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MY BEAUTIFUL ORCHID

The collision of China's One-Child policy with tradition and economic change has produced a wave of "missing" children—nearly all of girls. One of these girls changed my life.

By

Scott Church

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"Women hold up half the sky."
(Chinese Proverb)

The call came when I least expected it. In June of 2003 my wife Audrey and I had somehow managed to squeeze a few days out of our hectic schedules to enjoy a trip to the Oregon Coast. We were headed north toward Cannon Beach on highway 101 amidst the rolling, grass enshrouded dunes this part of the coast is famous for. Cathedral like cumulus clouds chased each other across the sky, while the sun fought its way through them with a youthful confidence that promised a warm summer yet to arrive. My reverie was interrupted by the electronic vibra-ring of Audrey's cell phone which seemed a little more insistent than usual, and we pulled over to take the call. It was Joanne Bailey, the Washington state liaison for Great Wall China Adoptions (GWCA). For almost a year Joanne had been assisting us with our petition to adopt an infant girl from and was acting as our intermediary with the China Center for Adoption Affairs (CCAA). The day had finally come she said, our referral had come back from the People's Republic of China—we were parents! More information about our soon-to-be daughter was available she said, and we agreed to contact her that evening when we reached our hotel.



Our process had begun two years before. We learned of China's gender biased infant abandonment problem through our church. Friends and co-workers who had adopted from China shared their life changing experiences with us. We had no children of our own, and a burden for the plight of these girls grew in our hearts. We formally applied in fall of 2002 and began a journey flooded with paperwork, meetings, notarized documents, fingerprints, seemingly endless phone calls and emails, and regular sessions with a wonderful Bainbridge Island social worker who specialized in foreign adoptions. When the specter of SARS appeared early in 2003 our referral was set back several month, and China closed the doors to foreign travel only two weeks before we were to be matched. Now, having navigated many setbacks, delays, and bureaucratic obstacles the day had arrived. That evening we told our story to the concierge at our beachside hotel. Sharing our excitement, she gave us access to her home email through which we were able to receive a terse communiqué from the CCAA.

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Her name was Du Lan. She had been abandoned on July 12, 2002 in Nanchong, a prefecture-level city of 7 million in the northeast corner of China's Sichuan Province. She was found in a public place near a police station—whoever left her had gone to some pain to make sure she was found and was likely watching from a nearby hiding place. From there she had been taken to Nanchong's Second Social Welfare Institute where she had been given her name and registered as a foundling. A nanny at the Institute had home raised her with one other girl since her arrival. She was estimated to be four weeks old at the time she was found, though we will never know for sure. She subsisted on a diet of milk, rice, meat paste, and corn paste we were told, and enjoyed sitting outside watching cars go by and tearing up paper lanterns. She had no health problems. A small, fuzzy snapshot showed a round faced little girl bundled in what could only be called a cacophony of clashing coats and scarves. Her expression was vacant. Staring past the camera her eyes revealed nothing about the little soul that hid inside or what the first year of her life had been like. In six weeks we would be traveling to China to bring her home to a new life.

My wife was ecstatic. I on the other hand was, well... *terrified*. It's not that I didn't want to be a father. I did (*really!*). But I'd always wanted to be one at least 3 years ahead of the present moment. Like most other men my age I had a long list of career and personal goals queued up in my well-ordered life, and I didn't relish the thought of interrupting any of them. When the "present moment" actually *arrived* it felt as though I'd been thrown screaming into the abyss, not knowing when I was going to hit bottom or whether I would land on down feathers or concrete. What did I know of raising a child? I had enough trouble keeping my own life in order. Even taking care of our dog presented challenges. Now I was being trusted with the soul of a little girl—feeding her, tending to her when she was sick, caring for her emotional and spiritual needs and raising her to the full stature of centered, healthy womanhood.

Was I up to it? I didn't know...

Her Name was telling—*Du Lan*. In Mandarin *Lan* means *orchid*. The orchid is revered by the Chinese for its exquisite beauty and delicate fragrance. It is relatively rare there and throughout history was available only to those who could afford to purchase it. The traditional character is,

蘭

The long horizontal stroke across the top punctuated by two small vertical strokes is the radical for *flower*. The character below is a combination of the characters for *gate* and *difficulty*,

門

and

東

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and denotes a fence barring access to something of great value. In Chinese tradition the orchid is symbolic of *refinement*—of that which is rare and precious reserved only for those worthy of it.

On the other hand *Du* is a common Chinese surname with little to distinguish it. Chinese orphanages frequently assign surnames like this to their wards precisely because they lend themselves to being handed out in quantity to anonymous children that no family will claim—like “Jane Doe”. The little girl who awaited us on the other side of the world was a unique and priceless treasure chosen by the grace of God just for us.... And yet, she was just another foundling among countless others, nearly all girls, abandoned to Social Welfare Institutes—one more brick in China’s *other* great wall.

Infant Abandonment

China’s infant abandonment problem is as complex as it is disturbing. Very little data about it exists and what does is difficult to confirm. Understandably, those who are abandoning infants rarely acknowledge having done so and government bureaucracies are equally reluctant to share information about a national problem that casts them in a bad light. We do know that the problem is neither new, nor unique to China. The social practice of infanticide (which goes hand in hand with abandonment) goes back at least as far as the Han Dynasty. During the 17th century it was widespread enough that Hubei and Hunan Provinces criminalized it, but it was no more common there than it was in Europe during the same period. By the mid 18th century Hunan Province had 68 county level orphanages and a number of “foundling hospitals” run by foreign missionaries. Other provinces had similar histories. Since then the practice has varied by region and period, typically rising during periods of famine or economic hardship and declining during stable ones. It appears to have been particularly common in the southern provinces and throughout the Yangtze River watershed (which is heavily rural and agricultural). In the 20th century orphanage intakes reached record highs in the 50’s when China underwent a rapid shift to collectivization, and again during the famine following Mao’s “Great Leap Forward”. By the mid 70’s political and economic stability had been restored and levels declined.

While this orphan population is not unusual globally, with a foundling population that is over 90 percent female, its gender bias is (the only other Eurasian nation that shows a similar pattern is India). For many centuries Chinese families have been built around patriarchal traditions that placed special value on sons. Though this preference is hardly new, in recent years it has grown to a near obsession, particularly in rural poor regions where China’s aggressive population control efforts have left families with few reproductive options. For those desperate enough, this has created a strong incentive for abandoning infant daughters. During the 90’s various estimates placed China’s orphan population at 100,000 to 160,000, including foundlings. These figures are almost certainly low. In normal populations biologically determined sex ratios run around 105 boys for every 100 girls, which is very close to what is observed in most developed countries. Census data shows that in 1953 and 1964 China’s gender ratio was also in this range. But in the early 80’s after Deng Xiaoping introduced the infamous “One-Child” policy it began to climb. By 1981 it had risen to 108.5 and by 1990 to 114.7. When compared to 1990 census figures this amounts to 1 million fewer female births per year than normal demographic trends say there must have been, and according to some estimates, 13 million total—China’s “missing girls”. Where are they? According to some estimates state run child welfare and social welfare institutes account for only 20 percent of this figure. If this is true what has become of the other 80 percent?

A considerable number are accounted for by sex-selective abortion. In 1994 Beijing criminalized the practice under the Marriage Law and the Women’s Protection Law, but regulation and enforcement of these laws is difficult at best. Ultrasound technology is readily available throughout China, even in the poorest of state run hospitals. A Chinese built ultrasound machine technologically advanced enough to discriminate fetal sex can be purchased for around \$1000 American. Doctors can quickly replace an investment in one by offering screenings for as little as 200 to 300 yuan (roughly \$50 American give or take) with little risk of being caught. Due to the illegality of the procedure for pregnant couples as well as doctors, malpractice and inaccurate results are seldom reported, offering doctors another layer of safety. Given the demand for sons in rural areas, the black-market potential is enormous. At least one 1999 report by the International

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Planned Parenthood Federation found that 500,000 to 750,000 girls are selectively aborted annually. If so, then this practice alone may account for nearly 74 percent of China's missing girls.

What of the remaining 25 to 50 percent? No one truly knows how many of them have been abandoned. Estimates typically run in the tens of thousands but are highly uncertain. Nor is it known how many perish, either from direct infanticide or neglect. However, a growing body of evidence suggests that most do not, but are instead absorbed by orphanages and informal adoptions. During the 80's 10,000 to 15,000 domestic adoptions per year were officially registered, but survey data suggests that a far greater number of informal adoptions took place. Over the last few decades China has generally allowed domestic adoption only under stringent conditions that few couples could meet. To apply they must be childless and over the age of 35, and even then few survive the ensuing bureaucratic gauntlet. It is common for couples who have gotten far enough to have taken a child home to actually return it to the orphanage because they were unable to complete the final stages of the process. This has created a huge and growing market for privately arranged adoptions in areas where abandoning infants is common. Prior to 1990 these may have numbered over 500,000 annually and evidence suggests that they have since increased in frequency, with girls accounting for nearly all of the growth. Private adoptions like these are almost always arranged in secret—"under-the-table". Penalties can be harsh for adopting as well as birth families. Infants adopted outside of approved channels, or chaobao, are considered to be aiding and abetting an over-quota birth, and are therefore assumed prima-facie to be over-quota. Families commonly report over-quota firths to local Civil Affairs cadres as having been stillborn or miscarried, and adopting families carefully avoid any official evidence of their existence. The end result has been an entire generation of girls who are invisible to census data and household registration records, which are known to be growing more unreliable with each passing year. It's possible that some girls are still being adopted as servants, or as tongyangxi (betrothals raised from birth to be spouses for a son). Historically, the practice of taking tongyangxi was a socially accepted form of adoption that provided many benefits in Chinese villages. By raising a wife for their son from birth a family could insure her loyalty and avoid unmanageably high marriage costs (particularly bride price). Many childless couples also believed that taking a tongyangxi would "lead in" (or, increase their chances for) the birth of a son. China has criminalized both practices and they have become extremely rare, but it's unlikely they've died out completely in rural areas. What we do know is that tens of thousands and perhaps even 100,000 or more Chinese girls have been abandoned since the early 90's. Some of these girls have perished. Many more are in orphanages hidden behind a dark curtain of national shame—unnoticed and unwanted.

Soon Audrey and I would be traveling to the other side of the world to bring one of these girls home.

Departure

On the morning of August 14th, 2003 Audrey and I boarded a flight to Beijing, our suitcases filled with baby bottles, toys, infant clothes, and a small pharmacy of medicines, many for conditions I hadn't even heard of much less knew about (thank God my wife is a nurse practitioner). 18 hours later after a brief layover in Tokyo, we arrived in Beijing. After a comfortable night's stay in a charming older hotel, we met our GWCA guides and spent the next two days touring the city with dozens of other adoptive American couples. We learned about its history and traditions. We climbed the Great Wall, the stones under our feet worn to a smooth sheen over many centuries by countless generations of travelers. We sampled new foods and strolled among shops laden with hand-made goods, electronic toys, jewelry, and some of the most beautiful textiles I had ever seen. Most were hand-made one stitch at a time and some had taken many months to complete. We bought pearls that would be set aside to be given to our daughter on her 16th birthday—a keepsake treasure from the land of her birth. We walked the Forbidden City and stood in Tiananmen Square in somber remembrance of those who had fallen. Had it not been for the baby paraphernalia and pharmaceuticals clogging our luggage I would have thought I was on vacation. On the morning of August 17th we left for Chengdu, Sichuan's capital city of 10 million. It was there that our life with Du Lan would begin.

The reality had yet to hit me.

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We Meet!

If Beijing embodied tradition, Chengdu was modernity incarnate—a multimedia whirlpool of neon, hi-tech, and très chic. Everywhere I turn brilliant spectacles, high fashion, and wizardry of all sorts demand my attention. Canon, Nikon, China-Tel, Armani, McDonalds, the Santa-Fe Polo and Racquet Club, and more. Our hotel would not have been out of place in New York or Paris. The movie theatre across the street featured a double-bill of Terminator 3: The Rise of the Machines, and James Bond: Die Another Day. Settling into our room, which was as comfortable and welcome as any I'd ever stayed in, I laid down to rest for awhile. We still had 2 hours until our appointment with orphanage officials.... Or so I thought. Within minutes someone was pounding on our door. It was our fellow adoptive parent Laurie. Her eyes were wild with excitement. *"They're here! NOW! At the elevator! Come quick!!"* Hastily I grab our camera and we rush out the door. Next thing I knew I was swept into a whirlwind of joyful chaos. Several nannies stood clutching infants and calling names. Ecstatic parents scrambled like bumper cars, arms reached, tears flowed, confused babies wailed, cameras flashed like artillery shells.

Since the dawn of history poets and lovers have known that the heart has its own landscape, haunted by transforming mysteries which have a way of appearing when we are least prepared for them. After fumbling our camera into operation I turned to capture the moment, and there was Audrey.... paralyzed, her back against the wall. From the start it was she who had been the inspiration behind our journey—the rock of faith to which I anchored the vicissitudes of my own fears. Now she stood before me frozen—shocked by her own emotional numbness. Her gaze turns to me and the shock becomes panic. *"You, you"*, she stammers. *"Please, I can't... you!"* I toss her the camera and begin scanning the chaos. Where is she?....

Then, I hear it.

"Du Lan? Du Lan?..."

And moments later I see them. Behind everyone else stood a sober faced nanny smartly dressed in an elegant knit skirt and red blouse waiting for the throng to abate. Cradled in her arms was a beautiful infant girl whom to my eyes bore little resemblance to the fuzzy snapshot we had received two months earlier. She was looking right at me. The halls resonated with the crying of confused babies who did not understand the sudden chaos or the strange new arms that were taking them from familiar ones. But this little girl was peaceful—even serene. I wave to them and as I approach her gaze never leaves me. When I reach for her she comes willingly into my arms, never once looking back at the woman who had raised her almost from birth. Somehow, *she knew!* It was Mommy and Daddy and we were there to take her home! Inner labyrinths open in my own heart and unleash mysteries I wasn't prepared for either. Fear vanishes like mist in the morning sun and as a wave of joy washes over me, I weep, my body quaking. The very first picture we have of Du Lan captures her looking up in peaceful trust at her tearful Daddy, surprised by joy. For awhile we ponder whether to keep the Chinese convention of last name-first name, and finally christen her Claire Lan Du Church.



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The next two weeks are a parade of miracles—and lessons. Claire is 14 months old, yet weighs only 16 pounds. She doesn't even crawl much less stand or walk. We help her with new toys, play with her, sing to her, giggle, tease, cradle, and kiss. Fortunately, I have a gift for acting one-fifth my age very poorly, which despite the irritation it causes Audrey in public places proves to be a source of endless delight to Claire. The very next day she's crawling like a battle tank and into everything. By evening she's on her feet and walking around the bed, the table, anything she can hang on to.

Eight days later she took her first steps and by the time we arrive home in Seattle she was running all over the house, scrambling up and down the staircase—14 months of development *in two weeks!* Being all over everything like a cheap suit, she quickly acquires the nickname "Squiggleworm", which eventually becomes "Squiggle", and finally just "Squig"—her nickname to this day (at least to Daddy).

Suddenly a whole new realm of Creation opens before me and I find myself confronted with a learning curve I never saw coming (every jot and tittle of which was, of course, self-evident to Audrey). Bottles, of which we brought dozens (they're warm fluid receptacles—do we really need this many?); nipples, which I learn come in dozens of different types; soft, hard, tri-cut, adjustable-flow (for crying out loud, how many ways can there possibly be to suck warm fluid from said receptacles?); diapers, again in countless baffling varieties (though I did learn very quickly the logic behind "overnights"—geez, the kid actually pees and poops, and not according to any logical diurnal timeline!).

The one thing that presented no challenges was *love*.

We spent another two weeks in China, first in Chengdu, then in Guangzhou where the U.S. Immigration Office is. All the necessary paperwork went smoothly and the Civil Affairs bureau and orphanage authorities who assisted us could not have been more helpful. Claire's foster nanny was present for our session with Civil Affairs. Once again, Claire never once looked at her during the entire meeting and would not leave Audrey's arms to go to her when given the opportunity. For two years I had worried about bonding issues. I now realize how foolish those fears were. God had destined the three of us to be a family—a fact Claire seems to have known long before it sank into my own heart.

With each passing day we learned more about each other, and the three-fold cord of unbreakable love grew ever stronger. We strolled among shops, parks, temples, and vistas marveling at the beauty and heritage of this magnificent land. We saw panda's at the Chengdu Panda Preserve (a rare and unforgettable gift for me as a landscape photographer), sampled foods I'd never before tried, and saw things I never imagined. I had many expectations of what China would be like. None of them included a six-story high billboard of Sega Playstation's Sonic the Hedgehog, or McDonald's river boats that were neon literally from the waterline up—including three-story high glowing renditions of the golden arches (yes, you heard right, I've got the pictures to prove it).

Yet none of this could compare to our human encounters. We had arrived in China with many fears. We were after all, foreigners who were taking their infants away to be raised in an alien culture. Friends had told us of urban legends spreading across China claiming that Americans were adopting girls to provide slave labor in the states, and Beijing was certainly not in any hurry to publicize the real reason for our journey. Would we be walking the streets amidst icy stares and clenched fists? Nothing could have been further from the truth, and once again I found myself amazed and humbled. Those in the hotels and shops who knew why we were there thanked us repeatedly for adopting their orphan girls. Again and again we were told, "You have a warm heart!" Everywhere we went people stopped to visit and asked if they could have their pictures taken with Claire. Many asked how it was that foreigners had come to adopt a Chinese girl. Never once was there even a hint of suspicion or doubt—they were fascinated and genuinely wanted to know. As we told of the widespread practice of abandoning infant girls, the growing trend in international adoptions, and our desire to give a home to such a girl their eyes would grow wide with amazement. They had no idea this was happening (yet more evidence of Beijing's tight-lipped treatment of the subject). "Xie xie!" (thank you). "You have a warm heart!" Seldom have I felt so welcome, and safe. Of course to Audrey and I it is the Chinese people who have made Claire possible for us, who have the warm heart.

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Our Life Begins

We return home on Labor Day weekend and Claire wastes no time exploring her new world. With boundless curiosity, she gets into everything that can be fussed with; containers, closets, toys with moving parts, books, and more. Her little eyes focus with a quiet concentration I wish I had, and sooner or later she unravels every mystery. I spend an hour at Home Depot selecting child-proof gates and another hour assembling and installing them. She figures out the mechanism in less than 10 minutes and comes and goes at will. Now they're only useful for containing the dog. By 18 months old she's figured out the television remote and the key fob for our van. From then on she insists on being the one to lock, unlock and open the doors. She even figures out how to reboot our computer and turn on the Microsoft sticky-key feature (which I could not reverse-engineer without consulting the Microsoft Knowledge Base and Help Desk staff at work). She teases, giggles uncontrollably, and plays like there's no tomorrow. Hide and seek is her favorite game, other favorites being swinging, puddle pouncing, "doinging" (jumping up and down aided by Daddy's grasp until she can touch the ceiling), and chasing our poor, bewildered dog with a broom (to Mommy's dismay and frustration).

With her deepening sense of identity comes a new independence. Nothing will do but she must roll her own diapers up after being changed, pick her own clothes, choose her own toothbrush before being brushed, and more. "By self!" she insists. Her little heart blossoms even more. She dotes continually on her stuffed animals and dolls with an ever watchful eye for their needs. One day I discovered a lump in our bed. Turning back the sheets I see her little stuffed lion, carefully tucked into bed and wrapped in one of her diapers with just its head showing. The diaper has been put on and secured properly. She shares her food with them, dresses them. At regular intervals they get gentle hugs and kisses. In public she is shy and hides quietly behind Mommy and Daddy when introduced. But within minutes she warms to everyone with unassuming acceptance (today, she will run to the first little girl she sees at the playground and ask, "Will you be my special friend?" after which they go off to play holding hands. Soon there are three or four of them all dancing, running, and pausing every few minutes for a group hug. What I wouldn't give for the same purity of heart!). Every night before bed we pray as a family. Without fail Claire reminds us to pray for "all the little children, China." She remembers them!

Over the next year her mental and emotional development skyrockets. She's fascinated by puzzles and routinely completes ones that are designed for ages 8 to 10 with minimal, if any help. At 24 months her speech explodes and by 30 months she is downright articulate and able to carry on details conversations. A few weeks ago at the age of 3½ we saw her pediatrician, who was amazed at her speech and mental development. At Claire's age, she told me, she's content with a child's progress if they can count at least to 3 unaided. Claire counts to 30 unaided, and with minimal assistance to 60. She adds and subtracts single-digit numbers, and is just beginning to learn the concept of multiplication. She knows the entire alphabet, writes her own name, and reads some simple sentences by word recognition. At work I get regular phone calls from her—she understands the speed dial on Audrey's cell phone and knows when it says "Calling Scott". Today she's teaching *me* Mandarin.



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She loves music—Disney, classical, kids bible songs, Norah Jones, and more. She even dances and sings at the top of her little lungs to her favorites (“Em-eye-ceeee-kay-eee-wyyyye, EEEMM-OHHHH-YUUUUJEESSS-EEEEEEEEEE!”). Ever hungry to learn about her world, she devours books, especially ones with colorful pictures and stories of other places, people, and animals. At 18 months she could identify giraffes, lions, tigers, polar bears, elephants, orcas, sea lions, octopi, and more by sight. Today she recognizes at least 50 other species of plants and animals as well: water lily, edelweiss, rose, walrus, fruit bat (which she distinguishes from the vampire bat and other members of the same family), great blue heron, sandhill crane, bald eagle, flamingo, wolf, tiger, mountain lion, leopard, panther (the last four of which she distinguishes from each other as separate species of large cat), gulper eel, blue crab, swimming shrimp, sea urchin, razor clam, scallop, nautilus, hermit crab, giant squid, bottlenose dolphin (which again, she differentiates from the spinner dolphin and other members of the porpoise family), beluga whale, narwhal, humpback whale, anglerfish, oarfish, queen triggerfish, blue tang (her favorite fish), and many more. In some cases she can discriminate male from female by overt markings or body morphology (including deer, elk, common mallard, and kelp greenling to name a few).

Two months ago at the doctor’s office she notices a boy coloring on the floor. “Daddy, what is that boy drawing? Is that a circle?” “Well, almost honey. It’s a spiral. See how it’s like a circle, but doesn’t quite close back on itself? It gets ever smaller with each revolution until it comes to a point.” “Oh”, she says, and without missing a beat exclaims, “like a galaxy!” She understands that galaxies like the Milky Way are spiraling star clusters. She also understands the sun, stars, planets (Saturn is the one with rings), comets, shooting stars, and the Moon (she even correctly identifies its crescent, half, and full phases—we’re still working on waxing gibbous).

At birth she was abandoned, and for 13 months she languished in institutional anonymity, her little soul starved for love and nurturing. Now, like a sponge she absorbs a whole new world and before our eyes her heart, mind, and soul take shape.

Our beautiful orchid is blooming!

Fortunately, stories like Claire’s are becoming more common. In 1988 the U.S. State Dept. issued 12 immigrant visas for children adopted from Chinese orphanages. In 1992 Beijing relaxed its restrictions on international adoption and the China Center for Adoption Affairs (CCAA) was opened in Beijing to oversee the process and serve as a liaison with Social Welfare Institutes. By 1995 over 2,000 immigrant visas were being prepared in the U.S. alone, and by 2002 when my wife and I filed our petition the figure had reached 5,053. Thousands more are being issued to other nations as well and each year the number increases. Thanks to an unprecedented level of Sino-Western cooperation the world has been exposed to a human tragedy of staggering proportions and thousands of families are providing homes to infant girls who would otherwise have little hope. Numerous adoption agencies and relief organizations have established working relationships with hospitals and Social Welfare Institutes. These have led to improvements in living conditions and opportunities for a wide range of medical care, including corrective surgeries that until now had been prohibitively expensive.



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And yet, the problem continues to be misunderstood. The underlying forces are well known—a cultural and economic preference for sons, and China's aggressive population planning efforts. Most Westerners take this at face value. Families want boys, not girls. Beijing wants its population targets met and is pursuing them relentlessly. Infant girls are caught in the crossfire. While there is much truth in this, the realities are far more complex and easily distorted by the Western media and activist groups—many of whom have conflated at least as much as they've revealed,¹ and a few of which have been downright negligent.²

Patriarchy & Chinese Tradition

Patriarchal traditions are not unique to China. For that matter neither is infanticide or abandonment. But to the Western mind, their epidemic of gender-specific abandonment is as baffling as it is disturbing. Most of us can identify with the desire for a son, but how could any mother or father kill or abandon their own daughter? The problem is more complex than it appears and cannot be understood apart from the traditions that shaped it—traditions that go back nearly 2500 years. Throughout history few thinkers have shaped Chinese culture more than Confucius (551-479 BCE) whose life spanned the final years of the Spring-and-Autumn period (770-476 BCE). This was a time when power became decentralized after the Zhou Dynasty fell in western China and gradually crumbled in the east over the next 3 centuries.

The growing power vacuum left behind was filled with regional battles as some 170 feudal states formerly loyal to Zhou fought for consolidation of their territories. By the time of Confucius' death these had coalesced into 7 major states run by warlords rather than traditional nobility. The next 250 years, known as the Warring States Period (476-221 BCE), was characterized by continuous warfare and more bloodshed than any other period in China's history until the empire was finally unified under the Qin Dynasty. Two centuries later Mencius (372-289 BCE) expanded on his ideas and developed them into a formal social and political doctrine. During the Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD) Confucianism was made the official state philosophy and remained more or less central to the Chinese worldview for over two millennia. After the fall of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) the new Republic of China discarded Confucianism. Forty years later Mao ruthlessly suppressed it and drove it underground where it remains to this day. China's urban centers and government now have essentially modern worldviews and are becoming increasingly Western in character. But for the 75 percent of China's population that live in rural regions, the guiding principles of life are still rooted in Confucian principles.

Confucius greatly admired the Zhou Dynasty and tirelessly preached the virtues of its rulers, yet during his lifetime it disintegrated as regional kings and nobles squabbled over their own interests at the empire's expense. Deeply disturbed by this, he devoted his life creating an ethical and social philosophy based on virtuous behavior, charity, and loyalty, and struggled to amass a large enough following for a new dynasty based on it. Only this, he argued, would restore harmony and the blessings of Heaven to the land.

"If right principles prevailed through the empire, there would be no need for me to change its state."

(*Analects* XVIII, 6)

Nothing mattered more to Confucius than virtue and peace, which could only be realized in a social order founded on what he called *Li*, or *Rites*. These were far more than external rituals or moral rules and to some extent they defy Western categorization. They included good manners, propriety, and most importantly *a clear understanding of one's place*. To Confucius, there was a moral and spiritual hierarchy to the order of Heaven within which everyone had a place—individuals, families, nobles, even the king. In every relationship there was an elder and a younger, a host and a guest, a ruler and a subject, and so forth. Living one's life in service to this order was the highest form of self-cultivation. The virtuous man behaves courteously and charitably toward others with *sincerity*, not out of obligation but because *he knows where he belongs and what is expected of him*.

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"Respectfulness, without the Rites, becomes laborious bustle; carefulness, without the Rites, becomes timidity; boldness, without the Rites, becomes insubordination; straightforwardness, without the Rites, becomes rudeness."

(*Analects* VIII, 2)

One who failed in this through thoughtlessness, foolishness, or self-interest would "lose face". Contrary to what most Westerners believe, to lose face is far more than merely bringing shame on one's self (as we understand the word)—it is *a denial of one's very identity that brings the displeasure of Heaven on self and family*. The king's power was derived from his virtue and he ruled by example rather than force. In so doing he acquired the *Mandate of Heaven* and the title *Son of Heaven*. If he did not rule virtuously and wisely, Heaven would be displeased and would give the Mandate to someone else. The Zhou Dynasty had justified overthrowing of the previous Shang Dynasty on the grounds that the king had ruled with meanness, and thereby lost the Mandate of Heaven. Confucius believed that a society where everyone lived according to Rites would restore the Mandate of Heaven and bring peace and prosperity.

What does all this have to do with a preference for sons? In the Confucian worldview all interpersonal connections in the order of Heaven were determined by the Six Relations, or *liu lun*;

Father-Son	Husband-Wife	Elder Brother-Younger Brother
Prince-Minister	Elder Friend-Younger Friend	Teacher-Student

These defined *superior-inferior* in all relationships. The Superior held the duty of benevolence and care for the Inferior, who in turn held the duty of obedience and respect. They also determined the order of *xiào*, or *filial piety*—the reverence, *religious* reverence, that children were to have for their parents. The superiority of men was at the core of this hierarchy. Society was structured around patrilineal kinship where everyone was exceedingly careful to distinguish their duties. In Mandarin there are no general equivalents for English words like brother, sister, grandfather, grandmother, uncle, aunt, or cousin—only specific ones that clarify kinship and one's place within the Confucian order. There were different titles for "older brother" and "younger brother", paternal and maternal grandfather, and even paternal and maternal uncles and aunts. Relatives by marriage (in-laws, spouses of your siblings) had their own titles as well. These kinship networks were the anchors that held communities together. It was said that the ideal family had five generations living under one roof, and the patriarch of a family that met this Confucian ideal was eligible to receive an official letter of congratulations from the Emperor.

In this order the highest role a woman could fulfill was to humbly serve the men in her life and insure the continuation of the clan by producing male heirs. Confucius taught that women should observe the Three Obediences and the Four Virtues. They were to be obedient to their fathers and elder brothers when young, to their husbands during marriage, and to their sons when widowed. The feminine ideal was dependence and a passive obedience that accepted a lower place in the order of things. A girl's position within her family of birth was temporary. Her marriage would be arranged by her parents with the primary objectives being an efficient household and the furthering of family continuity through the bearing of male heirs. Once married, she became part of her husband's clan and was lost to her own. Her status there would be ambiguous until she produced male heirs. She had no right of her own to select a husband, let alone the right to divorce or to remarry if widowed.

It must be remembered that in the Confucian worldview, the superiority of men was not merely a social value—it *was part of the order of Heaven* and carried with it a profound moral and religious significance that the patrilineal line sustained. Ancestors were deified and ancestor worship was common. There was an annual ceremony known as Ching Ming where one paid homage to one's ancestors through prayer and the offering of food and symbolic money at family shrines and gravesites. Even today there are many clan temples throughout China (we visited the Chen Clan temple in Guangzhou) and Ching Ming is still celebrated.

Without male heirs, there are no ancestors—and *no rightful place in the order of Heaven*.

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The importance of this worldview to the Chinese cannot be underestimated. Acknowledged or not, it has shaped their culture for over 2000 years and still provides the moral foundation of nearly 75 percent of China's population. Even in urban areas where it has largely fallen by the wayside, it remains more influential than many will admit. It's little wonder that even today peasants commonly refer to the birth of a daughter as *xiǎo xǐ*, ("small happiness") and the birth of a son as *dà xǐ*, ("big happiness"). As one peasant woman sadly, but faithfully stated in a recent documentary, "daughters are not family—they're relatives".

The One-Child Policy

Deeply rooted as the Confucian tradition is in China, by itself it doesn't explain the abandonment of infant girls. Benevolence, or *Rén*, was a core Confucian value and the duty of all Elders. Chinese families certainly loved their daughters no less than anyone else and could always have more children until the required male heir came along.

That is, they could until fertility became a national problem. China's population woes are formidable. Their year 2000 census yielded a population of 1.266 billion, an increase of 132 million since 1990. This estimate did not take into account unregistered citizens (including missing girls) and is known to contain significant errors. The World Health Organization reported a year 2003 population of 1.312 billion, but even this was likely to have been low. By 1998 China had succeeded in lowering their birth rate to 1.8 births per couple, but high fertility during the 60's and 70's produced a large population of child-bearing couples today that continues to erode this decline. Another 800 million urban Chinese are expected by 2020 and with a shift toward aging and urbanization. More than 400 new cities are being currently planned to accommodate them. In Claire's home province of Sichuan alone, nine will be completed by 2010, each of which will accommodate populations of over 1 million. These changes are coming at a time when China's current population is straining environmental and natural resources almost to the breaking point. Development continues to ravage ecosystems across the continent at rates unprecedented in the West, impacting quality of life, local economies, and public health. In 2003 seven of the world's ten most polluted cities were in China and according to some estimates more than 600 million Chinese now drink water contaminated with animal and human waste. But with less than one-tenth the per-capita energy consumption of the United States, China has fewer conservation options. If current trends continue, they will not see a decrease in population until the middle of this century—a juggernaut that promises to tax their economic and natural resources even further in decades to come.

In the late 70's Deng Xiaoping realized that realized that economic development and population were interrelated—if China was to recover from the failures of Maoist policies and prosper, it must control its burgeoning population. In 1979 he responded to these concerns by implementing what may be the most ambitious, and repressive, population planning effort in recent history—the "One-Child" policy which limited couples to one successful pregnancy for life. Like most of Beijing's 20th century reform efforts, the policy was brought to bear in every socio-economic arena with rigid, highly centralized control. Population planning became a central concern in every area of state planning and socio-economic development. Propaganda campaigns were launched praising the virtues of only-children and their benefits to families and society. Billboards touted round, healthy children of proud parents—"little emperors" who thrived because of the extra attention they received as only-children. When it was first implemented, the policy faced widespread resistance, which Beijing had not anticipated. To ease the transition and preserve public peace, they relaxed it somewhat in the early 80's and granted Provincial authorities more flexibility in how it was implemented. By 1988 "one-child" restrictions were the exception rather than the rule in rural regions.

At first, enforcement varied from strict to almost non-existent. But by the mid 80's Beijing concluded that their population targets were not being met, and they impatient with the lack of progress and what they considered "remnant feudal ideas". In response, they began enforcing the "relaxed" policy with an iron fist. Like most programs under China's communist government, regulation was highly centralized. Beijing imposed strict population targets and left local authorities to achieve them as they saw fit. At the lowest level this fell upon cadres in charge of individual *danwei*—the unit or institution each citizen belonged to. Cadres who did not meet targets were denied bonuses and promotions, and their *danwei* (typically agricultural in rural areas) could not be designated as "Advanced Units"—a ranking that carried with it

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many privileges and beneficial connections. A nationwide crackdown ensued as cadres sought to meet their danwei's quotas. Those that previously allowed peasant families to negotiate their situation and gain at least a minimally favorable outcome in allowed births no longer did so. Households were frequently "monitored" for reproductive compliance. Couples in violation of quotas were subjected to ruinous fines, and in many cases coerced abortion, sterilization, or IUD implants. By 1990 birth planning efforts at the danwei level had become well organized and intense, particularly in southern provinces where resistance to the One-Child policy was strong.

The result was often brutal. According to some estimates, millions of Chinese women have been forced to have abortions (many of which were late-term), sterilizations, and IUD implants, even under unsafe conditions. Because implementation had been left almost entirely in the hands of local cadres, Beijing had little ability to oversee their activities or respond to public needs in rural provinces. By the late 80's abandonment rates for infant girls had skyrocketed and the national gender ratio shifted even further toward boys. The increases were most visible in rising intake rates at Social Welfare Institutes. Kay Ann Johnson (2004) examined intakes at the Wuhan Foundling Hospital in Hubei Province where abandonment rates have historically been high. During the 70's WFH's intake rate was 50 to 80 annually. Most of these were canji—or disabled in some way (including non-crippling disabilities like cleft palates). By 1988 intakes had risen to 300 per year. In 1992 WFH received more than 1200 abandoned girls. Unlike the 70's most were healthy, and some were as old as five. Local cadres often contributed to the problem. With peasants angry at being denied sons and Beijing demanding progress, they found themselves caught in the middle. Corruption was rampant. Couples reaching their quota without a son would report a pregnancy as miscarried or stillborn and then abandon it or secretly arrange an adoption. Such claims were difficult to verify, particularly where migrant populations were high. Even those that were demonstrably false were often ignored. With bonuses and promotions at stake, few cadres were anxious to have any over-quota pregnancies on their records. The temptation to look the other way was considerable and many reported total family size only. In some cases cadres were even known to have assisted with undercover adoptions and the transport of unwanted infants to regions outside of their jurisdiction where they could be abandoned "off the record". To this day it's very likely that most of China's abandoned girls, including Claire, were born hours away from where they were left.

Since its inception the One-Child policy has proven to be one of the 20th century's most inhumane and counterproductive national efforts. Few would dispute the severity of China's population growth problem, or their need to address it at the national level. But by imposing totalitarian family planning restrictions with little sympathy or understanding toward those who were forced to bear their consequences, Beijing created even worse humanitarian and foreign policy problems and ironically, did little to solve their population woes. Official statements repeatedly tout the "success" of the policy, but the evidence suggests otherwise. It is true that China's total fertility rate (TFR) has dropped dramatically in the last 20 years and according to some estimates may even be below replacement level. But most of this decline happened during the 70's—before the One-Child policy was implemented and less repressive family planning policies were in place. Though TFR did continue to decrease during the 80's and 90's, the declines were minimal at best and China's population growth rate remained at the mid-70's level of 1.5 percent annually until well into the 90's.³ In fact, during the same period most other Asian nations achieved greater reductions in TFR despite having similar population problems and rural poverty levels. In each case the declines were the direct result of economic development, increasing literacy rates, and family planning services emphasizing education and access to contraception.⁴ Indeed, it is a well established fact that poverty and low literacy rates are the best known predictors of high birth rates. Had Beijing done likewise, and provided a viable social security apparatus in rural areas they would almost certainly have achieved even lower TFR rates *without* creating a humanitarian disaster!

Today, the original One-Child policy no longer exists. In 2002 it was modified somewhat and codified in a new birth planning law, which effectively removed it from the realm of politics and mobilization campaigns. On the plus side, the oversight and enforcement of the new law are less erratic and extreme than they were during the 80's and 90's. Some promising changes are also been made. Beijing's emphasis is beginning to shift away from population control in favor of population *management*. Reproductive health and education are beginning to play much larger roles. Thanks to CCAA's oversight of one of the world's best run international adoption programs, more foundlings than ever are finding loving homes. Likewise, social welfare institutes are receiving more support, both financial and logistic, and international adoptive couples are now providing badly needed cash. New forward thinking programs and cooperative efforts with

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international NGO's and relief organizations are providing reproductive health care, education, and medical care for orphans, including corrective surgeries.

As positive as these programs are, their implementation has been limited and huge inequities remain. Beijing's support has gone preferentially to well run orphanages that have been able to maintain good relationships with the Civil Affairs bureau and make better "showcases" for foreign dignitaries and adoptive couples. For the most part these are in or near urban areas. Orphanages in poor regions are disproportionately overlooked. Likewise, though the new law contains many concessions, the resulting restrictions are not radically different from those of the late 80's. In urban regions couples are allowed only one successful pregnancy (including those leading to multiple births), but some exceptions are made. Minority couples are often allowed two or more children. So are couples in which at least one partner is an only-child. Thus, those who want multiple children and are able and willing to pay these fines can have them. But exceptions are rare and it's safe to say that urban Chinese couples are effectively restricted to one child. As before, policies are more lenient in rural areas where most provinces have a one son-two child rule. If the first-born child is a son couples are restricted that child only. If the child is a daughter they're allowed one more successful pregnancy after a waiting period of several years. Some provinces allow two children regardless of sex. Though the new law is far less oppressive than its predecessors, enforcement is still harsh. Failure to adhere to quotas leads to stiff fines, which especially in rural areas, many families cannot afford to pay. Couples suspected of being in violation are still subject to highly invasive monitoring of their family planning and though they far less frequent, coerced abortions and sterilizations still occur. Despite the progress of the last decade, a One-Child policy mindset still persists throughout Beijing's social welfare bureaucracy.

And infant girls continue to be abandoned by families desperate for sons.

It's late. The rest of the world has long since gone to sleep as I lay awake pondering these things. Claire is sleeping with Mommy and Daddy tonight. She lies beside me wrapped in her blankie, her stuffed lion and dolphin cradled lovingly in her arms. Only the gentle rhythm of her breathing, soft as a dove's against my neck breaks the silence. I turn to watch her, cherishing her sweet presence. *How could anyone have abandoned such a treasure?* I will never know, nor will I understand. Certainly China's population control efforts have been draconian, and the rural obsession with male heirs could hardly be stronger. But this alone does not explain what is before my eyes. In his *Pensées*, Blaise Pascal wrote, "the heart has its own reasons which reason does not know." With Claire peacefully asleep next to me, her face angelic as she dreams of tomorrow's discoveries, my own heart cannot fathom how any traditions or values would make losing her preferable even to *death*.

There *must* be more to the story.



Socio-Economic Factors

And so there is. Throughout Chinese history Confucian principles shaped socio-economic structures as well as tradition. Residents of the typical rural village were all members of one clan, and all economic and civic structures were based on patrilineal kinship, which also determined citizenship, income, and property ownership. Male heirs insured that everyone had a means of support and a place within the community. In old age one could look forward to a position of respect as a village elder and know that their son's family would take care of them. Regional mobility among clan villages was limited and those who were poor, or of low standing had few options for relocating and "starting over". Typically, a Chinese man lived his entire life in the clan village of his birth. A woman lived in hers only until marriage, at which point she went to live in their husband's for the remainder of her life. Marriage almost always came early in life and a girl left home before acquiring any significant labor value. Thus, education and development of publicly useful skills were of no use for girls and seldom pursued, further limiting their ability to contribute to the family economy even if they weren't married off as planned. In addition to being cut off from destiny, a family without male heirs could count on ending up destitute as well.

With the rise of Communism villages were replaced by collectives and China gradually shifted from a primarily agrarian economy to one based on manufacturing. Improved economic conditions and centrally controlled distribution gave parents at least some freedom from the need to be supported by their sons in old age. The role of women in society expanded giving them a freedom they had never before known, especially in the areas of employment, education, freedom of choice in marriage and divorce, and family management. In 1949, 600,000 female workers and urban employees in China accounted for 7.5 percent of the total workforce. By 1988 they were 50,360,000 strong, and 37.0 percent of the total. Recent social surveys in some urban areas found that by the mid-80's 99 percent of married women were breadwinners, and more than 70 percent of these reported that decisions were shared by husband and wife.

Yet many of these changes bypassed rural regions where even today options remain few. As China struggles both to modernize and adjust from central control to a global free-market economy, Beijing's economic incentives have been concentrated in urban areas where industry, hi-tech, and manufacturing are located. All too often this has been done at the expense of rural regions. Until the 90's for instance, the state kept agricultural prices artificially low to insure cheap food for urban areas. Urban residents have long enjoyed cost-of-living and housing subsidies and generous state supported pension plans—none of which were available to agricultural sector peasants. Nor do rural workers have the option of pulling up roots and moving to the city. Official residential registrations, or *hukou*, for urban areas are required before one can relocate. These are strictly controlled by the state and are exceedingly difficult for uneducated farm workers to obtain. Under the collective system, state support of the elderly was meager at best. When family farms returned to rural China during the 80's even that disappeared in many areas. At least one 1987 social survey found that pensions accounted for less than 5 percent of the income of the rural elderly population. As of this writing, China is working toward a national social security network and has made some progress toward that goal, yet there is still no meaningful social security for most rural families and social services accessible to them are limited. Most agricultural sector families would be hard pressed to survive old age without the assistance of their children, and cultural expectations continue to shift this burden onto sons. It's easy to forget that for China's peasant families, these are not merely personal values or opinions, they're *institutions*. Whether they want daughters or not, families without sons have no more power to change the cultural traditions that have shaped their communities for over two millennia than they do the government that restricts their economic and reproductive options.

Even in the West most of us can identify with these pressures. Social surveys have repeatedly shown that the average American is overworked and overstressed. Most of us say we're working longer and harder hours than our parents' did. Few salaries are keeping pace with the cost of living, and with economic globalization tightening its grip on every sector of our domestic job market it's getting increasingly difficult even to keep the incomes we have. Here in my home state of Washington a recent study found that less than two-thirds of available jobs have salaries that could pay the mortgage on an *average* home where they live, and one-third will not even support basic living expenses for a single parent with two children. Our parents grew up in predominately single-income homes with large blocks of discretionary time for family and relationships. Today, single-income families are the exception rather than the rule, and it shows in our daily lives.

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Far more is at work here than our own values. Despite the highest standard of living in the world, a significant majority of Americans report that they chronically worry about money. We abhor debt and would gladly trade more discretionary income for time with family and loved ones, if only we could. But the society we live in has values of its own, that drive markets, housing and transportation costs, goods and services.... and ultimately our debt ratios. These values are imposed on us by our culture and limit our options in ways we have little control over. Consider salaries for instance. Ultimately, the pay structure of our job market reflects the value we place on services rendered. It's no accident that the average American science teacher earns less than half of his or her counterpart in industry, and both earn less than the average corporate attorney. Even in the developed world few other nations show similar trends. I read once that in Japan, the entire national population of attorneys, corporate or otherwise, would fit in a single hi-rise building. Teaching, on the other hand, is one their most respected professions. In the early 90's the *average* Japanese teacher could expect to earn \$73,000 American per year. At the same time his or her American counterpart could expect to start at around \$25,000 and retire at \$45,000 after 20 years—the entire tenure of which will have been spent living with the anger of large sectors of the American public who believe that even this is too much and resent every penny of their taxes that goes to school levies. Is it any wonder that American science and math literacy rates are among the lowest in the developed world?

A high school science teacher trying to buy a home has little power to change these values or the salary structures that result from them.

Our hearts and minds are battlegrounds too. Most Americans surveyed believe in God and say that moral values and spirituality are an important part of their lives. Over 80 percent claim a major religion (all but a few percent of which are Christian). At least 25 percent of us attend church on a weekly basis, and 40 percent attend semi-regularly. Yet the society we've created for ourselves imposes a seductive gospel on us that bears little resemblance to the faiths we claim to be living by. Every day we're confronted with it. Billboards, popular music, the media, peers at work and school, our paychecks, even our loved ones—all jack-hammering our hearts and minds with the same message: My income is my worth; I am what I own; he who steps on others to get to the top has good balance; everything has a price; beauty is desirability; if it hurts, there's a pill for it that will bring instant relief; in the sword we trust; and much more. The hour or two we spend in church each week can scarcely compete with this onslaught and few have negotiated it unstained. ⁵

Difficult as these pressures may seem to us, they pale when compared to what China's rural peasants must endure—life in the shadow of a spiritual tradition that is over 2000 years older than our own, without the incomes, social freedoms, and economic safety nets we take for granted. For them the thumbscrews are tightened a hundred-fold more. Regardless of their feelings about daughters, it's little wonder many of them believe they have no choice.

Abandoning Families in China

Between 1995 and 2000 Kay Johnson of Hampshire College, MA and her colleagues Wang Liyao of the Anhui Academy of Social Sciences and Huang Banghan of Anhui Agricultural University conducted what is likely the most reliable study to date of the motives and driving factors behind infant abandonment and adoption in rural China (Johnson, 2004). Using informal networks and word-of-mouth inquiries Johnson and her colleagues located 247 families who had abandoned at least one infant between 1950 and the present, and 771 who had adopted either secretly or through approved channels. Of these, all but a few were from rural counties in one south-central province and had adopted or abandoned between 1980 and 1999. Most had an average income and educational level for the regions they lived in and reported agriculture as their occupational category and type of hukou (household registration). Data was gathered mainly by questionnaire. Of the 247, information on siblings and birth order was obtained for 205. 60 of the target families were interviewed in person at least once (most were contacted on several occasions over an extended period). All interviews and data gathering were done anonymously by Chinese personnel to protect the identities of those contacted. Additional information on abandonment and adoption trends was obtained from local officials, social welfare institutes, hospitals, and government and media publications.

Their findings were striking. Even though girls were abandoned far more often than boys (90 percent of those sampled), the overwhelming majority of abandoning families (92 percent) already had a daughter who had not been abandoned. Fewer than six percent of those that provided information on siblings had abandoned an only-child, and a mere two percent (four families) had abandoned an only-daughter. Of the latter, one reported that they had done so only because the father had been threatened by officials with the loss of his job at a local factory if his over-quota child did not “disappear”. That family already had two sons and reported that they would have been willing to pay the requisite fine to keep their daughter. In fact, over 15 percent had already kept at least one over-quota daughter and paid the resulting fine, despite having no sons. Two had even abandoned healthy boys because, they said, they already had sons and were hoping for a daughter—had their child been a girl, they too would have paid the fine and kept her. Of all 247 families surveyed, only one reported that they “didn’t like girls”.

Some perspective on these choices can be gained by considering that for rural Chinese couple’s with an agricultural hukou, the first over-quota pregnancy would result in a fine of roughly one year’s salary, and would escalate dramatically for each one after that. For a median American worker, an equivalent fine would run around \$45,000 for a first offense, and possibly as high as \$90,000 for the second. For the median college educated professional the corresponding figures would be \$55,000 and \$110,000. Furthermore, because Chinese peasants don’t have access to loans, credit cards, HELOC’s, and other financing options most Americans take for granted, these fines would have to be paid either via heavily garnished wages or out of pocket—something few American families in a similar position would be able to do so without selling their homes. *Yet one out of every 5 to 6 abandoning families surveyed had already done this at least once to keep an over-quota daughter even though they had no sons.*

There is a general perception in the West that in China, infant girls are abandoned because they are not valued—when reproductive options are constrained their parents prefer to get rid of them rather than go without a son. Clearly, the evidence does not support this myth. The typical abandoned girl in China is a healthy newborn infant. Her parents are rural agricultural workers who make an adequate living but are not people of means and have little or no social security apart from family. She has at least one older sister, often more. More likely than not, her family is already at or beyond their pregnancy quota without her and cannot afford an over-quota fine. She may even have one or more over-quota sisters for which such a fine has already been paid. She is being abandoned because her parents already have daughters and want, or need a son. Odds are she will be left where she is likely to be found and taken in by someone who will care for her—the doorstep of families known to be seeking a child, populous urban areas with ample social services, or the doorstep of a social welfare institute. More often than not, her parents will have traveled a long distance to achieve this end. While not insignificant, her actual risk of death from infanticide or neglect is relatively low.

The overwhelming majority of girls like her have been abandoned unwillingly. Of the families interviewed by Johnson and her colleagues nearly all cited either the need for a son or the possibility of ruinous fines as the primary motive. Families identified as over-quota are often subjected to closer scrutiny by authorities making it more difficult for them to have a son even under the table. Even more troubling is the fact that in some areas parents who have had one or more over-quota pregnancies are still at risk for coerced abortion or sterilization. Faced with the prospect of little or no social security and the crushing weight of Confucian expectations from their communities, most feel they have “no choice” but to abandon and will spend the rest of their lives bearing a river of sorrow. Johnson tells of one woman who was typical of her study subjects. When asked how she felt about abandoning (ten years earlier), she stoically reported that she had “gotten over it”. But shortly thereafter the interview ended when she broke down sobbing saying that she never wanted to think or speak of this again. Abandoned girls are often found with notes attached to them pleading for someone with a warm heart to care for them, or an excoriating condemnation of government policies. One such note found with an infant girl in Hunan Province said;

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"This baby girl was born on – 1992 at 5:30 AM and is now 100 days old... She is in good health and has never suffered any illness. Because of the current political situation and heavy pressures that are too difficult to explain, we, who were her parents for these first days, cannot continue taking care of her. We can only hope that there is a kind-hearted person who will care for her. Thank you. In regret and shame, your father and mother."

Haunted by these words, sleep continues to elude me. I can scarcely imagine the demons that must torment this couple. To upper middle class Americans like me the word *shame* is almost comical ("shame on you!..."). But to someone with a Confucian worldview, it's nothing less than a complete loss of character, and even identity—a four-star general would sooner admit to being a traitor and a coward. As I lie awake watching Claire, I think of her birth parents. No doubt these words speak for them as well and I cannot shake from my mind the image of them watching from a lonely hiding place in urban Nanchong—in *regret and shame*—as she is picked up and taken away...

And I weep.

Population Management in China Today

And yet, there is hope. Slowly but surely, Beijing is beginning to realize that they will not achieve their economic and social goals unless they shed outmoded ways of thinking and cooperate with other nations. One result has been a gradual shifting of China's social welfare apparatus from rigid centralized control and secrecy to a more open one that grants county and provincial authorities with more freedom, including the freedom to cooperate with international NGO's. Prior to this, the only state provided social security available came from the Five Guarantees plan, under which elderly retirees would be assigned to other households in their collective who would be tasked with caring for their basic needs. When collectives vanished, so did its effectiveness. Today it has been revamped to fit better with market economies. Local authorities have taken advantage of their newfound freedom to establish a myriad of social welfare programs that draw upon state and local funds, charitable funds, labor, goods, and information to provide for the elderly, including families without sons. Some rural regions are even providing rudimentary pension and life insurance programs. On the socio-economic front, China's growing role in the global economy is raising the status of women. Increased mobility, higher levels of education, and more work opportunities are now available to them. This in turn leaves them in a much better position to care for their birth families as well as their in-laws' and takes much of the pressure off of sons. The impact of all this has been mixed and the end result is still no more than a pale shadow of what is available to those with urban hukou. Today all but a few percent of China's rural elderly remain dependent on the support of their children and grandchildren to survive. Nevertheless, they are a first step in a very promising direction.

Attitudes are also changing. Slowly but surely the Confucian emphasis on having many sons is being shed, and many if not most rural families are seeking a son *and* a daughter. This trend can be seen in the data gathered by Johnson and her colleagues. Over 70 percent of the parents they interviewed reported one child of each sex as being their ideal family makeup. Even as far back as 1985 field surveys in Hebei Province found that most women who had sons wanted their next child to be a girl. As we saw earlier, many are even paying fines to keep over-quota daughters. All of this reflects a growing status for women and a waning of the need for sons as a hedge against family destitution—trends that are eroding the temptation to abandon infants.

Beijing has also shown new interest in addressing the plight of China's orphans. In 2000 domestic adoption laws were revised now this is much more accessible. Married couples with a child of their own are now able to adopt as are couples without children. The adoption age has been lowered to 30. Fostering programs have been introduced throughout China that allow for orphans to be cared for in family homes rather than social welfare institutes. Claire spent the first 14 months of her life in just such a home in urban Nanchong. Her foster sister who was raised with her in the same home now lives near

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St. Paul, MN and we get together with her at least once a year. In the 14 years since it was founded the CCAA has refined and matured its operations and is establishing solid working relationships with a growing number of China's social welfare institutes. As the number of international adoptions grows, so does the flow of funds from adoptive parents. In conjunction with funding increases from Beijing, this is boosting living conditions at orphanages and mortality rates are at their lowest levels ever. As noted earlier, progress has been slow and uneven and huge inequities remain, but compared to the past two decades many strides have been made and the future is promising. As China expands these efforts and Western awareness grows, the number of forgotten girls who find loving homes will grow, and lives will continue to be transformed.

Lives like my own...

Family Transitions

With a growing realization that we will only pass this way once, Audrey and I are repositioning our lives. To date both of us have been blessed with careers that allow for strange hours. As a network operations center administrator for a global e-commerce firm, I've been able to position myself with 12 hour shifts and unconventional start times that open up large weekday blocks of time. As a psychiatric nurse practitioner (ARNP) Audrey has enough flexibility to alternate her work schedule with mine allowing us to avoid day-care. Claire never wakes up to anyone but Mommy, Daddy, Nana, or Grandma. Even so, our new life has given us a deeper awareness of how fleeting childhood is, and with it a desire to raise the bar further. Heeding the call Audrey has decided to switch careers. While continuing in her medical profession she is also training to be a mortgage broker so that she can work full time out of our home and be present with Claire round the clock. The transition is neither easy nor safe. The hours are grueling and stressful, and the learning curve is steep. Being on a limited timeline she must complete the transition in the next few months. Yet she has negotiated this obstacle course with speed and grace, and slowly but surely she is building a referral base that will provide stable ongoing business. Raising Claire has also brought us both a deepening burden for those who remain behind orphanage walls in China, and a desire to be part of something larger. Audrey will be partnering with the Oklahoma based relief agency Love Without Boundaries to raise funds for surgical care to orphans in China. 5 percent of every loan commission she makes will go in-place LWB programs that are providing these services. With China's changing social welfare apparatus still in its infancy, surgical care is a luxury in many orphanages, but through LWB it can be made available at surprisingly low cost. A life saving heart surgery can be provided for \$3,000-\$5,000. \$1000 buys a vision saving cornea transplant or 2 to 3 cleft palate surgeries. We're committed to making this work!

How Claire has Changed Me

Dusk has arrived and a chill October rain is beginning to fall. Mommy is working tonight and we're on our way to Nana's for dinner and Mickey Mouse videos. We pull into Starbucks for Claire's favorite treat, vanenna milk (vanilla milk). As we hurry toward the entrance her eyes light up. "Daddy, lookit!" she exclaims. "It's a little doggie!" And so it is. A small stuffed puppy with black eyes and a little button nose lies in the shrubs where it was dropped, or discarded by a distracted child. "Wow Honey, looks like he needs to be rescued, what do you think?" We lift him out of the garden. He is wet and dirty, but otherwise like new. "Daddy, let's rescue him and take him home!" Taking him to her breast, she names him "Buttons" and he comes with us.

The metaphor is of course, too poignant to be missed. Three years ago she was left on a street corner and the first year of her life was spent in a temporary foster home—unwanted, without a face or a story of her own. Now it is *she* who brings the forgotten one in from the cold wrapped in the arms of love. I soon realize that it's not the autumn rain that's filling my eyes.

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When I look back over the last 2 ½ years of my life, I am at a loss for words. How shall I describe the way life with Claire has changed me? What have I learned from being father to an adopted Chinese girl? Sadly, my limited writing skills leave me ill equipped to answer such questions without evoking the sort of greeting card sentimentality that draws new-age gurus and pop music stars like fruit flies to cheap wine. I could say the experience has been *transforming* (it has), even *redemptive* (that too), but even there I tread dangerously close to banality.

Perhaps it would be best simply to speak from my own daily experience of life with Claire. More than anything else I've been struck by the changes in my emotional landscape. Since August of 2003 experiences like the one in the Starbucks parking lot have become increasingly common. I've grown sensitive to so many things that used to pass me by like ships in the night. I can scarcely remember a moment when I wasn't on the verge of tears. A ray of sun finds its way through the clouds, somewhere a child laughs, a flower stirs in the breeze, a few measures of Dvorak find their way to my ears in a crowded mall.... and my eyes water. I never realized my heart could be this full.



Nor did I know that even the simplest moments of daily life could be so healing—resting in an easy chair as Claire sleeps in my lap; watching Mickey Mouse and Disney Princess videos over a shared dinner; holding hands and walking along the beach; or just sitting with a cup of coffee and watching her play with other kids at the mall. Things that barely registered on my radar before now impact me. I used to revel in “boy movies” with “the guys” while stuffing my face with beer and Doritos. Today most of those movies make me sick. The evening news will never again be the same. With a beloved daughter of my own, those dry statistics newscasters dole out so laconically—child poverty rates in America, famine in Ethiopia, civilian casualties in war-torn regions—take on a whole new meaning. These days I have a lot more sleepless nights.

The gospels record numerous events where Jesus is said to have “had compassion” on someone. Interestingly, the original Greek versions of these stories all make use of the same word for compassion, *splagcnizomai*. There is no direct English equivalent and “compassion” is at best a loose translation. Literally, the word means “passionate bowels” and is perhaps best captured by the phrase “gut-wrenching.” The widow who had lost her only son (Luke 7:11-15), the two blind men by the side of the road (Matt 20:29-34)—to everyone else they were statistics—invisible, unclean, inconvenient. *Those people....* Matthew even tells us that when the two blind men pleaded for mercy, the crowd “sternly told them to be quiet” (Matt 20:31). Yet to Jesus, they were *human*—with names, faces, and stories to tell, and their suffering was a *gut-wrenching* tragedy. Every time I hear yet another UNICEF report on child disease and mortality in post-invasion Iraq—while Claire plays at my feet—I feel a little closer to what he must have felt. Who knows? Maybe after a lifetime of Christian faith I’m finally getting it. Some day I may even have as many sleepless nights as He did.

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I play more than I used to and I'm goofier in public, which admittedly can be more annoying than amusing. Yet that bothers me less than it used to (another change). Under Claire's gentle tutelage, I'm learning all kinds of things. At construction sites for instance, there are mommy, daddy, and baby cranes (I'm still learning how to tell them apart). The tic-tac-toe play structure at one of her favorite mall playgrounds is actually a gas pump that can be used to fill up the toy cars she likes to ride there. It even takes my debit card! As a 20 year veteran U2 fan, I've always thought of myself as having an intimate grasp of their music.... Until Claire began referring to it as "that music underwater." *Huh?* Returning to old U2 favorites I sift through Bono's impassioned anthems and the reverb soaked propulsion of Edge's



guitar with a new set of ears.... *And I see!* It *does* sound like music playing underwater! Never in a million years would I have come up with an angle like that. How on *earth* did *she*?

I'm also coming face to face with another bedrock reality of life—one that is too often diluted by the ever-present nemesis of greeting-card sap, yet is known to every parent in history who has preceded me. Fatherhood is not a mission to be accomplished as much as a journey to be walked with someone. Like so many other carefree urban professionals who expected to be a parent, *some day*, I had my own ideas of what it would be like. She would get all the appropriate training in life, be taught all the right values, and learn from her daddy how the world really *is*. She would grow to love fly-fishing and jazz, hate rap and mindless reality shows, and would make a career of the natural sciences. I was going to do it *right*. Now I know better. Like her namesake, my beautiful orchid has an identity all her own—one that I can no more fit to my own pre-conceived templates than I could make an orchid seedling grow into a pine tree. She sees the world through her own eyes, and has her own way of doing things ("*by self!....*"). I can't even give her gummy bear vitamins by rote. "Daddy I wanna choose!...." So we go through a ritual where she sifts through the jar and picks out just



the gummy bears that strike her fancy. As my life unfolds every day brings new fears, hopes, joy, and surprises. Even fights with my wife are different. Very little of this fits any expectation of parenthood I ever had. Fifty years ago angler and conservation writer Roderick Haig-Brown wrote of his own life raising four children on post-WWII Vancouver Island. In his book *Measure of the Year* he tells of fishing trips, accidents, squabbles, and numerous parent-child conundrums. He sums up the experience with these words,

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"These and many others are the things that parents of all time have learned and relearned. They are the things that one used to hear one's elders speak of, but never expected to feel in one's own sophisticated, well-ordered life—annoyance, impatience, fear in many forms, many times repeated; the lift of the heart in pride and joy; the sense of inadequacy, of the frailty of one's own wisdom; despair at the slowness of reason's growth in them. But mostly it is joy, in round babies, in tall daughters and sons who grow, not into one's own image or into one's weak imaginings, but into themselves."

So it is with Claire and I. She grows, discovers, and enjoys *her* world, not mine as I do my best to keep up. Haig-Brown continues,

"I sometimes think the only crime a parent can commit, short of not loving a child, is to try and force it into the realization of his own half-forgotten dreams. There is no reason why the child of any parent should excel, or even want to excel, no reason why it should ever fight beyond its strength. A child, and the man or woman after the child, must strive within its strength, up to its own full realization. It must learn to feel and know the world about it, advance the world if it will, use the world so far as it must, understand the world as it can. Fulfillment may be in driving trucks as well as in signing treaties, in lying in the leaves as surely as in painting pictures. Let children only become themselves, using eyes and minds and senses, feeling and enjoying as men and women do, searching into the meaning beyond meaning if they aspire to, accepting the truth in light and color and movement before their eyes if that is more natural to them. Let them only be true to themselves, so that they have true selves to give. Let them be sure in this, feeling the strength of their sureness within themselves, not in relation to or in competition with other men and women, but in relation to an absolute standard their own hearts know.

This I wish for my children, not honors or rewards or riches, not the satisfactions of success or even of creation, but only this sureness, truly and solidly based, that makes them human beings, capable of sympathy, understanding and tolerance. It is in them now and growing within them. They see things with their eyes, interpret them in their minds, understand them in their hearts, and often show them again to Ann and myself with the impress of fresh thought upon them. They reach beyond us more and more boldly to touch the world and give themselves to it. I wish the world joy of them. And I wish them a world no more difficult and dangerous than man has always found it.

Even at the tender age of 3½ this sureness grows in Claire. No longer do I see her through the lens of my own weak imaginings. Nor do I imagine that through her life I will somehow redeem the failures of my own. I have been called to walk *beside* her—to tend the garden, expose her to things that will enrich her, do my best to model values that I hope she will make her own, and to pray daily for God's loving hand on her life and the grace and wisdom I will need to negotiate the next set of rapids. Anything I can do within my own considerable brokenness to provide fertile soil that she can sink her roots into. Along the way I do my best to enjoy the ride, continually reminding myself that she is *not* "my" daughter, she is *herself*.

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And yet, she is and always will be the taproot of my own heart. Claire Bear, Squiggle, Honey Girl, Princess, Sweet Girl, Lan Lan—my beautiful orchid who fills my life with a fragrance only she can give, and in her own way presides over my journey through an emotional and spiritual universe I am only just beginning to understand.

Last summer Audrey and I began the process for our second adoption. With luck we will be traveling to China with Claire next year and returning with her sister.

This time I am not afraid!



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Kay Anne Johnson:

Professor of Asian Studies and Political Science at Hampshire College, Amherst, Massachusetts and author of *Wanting a Daughter, Needing a Son: Abandonment, adoption, and orphanage care in China*.

Further Reading

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Footnotes

- 1) One of the best examples of this occurred in 1995 when the British watchdog group Human Rights Watch (www.hrw.org) released a documentary titled "The Dying Rooms: China's Darkest Secret". The program, and a 1996 follow-up report titled "Death by Default: Fatal Neglect in China's State Orphanages" alerted the world to what were then very real problems in many if not most Chinese orphanages: high mortality rates (some of which topped 80 percent), inadequate funding, and inadequate staffing and training. Yet despite their success at raising awareness, the reports raised many eyebrows because they accused Beijing of *deliberately orchestrating* these problems. It was even alleged that most, if not all state run orphanages had "dying rooms" where infants were deliberately being left to die. HRW's investigation was based on; a) visits to a handful of child welfare institutes; b) documentation of problems at a single orphanage (the Shanghai Child Welfare Institute) prior to a 1993 overhaul of its operations, and 6 year old child mortality statistics for a few provinces from Civil Affairs authorities. Critics rightly charged that while this demonstrated problems with some Chinese orphanages, generalizing them to a Beijing authorized policy of deliberate nationwide neglect was a sensationalistic leap of faith for which there was no evidence.

In addition to being inflammatory, the accusations could not have come at a worse time. Beijing's sensitivity to international scrutiny of what they perceive to be internal matters is well known. Years of effort is usually required before organizations like UNFPA, World Vision, or international adoption agencies establish enough trust with them to maintain effective programs in China. Many such organizations had done just this when HRW's documentaries were released—all of which were jeopardized. Predictably, Beijing responded angrily, denying all charges. But when it was discovered that producer Kate Blewett and other HRW staff had gained access to orphanages by misrepresenting themselves as representatives of the American Children's Fund, they were livid. International relief efforts were severely curtailed or blocked and access to orphanages and badly needed child welfare information was shut off. International adoption efforts got by relatively unscathed, but many international humanitarian programs were damaged almost irreparably.

Since then China overhauled much of its social and child welfare apparatus and conditions have improved dramatically in many, if not most orphanages. Yet even today the fallout from HRW's reports are still being felt, and many activist organizations (particularly extremist pro-life groups) still quote them uncritically even though most of the information they were based on is now one to two decades old. For more information on the issues surrounding the HRW reports and their impact, see Chap. 2 of Kay Anne Johnson's book *Wanting a Daughter, Needing a Son* (2004).

- 2) In 2001 humanitarian efforts in China suffered what may well have been the single most destructive act of activist negligence in recent history. In fall of that year a Virginia based pro-life extremist group called the Population Research Institute managed to convince the Bush administration and several Republican members of Congress that the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) was assisting Chinese Civil Affairs officials with forced abortions and sterilizations. In response, the Bush administration blocked \$34 million in U.S. funding for UNFPA. Later investigations revealed that PRI's entire case amounted to nothing more than guilt-by-association arguments and a handful of uncorroborated anecdotal reports. Despite numerous investigations by NGO's, the British Parliament, and three investigations by the U.S. State Department, not one of PRI's accusations was ever independently verified and no UNFPA official was ever implicated in any incident of coercion (including those alleged by PRI's witnesses).

Had they been more careful, UNFPA's antagonists might have been forewarned. PRI's lack of objectivity is evident in their checkered history. The institute began as a spin-off of Human Life International, a fundamentalist catholic extremist group with anti-Semitic leanings. HLI's founder, Rev. Paul Marx, believes that "jewish doctors control the abortion movement". PRI President Steven Mosher was appointed by Marx to spearhead their formation and has been the organization's inspiration and driving force ever since. A rabid anti-family planning activist, Mosher conducted anthropological research in China from 1979 to 1980, and in 1983 was denied a PhD by Stanford for "illegal and seriously unethical conduct" in the field. Details of the evidence for his expulsion were never made public by he or Stanford (due mainly to concern for the safety of witnesses still in China), but it appears that he'd had numerous run-ins with Chinese authorities, falsified records, and acquired and disseminated much of his data under questionable circumstances. Among other things, he published pictures in the Chinese media of women who had undergone late-term abortions, thereby putting them at risk for government retaliation. Since returning home he has

tirelessly turned out inflammatory publications about China's "evil empire", "U.N. butchers", the "myth" of overpopulation, and the importance of having as many children as possible to, among other things, "populate heaven with new souls"—the majority of which are circulated almost exclusively in Far-Right and pro-life extremist circles. While none of this bears directly on UNFPA, it raises serious concerns about the organization's objectivity making the complete absence of any independent evidence of their accusations all the more telling.

In June of 2002 the State Department released information about their third fact-finding mission to China regarding UNFPA's activities. Shortly thereafter, Congress voted overwhelmingly to reinstate U.S. funding and requested increased funding for the following year. But Bush was under pressure from the Religious Right, and apparently as unconcerned with the lack of evidence and PRI's credibility problems as they were. He refused to reconsider the matter and in July of that year vetoed the reinstated funds, which as of this writing have not been restored. Denied this funding, UNFPA had to scale back many reproductive health care, education, and medical efforts worldwide, including child welfare programs and access to safe contraception—all of which have been shown repeatedly to decrease abortion rates. Ironically, UNFPA has been one of the greater voices of *restraint* in China and done much to reduce the number of coercive abortions, sterilizations, and IUD implants and bring about increasing emphasis on contraception and reproductive health. By contrast, according to some estimates the U.S. defunding of UNFPA, engineered by so-called "pro-life" activists and the Religious Right, has resulted in more than 800,000 *additional* abortions annually around the world since 2001—a rate nearly equal to the total annual abortion rate in the U.S. For more on the U.S. defunding of UNFPA and its consequences, see my June 2001 research letter to Congress on the issue at www.scottchurchdirect.com/sustainability.aspx/us-funding-for-unfpa.

- 3) China's TFR reached a peak of 7.4 in 1963 largely as a result of compensatory childbearing after severe population declines after 1958 due to Mao's "Great Leap Forward". China's most dramatic reductions in TFR occurred during the 70's when Beijing instituted the "Wan-Xi-Shao" national family planning program which emphasized later birth and fewer births with longer spacing between pregnancies. Under this policy, which was far less oppressive than its successor, TFR declined from 6.0 in 1970 to 2.8 in 1979. In fact, when the One-Child policy was first implemented TFR actually *increased* to a 1981 high of 2.9. From then on it continued to fall and based on official census tallies achieved replacement level during the 90's, but these later declines were minimal compared to those of the Wan-Xi-Shao period. In fact, because these declines are based largely on census records that do not account for missing girls, it's likely that they have been overestimated (Tien et al., 1992; Lavelly and Freedman, 1990).
- 4) Thailand reduced TFR from 6.42 in 1960 to 2.6 in 1990, and 1.9 in 2004. Likewise, South Korea reduced TFR from 4.5 in 1970 to 1.2 in 2004. Japan, Singapore, and the Indian states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu achieved similar results and are now below replacement levels. In each case these reductions were achieved without coercive government dictates and in spite of high poverty levels and low population/arable land ratios, and resulted from some combination of improved economic conditions, higher literacy rates, and access to contraception and family planning services (Eberstadt, 2004; Christophe and Rajan, 2002; Kim, 2005; UNICEF Online, 2005). Furthermore, abortion appears to have played at best a minor role in these changes, particularly since the 80's (Guttmacher, 2005). In fact, it now appears that the decision in 1979 to implement the One-Child policy was based on flawed science and political motives rather than any clear evidence that the Wan-Xi-Shao program was not successful (Greenhalgh, 2003).
- 5) Roughly 75 to 80 percent of Americans identify themselves as Christian (Catholic or Protestant) of which some 40 million are "born again" Evangelicals. Nearly all report that the Bible is an important moral and spiritual authority in their lives, if not the final one. At its most irreducible core, the Bible teaches love, forgiveness, charity, and freedom from all worldly idolatry, including materialism. Few if any professing Christians are unaware of the parable of the rich young ruler: "*truly, truly I say unto you. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven...*" (Luke 18:25), or the Apostle Paul's insistence that "the love of money is the root of all evil, and by it some have made shipwreck of their faith and pierced their hearts with many sorrows" (1 Tim 6:10)—a poignant choice of words for a man who was himself twice shipwrecked and nearly killed as a result. Yet despite these and countless similar passages throughout the Old and New Testaments, it's revealing to drive by

any Catholic or Protestant church in America on Sunday morning and note how many late-model luxury cars and trendy SUV's the parking lot holds, not to mention how many can be followed home to exclusive neighborhoods with large stylish homes after the service.

Even fewer Christians are unaware of Jesus' commandment to love our enemies (Matt 5:44) and his insistence that "those who take up the sword will perish by the sword" (Matt 26:52). But once again, Conservative Evangelicals are among the nation's most strident supporters of unquestioned military spending, and are significantly more likely than their secular counterparts to advocate war and other forms of violence during international disputes. The year 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq is one case in point. A year 2002 national survey conducted by the International Fellowship of Jews and Christians (IFJC) found that of all major religious groups in America, Evangelicals were the strongest backers of war in Iraq. Over two-thirds of Evangelicals surveyed supported an invasion--10 percent more than the general U.S. adult population. In 2003 a Gallup poll of the general population reached similar conclusions.

The inconsistencies are not lost on the non-Christian public. A bumper sticker I saw recently asked, "What Would Jesus Bomb?"—a question that is both humorous and disturbingly relevant. Of course, Christians who embrace these values have a long list of ready answers for their critics—"nothing in the Bible says I *can't* have wealth as long as I'm 'responsible' with it..."; "sometimes war is necessary to rid the world of 'evildoers'..."; and so on. While these arguments are not without their merits they were not preached or practiced by Jesus, the apostles, or the early church despite persecution and social injustice even worse than today's. Their unquestioned acceptance among large sectors of the Evangelical community is difficult to explain as being anything other than a cultural contamination of biblical principles.

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