

2 China

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Jurisdiction

With an area of 3,705,408 square miles (9,956,961 square kilometres) China is twice the size of Western Europe. It has 31 provinces, including five 'autonomous regions' and four city municipalities. China is a highly diverse country and its terrain ranges from plains, deltas and hills in the east to mountains, high plateaux and deserts in the west. To the south its climate is tropical, while to the north it is sub-arctic. Less than one-sixth of China is suitable for agriculture and the most fertile areas lie in the eastern third of the country, which is economically the most developed region.

The Chinese imperial system came to an end in 1911, when the Qing (Manchu) dynasty was overthrown and China was proclaimed a republic, partly through the efforts of revolutionaries such as Sun Yat-sen. The country then entered a period of warlordism until in 1927 the Nationalist Party or 'Kuomintang' (KMT), under its leader Chiang Kai-shek, established a central government in Nanjing. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was founded in 1921 but broke with the KMT and was forced to flee into the interior in the Long March in 1934/35. Both KMT and CCP forces opposed Japan during World War Two but a civil war broke out from 1945-1949. CCP forces under Mao Zedong routed their KMT opponents and in 1949 Mao announced the establishment of the People's Republic of China. KMT elements fled to the island of Taiwan.

The period between 1949 and Mao's death in 1976 was characterised by an ambitious political and economic restructuring program which involved the collectivisation of industry, the establishment of communes and the redistribution of land. The Cultural Revolution from 1966-1976 brought enormous upheaval in the political system and Mao had to rely on the armed forces to maintain order and exercise control.

In December 1978 the CCP, inspired by Deng Xiaoping, launched a wide-ranging program of economic and social reform which sought to modernise the economy, develop China's external relations (the 'open door policy'), especially with the West, and implement a gradual and limited liberalisation of Chinese society.

Political opposition to the more liberal reforms forced periods of retrenchment and in June 1989, following the brutal suppression of pro-democracy demonstrators in Beijing, political control swung firmly into the hands of conservative elements within the CCP. The Chinese government labelled the demonstrations a 'counter-revolutionary rebellion' and clamped down on dissent. Prominent dissidents fled the country or went into hiding. Many activists were arrested. Jiang Zemin, former Mayor and later Party Secretary of Shanghai replaced Party General Secretary Zhao Ziyang. Jiang was appointed to the additional post of State President in March 1993. Since then, the Party leadership has continued the economic reform program, while also seeking to improve China's standing in the international community. Jiang retired as President in March 2003 and was replaced by Vice-President Hu Jintao.

China's current process of 'modernisation is of a speed, scale and scope probably unprecedented in human history. 1998 was the 20th anniversary year of China's 'reform and opening up' policies, which

have achieved fairly steady economic growth over the 20 year period. The growth is occurring especially within an emerging, highly dynamic, market-driven sector, more in coastal than in inland provinces and regions.

Opening to global market forces may increase disparities, and pressure on the poorest in China, in the short-term; however, the hope is for everyone to benefit economically. The impact of recent outbreaks of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) has yet to be measured. Every year, major natural disasters such as heavy rains, floods, snowstorms, drought and earthquakes cause heavy economic losses including hundreds of human casualties throughout China. Children are often the most vulnerable victims of such natural disasters. Many families lose their means of production and are left unable to support the cost of children's education, health care or other basic services.

Overall estimates by government indicate that infant and under-five mortality have declined. The Maternal Mortality Rate has decreased from 89 per 100,000 live births in 1990 to about 53 per 100,000 live births in 2000. Although the decline is impressive, the rate of decline has been falling over the decade. There is also wide variation within the country: even between provinces there can be three-fold differences. Major causes for infant deaths are Acute Respiratory Infections, problems of the newborn, neonatal tetanus, diarrhoeal diseases and injuries. Causes of child mortality (one to four years) are pneumonia, diarrhoeal diseases and injuries.

HIV/AIDS was first reported in China in 1985. In September 2002 the Chinese Government estimated that about a million people were infected with the HIV virus in China. The United Nations believes that this is still an underestimate and warns that as many as 1.5 million Chinese have the virus, with an estimated increase to 20 million by the end of the decade. Although cases have been detected in all provinces, HIV transmission is primarily focused among intravenous drug users in certain provinces (e.g., Yunnan and Xinjiang). In 1998 the Chinese Government set out policy objectives and strategies to deal with HIV/AIDS and introduced measures such as HIV screening for all blood for clinical use and information campaigns

Dominant Political System

The State Council of the People's Republic of China, namely the Central People's Government, is the highest executive organ of State power, as well as the highest organ of State administration. The State Council is composed of a premier, vice-premiers, State councillors, ministers in charge of ministries and commissions, the auditor-general and the secretary-general. The premier of the State Council is nominated by the president, reviewed by the NPC, and appointed and removed by the president. Other members of the State Council are nominated by the premier, reviewed by the NPC or its Standing Committee, and appointed and removed by the president. In the State Council, a single term of each office is five years, and incumbents cannot be reappointed after two successive terms.

The State Council follows the system of premier responsibility in work while various ministries and commissions under the State Council follow the system of ministerial responsibility. In dealing with foreign affairs, State councillors can conduct important activities on behalf the premier after being entrusted by the premier of the State Council. The auditor-general is the head of the State Auditing Administration, in charge of auditing and supervising State finances. The secretary-general, under the

premier, is responsible for the day-to-day work of the State Council and is in charge of the general office of the State Council.

The State Council is responsible for carrying out the principles and policies of the Communist Party of China as well as the regulations and laws adopted by the NPC, and dealing with such affairs as China's internal politics, diplomacy, national defence, finance, economy, culture and education.

Under the current Constitution, the State Council exercises the power of administrative legislation, the power to submit proposals, the power of administrative leadership, the power of economic management, the power of diplomatic administration, the power of social administration, and other powers granted by the NPC and its Standing Committee.

At the 16th Communist Party Congress in November 2002 Jiang Zemin stepped down from his position as Party General Secretary to make way for a new 'fourth' generation of leaders. Prior to this, he had pressed ahead with a major political campaign, the 'Three Representatives', which addresses key concerns surrounding the Party's continuing role and relevance at a time of major domestic and international change.

Hu Jintao succeeded Jiang as Party General Secretary. The new State leadership positions were announced at the National People's Congress (NPC), which met from 5-18 March 2003. Hu Jintao was named President and Wen Jiabao became Premier. Wu Bangguo replaced Li Peng as NPC Chairman. The new leadership have made it clear that they will continue the current policy main priorities of economic growth, internal stability and opening up to the world.

History and Origins of Foster Family Care for Children

In 1949 there were an estimated 500 million people in China. China's population in 1999 was about 1.2 billion - the most populated nation in the world.

Faced with a seemingly out-of-control population explosion, China implemented strict family planning controls in the 1970s with the aim of limiting the population to 1.2 billion by the year 2000. Those controls -- especially the 'one-child-only' rule -- have been largely successful. China's birth rate has dropped, and officials estimate that without the family planning campaign, the Chinese population would now be more than 1.5 billion. However, the controls also had other consequences; for example, an increase in the number of children, especially girls, being abandoned and put into orphanages. In 1996 orphanages in China were in crisis with overcrowding, lack of resources and no staff training. This crisis was certainly a factor in the establishment, in September 1988, of the Joint Shanghai Foster Care and Training Program, the first formal foster care project with management and training standards to be set up in China. This project will be further discussed later in the chapter.

Analysts say the biggest threat to China's efforts at population control is the growing number of transients -- a 'floating population' now estimated at more than 100 million, of mostly rural labourers and their families who travel to China's cities in search of work. Such transients tend to ignore the government's family planning policies. China's life expectancy average also has doubled since 1949, to 70 years. Longer living Chinese, with fewer births, could cause China to soon become the fastest aging nation in history.

For the past 20 years, 'encouraging' Chinese couples to limit the size of their families to one child has been employed as a means of controlling that country's soaring population growth. Restrictions on adoption by Chinese couples with existing children are now being eased. Provisions for this first appeared in the amended Adoption Law that went into effect April 1, 1999.

These changes are expected to affect the face of international adoption since the number of children in Chinese orphanages could drop dramatically over the next three to five years. It should be noted that children adopted from China are estimated to represent somewhere between one-quarter to one-third of the worldwide total of out-of-country placements.

Adoptions of Chinese children within China soared from 201 in 1989 to 5,053 in 2002, and the one-child policy certainly has to be considered a major factor in this enormous jump. Family planning will continue to be strongly encouraged by the Chinese government, and many alternative forms of contraception will be made available. Abortion also remains a legal alternative.

China's social welfare institutions for children play a role in the country's efforts to care for children. The welfare institutions accept orphans who have lost their parents during natural disasters or accidents, and also those abandoned by their parents because they are disabled mentally or physically, or because they have contracted a serious illness.

Each welfare home for children has drawn up guidelines concerning aspects of both internal management and the children's lives – upbringing, nursing, medical care, rehabilitation, scientific research, community rehabilitation, training, and support services.

Apart from welfare institutions set up by the Ministry of Civil Affairs and managed by the local Civil Affairs Bureaux, to take care of orphans and abandoned children, China encourages citizens to adopt these children so that they can enjoy a normal family life.

The Joint Shanghai Foster Care and Training Program

The Joint Shanghai Foster Care and Training Program was established in September 1998 as a three year program (subsequently extended by one year) to establish foster care in Shanghai through the adaptation of foster care practices used in the U.K. to the Chinese situation. It was a partnership between Care for Children (CFC), a U.K. registered charity, and the Shanghai Social Services, a part of the Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau. CFC was partly funded for the first three years of the project by the U.K. Government Department for International Development.

The purpose of the Shanghai Foster Care and Training Program was to develop, within the Shanghai Children's Welfare Institute, de-institutionalised alternatives for caring for abandoned or orphaned children under their jurisdiction, in particular, long-term foster care in a family environment. This involved the development of policies and practices appropriate in the Chinese context and the production of training materials for use in the training facility. Once the Program was successfully established, the experience gained could be used to set up a training facility in Shanghai to train staff from Shanghai and elsewhere in China in foster care. It was hoped that such a training facility would influence social policy and practice throughout China.

Two effects of the Program only indirectly related to the placement of foster children have to do with the social work profession and the alleviation of poverty. Social work is not yet a recognised profession in

China but Care for Children is introducing methods of training and empowering individuals to undertake standard social work roles in their communities, which will do much to establish the profession. With respect to poverty alleviation, the following extract from a report by Care for Children's President, Lord Laming, is of interest.

During the succeeding months the social workers observed the progress of each child. But also they noted a growing concern by the families that, whilst they could comply with the required standards in the home, they were worried about the state of the drains in the village. They feared that if the foster child was sick, it might be thought they were to blame. The authorities offered to make good the drains if the community gave an assurance that they would be used properly. At another meeting the foster parents expressed concerns that the foster children were getting greater opportunities than their own children. Again the authorities offered to enlarge the school if the parents would ensure that their own children attended regularly even during harvest or at times of other demands:

And so the story continued of how the quality of life in the villages was being steadily improved.

This observation by Lord Laming reveals that the relatively simple notion of ensuring a good standard of foster care can transform the welfare of a whole community.

There is a big difference between the type of foster care in the west (short term) and the practice that is being encouraged in China. Most children in the west come into care through some form of abuse in the past, and may have contact with their natural families. Children in China, many of whom are disabled, come into care through abandonment because of their disability or gender, so their traumas are very different. They have no contact with their natural families so we look for permanent families through long term foster care.

We use long term foster care (permanence) for placing children with disabilities. This is because the foster parents need added support and training to be able to care for the child. We encourage attachment and bonding between the child and its substitute parents but continue to monitor and support the families.

In China there is a great motivation to foster long term, as many couples have had their only child and want to raise another, often a girl if they have had a son. Adoption is an obvious solution here. However, we felt that to allow so many people to adopt without the initial support of foster care could lead to adoptive parents working in isolation and a higher breakdown and abuse rate. After a period of three to five years of foster care, many families do adopt the child placed with them.

When we work with local authorities, usually an orphanage, we select and train a group of the institution's staff to become family placement workers. We have adopted the U.K. national standards and codes of practice along with the assessment procedures recommended by the British Association for Adoption and Foster Care. These have been translated and culturally amended to make a comparable Chinese version that works very well. Family placement workers recruit and assess foster-parents, match foster-parents with children (who are selected by the management of the Children's Welfare Centre) and support placements.

The program has now been in operation for four years. Its achievements over that time can best be described under the following three headings: Shanghai foster care project; Training program; and Relationship development.

Shanghai foster care project

A team of 12 staff dedicated to the foster care service, operating under the auspices of the Shanghai Children's Welfare Institute, was established. This team included doctors, nurses and teachers who were trained to assess the needs of both children and parents in the pre-placement stage of fostering. The team also developed skills in training families to care for children with disabilities and were able to monitor the progress of the children and support the families effectively in the community. Supporting the team were staff from the Shanghai Children's Welfare Institution, the Shanghai Social Services, the Shanghai Charity Foundation and the East China Normal University. The All China Women's Federation provided volunteer support for the foster families in the community. Robert Glover, the CFC consultant to the program, was based with the team at the Shanghai Children's Welfare Institution in Pu Yu Shi Lu. Recruitment of foster carers surpassed original expectations. More than 700 families applied. By the end of the project, 400 children had been placed, surpassing the original target of 300 children, and foster carer self-help groups had been initiated in five localities. The children ranged in age from birth to 12 years and many had mild physical or learning disabilities. When the project ended in 2002, an average of 10 children continued to be placed every month.

The first group of children, placed in early 1998, have been in their foster homes for five years at the time of writing. At 7 per cent, the placement breakdown ratio is lower than that experienced in the UK but it is recognised that the program still has a limited history. Significant positive changes have been observed in many children following their move to foster families. In particular, several children who had in the past been felt to have serious learning difficulties have made significant progress.

In May 2000, an independent evaluation was completed by Professors Thoburn and Beckett from the University of East Anglia and Professors Shen and Zeng from the East China Normal University. Further details can be found in their evaluation report, which is available upon request.

The local authority remained the legal parent of each child placed and the foster family expected to raise the child to independence. Payment to foster families was fully funded by the Shanghai Civil Affairs Bureau and the Shanghai Charity Foundation. Each family received a monthly payment (on average RMB 300 equivalent to USD 35) to cover the child's medical, educational and living costs. The philosophy underlying the payment was that people should not be able to make money from fostering but neither should they lose financially. In fact, some families initially refused the money and were only persuaded to take it by being told that it was for the child and not for them. As well as the regular support visits from their family placement worker, there were monthly foster parent support groups which had an incredible 100 per cent turnout. CFC put on a free meal at a local restaurant and all the parents came to discuss and help and support one another. This was deemed to be one of CFC's best investments.

Training program

CFC funded the consultant, the translation and cultural tailoring of materials, the development of practice procedures, the training of foster parents and staff, service delivery, and the promotion of policy and practice development at a national level.

Various training methods were developed including:

- In service training.
- Seminar and specialist topic training.
- One-year postgraduate childcare course at the East China Normal University.
- Study and work visit placements to the UK.
- Masters degree in International Childcare Welfare in the UK.

These provided the necessary training for the day-to-day needs of the child care service and the theoretical underpinning for ongoing development and problem resolution. Overall, the project is undoubtedly an impressive achievement on a number of grounds:

- The establishment of a highly effective partnership between Shanghai Social Services and CFC.
- The number of placements achieved in a short time, the number of foster-parents recruited, and the interest generated.
- The stability of placements for children who are generally considered 'hard to place' and 'hard to parent'.
- The diversity of placements.
- The creative interplay of British and Chinese experience which will inform both British and Chinese projects in the future.
- The benefits to many of the children, who have progressed rapidly since moving from institutional care to foster-care.
- The establishment and training of a team of 12 childcare workers able to sustain the project independently when CFC's involvement ended.
- The establishment of a set of training programs in Shanghai and the U.K. able to support the continued training of staff and development of the program in Shanghai.
- The development of Shanghai Standards and guidelines in foster care.
- The achievement of full funding commitments from all intended sources and operation within the original budget.

Relationship Development: Childcare Conference

In July 2000, China's first National Childcare Conference was organised by Care for Children and Shanghai Social Services. Representatives involved in childcare were invited from Civil Affairs Bureaux and non-government organisations across China. Representatives from 135 Civil Affairs Bureau and 65 other childcare organisations attended. The conference provided information on the Shanghai Program

as well as providing an opportunity for other childcare organisations to share their experiences and issues. A second successful National Childcare Conference was held in June 2002.

Following from the conference:

- Cities across China expressed interest in replicating the Shanghai Program.
- CFC received concrete invitations from some cities for assistance in establishing their programs.
- CFC participated in a working party under the Ministry of Civil Affairs to draft National Standards for childcare.
- CFC was invited to contribute to a program focusing on the needs of children with disabilities across China.
- CFC commenced co-operation with Kunming Children's Welfare Institute, Chengdu Children's Welfare Institute and Ningxi Children's Welfare Institute.
- The success of CFC working in partnership with the Shanghai Government has led to an invitation from the Ministry of Civil Affairs in Beijing to work together with the China Social Work Association (an organ of the central government) on a national program in 15 of the poorest provinces. On the 29th May 2003 CFC signed a five-year contract to replicate the successful Shanghai project in 15 provinces (85% of geographical China). This could change the face of social welfare in China.

Areas still needing development in Shanghai Social Services

While the foster care service was established in the first four years of the program, further work is still needed to strengthen and develop it. In particular:

- The foster parent self-help groups are new and need support to function effectively.
- The foster care team needs to consolidate their training with practical experience and further on the job training.
- The effectiveness of the training programs need to be assessed.
- Practice guidelines and standards need to be agreed.
- Foster care policy and legislation need to be drafted.
- An autonomous family placement department needs to be developed.
- A staff development system needs to be put in place to ensure continued enhancement of skills.
- More work needs to be done around the placement of 'hard to place' children, usually older children and children with more serious disabilities.
- A research and evaluation section within the family placement department needs to be developed.
- Community family centres need to be established to support foster families in their communities.
- 'Preparation for independence' training needs to be developed for children and young people leaving care.

Lessons Emerging

While many adaptations had to be made it was apparent that, as in the U.K., foster care could provide a more effective and lower cost approach to meeting the needs of children in care. The primary differences between the Shanghai Program and current practice in the U.K. related to:

- Statutory checks of foster families.
- Motivation of prospective foster families.
- Community support for foster families.
- Background reasons for children coming into care.
- China's limited social care history.
- China's limited understanding of child protection issues.
- A greater focus on practice in China with limited policy development.
- The lack of legislation or national guidelines on foster care in China.

It will take time to determine how much these are a reflection of the early stage of the Program and how much they reflect the cultural and environmental differences between China and the U.K.

Conclusion

The objectives of the Shanghai Foster Care and Training Program were achieved in the four years. The basic foster care program was well established and operating effectively, with 400 children placed by the end of 2002. Short-term training courses were established with staff making use of the training in their day-to-day work. A full year diploma program was set up in Shanghai.

It was encouraging and extremely rewarding to see the Shanghai project become more and more independent during the first four years. The staff worked well in grasping and owning the concepts, allowing the international consultant to step back during the fourth year.

The danger from the initial success is that Shanghai sees itself as expert in foster care and may decide to go it alone. Much of the development, research and evaluation are related to the life span of the child. Many placements do not get tested until the child reaches adolescence; therefore no family placement is truly mature until it has been in existence for at least 20 years.

The need placed before Care for Children is unchanged: to establish family based care, so that orphaned and abandoned children can grow and develop in the love and care of a family environment. The size of this need however, has been propelled onto a national scale, which is where our challenge now lies.