a stratification of life opportunities for children reflected conscious decisions adults had made as to who was more deserving of limited governmental resources. But as a separate, well-funded foreign organization, TC was able to sidestep these negotiations altogether and remove a large financial burden from the welfare institute by caring for the youth at the very bottom of the social (and orphanage) hierarchy. In fact, once children arrived in the unit from the "dying room," the economic and emotional investment in their well-being far surpassed what was provided to their peers residing on the floors below. That the unit *only* administered to children with some form of physical or mental disability was also highly significant. Through its mission of aiding only the most devalued children, TC was able to intersect with larger transnational projects that seek to inspire Chinese people to care more about the welfare of *all* of its citizens.

After describing the children, staff and set-up of the unit I will explore further how child-centered caring practices in the Tomorrow's Children unit inculcated lifestyles into devalued special needs youth that rival those experienced in middle-class contexts.

The Children and Set-up of the Unit

The unit cared for roughly 45 children who remained under the legal jurisdiction of the CWI and could (theoretically at least, though rarely in practice) be called back to the facility below at any time. The majority of children, roughly 75%, suffered from mild to major cerebral palsy that was often combined with other health issues. Aside from cerebral palsy, children in the unit suffered from a wide range of illnesses and disabilities that included spina bifida, congenital heart disease, imperforate anus, hydrocephalus, liver failure, cleft lips/palates, autism, Down Syndrome, skull malformation, skin disorders, severe prematurity and a variety of undiagnosable terminal illnesses.

The facility was primarily set up to care for infants and toddlers, although actual ages range from birth to 14. Because children were abandoned and their true birthdates were unknown, welfare institute doctors guessed their ages based on physical size. Those suffering from cerebral palsy were usually incredibly malnourished and emaciated, and thus their ages were often estimated to be less than six years. After a few weeks in the

unit, however, they often doubled their weight and it became apparent that they were several years over their originally estimated age.

The TC unit separated children into five spacious, cheerful color-themed rooms according to age, size and illness or medical condition. Two smaller rooms primarily housed toddlers with minor to severe cerebral palsy, while an adjoining room housed 12 infants—many of them able-bodied and in need of only minor corrective surgeries. Such children, once fully recuperated, would be returned to the welfare institute below or sent out to local foster care. The largest room housed 12 older children ages five and up who had cerebral palsy. Babies suffering from terminal illnesses who clearly did not have long to live or preemies in need of intensive care were housed together in a special intensive care room. This room had an adjoined sterile nursery that contained an incubator, an extra crib and oxygen canisters. It could be closed off if a child ever needed to be isolated for reasons related to infection.

The unit also included a large kitchen and a full-time cook who prepared fresh food for the older children on a daily basis. There was also a separate children's play room, two large changing and wash rooms, a locked storage room, a laundry room with several new washers and dryers and a one-bedroom private volunteer apartment that could house up to three or four people. Each room, including bathrooms, was maintained through financial sponsorships from individual donors, church groups and even UPS (United Parcel Service).

Western Volunteers and Chinese Staff

At the time of my fieldwork, the unit was run primarily by Cathy, a devoutly Christian white British nurse practitioner, and her husband Brian; they had both retired in their mid-50s to devote their lives to working with orphaned and abandoned Chinese children. Cathy managed all of the medical care and treatment for each child in the unit, though major decisions regarding surgeries and palliative care were ultimately made by Barbara in Beijing, who was in daily phone contact. All other westerners in the facility served on a volunteer basis for anywhere between two weeks and a year. A typical stay was around one month in length. The unit received about three or four mostly evangelical Christian volunteers per month from countries such as the U.S., the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Singapore and Hong Kong. Nearly all volunteers were trained in a specialized skill, including nursing/medicine, physical and occupational therapy, speech pathology and teaching. For the majority of volunteers, this was their first visit to China; thus, most lacked any kind of Mandarin language skills or in-depth knowledge of Chinese culture.

The unit also employed roughly 75 local Chinese people who were privately hired, trained and compensated by Tomorrow's Children and were considered to be separate from the regular CWI staff (who were civil servants managed by the Chinese state). The vast majority of the Chinese staff worked as *ayi*, but there were also housekeepers, cooks, a full-time *ayi* supervisor and a driver/maintenance man (the only Chinese adult male in the unit). In order to enforce uniformity, all Chinese workers except the *ayi* supervisor and driver were required to wear identical uniforms: red flowered shirts, red sweaters, black pants and black slippers. All of these women were mothers of one or two children in grade-school and mostly resided in the city's rural

suburbs, commuting in for work. Their overall level of attained education was quite low, ranging from junior high school to high school. Though very few spoke even the simplest of English phrases, the western staff assigned each of them an English name such as "Courtney", "Alice" and even "Cherry" to facilitate easy memorization by volunteers. However, these names were primarily used only in conversations between westerners, as *ayi* were often unaware that they had English-language names.

The TC employee contract, which was approved by the CWI director, stipulated that each *ayi* care for the same three children every shift, except under special circumstances. Most *ayi* worked day shifts from 7am-7pm, after which they were relieved by night time caretakers who worked from 7pm-7am. Because the founders of Tomorrow's Children prioritized bonding, attachment and consistency of care for the children, it was impossible to switch from daytime to evening shifts or vice-versa, a stringent rule that provoked constant grumbling among the staff. For their labor the Chinese staff were paid extremely low wages of 450 *kuai* (at the time just over $60 U.S.) per month, with a 100 *kuai* cash bonus given at Chinese New Year plus 100 *kuai* worth of items such as apples, fish, cooking oil and rice. This work was significantly underpaid, less than half of the average per capita income of the local area, which totaled 998.5 *kuai* per month in 2006 (Henan Statistical Yearbook 2007).

Individualizing Practices of Care

> *All babies are individuals and although we try to fit them into our routine to make our work easier, please allow for their individual personalities so that they will grow as normal children in a loving home environment and not as 'institutionalized' children...Get to know your babies well and give them the care that they need.*
>
> --Excerpt from Tomorrow's Children "Baby Care Policy for Nannies"

While the social value of healthy institutionalized girls skyrockets through processes of adoption, western resources and practices work to "revalue" special needs children as objects of sentimental love and affection within institutional settings. Though volunteers were outnumbered nearly 10 to 1 by Chinese workers in the unit, the guiding philosophy and practices of care were imported directly from abroad. As Barbara told me in Beijing, "There are many different ways to do things. My way might not necessarily be the best, but here it is the ONLY way. Otherwise you don't have to work here!" These caring practices, detailed below, included naming, changing appearance, individual ownership and the intensive tracking of children's bodies.

Naming

When a child was moved from the state-run CWI facility to the TC unit, volunteers gave him an English-language name that often mirrored the sound of the Chinese name already given by the welfare institute.[36] (Note: Henceforth I will

[36] This CWI named children according to the year that they entered the facility. As is the case in many welfare institutes, all children are given the last name "Dang", which stands for "*gongchandang*" (Chinese Communist Party) (see *The Economist*, March 24, 2007). Due to issues of organization, all children who entered the institution during a particular year shared the same first character of their two character given

intentionally use the pronoun "him" to refer to children in the unit since the vast majority were male. At the time I was there, there were only 15 girls out of a total of 45 children residing in the unit). Most volunteers did not speak Chinese and thus tended to only memorize children's English names (though *ayi* continued to refer to them by their Chinese names). In this way the practice of naming instantly gave the child a new kind of identity that was not truly western but also not fully Chinese.

Changing Appearance

Through the mere changing of clothes and a bath, a major physical transformation occurred within just the first few minutes of a child's entrance to the unit. Children arrived from the orphanage below swaddled in thick, faded, one-size-fits-all Chinese quilted outfits. Due to a lack of bathing, they were usually extremely dirty and often covered in skin diseases. Once in the unit, they were gently bathed, shampooed, lotioned and powdered in a plethora of Johnson's and Johnson's baby products that cost two or three times more than local Chinese products. After *ayi* used Q-tips to clean out weeks of grime from their ears, they were clothed in expensive Huggies diapers and thin, bright, imported cotton onesies. In this immediate fashion, myriad resources were mobilized to begin caring for the child in a middle-class, western way.

Individual Ownership and Possession

The third aspect of this process of revaluing marginalized children as individuals occurred through giving them ownership and possession over various items. Unlike the "dying room," where a group of children was often fed with the same bottle or spoon, in the TC unit everything was individually labeled for use by only one child. Towels, washcloths and clothing were personalized by stitching the child's initials into them with thread matching the color of their assigned room. Each child had a separate labeled box for medication, their own pacifier, spoon, bowl, bottle, toothbrush and cup. Their names were taped onto their own baby walkers and specialized, imported feeding chairs. Moreover, on birthdays and during the changing of seasons, children were given a new set of clothing, and on Christmas they each received a large, battery-operated toy.

Tracking Children's Bodies

The last major set of western individualizing practices employed in the TC unit involved a high level of surveillance and measurement (Foucault 1978) as children's bodies and overall well-being were intensively tracked and monitored. Since children were abandoned, usually very little was known about their personal backgrounds or medical histories. They typically arrived with only with a brief form listing their Chinese name that was given by the CWI and a description of their general medical symptoms. Once the child was transferred to the special care unit, Cathy would give him an intensive medical examination to diagnose illness and to plan out a specialized care regimen. She began a file that included the child's name, photo upon arrival, date of birth, description of illness and suggestions for treatment. Each day Cathy went through the unit and checked on each individual's condition, recording notes in the file. Babies' weights were

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name. One character was designated for boys with a separate character for girls. The last character in each child's name is given by CWI staff. Only in one case did I meet a child who kept the name given by her parents—this is because she was abandoned to the institution at the older age of 7 or 8.

taken once a week, while older youths were weighed on a monthly basis, all of which was recorded in their folder.

Additionally, the TC unit required Chinese caregivers to use a separate clipboard that contained a series of forms that tracked each child's physical progress during each work shift. An "input/output" sheet monitored the frequency and time of urination and bowel movements (often including details regarding color, amount and consistency), as well as the intake and timing of formula or solid food. The second sheet tracked body temperature, which was taken by the *ayi* every four hours or more depending on the child's condition. The third sheet listed the medications the child should receive, with the dosage times written above boxes that the *ayi* were required to check off throughout their shift. The final sheet was used to pass messages between daytime and evening *ayi* to keep one another informed of changes in a child's medication or general condition. This was in addition to detailed notes that volunteers added to children's files each day.

This process was analogous to what Nieuwenhuys (2003) observed in her study of foreign NGOs that administer to street children in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. She argues that the constant surveillance and regulation of children's schedules is a primary component of western aid work, which plays a fundamental role in transforming stigmatized, disparaged youths into "normal" (i.e., first-world) children. She writes, "Submitting to the schedules purifies a child from the filth and vice that breeds unchecked in the disorderly [outside] world…turning the child in time into a new person" (110).

Though the ultimate objective of this detailed and precise system of tracking was to improve children's health (or at least to make them as comfortable as possible in the event of death), the implementation of this system involved constant glitches that led to extensive frustration. Many times after a child had fallen ill or major modifications were made to his medication, I checked the charts and saw that the *ayi* on shift had listed the child's condition as *zhengchang* ("normal"). When asked why they wrote this, many *ayi* answered that they were pressed for time at the end of the day bathing and feeding children before the end of their shift, and felt it was better if they relayed the situation orally to the next caretaker rather than summarize it on paper. Over time I realized that resistance to recording notes about the children may have been related to *ayis'* sense of inadequate education and writing skills; in addition, they probably did not want to be held responsible if they wrote complicated medical conditions down incorrectly.

Nonetheless, Cathy began asking volunteers to "stand watch" over *ayi* on days when the children under their care fell ill, and to physically take the form to them and point at it to make sure they filled it out in a more detailed fashion (this, however, was purely a symbolic demonstration of authority, as I was the only volunteer who could actually read Chinese). This situation highlighted the complicated dynamics that can arise in transnational sites of care, as foreigners attempt to import a first-world vision of appropriate behavior that is conditional on access to education, training and resources unobtainable by the local workers.

Instilling Global Values through Childcare Practices

Article 3(1) of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), adopted in 1989 and ratified by China in 1992, states that:

> In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

The special moral status granted to children in this document, which has been signed by every nation in the world except the United States and Somalia, is infused with ideological assumptions about inalienable individual rights. Children are represented as competent and responsible social actors "with viewpoints and specific interests that should be taken into account" (Gullov 2003: 33). As Thorne (2009: 14-15) explains,

> The 54 articles of the UNCRC specify rights related to protection from physical, sexual, and psychological exploitation; from the effects of war; and from exploitative work; provision, e.g. the right to food, clean water, health care, and education; and participation, based on an understanding of the child as an active and contributing participant in society.

The convention has been criticized for embedding individualist values that are not fully applicable to collectivistic societies (Alston 1994). China provides a relevant case in point, because although it ratified the UNCRC without issue, research conducted in Chinese welfare institutes has demonstrated a disjuncture between the individualist values embedded in the document and actual implementation at a local level. This suggests the difficulty of imposing universal standards of childhood across all national contexts and the ongoing salience of cultural differences and material limitations, even when parties agree on guidelines.

Howell (2006) describes a 2001 Norwegian study of on-the-ground implementation of the UNCRC in three Chinese children's welfare institutes which found that while Chinese personnel tended to be superficially aware of the UNCRC, in practice there was minimal discussion of children's best interests. Akin to the care provided in the Haifeng CWI, in all three settings children were dealt with in a highly regimented manner. Additionally, their physical health, education and possibilities for future training were heavily prioritized while emotional needs (as understood in the west) were completely neglected. This caused researchers to conclude that within state-managed institutions "the focus on individuality and individual needs and rights so strongly apparent in the UNCRC, carries little meaning in the Chinese context" (214).

In the Tomorrow's Children unit, the ideology of individual rights, autonomy and personal choice that underlie the UNCRC also motivated the work that volunteers performed. The child-centered approach of the unit not only attended to children's physical well-being, but also sought to encourage their emotional development. This approach reflected specifically *middle-class* understandings of appropriate care. Thus, volunteers would go to great lengths to encourage special needs children to live up to their fullest potential—regardless of whether that potential might be severely limited. If and when their physical health was stabilized, volunteers would expose children to a wide range of play and educational activities to discover innate talents and interests that would then be supported and developed over time.

For example, a group of European volunteers brought a huge variety of foreign toys to China, which they used to discern the likes and predispositions of each mentally

competent child. The volunteers drew up a list of activities—painting, drawing, playing with balloons, toy cars, puzzles, balls and water play—on a chart labeled with each child's name and level of engagement with each category. At the end of the assessment, the chart became a guide for future volunteers to organize individualized children's play and activities.

This rigorous effort to find and encourage each child's individual interests reflects the global dominance of child-rearing practices that are contingent on access to social and financial resources and forms of expert knowledge. Hays (1996) has argued that in the U.S., appropriate child-rearing is considered to be "child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive, and financially expensive" (8). Likewise, Lareau (2003) uses the concept of "concerted cultivation" to describe the child-rearing practices of U.S. parents with relatively more social and cultural capital who enroll their offspring in a range of activities to develop skills that will ultimately allow them to become more economically; this exposure to new experiences, she suggests, guides middle-class children onto a trajectory that will reproduce their own class status. Kusserow (2004) has also discussed this type of class-based childrearing, differentiating between what she terms the "hard individualism" of the American working class and the "soft individualism" of the middle class, which includes a "more psychologized conception of self [that emphasizes]…the extreme care, resources, wide canvas, and gentle touch needed to help the unique self of the child flower and open up into her full potential" (v).

Today in China's affluent urban areas, millions of well-educated parents are being influenced by the market (as well as encouraged by the government) to take this sort of individualized approach to raising their only child (Anagnost 1997). China's modernization project and economic progress depend upon cultivating a skilled class of globally competitive workers. Meanwhile, children in the special care unit were abandoned primarily because of physical and mental impairments that, it was assumed, would keep the vast majority from ever being able to live independently, let alone achieving gainful employment. However, as Dorow (2006a) has noted, the presence of foreign charitable aid to orphanages can lead socially liminal children to be raised in ways that parallel their fortunate "little emperor" counterparts. She writes, "Ironically, pockets of abandoned, marginalized children [residing in state institutions] are the objects of some of the same kind of western child development expertise now being marketed to middle and upper-class urban Chinese one-child families" (103).

This irony was not lost on the children's *ayi*, who watched with blatant puzzlement and curiosity as volunteers bounced children up and down on physical therapy balls, blew bubbles in their faces or serenaded them with plastic musical instruments. The volunteers' committed search to discover children's innate capabilities and the unwavering belief that each individual could "improve" was often a source of confusion for working-class Chinese caregivers.

To further illustrate this point, on my first day in the unit, Cathy assigned me to play with Jenny, a four-year old girl with severe cerebral palsy. She was concerned that this child was getting overlooked by volunteers and *ayi* alike, even though she "really had a lot of potential for improvement." I grabbed a bag of toys designed to stimulate infants and sat down on the floor pillows where Jenny—unable to sit up on her own, grasp objects or be potty trained—was lying prone, completely quiet and still. The two *ayi* in

Jenny's room immediately sat down next to me and grabbed baby rattlers, shaking them loudly in front of the child's blank, unblinking eyes. All the while they kept repeating, "She's not aware of anything, she just doesn't know anything." ("*Ta shenme dou bu zhidao*"). I mentioned that the nurse thought the girl could make some progress. Jenny's *ayi* shook her head with some disbelief and said, "Yes, but progress to what level? What kind of progress can she really make?" ("*Jinbu dao shenme chengdu?")*

Sarah, a white 38 year-old volunteer nurse practitioner from the UK, offered an opinion about kids like Jenny:

> With a lot of these children you may not see much of what we would normally think of as improvement. But we need to be okay with the fact that we might work with a cerebral palsy child intensively their whole lives, and the only noticeable difference is that they can make eye contact. All of these children have their own personalities; with some you just have to look a little harder.

Cultural and Class-based Struggles over Children's Best Interests

In the unit, volunteers and *ayi* engaged in a constant tug-of-war as each side held a distinctive view of children's best interests. They were aware of holding different views, which each assumed was the result of static cultural differences between China and the west. However, I found that sometimes dissimilar cultural ideologies regarding children tended to be amplified by *class-based* differences, socioeconomic disparities and the limitations of institutional caregiving.

Children's Changing Needs in Globalizing China

Within the special care unit, defining children's best interests was a negotiated and highly conflict-ridden process. At issue were different conceptions of what children need (such as protection, emotional well-being, etc.), which many people understand to be universal and based on scientific standards of human development. Woodhead (1997), however, argues that the very concept of "need" should be viewed as a cultural construction that derives from the heavily value-laden context of western developmental psychology. In his view, unquestioned, normative notions of children's best interests conceal "a complex of latent assumptions and judgments about children. Once revealed, these tell us as much about the cultural location and personal values of the user as about the nature of childhood" (63).

As previously described, the unit's middle-class western volunteers greatly prioritized child-directed practices and active engagement with individual children; these expectations were then imposed onto the Chinese staff. Throughout the course of each day, volunteers could be heard complaining that the *ayi* were too restrictive, too passive or appeared uninterested in promoting children's emotional growth and independence. They pointed out the large chests full of new toys in each room that were hardly ever taken out and lamented that infants' gross motor and cognitive skills were being delayed from lack of stimulation. These complaints were based in a fair degree of truth, as babies were typically not held and often sat for hours on end in seats that *ayi* would rock with their feet as they chatted with one another. As children were rarely put on the floormats, it was not uncommon for six-month old healthy babies to not yet be able to roll over.

Western volunteers who were newcomers to the unit would invariably express shock at what they considered to be the harsh, rough way that many local, working-class caregivers treated the children. When I asked Barbara to name the biggest cultural challenges she has faced in running her facility, she stated, "Mostly it's been difficult in terms of training the nannies to raise children in a western way. Chinese people are often very hard on their kids, very strict."

For their part, in private informal conversations many *ayi* stated that their primary consideration was to keep the sick and disabled children under their care fed, clean and warm. They complained that in having to bathe, feed, administer multiple medications and change three children's diapers up to six times a day during 12 hour shifts, to add "playing" to their list of responsibilities was asking too much. Therefore, they believed that if volunteers wanted children to be entertained, they should do it themselves. While observing a volunteer help a child learn how to draw, one caregiver shook her head in a bemused fashion and said, "Westerners always do what the child wants to do. It's really different from Chinese people. In China, children do what the parents say."

More importantly, however, several *ayi* explained to me that they thought extensive proactive involvement with children encourages demanding and less compliant behavior which can negatively affect the other caretakers and children who must share the same limited space. Their comments draw attention to the limitations of caregiving within an institutional setting. A recent in-depth case study of a small, privately-run native Chinese Christian orphanage provides a relevant comparison to the TC unit. Niemetz (2007) observed that time-pressed *ayi* responsible for caring for large groups of children are often only capable of prioritizing children's basic needs, such as making sure that they are fed. Akin to TC's *ayi*, the caregivers in Niemetz' study did not consider it to be their responsibility to facilitate play amongst children, instead leaving them to organize their own activities without adult interference.

In recent decades, a variety of researchers have investigated the extent to which Chinese parenting styles have been changing alongside larger structural transformations. Although the care given to children in Chinese institutions does not necessarily mirror parental care, these studies are nonetheless useful in exploring the relationship between different cultural and class-based values in childrearing. Many scholars have argued that in current time of social flux and rapid modernization in China, conservative traditions of child education and rearing have actually reemerged in the current period. Wu (1996) contends that the basic tenets of "ancient Confucian thought" are still quite apparent in contemporary Chinese parenting practices—which include expectations that children obey elders, exhibit impulse control and accept social obligations, while little emphasis is placed on independence, assertiveness and creativity (148).

In a study comparing Chinese and white American mothers residing in the U.S., Chao (1994) also finds support for the lasting influence of Confucianism on Chinese childcare practices, especially the importance that is placed on familial harmony through obedience to hierarchical relationships and set roles. She contends that while westerners tend to describe the Chinese parenting style pejoratively as authoritarian, controlling or restrictive, Chinese mothers associate stricter control and governance of their children with parental care, concern and involvement (1113). In comparison, the child psychology and development framework prevalent in western industrialized nations emphasizes

child-centeredness, individuality, independence, freedom, individual choice and self-expression that encourage children to discover a unique "self."

Likewise, Chen et al. (1998: 678) argue that,

> In Western individualistic cultures, children are encouraged to be assertive and independent in challenging social situations. Acquiring self-reliance, autonomy, and assertive social skills are important socialization goals… [while in comparison,] achieving and maintaining social order and interpersonal harmony are the primary concerns in both traditional and contemporary collectivistic Chinese societies. Individuals are encouraged to restrain personal desires for the benefits and interests of the collective…The expression of individuals' needs or striving for autonomous behaviors is considered selfish and socially unacceptable.

However, a number of researchers such as Lau and Yeung (1996) are wary of using Confucianism as a unitary explanation for Chinese beliefs and practices related to child development; Lau and Yeung are cautious about overgeneralizing or promoting misconceptions about Chinese youth. They suggest, instead, that researchers take a more holistic and complex view of Chinese society that accounts for *both* the lasting impact of cultural traditions and the rapid social transformations affecting individuals in the present day (33).

In addition to cultural factors, in China there are diverse and competing notions of good child-rearing that are contingent on social class, educational attainment and economic development. Recent research on younger, more educated middle-class Chinese parents who reside in cosmopolitan urban areas finds that they tend to value more autonomy in their children while older, less well-educated working-class parents are more likely to emphasize conformity in their child-rearing practices (Xiao 2000). This resembles the change that occurred in the 20th century U.S., when an increasingly industrialized and competitive economy caused parents to shift from valuing obedience in their children to emphasizing independence and autonomy (Alwin 1988).

Children Living at the Intersection of Difference

The case of Henry, an adolescent boy with cerebral palsy, illustrates the kinds of complex negotiations and misunderstandings that I repeatedly observed in the TC unit involving conflict about standards of appropriate childcare. Henry arrived in late January completely emaciated, ghostly pale, nearly catatonic and weighing only 15 pounds. The welfare institute's doctor estimated that he was roughly six years old. Yet within only two weeks of receiving a specialized care plan of nutritional feedings and medication, the boy had doubled his weight and grown so much in height that everyone believed he was actually a teenager. While Henry's physical health continued to rapidly improve, his *ayi* used physical therapy techniques taught to her by a volunteer to stretch his taut limbs and teach him to grasp objects. The western staff was amazed by his progress as well as proud of his caretaker's supportive, hands-on care.

When I returned to the unit in April, however, I saw that the situation had dramatically changed. Henry's weight and physical condition had stabilized and he had

become a highly intelligent and perceptive adolescent. Nursed back to health and hungry for mental stimulation, he began showing deep frustration with toys and activities offered designed for use by small children. His *ayi* believed he had begun to misbehave and demand too much of her time, taking her away from the other two children under her care. She ceased giving him physical therapy and began to sit him for hours on end in front of the television with his back facing the rest of the room. Volunteers, on the other hand, couldn't understand the shift in her attitude.

Over time Henry had come to equate volunteers with freedom, autonomy, play and personalized attention. When a volunteer entered the room, he would begin to howl, craning his head to make pleading eye contact. If lying on floor mats, he would roll himself across the room and grab one's ankles, begging for attention. Upon asking whether anything could be done to assuage him, the *ayi* in the room replied, "He's fine, just ignore him!" And, with more than 40 children to tend to and only several volunteers spread among them, it was impossible to give Henry the kind of individual attention he had come to crave. The whole staff became highly distraught when the boy began to bite his own hands in frustration, more than once drawing blood. Volunteers attempted to devote more one-on-one time to him, but this would only temporarily placate his mood and need for stimulation.

The westerners understood this situation to be the result of insurmountable cultural differences between themselves and *ayi*. Claire, a volunteer nurse from the UK who spent nearly three months in the unit, even expressed doubts about the feasibility of the entire organization:

> I know that we're doing good by doing this, but there are such huge cultural differences, how much can you do just by helping this little group?...I'm not putting down Tomorrow's Children, but now that I've seen so much more of the cultural differences, I wonder if it can really work. A western-led voluntary organization in China—can it really work?

While cultural factors and the emphasis on group membership and harmony likely played a role in Henry's predicament—causing his behavior to be viewed as selfish and disrespectful of the needs of other children—I came to see that *class-based* differences in childcare ideologies were just as significant. Hays' (1996) comparison of class-specific mothering styles in the U.S. can provide deeper insight into the tensions between *ayi* and volunteers. Hays found that due to disparities in material resources, reference groups and cultural milieu, U.S. working-class and poor mothers were more likely to give children set rules and demand obedience while wealthier mothers tend to emphasize negotiation, choice and self-esteem in their offspring.

Like caregivers in the TC unit, the working-class and poor mothers in Hays' study emphasized compliance and respect for adult authority in their children, done (in part at least) because parenting in this way requires less time, money and labor for those who are materially constrained. As Hays elucidates,

> An obedient and compliant child…is less demanding than an assertive and independent one. Establishing a system of standardized and strictly enforced rules requires less time and individualized attention than carefully providing the

child with a set of bounded choices and negotiating with the child to establish the rules for proper behavior (94).

Viewed through this perspective, TC *ayi* provided care that was influenced by their working-class or poor status *and* by the limitations of institutional caregiving, which held them responsible for performing all of the intensive physical labor of caring for three special needs youth over 12 hour shifts. Under these circumstances, it was logical that workers would prefer children to be docile and less demanding. In comparison, western volunteers who had the time to play freely with children and provide intellectual stimulation mirrored the affluent mothers in Hays' study; in the process of attempting to serve as "examples" for *ayi* to learn appropriate childcare practices they often overlooked the disparities in life options and material resources between themselves and workers.[37]

Henry's situation also highlighted one of the unforeseen dilemmas brought about by implementing first-world practices in a non-western, institutional context. Child-centered methods were used to nurse children back to health, draw out their unique personalities and encourage them to reach their maximum capabilities. As a result, newly-healthy children such as Henry became self-expressive and yearned for intellectual stimulation, traits that are highly valued in first-world contexts as well as in China's global cities. Yet, his severe physical disabilities, long-term dependency and the limits of the institutional setting constrained Henry's possibilities for future growth and caused immense frustration for himself and everyone else involved.

Volunteers and working-class Chinese caretakers thus subscribed to very different views of what it means to be a "good child." *Ayi,* who worked much more closely with children over longer periods of time, actually tended to take a shorter-term view of children's progress and focus primarily on immediate physical health. In the context of modernizing China where societal membership is contingent on high quality children who will become creative, individualistic, entrepreneurial and productive laborers as adults, physically and mentally disabled youth are seen to lack a viable future. Thus, *ayi* tended to define the needs of their charges solely in the present tense.

Temporary western volunteers, on the other hand, took a long-term and individualized approach to care, emphasizing children's emotional as well as physical well-being. Even though the mere sustainability of the unit was tenuous and contingent on political circumstances that could shift at any moment, westerners treated children as they would in their own countries, attempting to prepare them for myriad life opportunities that likely will never actually become available in China.

The Material Limitations of Unconditional Love

The child-centered, individualistic ideologies that motivated the unit's care practices illuminate underlying tensions between money, care and intimacy that go beyond the bounds of cultural differences. Once hired, working-class and poor Chinese

[37] It is important to note that the TC staff did consider giving incentives to improve the quality of care that *ayi* provided, such as bonuses and free food. At the time I conducted fieldwork, however, the unit had just opened and no incentives had yet been implemented. By the end of 2007 there was a new system where caregivers were given an extra 100 *kuai* if they didn't miss any days, wore their uniforms all the time and filled out all of their paperwork correctly.

caregivers were expected to love children unconditionally for very little material reward, which is similar to the situation of childcare workers in developed country contexts (*see* Cancian 2002; Uttal and Tuominen 1999; Wrigley 1995; Nelson 1990). The obvious disparity between the first-world consumption practices within the unit and many *ayis'* own precarious financial situations presented a constant source of dissatisfaction and resentment. Some of the Chinese women were the sole income earners in their households and struggled on their low wages to support their families.

The fact that the unit's children received expensive gifts and a seemingly endless supply of foreign clothing, diapers, bath products, toys, specialized medical equipment and western medicine while *ayi* earned only 25 *yuan* per 12 hour shift (at the time roughly equivalent to $3.30 U.S. a day) was a reality entirely apparent to the Chinese staff. By way of comparison, while *ayi* earned a total of 450 *yuan* per month, diaper costs alone averaged around 360 *yuan* per child each month. This disparity was also easily overlooked by volunteers, who felt that they were making an enormous financial sacrifice since most had paid their own way to China or were subsisting on donations from church congregations back in their home countries.

Tensions over low pay and long hours came to a head during the Chinese New Year holiday, when seven *ayi* threatened to strike if their wages were not raised. They expressed displeasure at being required to work during the three-week holiday, after having discovered that the *ayi* in the state facility below were being granted vacation leave. In the days prior to their announcement these usually diligent and compliant workers had begun to engage in everyday acts of resistance (Scott 1986) through noticeable foot-dragging, neglecting their children or ignoring volunteers' requests. The main strike organizer had begun calling in sick on a daily basis, forcing the *ayi* supervisor to call in untrained substitutes at the last minute. The westerners were both shocked and deeply hurt by what they considered to be a blatant demand for money.

The TC management found itself in a difficult cultural and legal bind. Any discussions regarding finances tended to make the western staff highly uncomfortable. When asked, they often claimed that the unit's funding "comes from God" and operated under the taken-for-granted assumption that everyone was equally committed to unconditional care for the children. TC had the financial means to pay their workers more, and the British nurse supported providing health insurance and cutting work shifts from 12 hours to eight. However, even though the organization was completely autonomous in terms of hiring and paying its *ayi*, its agreement with the Chinese government obligated it to pay wages and assign work shifts equivalent to the state workers on the floors below.

At the same time, as a result of their child-centered ideologies and altruistic motivations for working in China, the heads of the unit were personally offended that *ayi* would ever abandon their duties to the children in their care for the sake of money. They countered that at least *ayi* received a wage, while volunteers were donating their time and effort on behalf of children entirely without compensation. Upon much anxious deliberation and prayer, the management decided to fire all of the women who refused to come into work the next day.

The following morning, an older caregiver who was particularly well-liked and trusted by all staff members stepped forward at the last minute to mediate the dispute, convincing her colleagues to negotiate rather than strike. She explained one of the major

sources of ire—the requirement that daytime caretakers were scheduled to work an exhausting six 12-hour days in a row, with only three days off in-between.
The management argued back that the regular CWI *ayi* were required to work 12 hour shifts *every day* and received only national holidays off, implying that they were giving their own staff a highly favorable deal.

Nonplussed, the TC *ayi* would not be dissuaded from their stance and ultimately the employers decided they could not risk losing seven trained caregivers. While their wages could not be directly raised due to its agreement with the institution, major adjustments were made to the daytime work schedules, reducing the number of consecutive work days from six down to three while still maintaining the three day rest in-between. Immediately following these concessions, the caregivers' attitudes shifted considerably and they began to care for their children with the same amount of concern and attention that they had shown in the past.

This episode, however, left the western staff shaken. For the first time they realized that their belief in sacrifice without reward did not align with the expectations and demands of their Chinese staff, who viewed their work as a job rather than as a calling. Changing work schedules involved a significant amount of labor, as a number of new caregivers needed to be hired and trained. Hiring more *ayi* also meant compromising on one of the unit's basic philosophies regarding the consistency of care for children. More than anything, this situation drew attention to the socioeconomic disparities between affluent volunteers who have the privilege of donating their time to helping marginalized children and the local women who perform caring labor due to the lack of better options.

Conclusion

The case of the Tomorrow's Children special care unit provides a detailed illustration of one type of foreign involvement in the politically sensitive issue of caring for China's institutionalized children. I have examined the conflicts and negotiations that occur when westerners, crossing uneven and unequal national spaces, attempt to import particular assumptions, ideologies and practices of childcare into local settings and the ways in which the social value of special needs children transforms as they circulate between different sections of the same institution. While the state-run institution was relatively open to foreign intervention in regards to children, by requiring Tomorrow's Children to pay their caregivers the same amount as the workers on the other floors, it demonstrated a certain amount of wariness over importing western notions of workers' rights.

Western volunteers who possess their own financial backing and medical expertise are highly valued by the Chinese state bring "modernity" to struggling welfare institutes. They draw upon western middle-class notions of childhood as a protected, nurtured time of life, which inspires practices that seek to revalue each child as a unique individual and to "give children a childhood." These methods included giving children English names, tracking their bodily and emotional development on a daily basis, and attempting to discover and encourage each child's innate talents and predispositions. In the special care unit, contrary to more traditional Chinese expectations that children will grow up to care for their parents in the future (still a common practice in primarily

agricultural regions), western volunteers appreciated special needs children *in spite of* their economic uselessness.

Yet, as this chapter has explored, it is imperative to keep in mind that the western view of children as sacred and "priceless" resulted from culturally and historically specific ideological changes that emerged alongside broader trends of industrialization and urbanization. The situation in contemporary China is comparable, as meanings of childhood, children's societal roles and their best interests are also shifting depending on local patterns of economic and social development. As I discussed in Chapter 2, state-directed structural changes have resulted in the stratification of Chinese childhoods. In fact, pampered "high quality" singletons residing in global cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou now arguably have more in common with middle-class children in the industrialized global north than with those at the center of this research. Moreover, foreign involvement with welfare institutes has brought an additional layer of stratification to abandoned children. While some children leave permanently to be adopted into families, those who stay behind are separated according to perceived need, which determines their access to resources.

In the Tomorrow's Children unit, Chinese caregivers were central to the process of "revaluing" the nation's most dispensable population. They were expected to alter their own cultural and class-based views of appropriate childcare by implementing a formally-planned set of practices derived from western stage theories of child development and psychology. *Ayi* found themselves in a situation that raises questions of power within a transnational context. While many of these working-class and poor women struggled on their low wages to make financial ends meet, issues of socioeconomic inequality among the adults in the unit were often obscured by the dominant principle of child-centeredness.

Caregivers were expected to encourage children to become individualistic and self-expressive, which resulted in conflicts over appropriate childcare practices. Keeping children docile and well-behaved served the interests of *ayi* who performed the demanding physical labor of caring for disabled youth, while westerners viewed the development of emotional and intellectual capacities as fundamental to what children needed. Personalized care and attention often resulted in transforming malnourished, silent, passive beings into fat, happy and active children. But, as became obvious in Henry's case, the successful implementation of child-centered practices can also lead to unresolved frustration for youth who are limited by their institutional setting.

In an era of market competition, due to their long-term dependency and special needs, youth such as Henry will likely continue to be marginalized throughout their lives regardless of the amount of material resources and emotional labor temporarily invested in them by the unit. Henry's situation highlights the ways in which foreign aid groups, in their rush to get involved, enact change and save lives, can reach a point in their work where it becomes clear that they have not adequately considered the long-term interests of those they seek to help.

Lastly, while volunteers and *ayi* alike tended to view their conflicts over childcare practices through the lens of insurmountable cultural differences, I have argued that they are better explained through adding a class-based analysis of understandings of children's best interests. As demonstrated by the New Year's strike, children's care was deeply affected by socioeconomic disparities between management and staff. Ultimately, each

side viewed their work with marginalized youth from fundamentally different vantage points depending on their access to material resources.

In conclusion, studying struggles over ideologies and practices of childcare in a transnational setting is useful in delineating the heterogeneous and contested nature of children's best interests. As Gullov (2003) writes, because children are "symbols of the time to come," places for children "are at once concrete, material loci, and symbolic expressions of social positions and expectations for the future." (p. 27) Through processes of globalization, organizations such as Tomorrow's Children are part of a new social movement in China that is attempting to change—or at least challenge—Chinese culture and practices from the ground-up. International collaborations of this kind make obvious the socially privileged nature of western volunteerism and the often taken-for-granted ideologies that well-intentioned actors bring to countries undergoing rapid economic development. Ultimately, this research brings more nuance into discussions of globalization by exposing the tension and negotiation that occur at the local level in processes of transnational exchange.

Chapter 5

Gendered Inequalities: Contested Carework in a Transnational Context

I jumped off the bus in a nondescript suburb of Beijing on a crisp fall morning. Passing a stern-looking security guard, I entered the grounds of the Yongping Social Welfare Institute, which housed a nursing home, a facility for developmentally disabled adults and a small orphanage. On my way in, I waved at two elderly male residents wearing winter caps and rectangular sunglasses who sat on a bench outside of the large old people's home next door. They relaxed in the sun, tapping their feet along to Chinese opera blaring from a hand-held radio. I passed by a colorful, if somewhat forlorn-looking, children's playground that had been built by donations from a western multinational corporation only a few years earlier. Rarely used, it was littered with broken toys and crisscrossed with lines of flapping laundry. Several foreign luxury cars were parked alongside, with Chinese drivers dozing off in the front seats. I could tell that the volunteers had arrived.

To my right two middle-aged white American volunteers had spread a blanket out on the floor, on which they had placed five dirty, dazed-looking infants whose clothes were crusty with dried-up formula. The women cheerfully bounced the babies on their laps, clipping tiny fingernails and spreading lotion on chapped cheeks while chatting animatedly about their own children's activities at the local international school. The volunteers soon discovered that they had forgotten to bring baby wipes. "*Ayi*!" one of the women addressed a Chinese worker who was hurrying by with an armful of dirty laundry. "Tissue? Tissue?" she called out in loud English while gesturing at a child's runny nose. A look of deep annoyance crossed the caregiver's face as she shrugged her shoulders and continued walking down the hallway.

Several days later, the management committee of Helping Hands gathered in one of the member's spacious luxury high-rise apartment in downtown Beijing to discuss the situation at Yongping. Several volunteers criticized the apathy of the Chinese staff and their failure to give individualized attention to children's needs. Ellen, a British mother of two who served as the group treasurer, recounted her last visit to the orphanage. With an air of disdain, she scoffed, "The *ayis* asked me to wash the floor, and I just laughed! I mean, come on. I'm there to play with the babies, not do the work for the *ayis*!"

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Thus far I have considered the ways in which efforts to care for abandoned Chinese children residing in state-run institutions are "globalization projects" (Tsing 2000) in which a variety of state and global actors have a stake. Institutionalized youth are uniquely situated outside of the prevailing social order, cast out of their families and left out of China's state-driven processes of modernization. Many healthy girls are relinquished because they are "over-quota," others, both boys and girls, because of various kinds of disability. Yet many abandoned children also live at the nexus of competing local and global forces since transnational processes, particularly adoption, have brought increasing levels of foreign aid and western involvement to Chinese welfare institutes.

Although abandoned children suffer from a lack of social value in Chinese society, I argued in the last chapter that western humanitarian NGOs tend to use first-world understandings of protected childhood and individual rights to reframe these youth as "priceless" (Zelizer 1985). In this chapter I continue to explore varied and contested ideas about children's "needs" and "best interests" (Woodhead 1997; Stephens 1995) by examining disagreements between the Helping Hands volunteers and Chinese caregivers over standards of appropriate care.

Global Women in Local Care Settings

In recent decades there has been an upsurge of research on the relationship between carework and globalization in both paid and unpaid contexts. Across the globe, the labor of care has been and continues to be disproportionately performed by women. Researchers have analyzed how globalization has spurred the massive migration of workers from developing to industrialized nations, particularly the migration of women of color who supply domestic labor and childcare to higher status employers (*see* Ehrenreich and Hochschild, et al. 2004). Scholars have tended to focus on the ways in which migrant women comply with, negotiate or resist the demands of their more privileged employers (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Parrenas 2001; Romero 1992); how they communicate across cultural divides (Wrigley 1996); and how they are denied aid and citizenship in "host" countries while being exploited for their labor (Chang 2000; Constable 1997).

In general, these studies have illustrated the tenuousness of relationships between first-world employers and their disadvantaged workers and how social inequalities between nations and groups of women are exacerbated through global processes and transnational labor flows. However, my research on the collaboration between Yongping and Helping Hands puts a unique twist on this recent scholarship on gender and carework by focusing on the gendered social inequities that emerge when affluent first-world women migrate *into* developing countries such as China and become embedded in local dynamics of care. In this case, westerners who exist near the top of the global social hierarchy were disempowered on-the-ground at Yongping by the Chinese state institutional structure and were ultimately unable to enact any real changes for the children.

Helping Hands was a grassroots volunteer group comprised primarily of affluent western expatriate wives; most of their husbands worked for foreign embassies or large multinational corporations in Beijing. Due to the women's privileged class backgrounds, the group had access to immense social, cultural and financial capital in addition to flexible volunteer labor. Yet despite the overwhelming availability of foreign resources and the western women's desire to transform orphanage conditions, over my two year period of observation, the children's care remained extremely routinized and perfunctory. This was due in large part to the institution's attitude toward foreign involvement.

Akin to the dynamics that I've described occurring in the Tomorrow's Children (TC) unit, Yongping was also a site of substantial discord between volunteers and *ayi* over standards of appropriate care for primarily special needs children. However, while disagreements in the TC unit were related to the importation of western middle-class ideologies about children into a resource-poor Chinese institutional setting, at Yongping

conflicts tended to hinge on divergent gendered understandings about appropriate childcare and the role that women should play in children's lives.

In the case of Tomorrow's Children, the progressive director of the Haifeng CWI welcomed westerners and gave the organization the full authority to operate its own facility, determine its own care guidelines and hire, train and fire its own staff. In contrast, Yongping's director was highly suspicious of outsiders and heavily restricted volunteer involvement to material donations and short visits with children, even though Helping Hands sought to do much more. The oppositional perspectives of western volunteers and Chinese caregivers were embedded in two irreconcilable logics of care in the orphanage, which led to recurring friction within the collaboration. As a result, the children's care went unchanged and social inequalities between the two groups of women were exacerbated.

Overworked and underpaid Chinese caregivers at Yongping generally performed routinized, perfunctory labor on behalf of children and prioritized social reproductive tasks such as feeding, bathing, cleaning and washing clothes. Their work ensured that children's basic physical requirements were met but did not acknowledge or address their emotional needs. Unlike many other welfare institutes, the care standards at Yongping did not seem to be shaped by a lack of material resources: the Helping Hands Organization constantly offered to hire more caregivers and to bring in separate cleaning staff, teachers and/or physical and occupational therapists to ease the burden on overworked *ayi*, but the offers were all repeatedly rebuffed by the orphanage director.

I suggest that this ambivalence towards improving conditions resulted from a hierarchical institutional structure that adhered to Chinese state-driven *suzhi* ideology, which marginalized these youth and relegated them to "low quality" status; orphanage conditions remained deficient because they were not seen as having a future or as deserving of intensive investment. Although *ayi* occasionally expressed fondness for certain children, their sentiments were limited by an institutional culture that did not encourage or reward the expenditure of emotional labor. Hence, at Yongping nurturance was not considered to be a necessary aspect of care.

In contrast, western wives perceived childcare to be inseparable from maternal love and placed little to no importance on the physical tasks of caregiving. Hays (1996) has described this type of "intensive mothering" as a distinctly middle-class phenomenon, which valorizes an immense investment of time, resources and emotional labor in children. However, I suggest that beyond merely reflecting middle-class parenting styles, Helping Hands volunteers' views about care were even further amplified by the extremely gendered, heteronormative expatriate (expat) environment in which nearly all of them lived. Through relocating to China, these women often transitioned from regular middle-class lifestyles in their home countries to an elite environment that was typified by gendered separate spheres that relegated wives to the household while husbands pursued professional careers.

Because most expatriate households employed low-paid female Chinese servants to perform the most tedious tasks of housework, expat women were freed from performing domestic labor within their own homes. As a result, many turned to gender-appropriate charity work with orphaned and abandoned youth, which I believe intensified their understanding of childcare as inseparable from emotional labor and maternal nurturance. However, despite their shared ideology of intensive care, women's

transnational lifestyles required them to maintain flexible schedules that led them to limit their commitment towards their volunteer work.

Being a "Carer" or a "Cleaner": Fitting into Feminist Debates about Carework

At Yongping, disagreements over standards of care between state caregivers and expatriate wife volunteers provide a window into the difficulties that plague transnational collaborations over China's abandoned children. Significantly, the two different approaches to care that I observed, although localized, actually mirrored larger feminist scholarly debates about the meanings and practices of women's work. In an extensive survey of the western feminist literature on caring labor, Mignon Duffy (2005) found that despite a general consensus that care includes both paid and unpaid tasks performed on behalf of dependent populations (such as children, the elderly and the ill or disabled), there is a "lack of consistent conceptual clarity about what kinds of activity constitute care work" (67). Duffy identified two distinct theoretical understandings of care, which she termed *nurturance* and *reproductive labor,* and argued that their very different starting points hold significant repercussions for empirical research on carework and broader understandings of women's inequality.

Helping Hands volunteers subscribed to the nurturance model, which focuses on relationality, human interdependence and the placement of interpersonal relationships between the giver and receiver of care at the center of analysis. Feminist scholars who subscribe to this viewpoint believe that care includes a strong emotional dimension and an emphasis on overall well-being. This perspective is encapsulated by Cancian and Oliker's (2000: 2) definition of care as "feelings of affection and responsibility combined with actions that provide responsively for an individual's personal needs or well-being, in a face-to-face relationship."

In comparison, the care provided by Yongping's caregivers overlapped with the reproductive labor perspective. This approach originated in the earlier western Marxist feminist tradition that sought to bring attention and valuation to women's unpaid domestic work, reconceptualizing it as productive labor essential to societal functioning. This perspective has been typified by Glenn's (1992: 115) often-cited definition of social reproduction as "the array of activities and relationships involved in maintaining people both on a daily basis and intergenerationally." The term "carework" has been used to encompass a much wider range of activities than the nurturance model, including practices that involve human connection and emotion as well as non-relational, non-face-to-face tasks of social reproduction such as routine acts of shopping, cleaning and cooking. The reproductive labor approach views relationality and human connection to be important aspects of many types of activities, but they aren't necessary for an activity to be considered as care.

This chapter uses these two distinct framings of carework to analyze the tension-filled collaboration between Yongping and Helping Hands. In what follows, I first provide a discussion of my methodology and a brief history of the collaboration. I then turn to my ethnographic fieldwork to discuss the routinization of care and organization of children at the orphanage, followed by a discussion of gendered spheres and volunteering amongst affluent expatriate wives in Beijing. These different ways of understanding care

largely contributed to the lack of change in suboptimal care conditions for Yongping's children and highlight the complex nature of transnational efforts.

Fieldwork at the Yongping Orphanage

Helping Hands was comprised of women from a diverse range of national backgrounds, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, South Africa, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Canada, Germany, France, Denmark and Spain. They all shared the same high socio-economic status, since their husbands worked for embassies, international media, banking and legal organizations or multinational corporations such as Motorola, Alcoa or Toyota. Nearly everyone resided in expat enclaves near the embassies or financial centers in Chaoyang District or on the north-eastern outskirts of Beijing near the international schools that most of their children attended.[38]

Volunteer shifts were organized to accommodate the exigencies of women's mobile lifestyles, taking place between 9:30-11:30 am on weekday mornings when their own children were in school and ceasing altogether during the months when families returned home for extended visits. There was an enormous attrition of volunteers each summer as families either returned home for good or moved on to their next international assignment. Most families lived abroad during their children's academic school year and returned to their home countries for about a month during the winter and three months each summer. Families typically resided in Beijing for a period of three to five years. Each fall, when women returned to China for the school year, they would recruit more volunteers from the ranks of newly arrived expatriate women in their social circles and housing compounds.

Helping Hands relied on women for flexible volunteer labor and on their husbands' professional contacts for corporate sponsorships. While volunteer membership was certainly not restricted by gender, male participation tended to be limited to financial or material donations. During my fieldwork, there was a rotating contingent of approximately 40 female volunteers and only two male volunteers (a white Catholic priest and a retired Australian evangelical Christian who moved to China specifically to work with at-risk children). While women would sometimes bring their children to Yongping to volunteer on special occasions, not once did I see one of their husbands in the orphanage. However, men usually attended the formal black-tie events that women organized to fundraise for their projects.

The Limitations of Being an Insider and Outsider

Although Marjorie, other HH volunteers and the Chinese orphanage staff were all aware of my researcher status, my primary identity was that of a volunteer. Yet rather than being fully accepted, I inhabited a kind of insider/outsider position with both volunteers and caregivers. Most of the expatriate wives appeared to consider me to be

[38] Wu and Webber (2004) describe the rise of foreign gated communities in Beijing as the result of economic globalization that has enhanced demand for foreign housing, along with a corresponding shift from state-owned to commodity housing. The spatial clustering of gated communities in specific parts of the city is a main facet of Beijing's economic development that exacerbates status differences between foreigners and the local population.

fundamentally different from them because I was an unmarried, childless, bilingual, bicultural graduate student who resided in an all-Chinese area. However, unlike Simmel's "stranger" (1921) whose objective distance from a social group can lead to becoming a confidante, I overlapped enough with volunteers in terms of gender and cultural background *not* to be allowed in too closely. As a result, while my presence was always welcomed, the volunteers didn't seem to understand why I was there.[39]

I should also note that I was not able to formally interview any of the female Chinese caregivers or spend time with them outside of the institution. Although they were clearly more comfortable with me than with white volunteers due to my Chinese heritage and language skills, I was still considered a representative of HH; therefore, I was not included in any of the "backstage" (Goffman 1959) discussions that the staff shared about the children or volunteers. However, I was able to glean a certain amount of information about their lives through informal conversations with five of the six caregivers, who ranged in age from their mid-20s to their mid-50s. Three of the women had one child while the two younger women were childless. About halfway into my fieldwork one *ayi* in her early 20s married and quit her job soon after, yet for the most part there was surprisingly little turnover in staff.[40] Four of the women who worked in the orphanage in 2006 remained there in 2009.

While the orphanage served as an extension of the domestic realm for expatriate women, it was a workplace for low-status local Chinese women. At the time of fieldwork, they were paid only 580 *yuan* per month (equivalent to about $75 U.S.). This paled in comparison to the average Beijing wage in 2006 of 1750 *yuan* per month, which was nearly three times that amount (China Statistical Yearbook 2007). Similar to the state caregivers I discussed in the last chapter who worked at the Haifeng Orphanage, *ayi* at Yongping worked 12 hour shifts seven days per week. They were given only one day of rest per month, in addition to national holidays.

Caregivers were always cordial and often friendly to me; even so, they were extremely tight-lipped about their opinions and never revealed much information about the children. In this highly sensitive political climate, it was extremely difficult to ask in-depth questions without arousing suspicion or possibly jeopardizing HH's already tenuous working relationship with Yongping. Thus, for this analysis I rely more on my fieldwork observations than on interviews with the Chinese staff.

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[39] Even so, over time my level of involvement with the group became quite deep. Collaborating with an American friend who had expertise in pre-school teaching and child development, I helped to organize a volunteer group comprised of young, motivated Chinese and western college students to visit Yongping on Saturday afternoons. We developed a bilingual list of guidelines and worked to build strong levels of trust with all of the *ayi*—for example, by giving them traditional *hongbao* (red packets filled with money given during Chinese New Year) and thoroughly cleaning the facility each time we visited. This group contributed large donations and held fundraisers on behalf of the children. However, its existence was largely ignored by other HH volunteers, as our Saturday schedule interfered with their weekend family time, so they never considered participation as an option.

[40] This lack of turnover is surprising in comparison to orphanage settings in other cultural contexts. Groark, et al. (2005) describe high turnover rates of caregivers in orphanages in St. Petersburg, Russia that resulted from low pay, low status and difficult working conditions.

History of the Yongping-Helping Hands Collaboration

Helping Hands was founded in 1998 by Marjorie Lee, a tireless overseas Chinese woman in her early 60s who was born in Brazil, raised in Hong Kong and educated in the United States. Her American husband worked for an international law firm while Marjorie devoted all of her time to a variety of issues related to orphaned and abandoned children. She was a "cultural translator" (Merry and Stern 2005) who had a rare combination of English and Chinese language fluency, understanding of the complex Chinese state bureaucracy and western cultural understanding. Marjorie used her vast network of social connections to garner support for her causes within Beijing's expatriate community, which responded by organizing black-tie galas and other types of fundraisers for the organization. Without Marjorie's bicultural knowledge and ability to act as a liaison between the two sides, HH would not be able to exist.

The Yongping Social Welfare Institute (SWI) became a popular site for volunteers primarily due to its location; situated on the eastern outskirts of Beijing, it is in close proximity to the numerous expatriate housing compounds that have sprung up en masse in recent years. At the time of fieldwork the SWI was managed by the local district's Ministry of Civil Affairs (it was originally only intended to be a nursing home to care for former Communist cadres). However, over the past decade it was required to take in a number of abandoned children. In addition to the nursing home and orphanage, the premises also housed a private-pay facility for approximately 100 severely mentally and/or physically disabled adults who required full-time supervision. Visitors were not permitted inside the building and the windows were placed so high on the walls that the residents inside were not visible, although loud moans and other disturbing noises could often be heard. Volunteers often whispered rumors to one another about the horrific treatment of the individuals living "in the back." This profit-driven facility reflected the general decline of financial support from the central government for social welfare provision that has led many welfare institutes to garner additional income through revenue-generating ventures (Keyser 2006; Shang 2001).

Helping Hands first became involved with Yongping in 2003, bringing volunteers to hold babies who resided in three isolated and neglected rooms located at the end of one hallway of the nursing home. At the time, the rooms housed about 20 mostly special needs children. There was a wide diversity of disabilities and ailments ranging from minor cleft palates to debilitating cerebral palsy, though there were also a significant number of healthy children. In these early days children were separated according to age, with infants in one room and toddlers in another. A third room was designated as a "playroom," although there were no toys or activities. Long-term volunteers described unimaginable conditions and recalled that the children were only attended to during the day. At 6pm they were strapped down to their beds or cribs, the doors were closed and the *ayi* did not return to check on them until 6 am the next morning. Fortunately, there was one elderly man living in the facility who took it upon himself to monitor the children when the staff was off-duty.

Heather, an American mother of four whose husband worked for a large multinational oil company, described the material and emotional deprivation of the time:

> At the beginning…we'd walk past these rooms with old people laying by themselves in their beds. The smell was awful and the sanitation non-existent.

> They had non-flushing little kids' toilets on the ground that used to get filled up, and sometimes they'd get knocked over. They used to put two or three babies in a crib and line them all up next to each other. And if the kids were big enough to stand they'd put them in these metal cage things [metal carts with bars on all four sides] all day long. There were no toys whatsoever. At first we weren't allowed to hold the babies. We had to prop them up on pillows and look down on them from above because if we held them they'd want to be held again after we left and would cry.

Sensing an opportunity for action, HH founder Marjorie Lee quickly got to work, using her unrivaled communication skills to gain permission from Yongping's director to construct a separate orphanage facility and a colorful adjoining playground on one side of the nursing home. Completed in 2004, this bright one-story structure was paid for through the financial sponsorship of several Beijing-based foreign corporations.

(Photo of the Yongping Orphanage, taken by a Helping Hands volunteer in 2007. The nursing home and private pay facility for mentally disabled adults were located to the left- hand side, out of frame.)

The building featured a long hallway, which connected several large bedrooms that housed approximately 36 mostly male children at any one time (see Chapter 3 for information regarding the changing gender composition of orphaned and abandoned youth). There were also separate boys' and girls' bathrooms, a cafeteria, two storage rooms, a laundry room and a large children's playroom. Since becoming involved with Yongping, HH oversaw a variety of building renovations, consistently paid school fees for children and the salaries of three of the orphanage's six full-time *ayi*, donated washing machines and other large items and delivered a continual supply of disposable diapers and infant formula.

Routinized Care and Children as "Inmates": Yongping as a Total Institution

On weekday mornings groups of expatriate women drove through Yongping's gates in a caravan of chauffered luxury vehicles. They often brought friends along as prospective volunteers, many of whom were visibly shaken by their experience and never returned again. At the end of one volunteer shift I saw a first-time volunteer—a young Chinese American mother—standing in the corner with her hands covering her face, quietly sobbing. Her friends gathered around to console her and assured her that volunteering would get easier over time. In an anguished voice, she said, "I can't believe that the [*ayi*] just throw the kids around like that…It's like they don't even care!"

Western visitors tended to experience similar reactions of shock and dismay about the conditions of care and treatment of children at the orphanage. In fact, Yongping shared much in common with Erving Goffman's (1961) concept of the "total institution." In his classic study of life in a mental hospital, Goffman described the daily lives of inhabitants as routinized, tightly scheduled and structured in ways that subordinate individual needs to the goals of the larger system. When staff are responsible for managing "the daily activity of a large number of persons in a restricted space with small expenditure of resources" (50), individualized attention is scarce and activities of daily living tend to be conducted in a large group. Additionally, total institutions are characterized by a breakdown of barriers between the normally distinct spheres of work, play and sleep, which all occur in the same space.

Goffman's description pertains well to childcare in orphanages, particularly those that exist in socialist and post-socialist contexts. In their study of Russian institutions, Groark, et al. (2005) found that activities such as feeding, diapering and bathing were "performed in a businesslike, perfunctory manner with minimum talking and very little social interaction of any kind" (101). Caregiving interactions were totally adult-directed, routinized and done using mechanical-like motions (104). They suggest that caregivers' detached attitudes and lack of responsiveness to children reflected the low social status of orphaned youth in Russia as well as of the women who work with these children. Similarly, Romanian institutions that are underfunded and understaffed have also been characterized by "a lack of adequate nutrition, minimal interpersonal contact, and little to no sensory stimulation" (Wilson 2003: 474).

The care that I observed at Yongping and caregivers' focus on performing tasks of reproductive labor rather than emotional nurturance was similar to its Eastern European counterparts. With their high child-to-caregiver ratio—approximately 10 children to one adult and often even higher—*ayi* prioritized schedules and adult-directed group activities that saved time by decreasing the amount of individualized attention given to each child. Doubling caregivers' burdens was the fact that in addition to performing childcare tasks, they were also responsible for cleaning the entire facility. In comparison, the Tomorrow's Children unit purposely hired separate caregivers and cleaning staff whose responsibilities never overlapped in order to give children as much individualized attention as possible. At Yongping, however, *ayi* spent most of their time performing domestic chores that did not directly involve children such as laundry and mopping floors, which left them with only enough time to provide care for youth in a manner that required the lowest expenditure of energy.

Feeding children, an activity that consumed much of each day, offers a clear illustration of the custodial-type care that was typical in the orphanage. Babies were bottle-fed all at one time at intervals throughout the day, rather than according to each child's level of hunger. Since there were about 10-12 babies and young children who needed to be fed and only one caregiver, bottles were usually placed on small pillows that were balanced on children's chests. More often than not, children lost their grasp on the plastic bottles, which tended to roll out of their reach only half-full, at which time they were quickly collected rather put back into babies' mouths. Even though the formula was provided by Helping Hands and therefore did not cost the orphanage anything, on more than one occasion I observed *ayi* pouring leftover formula from just-used bottles into new ones for other children to drink. After eating, babies were never burped.

At mealtimes the older children—those who could eat solid foods—were gathered into the cafeteria, a room that featured about eight high chairs for toddlers lined across one wall and several tables for the larger children. Even though lunch was usually not given until 11am, children were often herded by *ayi* into the room 30 minutes to an hour beforehand and told to sit and wait quietly—even though they were given nothing to do. During this time volunteers would try to entertain the fidgety children by singing songs and feeding them fruit or other snacks that they had brought with them. After a long wait two or three *ayi* would enter carrying giant steaming bowls of rice porridge (*zhou*) and pork-filled buns (*baozi*) retrieved from the kitchen of the old people's home. This lunch-time meal never varied, even though it contained few vegetables and was comprised mostly of starch and fatty meat.

After doling servings into individual bowls for the older children who could feed themselves, the caregivers would mix the porridge and buns together on large plates and feed the toddlers; by this time they were usually so hungry that they would be banging their hands against their high chairs and even standing upright on their seats. The *ayi* would quickly move up and down the row of wriggling children, using the same spoon to feed the entire group one bite at a time. The toddlers often resembled a group of baby birds, chomping away happily and opening and closing their mouths repeatedly.

Other examples of group-based, custodial care included diapering, bathing and naps. Similar to mealtimes, babies were changed by caregivers all in a row once in the morning and once in the afternoon (and likely once at night, though I was never there to observe), which required nearly all of the infants to sit in wet and dirty diapers for hours on end. The larger children were all bathed together in the shower in groups of four or five boys and girls, shrieking with delight as an *ayi* sprayed them down with water. In my observations no soap, shampoo or lotion was ever used, which caused many of the children to develop dry, chapped and cracked skin or rashes.

Children also spent much of their time sleeping; even the older ones who did not need lengthy naps were nonetheless required to lay down every day from 11:30am to 2pm. One American volunteer half-jokingly described the philosophy of care at the orphanage to be: "Keep them quiet, asleep and out of the way!" She continued in a more serious tone, "It's like there's no long-term plans and ambitions for the kids." While a lack of personalized care may be an unfortunate but expected consequence of life in facilities that suffer from a lack of financial or material resources, this was less valid at Yongping because Helping Hands was willing to pay for or provide just about anything that might improve children's lives. Rather, I contend, the routinized, perfunctory care

that was provided to these children reflected the underlying premise of *suzhi* ideology that abandoned children are not capable of contributing to China's global future are therefore were not worthy of being invested with human capital—regardless of who was providing the money. This attitude was amplified by the caregivers' resistance to westerners setting the terms of conduct or bringing in unfamiliar practices that would give them more control over management of the children.

Volunteers continually attempted to pressure the *ayi* to pay more individualized attention to the children, which was clearly a deep source of irritation for them as the local workers hurried around performing chores. A Spanish volunteer explained her view of the differences between the two groups' views of care,

> Westerners feel that kids need more than just material things, whereas the Chinese just feel happy if they are providing enough beds, clothes and food. When you talk to them about giving one-on-one attention, they look at you like you're from Mars! I think the Chinese do not think it's that important to build emotional bonds with the children. I think it's important for them to develop more of an idea about covering more than children's basic needs.

Keeping Kids Confined: The Organization of Space and Infant Care at Yongping

The orphanage was organized in such a way as to keep children's movements controllable by few staff within a limited amount of space. Hence, the 36 mostly special needs youth were divided along general lines of age and physical ability. Infants and older children comprised distinct groups that slept and ate separately, while toddlers were transitioned from one group to the other when they were able to walk on their own. About 10 infants were confined to one small, crib-filled room that measured approximately 10 feet by 15 feet. Although some of the volunteers were intent on learning all of their names, it was extremely difficult to keep track of the babies because they were randomly switched from crib to crib on a seemingly daily basis.

The only child who never changed cribs was an extremely rigid, unresponsive boy with cerebral palsy and mental retardation. Of all of the infants, he was by far the most neglected and suffered from a serious skin infection that festered on his face for the better part of a year. In comparison, I recalled the course of events for a similar situation that had occurred in the Tomorrow's Children unit when an unidentifiable skin rash appeared on one of the babies. The British nurse immediately snapped a picture of it, emailed it to a skin specialist in the United States who diagnosed it from afar and suggested appropriate treatment. As a result, within a few days it had totally healed. While the TC special care unit spared nothing to provide individualized care to China's most ill and disabled children, at Yongping the opposite was true.

Another unexpected aspect of infant care at the orphanage was how little attention was given to babies, particularly newborns. Although infants who are reared by their own parents are typically considered to require the most time and energy of all children, in the facility this was reversed. Infants tended to be left in their cribs all day long and were rarely held, stimulated, played with or talked to, and as a consequence nearly all of them exhibited significant development delays. Babies were also eerily quiet and

complacent, as they learned early on that crying out of hunger or from having a wet diaper did not garner attention.

The baby room at the Yongping Orphanage. Photo taken in April 2007. (Image blurred to protect the identity of the children.)

It seemed as if children who could not yet speak or walk were considered to be the least deserving of caregiver time, which placed newborns at the bottom of the orphanage hierarchy. Tirella et al.'s (2008) study of caregiver time use in Russian baby homes concurs with my observations, finding that institutionalized infants actually spent the *least* amount of time with caregivers as compared with their older peers. Across all age ranges, children spent about half of their time alone, while infants who were less than 12 months of age spent about 65% of their time by themselves (82). Moreover, these researchers found that because their observations were performed during the daytime when caregiving interactions were more frequent (between 8am and 1pm), the actual percentage of time that children spent on their own was likely even higher.

This counterintuitive approach to infant care became obvious to me on one of my first visits to Yongping in the winter of 2007. I arrived on a dark afternoon to find only three caregivers present, instead of the usual five or six. Dang Yu, a typically friendly (if sometimes aggressive) teenage girl with Down Syndrome, spotted me and ran over excitedly. Grabbing my hand roughly, she pulled me down the hallway and into a side storage room that was filled with boxes and clothing. Pointing to a small crib in the middle of the space, she exclaimed, "It's crying!" (*ku le*). I peered inside and was astonished to find a wailing but otherwise healthy, week-old tiny baby girl bundled up in two heavy quilts, many layers of clothing and a large pink baby cap. I immediately scooped her up and hurried back down the hallway towards one of the *ayi*. She instructed me to put the baby back down, warning me that she might catch a cold if she was held. On subsequent visits I was relieved to find that the girl had been moved to the baby room and within several months had been adopted by a local family.

Although the lack of individualized care for infants created major developmental setbacks, I also observed that over time the healthy babies were able to teach themselves

motor skills that allowed them to catch up on their own. When I first began volunteering there was a cluster of 3 to 6 month-old healthy babies whose bodies were extremely floppy; they were unable to hold their heads up, roll over or tolerate being on their stomachs. Yet even with a nearly total lack of adult stimulation (other than what volunteers could provide in short, two-hour spurts), by the time they had reached the age of 18 months the children were incredibly mobile, intelligent and inventive. One day I arrived to find that the door of the baby room had been purposely blocked with wooden shelves in order to keep the infants from escaping. Since there were no toys in the room to occupy them, I watched transfixed as the now-toddlers performed gymnast-like feats by pulling themselves up, into and even out of one another's cribs as a form of entertainment. Their increased mobility also had an unfortunate downside as *ayi* began using cloth to tie children's left arms to the side of their cribs during naptimes to prevent them from getting out.

The Organization of Older Youth and the Emotional Effects of Routinized Care

Once toddlers could walk without assistance they were moved to the crowd of roughly 20 older children, who were often only attended to by one *ayi*. The group ranged in age from roughly 2-16 years, and included a larger number of boys and disabled children whose age, gender and physical and/or mental limitations gave them little to no chance of adoption by local families. Due to the high energy of this rambunctious group, caregivers contained their movements by locking them into a large playroom whose door had a window cut into it that allowed monitoring from the outside. For the sake of organization, children were also divided according to type of disability. Two small boys with Down Syndrome were usually kept together in a cage-like metal cart and two adolescent boys with cerebral palsy were always placed side by side in their wheelchairs in one neglected corner of the playroom.

There was a noticeable lack of toys in the sizeable space, even though there was a locked cabinet *in the room* that was crammed full of donated books and other play materials that were never brought out. The children, who were understandingly bored, invented their own games or fought over discarded scraps of paper that they could use to make paper airplanes. The only entertainment was a television mounted high on one wall, which had been donated for the purpose of playing educational DVDs and kids' shows. Instead, it was nearly always tuned to a dramatic Chinese soap opera that the *ayi* watched with one eye while she supervised the group.

Although Yongping was certainly not the most resource-deprived of institutions, the absence of individualized care appeared to create major behavioral issues that were readily apparent in the older children. Groark, et al. (2005) observe that youth who lack a consistent and responsive caregiver often exhibit a similar range of behaviors, which include indiscriminate friendliness, a shift from early passivity to later aggressivity, overactivity, distractibility, an inability to form deep or genuine attachments and difficulty with establishing peer relationships (100). A significant portion of Yongping's older children displayed many of these behaviors, particularly indiscriminate friendliness.

When I first began visiting the orphanage I was charmed when children would literally launch themselves into my arms even though they had no idea who I was. They jostled against each other with their arms outspread, calling out plaintively, *"Ayi, bao*

wo!" (Auntie, hold me!) as they attempted to be heard above the rest. As I learned more about child attachment issues, my initial pleasure switched to concern as I came to realize that most of the older children were completely unable to distinguish between trustworthy adults and those who should be avoided. A male Australian volunteer who had been working regularly at Yongping lamented the fact that children never get the chance to feel emotionally secure; he predicted that those "who do not start out disabled in any way will become environmentally disabled over time, which [will have] both physical and mental effects."

Compared with relative calm of the baby room, the general dynamic of the playroom was far more chaotic, competitive and aggressive. A group of five boys with fixed cleft lips and palates—first and second-graders who attended a local elementary school during the week—set the tone during Saturday visits. Although they were mostly well-behaved and could even be quite considerate, massive spurts of energy led them to careen around the room wildly, steal toys from smaller children, hoard snacks and practice martial arts moves on each other. Tried as I might, I found it difficult to suppress vivid images from *The Lord of the Flies*. This unruly environment appeared to have the strongest effect on the group's youngest members as they transitioned into their new setting.

For example, within weeks of being placed with the older children, Dang Wu, a two-year old deaf boy who had been a sweet and mild-mannered baby, began to act out in antagonistic ways. One afternoon as I sat on the floor of the playroom, a five-year old boy plopped down into my lap and chatted with me animatedly. Dang Wu ran over and with clear, unabashed enthusiasm fiercely kicked the leg of the child I was holding. With a flash of anger, the much larger five-year old immediately jumped to his feet and reared his leg back to kick the boy in return. With children running amok around us and no *ayi* in sight, I used all of my strength to physically restrain them until tempers had subsided.

Laura also thought that children's issues often stemmed from the institutional environment and lack of good care. She ultimately did not hold out any hope that the situation would change:

> I've noticed that kids who are raised there create their own problems. Whereas [westerners] think, if kids have a problem, let's not create a new problem while we're trying to avoid the old problem. You need someone with a professional background, but what you have is uneducated *ayi* and a director who really doesn't care.

The Separation Between the Public Care of the State and the Private Care of Kinship

Rosie Read's (2007) ethnography of caregiving in a Czech nursing home in the 1990s provides a useful analogy to the care that was provided to children at Yongping. Similar to *ayi*, Czech nurses did not personalize the care that they provided to their patients because they "simply did not see emotional work, i.e. communicating and empathizing with patients and creating a warm and supportive environment of care, as part of their job" (209). Read found that workers did not identify with their patients and their needs, but instead, identified with their employer and with the broader ideology of the socialist model of care that focused solely on improving patients' physical and

medical health. This approach logically resulted in "an entrenched and pervasive culture of indifference towards patients' emotional well-being" (209-10).

This was also the case at Yongping, where *ayi* were located on the bottom rung of a larger socialist institutional culture that devalued abandoned children and equated official work responsibilities with reproductive labor tasks. Similar to what Read found in the Czech nursing home, there was an enforced separation between the "public care of the state and the private care of kinship" (214). In other words, state-employed caregivers were not expected to provide personalized care to their patients because love and commitment were considered to be part of the private, emotional realm of the family.

The separation between public and private responsibilities at Yongping became apparent in my interview with Angela, the Filipina occupational therapist, who by that time had been living at the orphanage for several months. She was recuperating from a serious asthma attack for which she had been hospitalized and was clearly homesick, exhausted and dissatisfied with her experience. Angela bitterly noted that her job duties had expanded from providing therapy to also including reproductive labor. She complained, "here they expect you to do care giving. I can't just do therapy, but am also supposed to clean and give the children a bath." She questioned her purpose in being there at all:

> It's totally disorganized here. There's no real schedule for the kids to follow. The *ayis* should teach the children, but they don't. I get frustrated because we are giving them an example but they're not following it. It's like they think "you do your thing and we'll do ours." I wonder why are we here?

This is not to say that caregivers did not provide *any* emotional care to the children, but rather that personalized relationships were considered separate from work duties. *Ayi* gave individualized attention to certain youth, usually picking out favorites who were the cutest, most sociable and able-bodied children. Yet as Read also found in her study, "these personalized relationships were only recognized and indulged in…when there were no formal physical duties to perform" (211). This demonstrated that caregivers did not conflate their work responsibilities with their personal identities as women and mothers.

"Trailing Wives" in China: Gendered Spheres and Volunteer Work

In contrast to *ayi*, expatriate wife volunteers brought their gendered identities with them into their volunteer work at Yongping. Moreover, I argue, the heteronormative, elite social context in which they lived even further heightened their view of childcare as intensive mothering and led them to disparage reproductive labor.

Helping Hands volunteers were part of a quiet, but growing, "privileged" migration of first-world citizens into urban Chinese society. Most studies of globalization have tended to focus on the migration of low-paid workers from the global south into industrialized nations and the transnational ties that they build in their new communities. The contemporary experiences of privileged skilled migration of first-world workers to developing country contexts have not been as thoroughly investigated as the global "brain drain" of educated workers from developing to developed countries; this is true even

though first-world migrants' "comparatively small numbers contrast with their disproportionally significant role in global capitalism" (Fechter 2007: 22).[41]

Moreover, while globe-trotting westerners have often been portrayed in celebratory ways as examples of "unboundedness" and fluidity that challenge the concept of national borders little scholarly attention has been paid to the specifically *gendered* dimensions of privileged migration (Mahler and Pessar 2001). The intertwined nature of globalization and gender makes it imperative to use feminist sensibilities to analyze transnational processes. As Enloe (2000) has succinctly argued, "the personal is global [and] the global is gendered" (xi).

The transnational movement of western professionals is a highly gendered enterprise. Men comprise 86% of the international workforce, while in Beijing the ratio is even more skewed at 96% male (Arieli 2007). Yeoh and Willis (2005) note that the globalization literature's tends to portray skilled international migrants as individuals not bound to others; they are "treated as highly mobile individual male careerists…and discussed as if they are non-gendered beings who do not form part of a household" (212). This is true even though foreign relocation is usually a family affair that includes an even larger number of wives and children. However, because women are considered to be dependents of their husbands and their migration "is not directly linked to paid work in globalized settings," scholars have tended to overlook their concerns and contributions (Yeoh and Willis 2005: 213). Even the terminology denotes these gendered power relations, as male workers are often referred to as "lead migrants" while their female partners are relegated to the status of "trailing wives."

Spousal and familial adjustment to foreign countries can have major financial implications for corporations, since it directly impacts the overall success or failure of international assignments (Copeland and Norell 2002). Because of the extremely high costs of relocating workers abroad (or in the case of failure, of moving them back home again), it is in the best interests of corporate employers for wives to find ways to effectively manage the total disruption of their personal and professional lives. Myriad websites and online support groups such as ExpatWomen.com, expatmum.com, momsclub.org and female-expat.org (to give but a few examples) point to the gendered responsibility that women bear to ensure that their family's international experience goes smoothly.

The presence of wives in expatriate life is also integral for the pivotal, albeit usually unacknowledged role they play in smoothing and facilitating relations between men in the worlds of international business and diplomacy (Enloe 2000). In fact, corporations tend to prefer sending married men to work abroad, since evidence of stable marriages creates confidence in employers that men are professionally trustworthy. Thus, when studies of privileged migration take gender into account global cities such as Beijing shift from being considered flexible—even emancipatory—spaces to places that are heavily

[41] Foreign investment and multinational corporate partnerships are major factors in China's rapidly increasing economic power. In recent years, more than 10,000 joint-ventures and regional headquarters of multinational corporations have been established in Beijing (Wu and Webber 2004), which is also the center of the nation's booming tech industry. Correspondingly, thousands of highly skilled foreigners—comprised mostly of middle-class western and Asian professionals from Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan—have relocated to Beijing and other urban centers.

dominated by heteronormative ideologies and restrictive standards of conduct for both women and men (Fechter 2007; Yeoh and Willis 2005; Yeoh and Khoo 1998).

International movement can upset more egalitarian gender arrangements shared between heterosexual married couples within their home countries that were often a result of both partners having their own career. Many Helping Hands volunteers recalled their professions back home, which included accountant, journalist, nurse, teacher, physician's assistant, massage therapist and physical therapist. None, however, pursued paid work in Beijing; in addition to the tremendous difficulty of attaining work visas, most also lacked Chinese language skills or couldn't find local temporary career options other than low-paid English teaching positions.[42] Since these women were viewed as extensions of their husbands by their host country government, they could not obtain the appropriate visas or permits that would allow them to work legally. Moreover, their husbands' generous relocation packages usually eliminated any financial need for women to work. The act of moving abroad, therefore, has led many career-oriented women to choose between work and family, rather than accommodating both.

New patterns of globalization have led women to become "incorporated wives" (Callan and Ardener 1984) whose social identities become conflated with their husbands' professional roles. These contemporary gender arrangements closely resemble a trend that Hanna Papanek (1973) termed the "two-person single career" nearly four decades ago; this idea referred to the experience of educated middle-class housewives who did not engage in paid work but instead used their skills and training to make significant contributions to their husbands' careers, through which they gained a sense of "vicarious achievement."[43] In the present day, rather than giving expatriate wives freedom from social constraints, new transnational spaces can reinstate earlier forms of women's disempowerment within families.

"Not a Typical Expat Wife": Escaping Social Constraints and Stereotypes Through Charity Work

The expatriate women I met were among the most mobile populations in the world. However, their lives abroad were restricted by social, economic and geographic boundaries that distanced them from local society. By residing in specific parts of the city where everything was western-oriented, foreign families in Beijing experienced a cocoon-like existence. Moreover, the strict separation between public and private spheres that structured expat life resulted in even more social isolation for women than for men, who interacted daily with Chinese society in their work lives. Fechter (2007) describes the lives of expatriate women as an odd combination of freedom that derives from material affluence and "the experience of being fenced in and restricted in terms of social and spatial movements" (42).

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[42] This accords with the findings of the first large-scale academic survey of expatriate spouses (McNulty 2005), which included 264 respondents residing in 54 different host countries around the world. 90% were women and most of them were highly-educated married mothers under the age of 40 who (often reluctantly) gave up careers in order to relocate.

[43] In her landmark study *Men and Women of the Corporation*, Rosabeth Kanter (1977) also discussed a similar trend of middle-class wives being forced to subsume their own professional interests to those of their husbands, which often resulted in diminished self-esteem and self-confidence for women.

Although globalization has clearly resulted in more social interconnectivity and interdependency between disparate groups, most individuals continue to live local, "bubble lives" based around shared ethnicity, nation and social class (Kennedy 2007). Laura, an American mother of three young children who accompanied her journalist husband to Beijing five years earlier, self-consciously lamented how "grossly out of sync" her family's lifestyle was with the rest of Chinese society. She elaborated, "we live in a compound—we have to out of necessity. But our kids go to the international school, so the choices that we've made have in some ways separated us from the [local Chinese] community." This sense of distance from local society provided the impetus for many foreign women to seek out involvement with charity organizations. During one management meeting, Ellen, a British woman who served as treasurer for Helping Hands, candidly remarked, "We are mostly trailing wives, and we volunteer as a way to close the gap of privilege between ourselves and Chinese society."

Unlike the evangelical Christians at Tomorrow's Children who described volunteering as a religious "calling" that they performed in service to the world's least fortunate members, HH volunteers did not use their work with abandoned children to change Chinese culture from the ground-up or to challenge existing patterns of inequality. Rather, many foreign women turned to charity work to create more of a sense of purpose in their own lives and to escape the cultural, class and geographic constraints that structured their worlds. Volunteering at Yongping served as a gender-appropriate activity that allowed them to feel like they were contributing something to local Chinese society while keeping their primary social identities as wives and mothers intact.

Their more personal reasons for getting involved in social causes connect contemporary expatriate wives with the American "child-savers" of the Progressive Era, affluent women whose social worlds were also defined by separate gendered spheres. Anthony Platt (1969) has argued that the rearrangement of family life at the turn of the 20th century increased the amount of leisure time for white upper and middle-class women. As a result, many turned to philanthropy as a way to fill their hours and fulfill their own desires to be productive while staying clear of posing any challenge to heteronormative social structures. Child-saving, which included successful political campaigns against child labor and for mandatory schooling, "was a reputable task for any woman who wanted to extend her housekeeping functions into the community without denying anti-feminist stereotypes of woman's nature and place" (76).

Similarly many foreign wives, faced with unexpectedly free schedules, many turned to unpaid community-based work in their transnational contexts as "an adaptive strategy" to alleviate a sense of boredom and purposelessness (Yeoh and Khoo 1998: 159). These feelings were expressed by an HH volunteer named Shirley, a middle-aged woman from Hong Kong who had earned master's degrees in special education and educational psychology in the U.S. and Canada. With her son grown and out of the house, she accompanied her husband to Beijing in 1997 where she had nothing to occupy her time. She met Marjorie through mutual friends, who asked her to join Helping Hands as one of its first volunteers. Shirley described her reasons for getting involved with volunteer work:

> I just had too much time on my hands. I would just sit at home and watch TV by myself. I'm not the kind of person who goes out to buy jewelry and goes

shopping all the time and has tea with my friends. So I got involved with Helping Hands to save myself from depression.

In her study of expatriate wives in Beijing, Arieli (2007) argues that women experience a high degree of "intensified ambivalence" as they attempt to reconcile the feminist-infused values of their home societies with the highly gendered and restrictive structure of life in China. Yet rather than resisting new norms, she found that many women willingly relinquish their careers and desires for professional development as well as provide emotional support for their families in exchange for higher social status and an affluent lifestyle. In this way, many expat women engage in a patriarchal bargain (Kandiyoti 1987), swapping emotional labor for "wealth, leisure, the ability to dominate women of lower status who do most of the housework for them, and the ability to…construct for themselves a prestigious identity as privileged women" (20).

HH volunteers spoke about the instantaneous—and for some, quite unsettling—elevation of their social status and standard of living in Beijing as compared to their more typical middle-class lives back in their home countries.[44] Women found that they could enter into a life of nearly total leisure because almost all foreign households employed at least one (though usually several) full-time hired help to do most of the difficult or time-consuming domestic duties. These tasks included cleaning the house, doing laundry, cooking meals, purchasing groceries and caring for children—including dropping them off and picking them up from school. In fact, domestic servants were often included as part of their house or apartment.

Yet in contrast to Arieli's findings, I found that many foreign women experienced true discomfort with their lack of independence and new roles as housewives. Volunteers seemed particularly wary of fulfilling the negative stereotype of the pampered expat wife, who has been characterized by "luxurious lifestyles, a lack of language skills, arrogance, ignorance and possibly racist attitudes" (Fechter 2007: 5). Daniela, a Spanish occupational therapist who was married to a Swiss Embassy official, shared this perception. She tried to distance herself from it, stating "I don't feel like a normal expat wife who just follows my husband around, like one of those women who just does her nails everyday." Daniela noted that their move to Beijing was a mutual decision that allowed them to experience other cultures and clarified that even though she was currently supporting her husband's career, they had agreed that in the future the situation would reverse and he would support her professional goals.

Some women were highly self-conscious of their privileged social positions, which motivated them to do something useful with their time. Laura began volunteering at Yongping due to her uneasy feelings about the expatriate lifestyle. Although she had stopped working years earlier to raise children, she wasn't prepared to have other people perform most of the housework and childcare. Laura stated,

[44] Companies seeking to persuade families to move abroad tended to offer extremely generous employment packages that usually included a housing stipend and tuition fees for children to attend prohibitively expensive international schools. About half of the western families I met in Beijing also employed a chauffer to drive them around in a company-provided car, as many companies did not allow their employees to drive in China.

> When you come to China, you walk into this environment where you have [household] help, where I've got somebody full-time watching my kids, doing the cleaning, and I felt a tremendous sense of guilt. I wasn't working, and I had help to take care of the kids so I felt a need to be productive in some way.

Other volunteers expressed similar sentiments. Heather, an American mother of four whose family had previously lived in Dubai and was later sent to Indonesia, met with me in her palatial house in an exclusive western-style compound. As we sat at her large dining room table being served tea and cookies by one of her Chinese housekeepers, she critiqued other western women for not volunteering:

> I don't understand why there aren't more expats helping out. There are people out here who are just interested in shopping, eating, doing their nails. I mean, I like to shop and eat, but I just think they're missing the whole boat of why they're here. Plus the fact is that we all have *ayis* who do our housework, cook our meals, and take care of our kids. My *ayi* sends my kids off to school and picks them up in the afternoon, so once they're gone I really have the whole day to do things. So when I ask them to volunteer, and they say they're busy, I think—busy doing what? You don't even clean your own house!

Volunteering as a Flexible Way to "Do" Motherhood

For expatriate wives, I suggest that the heteronormative social expectations that they faced led them to overemphasize emotional labor in their volunteer work and to not view reproductive labor tasks as fundamental aspects of caregiving. Although their western middle-class backgrounds already predisposed them to ideologies of "intensive motherhood" (Hays 1996), the transnational setting further exacerbated their understandings of appropriate care as necessarily entwined with maternal nurturance. Yeoh and Willis (2005: 220) discuss the relationship between social conditions and mothering practices, which "are constantly being (re)negotiated as women interpret their identities in relation to the particular context in which they find themselves."

HH volunteers brought their expectations of care into their work at Yongping, where during short two-hour shifts they tried to provide children with maternal love—which usually amounted to holding babies and playing with the older youth using toys and gestures to bridge the language divide. Heather, who had been volunteering there for four years, stated that she felt an emotional bond and responsibility between herself and the Chinese mothers who abandoned their children to state care. She stated, "I feel like I have to be the arms for the mothers who had to give their kids away. It's important just to hug a child and let them know that someone loves them when their mothers couldn't."

The orphanage was a setting that stirred women's maternal instincts, sometimes in dramatic and surprising ways. Laura, who served as one of the day leaders responsible for organizing volunteers each week, explained a situation where she spotted a new volunteer breast-feed two infants at Yongping without permission. The young woman, who had a young child of her own at home, had become extremely emotional upon seeing brand-new babies lying alone in their cribs and felt compelled to physically nurse the infants. Laura happened to pass by and was shocked at the scene and worried that the

volunteers were going to get into trouble with the *ayi*. However, she ultimately chose not to intervene because, as she said, the volunteer "was in severe survival mode" and her maternal intensity "was almost like something not to be reckoned with." To everyone's amazement, none of the *ayi* complained and the woman breast-fed the babies again the next time she volunteered.

Even so, despite their identification as maternal nurturers, expatriate wives' transient, transnational lifestyles prevented them from being able to provide consistent care to the children. Unlike Tomorrow's Children volunteers who had to apply for the position, provide references and were obligated to serve for an agreed-upon length of time, HH did not ask for any kind of commitment from its members. Marjorie felt that women were being generous to give any of their time and did not feel as if she could ask them for more of an obligation. Ironically, the lack of guidelines led expat wives to add to the problem of inconsistent care for children, as volunteers continually brought other friends for one-time visits and went when it was convenient, usually ceasing for several months of the year when they returned home. This predicament made apparent the fact that women engaged in volunteer work as a way to pass time and to create a sense of purpose while in China.

Daniela—the only expat wife volunteer who did not have children—critiqued other women for not being more serious or committed to their volunteer work. As a licensed children's physical therapist, she treated volunteering as an unpaid profession and spread her time across several different orphanages and western foster homes in the Beijing area. Daniela expressed disapproval over the lack of professionalism that she felt expatriate women brought to their volunteer work:

> I think that in some developing countries many expats think they're here to enjoy themselves and so they do things superficially…Sometimes I get worried because China can be so open and allows us to do things that it would be impossible to do in our own countries! There are no regulations of volunteers. There are some people who have childcare skills or parenting experience that know what kids need…but people still need to plan and take their work seriously.

Limitations on Western Interventions at Yongping

Despite the superficiality of many women's volunteer efforts, there were many junctures where HH sought to implement true changes—only to be rebuffed by Yongping's extremely guarded and cautious director. Consequently, all of the volunteers who were initially committed to improving conditions gradually gave up hope and resigned themselves to feelings of ambivalence. Over a period of several years Marjorie tried a variety of different strategies to improve children's care. She offered to pay to hire more *ayi* that would ease the workload of others, but was told that having more caregivers would just encourage laziness. She attempted to implement a foster care program and even located local families who were willing to participate, but the director backed out upon learning that the families were Muslim. Because quite a few HH volunteers were interested in adopting children from Yongping, she tried to help the

orphanage sign up for the international adoption program only to be told that the children lacked the appropriate documents.

Marjorie believed that the situation at Yongping had become increasingly politically sensitive in the run-up to the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics, which she thought had caused the director to become even more guarded than usual. Unlike the Haifeng Orphanage, whose director equated Tomorrow's Children with modernity and national progress, Yongping's director appeared to feel that western aid signaled a loss of face (*diu mianzi*) and gave the impression that the institution could not adequately care for its own. The director treated feedback from Marjorie as if it was a threat—a sign of western judgment and evaluation that could be used to shame China as a whole. As a result, particularly after receiving any complaints about care, she began threatening to cut off the collaboration with Helping Hands altogether. For her part, Marjorie expressed how depressed she felt about the lack of change and ultimately decided to gradually pull away in order to devote most of her energy to projects where she "could actually make a difference."

Other volunteers expressed similar feelings of frustration with the orphanage. Joanna, a Taiwanese-American woman who had been volunteering at Yongping for three years and felt that she had built a good rapport with the staff, complained that the orphanage was not using expensive items that HH had donated for specific purposes. She demanded that the head *ayi* return a piece of equipment that was meant to be used to bathe disabled children but was instead gathering dust, which led to a heated argument over children's care standards. At the next HH volunteer meeting, a still-wounded Joanna suggested that the group cease donating major items to Yongping because the caregivers were "ungrateful." This was a situation that highlighted how arguments between adults could inadvertently affect the children in a negative way.

The most pronounced disappointment I encountered was conveyed by Angela, the Filipina occupational therapist who had been hired by Marjorie specifically to train *ayi* how to work with special needs children. She was completely exasperated with her experience at the orphanage. As she explained, "There are real limitations to what you are allowed to do here. I have a lot of ideas, but they are always turned down by the director or reversed by the *ayis."* Angela described her irritation with a recent situation where her ideas were thwarted for seemingly no good reason. She had attempted to get special shoes made for Dang Yan, an extremely intelligent seven-year old girl who was in a wheelchair due to spina bifida. Because disabled children were not allowed to attend regular Chinese schools, the shoes would have allowed the girl to use a walker and to get a real education. But as Angela angrily recounted, "I found a doctor out here who was willing to work with her and set everything up, and then we asked the director and she said no! So nothing happened."

Many women continued to volunteer in a half-hearted manner, as they were resigned to their inability to improve the situation. Teresa, a Mexican-American volunteer, expressed her frustration:

> I understand that there are certain ways of doing things here and we must respect that. But some of the things that [the *ayi*] do to the kids you shouldn't do anywhere—China, North America, Africa. Like tying the kids to the beds or tying [an autistic] boy's hands behind his back. It's like they're animals…But

> we're not going to be able to change them. If there's going to be change, then it needs to come from the top. Like someone has to tell them that if they do something wrong, then they'll get fired. Or if they do better, they'll get an extra 10 *kuai* or something. But it's not going to come from us.

Conclusion

This chapter has used a gendered lens to situate and contextualize conflicting understandings about care that complicated the collaboration between Helping Hands and the Yongping Orphanage. Expatriate wife volunteers, many of whom gave up their careers in order to support their husbands' careers abroad, tended to equate caregiving with intensive motherhood and maternal nurturance—even though they only provided this care when it was convenient to their schedules and in short spurts. On the other hand, Chinese *ayi*—several of whom had their own children—did not view themselves as maternal substitutes. Instead, they identified with the institution and reflected the attitudes of the larger socialist institutional hierarchy that equated work with the physical tasks of reproductive labor.

I've argued that these two different perspectives mirror larger feminist scholarly debates that have taken place over definitions of care, which usually tends to be simplified as "women's work." It seemed ironic these expat wives, who are positioned at the top of elite Beijing society, were completely disempowered from implementing their vision of appropriate care within the institution. Despite offering an overwhelming amount of social and financial resources, in the end they were powerless to bring change to a state-managed facility that viewed foreign involvement with suspicion and considered its population of children as unworthy of investment (regardless of who was providing the money). Ultimately, I argue that this mismatch in understandings about women's work and children's social value resulted in a deep sense of ambivalence that plagued the collaboration and resulted in a stalemate.

The elite transnational community that expat wives reside in exerts immense pressure on them to conform to very narrowly defined identities as housewives and mothers, despite the fact that many had previously pursued successful careers in their home countries. Yet even though they were relegated to the household, these women's high class positions and elevated social status allowed them to rely on the labor of low-paid female Chinese domestic servants who performed the most tedious and time-intensive chores. Freed from housework, they were able to spend their time contributing to social causes that allowed them to feel as if they were contributing to local Chinese society while also not challenging restrictive gender norms. While they saw their roles in the orphanage to be as maternal nurturers for children, their efforts were inconsistent and they were blocked by the orphanage director from having an impact on the actual conditions of care.

This situation exemplifies Colen's (1995) concept of stratified reproduction, which highlights inequalities in women's performance of physical and social reproductive labor. It draws attention to the ways in which axes of difference such as class, ethnicity and nationality cut across the typically feminized realms of childbearing and rearing. The increasingly commodified nature of reproductive labor benefits women who can hire others to perform it for them, and in the process, "reproduces stratification

by reflecting, reinforcing and intensifying the inequalities on which it is based" (1995: 78). This collaboration highlights women's vastly different relationships to reproductive labor depending on their position in the global economy and the ways in which their status can help to shape understandings of what children need and deserve.

Conversely, *ayis'* attitudes towards children's needs were shaped by a harsh institutional workplace culture that prioritized routinized, perfunctory tasks of reproductive labor and did not encourage emotional investment. Overworked and underpaid, their standards of childcare reflected the apathy of those higher up in the institutional bureaucracy. I've argued that through their very abandonment these mostly special needs youth are considered by the Chinese state as embodiments of "low quality" who are slowing the nation's modernization process. As the hidden, unintended consequences of economic progress, these children are treated as a valueless group to be maintained on a daily basis rather than as worthwhile individuals who will contribute to China's global ascendancy.

This collaboration was fraught with unresolved tension, as HH volunteers were frustrated over their inability to accomplish more or at least to provide more resources for the children while the Chinese director and staff were resentful about being told what to do by westerners. Yet I suggest that these disagreements over standards of care reflected larger political concerns and implicated national-level relations of power. While western volunteers viewed themselves as individuals who were merely interested in giving time and attention to needy children, it appeared that for orphanage, allowing outsiders to dictate the treatment of its youth would have represented a global loss of face for the Chinese nation as a whole. Perhaps as a logical result, over time nearly all Helping Hands volunteers conceded defeat to Yongping, gradually withdrawing from involvement to devote their time to myriad other social causes. As a sad irony, despite all of these conflicts over care, ultimately the highest price was paid by children.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

China's efforts to build a socialist market economy and improve the "quality" of its population in a globalizing era have alternated between carefully planned and wildly experimental. Rapid social, political and economic changes have created unforeseen consequences for the lives and future opportunities of children. This improvisational approach towards development—reflected in Deng Xiaoping's famous phrase "crossing the river by feeling for stones" (*mozhe shitou guo he*)—is also apparent in the tenuous, constantly shifting nature of collaborations between western NGOs and Chinese orphanages that care for abandoned youth.

Although much of the scholarly and media discussion of Chinese development has heralded the nation's economic progress, throughout the preceding chapters I have drawn attention to the human consequences of state-driven modernization processes. Since first "opening up" to the outside world in 1978, Chinese society has become radically stratified along the lines of gender, class and health. Attaining global economic dominance has come at significant cost to many of its youngest members, contributing to a large population of children whose gender or disabilities have caused them to be discarded by their families and left out entirely from the state-driven project of modernity. Their liminal existence on the margins of society has helped to define contemporary personhood and citizenship in the PRC.

The notion of intermingling, often colliding "globalization projects" has been a central organizing principle of this study. As I have explored, abandoned children exist at the intersection of two major globalization projects: 1) China's state-driven modernization, and 2) western child-saving interventions, which include the transnational adoption of mostly healthy female infants and NGO collaborations with state institutions geared towards improving the lives of the "unadoptable" special needs children who are left behind. Chapter 2 highlighted the broad range of economic and population policies implemented in the PRC since the late 1970s in its attempt to reach economic parity with industrialized nations. This process has created new definitions of social acceptability within Chinese society that are based on individual mental and physical potential.

These sweeping changes have been accompanied by state-promoted *suzhi* discourse, which has encouraged parents to invest in improving their children's "quality" to create productive workers who will care for them in the future as well as modernize the Chinese nation. The seemingly neutral project of improving population quality serves as a form of social engineering that is articulating new categories of citizenship and non-citizenship through the unselfconscious application of eugenic practices. Although this ideology promotes values that map onto to the current neoliberal era, it also connects back to centuries-long Chinese historical concerns regarding the nation's perceived inability to attain a higher level of civilization and national progress.

The internalization of *suzhi* discourse by Chinese citizens has helped to justify unprecedented forms of stratification among children. Healthy, well-educated little emperors are held as the normative standard against whom everyone else is judged. As a result, millions of youth who are considered to lack future economic potential fall outside the state-sanctioned norm, relegated to "low quality" status. The increasingly insecure

fiscal environment and dismantled social welfare safety net have resulted in a far more calculated and utilitarian approach to childbearing and rearing. As Anagnost (2008) has written,

> The shift to a market economy has transformed the stakes in the game of life, in which the individual, increasingly responsible for his or her own profits and losses, is more and more conscious of the cusp between success and failure. This anxiety is translated by parents into the project of ensuring that their only child will be prepared to deal with the heightened competition of a future in which economic opportunity and peril loom equally large (50).

This combination of new economic pressures, stringent fertility regulations and *suzhi* discourse has had extremely gendered effects, particularly in rural areas that continue to be structured along patriarchal and patrilineal lines. Parental preferences for healthy, able-bodied sons that already existed before the reform era have greatly intensified in recent years. Chinese society is already beginning to exhibit effects of the "missing girls" phenomenon, which has been accompanied by an abnormal sex ratio at birth of epic proportions that will undoubtedly exacerbate, if not entirely create, a variety of major social problems in the near future. This desire for able-bodied sons has also increased the chances of special needs children being abandoned to state care, as healthcare costs have skyrocketed and disability continues to be greatly stigmatized.

Chapter 3 explored the ways in which global processes are affecting the lives of healthy rural daughters as they converge with special needs children within institutional settings. In orphanages, daughter discrimination turns into a reversal of fortune for girls whose combination of gender, physical health and racial "flexibility" has reconstituted their social value and made them highly desirable for adoption by white western families. I have highlighted the symbolic significance of transnational adoption for the Chinese state, which has used the transfer of children to bolster its struggling child welfare system and to build closer relationships with a range of industrialized nations. China's growing economic power has been noticeably accompanied by shifts in adoption policy; whereas westerners were once favored, they are now subject to a large number of highly specific qualifications that rule out the majority of prospective parents. I have suggested that the CCP is using adoption regulations to extend its project of population quality and to assert its political will beyond national borders.

The international adoption of Chinese girls, especially to the United States, has been subject to extensive discussion in western countries since it first began in the early 1990s. Scholars have debated the moral meanings that underlie the international transfer of children and used numerous means to assess the adjustment of adoptees to their new surroundings. These studies often represent children's lives as if they begin only once they have joined foreign families. Moreover, the few studies that do consider children's prior histories have tended to describe the care they received in orphanages in purely clinical terms as factors that affect future cognitive and emotional development. By presenting transnational adoption and Chinese institutional care side-by-side, I have sought to draw attention to them as two interrelated halves of the same global project.

In the socialist era unwanted children were often hidden away in institutions and not seen again. However, China's new—albeit guarded—openness to foreign involvement in state orphanages has shined a global spotlight onto one of nation's most politically sensitive domestic issues. Western humanitarian organizations have taken advantage of this narrow window of opportunity to import first-world beliefs and practices into local institutional settings in an attempt to "revalue" disparaged children. Although the foreign organizations I observed varied widely in terms of motivations and commitment to their work, they are nonetheless part of a larger landscape of international organizations sharing similar western ideologies of individual rights and intrinsic human worth. Howell (2006: 14) has argued that it is difficult to deny that "contemporary western views have assumed a global perspective, and that they carry strong normative ambitions." Exporting universalistic models of childhood around the globe, however, can also reproduce existing unequal power relations (Burman 2004).

Using Transnational Collaborations to Reconceptualize the Global/Local Divide

Global forces are often portrayed as having unidirectional ideological and economic impact on unwitting local societies. However, in recent years scholars have suggested that studies of globalization should utilize more historically specific and nuanced investigation in order to identify multiple, varied outcomes that occur at different scales of analysis. By pitting the global against the local, diverse interests and identities are forced into homogeneous categories. Tsing (2000) asserts that researchers must stop making a distinction between "global forces" and "local places" because it obscures "the ways that the cultural processes of all 'place' making and all 'force' making are *both* local and global, that is, both socially and culturally particular and productive of widely spreading interactions" (352, emphasis in original). Similarly, Grewal and Kaplan (1994) argue that viewing the world in terms of a binary local/global divide denies each side's permeability and the continual manner by which they influence, temper and infiltrate the effects of the other (11).

Examining the effects of Chinese economic development at different scales of analysis can create a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the "local" and "global" with regard to reproductive processes. Orphanages that receive foreign aid are sites that make it possible to view the link between macro-level forces of globalization and micro-level interactions. As I have used ethnographic fieldwork in two different Chinese orphanages to demonstrate, institutionalized youth are treated in entirely divergent manners that highlight the socially-constructed and contextual nature of children's social value. In this context they are either seen as priceless individuals deserving of unlimited love and resources or they are considered obstacles to Chinese modernity unworthy of affection or significant investment.

"Saving" Children in Globalizing China

The global/local framing has also been used to describe the transforming nature of childhood in an increasingly interconnected era (Naftali 2008). Analysis of on-the-ground negotiations between foreign organizations and Chinese state institutions reveal the overly simplistic nature of this binary perspective. Orphan-relief NGOs in China

often have the dual objective of "saving" children by improving their material conditions and of enhancing "the economic and spiritual 'health' of the nation" (Cohen 2007: 182). These groups are motivated by normative western ideologies of what childhood should be like. Panter-Brick and Smith (2000: 10) assert that abandoned children are particular objects of concern:

> Children who are not nurtured by responsible adults, who are separated from home, are portrayed as disconnected from family and society; their existence cannot be safe and happy, and therefore they must be rescued or 'saved' (10).

My work with Tomorrow's Children and Helping Hands has demonstrated, however, that the process of "saving" children in developing countries is not necessarily straightforward. Even though foreign organizations may have attempt to impose a certain normative vision of appropriate childhood in their work, this does not mean that their efforts are always successful in practice since local caregivers often push back against or attempt to redefine these standards.

Tomorrow's Children was motivated by ideologies of altruism, child-centeredness and unconditional love. The staff's evangelical Christian inspiration provided them with a dual set of motivations for becoming involved with orphanages: on one hand they sought to provide care for sick and dying children while on the other they tried to serve as an example for local people and to transform Chinese cultural values from the ground-up. Their vision, however, was complicated by the presence of Chinese caregivers who were dissatisfied with the very low wages they were paid to provide intensive care to children that larger society perceived as lacking a viable future. In comparison, Helping Hands volunteers engaged in charity work largely for their own purposes and therefore did not exhibit the same commitment to children or a strong desire to transform Chinese society. Nonetheless, they sought to utilize their significant social and financial capital to improve care for children at Yongping. After years of battling a suspicious institutional structure that equated foreign resources with Chinese loss of face, each side experienced a deep sense of ambivalence that caused conditions to remain unchanged despite the resources at hand.

It is not always clear who is being helped by well-intentioned western altruism, efforts that can even have negative repercussions (Burman 1994). Moreover, as Inda and Rosaldo (2002) have written, global interconnectedness can turn places "into spaces of juxtaposition and mixture, spaces where disparate cultures converge, collide, and grapple with each other, often in conditions of radical inequality" (3). Studying on-the-ground transnational collaborations in orphanages highlights these inequalities as well as challenges sweeping notions about the straightforward imposition of western hegemonic ideologies and practices into developing country contexts. These partnerships reveal the process of translation that global standards undergo within local settings, where they are met with a complex mixture of resistance and negotiation, as well as agreement and cooperation.

Fieldsites Revisited

I made subsequent return visits to my fieldsites in October 2008. Though relatively little time had passed since I had completed my field research at the end of 2007, change in China occurs so swiftly that all of the circumstances were significantly different. There had been a nearly complete turnover in Helping Hands volunteers, though Marjorie Lee was still coordinating donations to Yongping. I visited the orphanage with a new group of expatriate wives and was surprised (and gratified) to see three *ayi* cuddling babies as cheerful children's music played in the background; it was the first time I had seen the CD player being used, although it had been donated nearly two years earlier. Marjorie told me that the conditions were improving because Yongping had a new director and was finally going through the process of signing up for international adoption. It appeared that the incentive that had been missing all along to improve the conditions of care for children had finally arrived, as the staff had clearly been told to pay more direct attention to the babies.

I poked my head into the large playroom and surveyed the scene. Twenty children were standing in rows, each behind a small desk. They had been instructed to work on puzzles, and for the next two hours, without a break, the group tediously put puzzles together one after the other. The speed by which even the toddlers performed this task made clear that they knew every puzzle by heart. As I weaved my way in-between the desks, it was impossible to ignore the male-dominated nature of the group. All of the healthy girls were gone, having been adopted by local families. Only two girls in wheelchairs and several others who had mental retardation were sprinkled in amongst the large group of male children.

While I was disappointed that none of the boys had been locally adopted, the news about Yongping's participation in transnational adoption provided significant hope for the future. Marjorie was working hard to facilitate the process in any way possible, particularly after a Helping Hands volunteer who had moved back to the U.S. sought to adopt one of the healthy little boys from the orphanage. Over a period of several months Marjorie pushed the new director to complete all of the necessary paperwork and reported back encouraging news that 17 children were going to be put on the adoption list once their "finding ads" had been placed in the local newspaper.[45]

For reasons that remain unclear to me, the institution ultimately did not follow through with this last step. Hence, when I made my final visit to Yongping in July 2009, I discovered that all of the boys were still there. In conversations with Marjorie, she expressed deep frustration with her inability to change the situation and felt that she had given enough of her time and energy to the orphanage. As a result, she decided to pass responsibilities for Yongping over to another Chinese American expat wife. Although Marjorie continued to work on other aid projects, she had suffered health problems and had begun preparing to return to the U.S. for good.

As for Tomorrow's Children, by the fall of 2008, in what seemed like a flash it had opened a third medical unit designed to care for 18 children in another orphanage in Henan Province. Nurse Cathy was overworked, anxious and in disagreement with TC founder Barbara over the future of the special care units. I learned that in addition to this third unit, the organization had received permission from the Ministry of Civil Affairs to

[45] See Chapter 3 for a discussion of "finding ads" and the process of signing up for transnational adoption.

build an entire six-story, fully functional hospital for sick and dying children on the outskirts of the city that would house up to 124 children. The construction of the building was being paid for by an American evangelical Christian organization whose founder was close personal friends with Barbara, while the interior was paid for by a British group affiliated with the makers of the "Dying Rooms" documentaries. Cathy explained that the hospital was scheduled to open in the summer of 2009, at which time the Haifeng special care unit (described in Chapter 4) would be closed and all of its *ayi* would be transferred to the new hospital.

(Photo of the TC children's hospital, opened in July 2009. Image taken from the organization's website.)

When I spoke with Cathy's husband, Brian, he conveyed serious discomfort with the speed by which the organization was growing. He noted that the TC founders in Beijing "rush into new projects and get them started without having a long-term plan of how things are going to run. This puts people in the position of having to clean up messes when they occur. If they took a bit more time, then they could figure out how to prevent them." In his opinion, the third special care unit had been opened far too quickly, resulting in inadequately trained nurses and caregivers. Brian and Cathy also harbored reservations about the new palliative care hospital, noting that the tremendous size and distance from the city would make it difficult to find enough *ayi* and western volunteers.

When I returned to China in the summer of 2009 the new hospital had indeed opened to tremendous publicity and fanfare. I also learned that as a result of their conflicts with the TC founders, Cathy and Brian had made the difficult decision to leave the organization in order to seek more autonomy. They moved onto another orphanage in a different province that allowed them to open their own palliative care unit in spring 2010. As for Tomorrow's Children, the organization's website says that it plans to open a fourth special care unit in the capital of Henan that will care for 45 children, but it did not provide specific details regarding a timeline.

Reflections and Implications

Fundamentally this research has centered on inequalities that are highlighted through processes of biological, social and national reproduction within China's dramatically changing political economy. Ginsburg and Rapp (1995) argue that in this increasingly interconnected era, the study of reproduction raises deeply entangled "questions of culture, politics, and biology…that often involve transnational processes that link local and global interests" (2). I have grounded discussions of globalization in two detailed case studies, bringing ethnographic investigation together with theoretical debates about the nature of globalization.

Foreign NGO-Chinese state collaborations are taking place on constantly shifting political terrain and often move forward with unchecked momentum or run up against unforeseen difficulties and collapse altogether. As an observer and participant, it has not been my aim to measure the "outcomes" of transnational collaborations—there are no objective standards by which to assess success or failure in such a contingent environment. Rather, I have found a complex reality in which many children's lives have been improved through the importation of first-world resources, beliefs and practices. Yet at the same time, the unstable nature of these efforts causes them to occasionally be counter-productive for the children they are designed to help. This raises larger questions regarding the limits and possibilities of transnational partnerships in globalizing China.

It is also important to consider that these collaborations, while appearing to represent a more open approach to outside influences, may actually be facilitating Chinese state efforts to modernize its own population. Western child-savers expend practically limitless resources caring for and rehabilitating the nation's unwanted children, imparting "modern" forms of knowledge that can continue to be employed regardless of whether these organizations exist. In the process, Chinese state authority is maintained and may even be bolstered.

In conclusion, China's economy is growing at unparalleled speed, the standard of living has risen rapidly and the nation has become a forceful presence on the global stage. Despite these dominant markers of success, it is imperative to bear in mind the human consequences of modernization and development. Ultimately, the treatment of children who exist on the margins of society not only symbolizes a nation's priorities, but also reflects larger contemporary debates in the arena of global politics.

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