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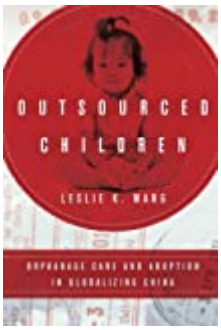

Leslie K. Wang. *Outsourced Children: Orphanage Care and Adoption in Globalizing China.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016. 208 pp. $24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-5036-0011-9.

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In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the international adoption of Chinese girls by families in the global North has transformed Western as well as Chinese society, politics, and culture. Since 1992, when the Chinese government first allowed foreign adoptions, Western families have adopted over 140,000 primarily healthy Chinese girls (p. 49). The passage of transparent Chinese international adoption laws and the presence of a centralized regulatory agency, the China Center for Childrenâs Welfare and Adoption (formerly known as the Chinese Center for Adoption Affairs), made China an attractive choice for potential international adoptive parents. Furthermore, Western portrayals of the deplorable conditions of Chinese orphanages, popularized by the 1995 documentary *The Dying Rooms: Chinaâs Deepest Secret*, as well as critiques of the backwardness of Chinese cultural preferences for sons over daughters, linked Chinese international adoption to rescue and redemption. The adoption of these children in Western countries has received wide-ranging attention in mainstream media and the publishing industry. *New York Times* articles have featured the multicultural integration of Chinese adoptive girls in transracial, Jewish, and gay and lesbian families. In the iconic HBO series *Sex and the City*, Charlotteâs adoption of a Chinese girl represents the happy ending to her struggle with infertility. A popular childrenâs book refashioned a Chinese folktale about the âred threadâ into a symbol of the predestined connections between Western parents and Chinese adoptive children.

In *Outsourced Children*, sociologist Leslie K. Wang aims to reconceptualize the unidirectional perspective that views adoption as a one-way migration of children from poor countries into richer ones. Rather Wang emphasizes the transnational exchange that involves the importation of Western actors, resources, and practices into Chinese orphanages to care for abandoned youth as well as the exportation of Chinese children into Western homes via adoption. The main focus of Wangâs book, however, is the former. One of Wangâs major contributions to the scholarly literature is her concept of âoutsourced intimacy,â which she defines as âthe process by which the Chinese state has outsourced the care of locally devalued children to Westerners who, using their own resources, remake them into global citizensâ (p. 4). Between 2005 and 2014, Wang visited nine different Chinese state-run orphanages across the country, interviewed staff members at adoption-related nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and Western orphan relief organizations, and mined archives on the topics

of state modernization and the changing child welfare regime. The most notable component of her methodology is her ethnographic fieldwork in Beijing that took place in 2006 and 2007 in two Chinese state-run orphanages that collaborated with Western NGOs. As a volunteer with the faith-based Tomorrowâs Children, Wang spent several months at the Haifeng Childrenâs Welfare Institute (CWI). Tomorrowâs Children managed a medical facility for the care of severely ill and disabled infants at this CWI. Wang also served as a volunteer for the organization Helping Hands, a grassroots group of Western expatriate wives who assisted the Yongping Orphanage, a small state institution that cared for about forty special needs youth.

In seven succinct chapters, Wang explores the reasons why Chinese parents abandoned some of their children to state care during a time of unprecedented prosperity in the country, and the positive as well as negative impacts that result from the involvement of foreign humanitarian NGOs in the nationâs child welfare system. Several of these book chapters feature macro-level issues of Chinese economic reforms and fertility regulations. Wang argues that the Chinese stateâs modernization goals and its desire for economic glory in the international sphere encouraged the unequal treatment of children on the basis of gender and bodily and mental ability. Since the late 1970s, punitive fertility regulations, such as Chinaâs one-child policy, aimed to regulate population growth and to create so-called high quality citizens who were competitive in a global economy. Although the Chinese government relaxed its one-child policy in 1984 and began phasing it out in 2016, the policy resulted in the âgendercideâ of tens of millions of daughters through sex-selective abortion, abandonment, hiding, or even killing (p. 6). Furthermore, assessments of bodily and mental ability have sorted youth into advantaged and disadvantaged groups. Thus, Wang observes that Chinese economic development has come at significant cost to certain youth. International adoption has reversed the fortune of many healthy Chinese girls. However, the demand for healthy Chinese girls by potential adoptive parents has intertwined commodification with care, thereby creating incentives for corruption and child trafficking.

The most original and innovative book chapters feature Wangâs engaging writing about her observations at Tomorrowâs Children and Helping Hands. Managed by Western evangelicals, Tomorrowâs Children uses its own funds to provide palliative and medical care to severely ill and disabled children of Haifengâs CWI. Wang characterizes the impact of this care on the children as a ârebirthâ into an âobject of unconditional love.â Yet she also complicates this transformative process in several ways. First, she highlights the everyday tensions at the unit as Western volunteersâ âintensive logic of careâ continually collides with low-paid local *ayis* or caregivers who follow a âpragmatic logic of careâ (p. 78). Similar tensions existed at Helping Hands between the Western expatriate wives who emphasized maternal nurturance in contrast to local caregivers who focused on the tasks of feeding and cleaning in order to meet the childrenâs most basic physical requirements. Wang divulges some of her own inner conflicts about the harsh and rough treatment of the children by the local women. Yet she balances these perceptions with her observation that most of the caregivers were responsible, hardworking women who sincerely cared for the children but were also overwhelmed by long hours and low pay. Second, some disabled children were excluded from care because they were not disabled enough to warrant specialized services. Thus, Western practices have also resulted in the stratification and a different kind of abandonment of Chinese children based on perceived need.

Wangâs insightful study of outsourced intimacy in contemporary Chinese orphanages would have been strengthened by more substantive historical analysis of earlier Western religious and humanitarian involvement in China and the longer history of Asian international adoption. How might the current situation continue the legacy of or differ from the previous presence of Western missionaries and nonsectarian organizational actors in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? How have histories of post-World War II European international adoption and Cold War Asian international adoption, including the Cold War international adoption of Chinese refugee children from Hong Kong by American and European families, influenced the trajectory of contemporary Chinese international adoption? The significance of a historical perspective is heightened by the way in which the period of Chinese international adoption featured in Wangâs book is becoming history. For example, Wang notes that, beginning in 2007, the Chinese government implemented more stringent international adoption policies regarding the marital status, age, education, health (body mass index), and employment of potential adoptive parents. Nevertheless, Wangâs book effectively expands the temporal and geographic scope of international adoption studies to foreground the early experiences of international adoptive children in China and the labor of their local caregivers, making it a no-

table contribution to the scholarship on contemporary Chinese history and society, child studies, and adoption studies. Wangâs vivid and accessible writing, and her ability to raise difficult issues about the best interests of children in local, national, and transnational contexts makes *Outsourced Children* a compelling read for undergraduate and graduate students, policymakers, and general readers.

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