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"A Penny for the Little Chinese": The French Holy Childhood Association in China, 1843–1951

HENRIETTA HARRISON

"You will sign up again this year for the work of the Holy Childhood, won't you?"

"I can't—my parents don't want to pay."

"But you must have some small sum. You can pay with your own money."

"I don't have any money . . . I have a rabbit and I could sell it, but . . . " Tears rose in the little boy's eyes.

"Come, come, I will put your name down."

"He is so pretty! And I like him so much!" Then, after a moment of reflection, "All the same, I could certainly sell him for the sake of the little Chinese."[1]

Contract breaking off relations: Chen Zhiwan of Diantou village in the Western Mountains has a son, Yinwa, age 12, but his family is too poor to raise the child, so he requests to send him to the Geliaogou boys' orphanage to be brought up, and to study and learn prayers. Henceforth whether this boy lives or dies will be of no concern to Chen Zhiwan. He will not regret and go back on his word, and he signs this contract breaking off relations as proof.

25th day of the 1st month of the 28th year of the Guangxu emperor [1902]

Signed: Chen Zhiwan

Middlemen: Eldest son-in-law Liu Rong; Scribe Wang Yongzhen[2]

THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE SENTIMENTAL DESCRIPTION of the sale of a French child's rabbit and the harsh terms of a contract for the sale of an impoverished Chinese boy to a Catholic orphanage is stark, but both of these children's lives were touched by one organization: a charity founded in the nineteenth century to raise money from

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[1] *Annales de l'Oeuvre de la Sainte Enfance* [hereafter *Annales*] 25 (1874): 69. All translations in this article are my own.

[2] Geliaogou cunweihui dang'anju [Geliaogou Village Party Committee Archive Office], Baochihui dang'an [Orphanage Archives], 1902–1944, Chen Zhiwan, 1902/1/28.

French children to rescue Chinese babies from infanticide. The Holy Childhood Association is a fascinating institution because its history unites the lives of some of the most powerless members of society with the grand narratives of world history. These narratives often work at a level that makes it difficult to integrate this generation's growing interest in the history of globalization with our closely related passion for the local, the family, and the history of everyday experience.[3]

The Holy Childhood Association (l'Oeuvre de la Sainte Enfance) was established in 1843 by Charles-Auguste-Marie-Joseph de Forbin Janson, the bishop of Nancy, who had been moved by tales of infanticide in China. China had played an important role in debates over the proper ordering of French society ever since popular Jesuit missionary writings had depicted it as an idealized benevolent monarchy and a model for Europe. Since then there had been a dramatic increase in trade, and in 1840, Britain's victory in the Opium War had signaled that the country was likely to be formally reopened to missionaries. Indeed, the French government, as official protector of Catholic missions in China, was negotiating the lifting of the Chinese government's ban on Christianity. Forbin Janson saw himself as the new Moses, leading an army of children who would rescue Chinese children and turn them into apostles and martyrs. For this purpose he set up an association for children under the age of twelve who would give a small monthly donation that would be used in China to baptize abandoned children, to buy them and raise them in Christian families, and later to build schools on the frontiers of China to train them as missionaries.[4] The idea is well illustrated by a picture that accompanied an article in a popular Catholic journal in 1848; it shows Chinese in fanciful costumes bringing unwanted babies to two Catholic priests, one of whom has his hand raised to baptize a child being held up to him. (See Figure 1.) The accompanying text decries China as a country where "savage mothers throw into the public road and expose to the teeth of cruel beasts the child whose sex should inspire the greatest compassion."[5] Forbin Janson died not long after setting up the association, and its headquarters were moved to Paris, where a committee of church and state dignitaries published its journal, took in the donations that arrived as a result, and distributed the money to missionaries.

From 1843 to 1870, the Holy Childhood's growth was extraordinary. Its annual income reached 250,000 francs in 1851, and nearly 2 million by 1869. Membership also spread to other countries, with the largest donors outside France being dioceses in Belgium, Italy, and Germany. In North America, the association was active in Catholic schools in Baltimore, New York, Cincinnati, St. Louis, New Orleans, and Boston. Its journal appeared in fourteen languages, including Czech, Maltese, Polish, and Danish. As the Holy Childhood's membership expanded, so did its activities, so that it came to care for children in Indochina, India, Africa, and Southeast Asia as well as China.[6] The 1860s and 1870s were the period of its greatest popularity, and the time when it established its characteristic institutional framework. At this

[3] C. A. Bayly, Sven Beckert, Matthew Connelly, Isabel Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol, and Patricia Seed, "*AHR* Conversation: On Transnational History," *American Historical Review* 111, no. 5 (December 2006): 1441–1464.

[4] *Annales* 1 (1846–1847): 17, 36, 64.

[5] *Musée des Familles: Lectures du Soir* 16 (1848–1849): 213–214.

[6] *Annales* 3 (1851): 290; 11 (1859): 94–100; 18 (1866): 80–85, 160–163; 21 (1869): 75; Paul Lesourd, *Histoire générale de l'Oeuvre Pontificale de la Sainte-Enfance depuis un siècle* (Paris, 1947), 109.

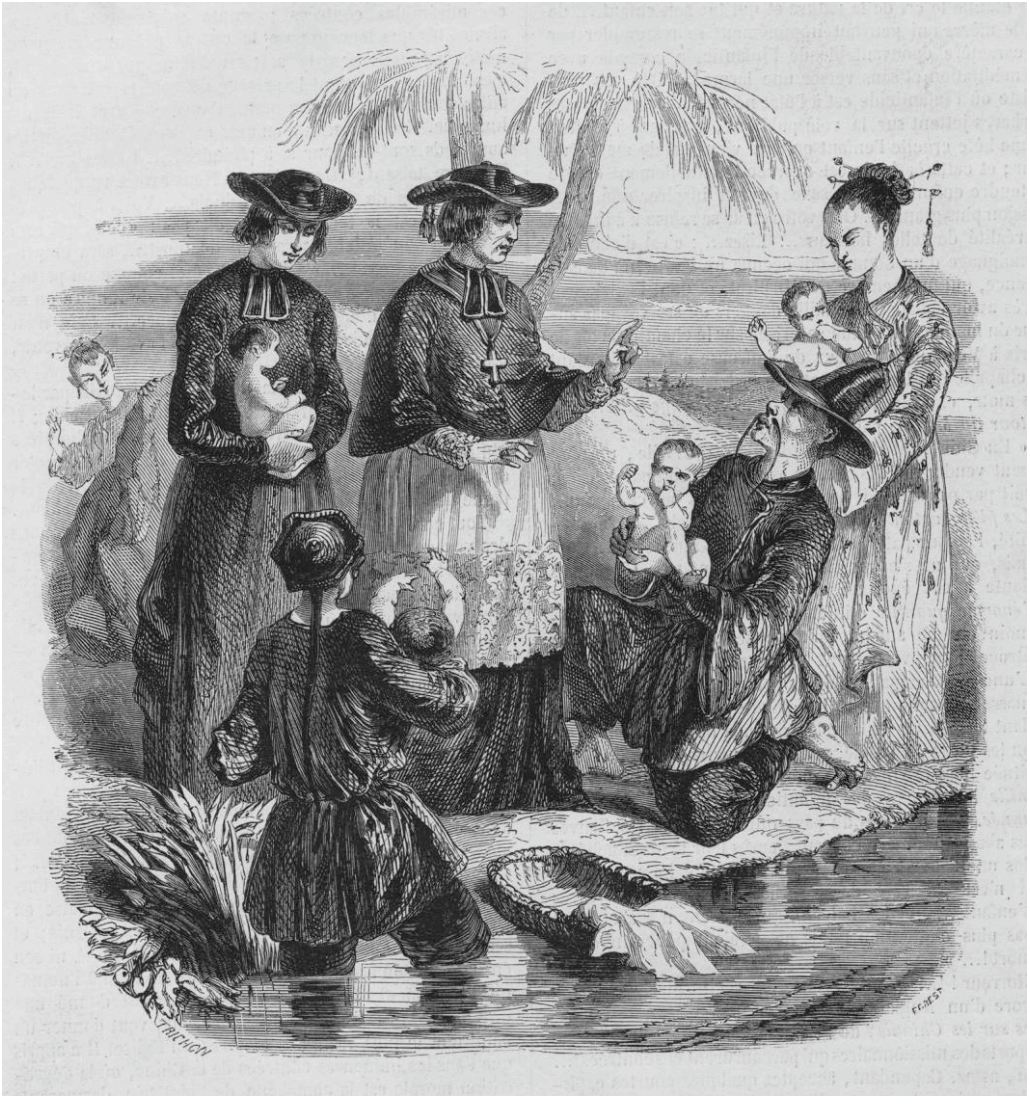


FIGURE 1: "Chinese Children Rescued by the Holy Childhood." The work of the Holy Childhood as it was imagined in nineteenth-century France. From A.-M. Touzé, "La Sainte Enfance," *Musée des Familles: Lectures du Soir* 16 (1848–1849): 213.

time France was the source of its institutional culture, and despite the fact that it was active in many other countries, its fundraising focused on images of China. The Holy Childhood Association exists today as the Vatican's organization for helping children in the developing world, but since the turn of the twentieth century, its story as a mass-membership organization has been one of decline. In Europe, World War I destroyed its financial base and the social culture in which it had flourished; it became unable to meet its huge financial obligations and was taken over by the Vatican. In China, the growth of anti-imperialist nationalism focused elite hostility on the institution, and ultimately led to its activities being ended by the Chinese Communist Party in 1951.

There is almost no existing literature on the history of the Holy Childhood Association. Instead, its story has been submerged in two of the major narratives through which relations between China and the West during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have been understood: Christian missions and imperialism.[7] Both of these provide important insights into its story, but they also have their limitations. A contemporary Chinese observer commenting on the evangelistic aims of the organization wrote, "Sometimes they buy baby girls elsewhere, take them into the church compound, and let only those who practice their religion see them. How this contributes to spreading the religion is hard for outsiders to understand."[8] It is easy enough for us to share this skepticism. Alternatively, the association has been seen as part of the spread of European and American imperialism in China. Its connection with the foreign powers was indeed crucial to its history: in 1870, it was at the center of an international diplomatic crisis when rumors that children were being killed and mutilated in its orphanages caused riots in the city of Tianjin that led to the death of the French consul. However, there are other aspects of the Holy Childhood's activities, such as the encouragement of French children to pray to powerful Chinese guardian angels, that are not easily explained by the idea of imperialism. While we should not deny the importance of either of these explanatory frameworks, we ought to see the Holy Childhood Association as one of the earliest examples of a distinctive contemporary institution: the transnational aid organization.

The existing literature on the history of international organizations tends to see their origins in ideals of internationalism that developed in the second half of the nineteenth century, with the International Red Cross, established in the 1860s, as the key early example.[9] Religious organizations play only a subordinate role in this narrative, but the history of the Holy Childhood Association suggests that this imbalance needs to be reexamined. This is not merely because religion provided a motive for charitable giving, but also because the Catholic Church was one of the few organizations at the time with the financial and human infrastructure through which charitable funds could be collected, transmitted, and dispersed across the world. Moreover, the Holy Childhood Association was remarkably similar to today's transnational aid organizations. Like many contemporary nongovernmental organizations, it was highly entrepreneurial in building a mass membership in the donor country through emotionally affecting stories of individual desperation and dramatic rescues in foreign lands, but it became embedded in a very different culture and social order and developed in ways that came to contradict its original aims. The association's fundraising was focused on the moment of dramatic rescue when the abandoned Chinese child was taken into the arms of a waiting priest, an image that appealed to and legitimated the sentimental emotions around which the modern bourgeois family was being constructed in France. This moment bore almost no relationship to the realities of the Holy Childhood's work in China, but its emotional power came to shape the association's activities even while it misrepresented them.

[7] The only study is Lesourd, *Histoire générale*.

[8] Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, *Jiaowu jiaoan dang* [Archives of Religious Affairs and Cases], 21 vols. (Taibei, 1974), series 1: 915.

[9] Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley, Calif., 2002).

Missionaries administering the association's projects had to operate in the space between the French rhetoric and the realities of family life for the poor in China. The result was a situation in which the ritual of baptism became divorced from Christian conversion, and the children taken in were sometimes bought for the church rather than rescued from their families. What we see, then, is neither a one-way flow of ideas from Europe to China nor a process of homogenization, but a far more complex interaction that involved differences of class as well as nation and that tended to strengthen rather than weaken distinctively different visions of the family.

Differences between China and France came to shape the Holy Childhood's work in unexpected ways, but much of its initial success was attributable to similarities between the two countries. Stories of Chinese women abandoning babies made sense because some of the same pressures and problems existed in France.[10] In both societies, parents wished to limit the size of their families, either because they were too poor to support large numbers of children or in order to maintain their social status. The means by which they did so, including abstinence from sexual activity, withdrawal during sexual intercourse, and the neglect, abandonment, killing, and sale of unwanted children, were also controversial in both societies. In France, where withdrawal was a common contraceptive technique but was condemned as a sin by the church, the pious bourgeois women who were at the heart of the Holy Childhood Association's work were under particular pressure over this issue.

Abandonment was a common solution to the problem of unwanted children in both China and France. Studies of foundling homes in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Europe have suggested extraordinarily high rates of abandonment: in some years, the number of children left in foundling homes in Paris, Milan, and other major European cities was more than 20 percent of the total number of births recorded in the city.[11] The issue of child abandonment in China, partly because of the legacy of the Holy Childhood Association and its claim that infanticide was a Chinese cultural practice, has been far more politically controversial. And while the vast majority of French children who were abandoned were taken to foundling homes where detailed records were kept, there is little demographic data for Chinese children. The killing of children at birth was widely condemned in China. It was reported as an evil custom in many local gazetteers, was banned by local and national government, was depicted in temples as the cause of torments in hell, and was the subject of many moral tracts. An illustration from one of these, titled "Preventing Infanticide Moves the Gods," shows an infant drowning in a bucket by the mother's bed, while one woman persuades another against the evil deed. In the clouds above, the gods take notice of her virtuous act. (See Figure 2.) Since documents of this sort

[10] See Christine Adams, "Maternal Societies in France: Private Charity before the Welfare State," *Journal of Women's History* 17, no. 1 (2005): 87–111.

[11] Rachel Ginnis Fuchs, *Abandoned Children: Foundlings and Child Welfare in Nineteenth-Century France* (Albany, N.Y., 1984), 72; Volker Hunecke, *I trovatelli di Milano: Bambini esposti e famiglie espositrici dal XVII al XIX secolo* (Bologna, 1989), 306. These statistics are complex, in part because not all of the children left in a city's foundling home came from within the city. Giovanna da Molin, who computed figures for abandonment for Italian regions for 1869, concluded that in Sicily and Umbria, more than 6 percent of all children were abandoned after birth. Giovanna da Molin, "Illegittimi ed esposti in Italia dal Seicento all'Ottocento," in Società italiana di demografia storica, *La demografia storica delle città Italiane: Relazioni e comunicazioni presentate al convegno tenuto ad Assisi nei giorni 27–29 ottobre 1980* (Bologna, 1982).



FIGURE 2: "Preventing Infanticide Moves the Gods." Nineteenth-century Chinese woodblock print urging people to prevent infanticide. The French Jesuit Gabriel Palatre collected this and other ephemera related to the issue of infanticide from bookshops in Shanghai. From Gabriel Palatre, *L'Infanticide et l'Oeuvre de la Sainte-Enfance en Chine* (Chang-hai, 1878), 76.

give no indication of the frequency of the practice, scholars have used the assumption that girls were more likely to be unwanted than boys, and then looked at sex ratios to find evidence of infanticide. These show that girls died in disproportionately large numbers, but not necessarily that they were killed at birth. Some women did kill their infants, but more commonly it seems that children were abandoned in situations

where they were likely to die. In other cases, abandonment, especially of baby boys, who had a higher market value, could be nearer to a form of sale.[12]

In response to the problem of infanticide and abandonment, both China and France had private and state-run foundling homes. In both countries, foundling homes were large, well-established, and prestigious charitable institutions: a nun who visited a Tianjin foundling home run by the city's wealthy salt merchants commented that it received vast donations, and that the children would definitely be better off there than with their families. The problems that foundling homes faced were also very similar in the two countries and stemmed above all from the huge demand for their services, which meant that they were nearly always in financial difficulties. A visitor to one of Beijing's two foundling homes in 1848 found that each wet nurse was responsible for several children, a problem that was also typical of European foundling homes and inevitably led to deaths from malnutrition. Moreover, in both countries, foundling homes were prestige buildings constructed in urban centers to display the donors' virtue, whereas many of the parents who abandoned their children lived in rural areas. As a result, infants were often shipped long distances in baskets and panniers, and many died before they ever reached a wet nurse.[13] These factors, with the addition of epidemics exacerbated by crowding, led to appallingly high death rates. In the city of Bourg, France, between 1815 and 1849, 37 percent of foundlings died before their first birthday, a figure that was about twice the normal rate of child mortality at the time; in Paris in 1841, 63 percent of children died in their first year. In China, the Songjiang foundling home had a death rate of 48 percent by age one in 1869, while at a foundling home in a poor part of Hunan province, the figure was 67 percent.[14] When the Holy Childhood Association opened foundling homes in China, it was operating institutions that made sense both to

[12] Huang Liuhong, *Fuhui quanshu* [A Complete Book Concerning Happiness and Benevolence], 32 *juan* (1699), 31: 16–20; Gabriel Palatre, *L'Infanticide et l'Oeuvre de la Sainte-Enfance en Chine* (Changhai, 1878), 2–114; Zhang Jianmin, "Lun Qingdai niying wenti" [On the Problem of Female Infanticide in the Qing], *Jingji pinglun*, no. 2 (1995): 75–82; Michelle King, "Drowning Daughters: A Cultural History of Infanticide in Late Nineteenth-Century China" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, 2007); James L. Watson, "Transactions in People: The Chinese Market in Slaves, Servants, and Heirs," in Watson, ed., *Asian and African Systems of Slavery* (Berkeley, Calif., 1980); James Z. Lee and Cameron D. Campbell, *Fate and Fortune in Rural China: Social Organization and Population Behavior in Liaoning, 1774–1873* (Cambridge, 1997); Lillian M. Li, "Life and Death in a Chinese Famine: Infanticide as a Demographic Consequence of the 1935 Yellow River Flood," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 33, no. 3 (1991): 466–510. There are many anecdotal accounts of infanticide. One of the most striking is in Carma Hinton's 1985 documentary film *One Village in China*, in which a woman explains that, under pressure from her in-laws, she smothered her second son as an infant during the 1940s because she had two babies and not enough food.

[13] *Annales* 2 (1848–1850): 45; 16 (1864): 171. Foundling homes in both China and France have been well studied: Angela Ki Che Leung, "L'accueil des enfants abandonnés dans la Chine du Bas-Yangzi aux XVII^{e} et XVIII^{e} siècles," *Études Chinoises* 4, no. 1 (1985): 15–54; Xiao Qian, "Qingdai Jiangxi minjian yuying shiye yanjiu" [Research on Foundling Care in Qing Dynasty Jiangxi], *Zhongguo shehui jingjishi yanjiu*, no. 1 (2001): 38–46; Fuchs, *Abandoned Children*.

[14] Alain Bideau and Guy Brunet, "La mortalité des enfants trouvés dans le département de l'Ain aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles," in Società italiana di demografia storica, *Enfance abandonnée et société en Europe XIVe–XXe siècle: Actes du colloque international* (Rome, 1991), 245; Fuma Susumu, "Shindai Shōko ikueido no keiei to chihō shakai" [Local Society and the Actual Management of the Hall for Infant Relief in Qing Dynasty Songjiang], *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 45, no. 3 (1986): 74–75; Angela Ki Che Leung, "Relief Institutions for Children in Nineteenth-Century China," in Anne Behnke Kinney, ed., *Chinese Views of Childhood* (Honolulu, 1995).

Western donors and to Chinese who came into contact with them, although the high death rates meant that these institutions were also feared by many.

The Holy Childhood's fundraising exploited both the unspoken similarities and the imagined differences between China and France. The key image used was the abandoned Chinese baby girl at risk of being eaten by wild animals. A trinket that was widely awarded to the association's members depicts little children sitting on the ground while huge, fierce animals approach to eat them. One of the little girls is pushing away an animal when a priest comes and takes her in his arms. The combination of horror and fascination was well designed to inspire the desire to rescue such children.[15] The emotional effect was often strengthened by contrasting the innocence of the French children with the sufferings of the Chinese. So, for example, a French girl in Chinese costume sang at a school concert:

> I am a Chinese child, a child of poverty:
> I never knew a mother's kiss;
> Driven from the cradle, abandoned by my father,
> My bed is the hard ground, the sky my roof.[16]

With such performances, the Holy Childhood Association appealed to French mothers in a world where child mortality was high and the financial collapse of the family or the death of a parent might bring poverty or destitution. Moreover, the dramatic images and the easy solution of a small donation given by a child contrasted with the much more difficult problem of abandonment in France, which was associated in the public mind with improper sexual relations and illegitimacy. Although it was never stated, it is clear that abandoned Chinese children were often felt to be a more appropriate object of pity for innocent French children and pious young women than their French counterparts.

The association also promoted attractive images of the power of French Christian children over the pagan Chinese. Children taking part in Holy Childhood processions often carried statues of the infant Jesus through the streets, an image not of weakness as such, but of power through weakness. This idea was central to the appeal of the Holy Childhood, for it spoke not only of family and sentiment, but also of France and missions and empire, of the exotic and oriental transformed by Christian children. In other words, it presented, at very little cost, an image of the future power of France in which Christian women and their children played the central role.[17] The association of innocence with power is also seen in the idea that the souls of the Chinese infants would become intercessors with God on behalf of those who had sent them to heaven. A poem about a dying French child published in the association's journal has her speaking of heaven, and then:

> But I see . . . look . . . I see
> My brothers the little Chinese
> Leaving the eternal plains;
> And all coming, in a single flight,

[15] *Annales* 19 (1867): 279. Cf. Lisa Cartwright, "Images of 'Waiting Children': Spectatorship and Pity in the Representation of the Global Social Orphan in the 1990s," in Toby Alice Volkman, ed., *Cultures of Transnational Adoption* (Durham, N.C., 2005).

[16] *Annales* 21 (1869): 355.

[17] *Annales* 27 (1876): 345.

To crown me with a wreath of gold
And put on my white wings . . .[18]

People also prayed directly to the dead children's souls. Children were taught to pray,

Oh little Chinese brothers, love us:
By your tender prayers, help us![19]

As a result, members of the association were thought to be under the miraculous protection of "those good little Chinese angels whom we love and who love us."[20] The power of these angels and their very specific care for Holy Childhood members were demonstrated by miracles that were reported in the association's journal. These tended to the direct, personal, and somewhat capricious protection of the members: a woman with four children had enrolled the three oldest in the Holy Childhood when an epidemic broke out. All four children became ill, but only the youngest, who was not under the protection of the association, died.[21] From this point of view, the sheer number of Chinese children who died immediately after baptism was an asset to the association (for children who survived might very well not become angels). A missionary in one north China diocese wrote to the members:

For our part, this year we offer you more than eight thousand little angels who have departed for Heaven! They have a duty to care for you, and when your good and tender mother cannot watch over your cradle or over your steps still tottering in the way of virtue, your little angels will be there, putting to flight the demons, driving away bad company and wicked words, and inspiring you with good thoughts and good examples.[22]

More brutally, one missionary bishop was reported by a hostile critic to have said "that it would be most desirable to have a good epidemic that would rid him of his orphans."[23]

The Holy Childhood Association was also successful in France because it fitted into the culture of consumption that was growing around bourgeois women and their families.[24] The association gave children opportunities to form small clubs, access to its journal, and religious trinkets, but what made it most popular was offering the chance to name a Chinese child. In most parishes it organized an annual procession and church service, and the high point was always a lottery. All the French children's names were included in the drawing, and the lucky winner became the "godparent" of a Chinese baby and got to choose a baptismal name that would be sent to China.[25] It was easy for the "little Chinese" themselves to become a kind of consumer item. A correspondent to the association's journal described how a group of little girls in a workshop had just joined and paid their subscription when the mistress heard a

[18] *Annales* 24 (1873): 215.
[19] *Annales* 19 (1867): 343.
[20] *Annales* 26 (1875): 137.
[21] *Annales* 23 (1871–1872): 133.
[22] *Annales* 27 (1876): 14.
[23] G.-Eug. Simon, "La famille chinoise," *La nouvelle revue* 21 (1883): 391.
[24] Lisa Tiersten, *Marianne in the Market: Envisioning Consumer Society in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Berkeley, Calif., 2001), 188–199.
[25] *Annales* 1 (1847): 142–143, 436; 2 (1848–1850): 16, 20–23, 172–173.

sob and one of the girls saying, "I want one! I want one!" When asked what she was referring to, the girl replied, "What I want is a little Chinese like my friends have!"[26]

In 1875, the journalist Francisque Sarcey claimed that

> There is not a mother in our country who does not know of the Holy Childhood; not a little girl who has not given her pennies each week to redeem those unhappy little Chinese whose mothers villainously throw them to the pigs on the day of their birth; and there is not a father whose little child has not asked for the pennies in question with outstretched hand, and who has not shrugged his shoulders and taken them out of his pocket.[27]

This description comes from an article in which Sarcey accused the Jesuits of embezzling the money collected, and satirized the association's claims regarding the power of the Chinese angels as intercessors: "Does God not understand French?" He was backed up by new experts, keen to contest the church's monopoly on knowledge of China, who argued that infanticide was not a serious problem there. Eugène Simon, a former French consul in Ningbo, wrote:

> To believe that before the arrival of Catholic missionaries in China children died like dogs in the streets, and that outside the Catholic apostolic and Roman church there is neither salvation, nor mercy, nor charity, is an error that we are absolutely bound to abandon.[28]

As this suggests, behind the debate over Chinese infanticide lay much larger tensions within French society between religious and secular visions of the nation-state. Claims that Chinese threw newborn babies to wild beasts (which actually originated in late antique criticisms of European parents) were perilous ground on which to fight such a debate.[29]

The Holy Childhood's activities in China reflected all these aspects of its fundraising, but the way they came to affect society was quite unlike what was imagined in France. Bishops in China were required to complete tables showing the number of children they had rescued, and grants from the association, which formed a significant proportion of their expenditure, were dependent on these figures. Priests encouraged Chinese Christians to baptize dying children, telling them that whoever provided the ritual of baptism was sending a child to heaven and would earn merit for this good deed.[30] While the idea of original sin was alien to the Chinese intellectual tradition, the efficacy of ritual formulas, practices to ensure entry into a better afterlife, and the accumulation of merit are all central to Chinese folk religion. It is thus not surprising that the practice of baptizing dying infants was eagerly taken up. The kind of enthusiasm that could be generated is well illustrated by an old man in Sichuan province who set out on a long and dangerous journey to an area afflicted by the Taiping rebellion "to do this good deed and so expiate my faults."[31] In order to increase the numbers of children rescued, bishops often authorized payments for each baptism of a dying child reported to them. When they mentioned these in their reports to Paris, which was not often, they emphasized that the sums involved were

[26] *Annales* 5 (1853): 441.
[27] Francisque Sarcey, "Les petits chinois," *Le XIX^e siècle*, November 9, 1875.
[28] Simon, "La famille chinoise," 390.
[29] For the origins of the accusation, see John Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Chicago, 1988), 138–179, 414–415.
[30] *Annales* 5 (1853): 152–158.
[31] *Annales* 18 (1866): 11.

very small, but in fact they were quite significant for the recipients. A report from southern Shanxi in 1895 explained that the numbers of baptisms had declined because the diocese had reduced the amount paid to the baptizers. Diocesan accounts for 1911 record payments of up to 10,000 copper cash (several months' wages for a laborer) made to someone baptizing in the province's government-run orphanage, where no doubt there were many dying children.[32] With these methods, the numbers of baptisms recorded annually were extraordinarily high. Holy Childhood baptisms in Shanxi province averaged more than 6,000 a year between 1868 and 1888, with a peak of 21,460 in the terrible famine year of 1878.[33]

So how did the Chinese make sense of the baptisms? The families of these children were nearly all poor and unlikely to leave records, but a careful reading of the missionary accounts indicates that baptism was commonly understood either as a remedy or as providing access to a special Christian afterlife. The idea of baptism as a remedy for childhood illnesses made sense in a situation where many of those who administered the rites were women who were specialists in children's medicine, sometimes with specific skills such as acupuncture. In some cases these women baptized secretly, without telling the parents, but in others the baptism itself was used as a remedy. In one north China village, a Christian woman set herself up as a children's doctor. Her method was to wash the child with a sponge and a little water while mysteriously muttering the baptismal formula. She must have had quite a busy practice, for she claimed to have baptized 120 children in a year. The baptismal formula was also sometimes used by elite male doctors who were not themselves Christians.[34]

Baptism was occasionally taken up by non-Christians as a special death ritual for young children. If children died young, their spirits could not be worshipped as ancestors, but spirits who did not receive offerings were doomed to a desperate existence as hungry and wandering ghosts. Morality books threatened mothers who killed their children with the spirits of their dead children seeking revenge. Parents particularly feared that such spirits might return to inhabit the bodies of younger siblings. Missionaries reported that in some parts of the country, parents would take elaborate precautions to prevent a child's spirit from returning. One method was to beat a dying or dead infant or put the baby out in the cold so that it would not want to return. Another was to mark the body before it was abandoned so that it could be recognized if its spirit returned, either by blackening it with soot or ink or by cutting off a finger or an ear. Babies were occasionally found in this condition. (Similar fears and responses can be seen in early modern Europe, where Scottish mothers prosecuted for infanticide were said to have put earth in their dead children's mouths to prevent their ghosts from speaking.)[35]

[32] Nineteenth-century China had a bimetallic currency system denominated in cash (copper) and taels (silver). In Shanxi in 1866, 1 French franc was worth approximately 200 cash. Leon de Kerval, *Le R.P. Hugolin de Doullens: La vie d'un frère mineur missionaire en Chine au XIX^{e} siècle* (Rome, 1902), 114.

[33] Pontificia Opus Sancta Infantia, Archive, Rome [hereafter POSI], file C432, Louis Moccagatta, September 1878; C437, Mission du Chansi-Méridional État de l'Oeuvre, July 14, 1894–July 14, 1895; "Giornale dal 1^{o} Giugno 1910 al 31 Agosto 1912" (manuscript; Zhongguo tianzhujiao lishi ziliao zhongxin [China Catholic Historical Materials Center], Taiyuan, China). Statistics for Holy Childhood baptisms in Shanxi from 1866 are available in the annual reports contained in POSI C432. The average is pulled up by the huge figure for 1878. In most years, the number of baptisms was around 4,000.

[34] *Annales* 32 (1881): 295–297; 35 (1884): 313–317; 37 (1886): 370.

[35] Palatre, *Infanticide*, 75; *Annales* 20 (1868): 221–222; 23 (1871): 88; 25 (1874): 90; Deborah A.

Baptism, which sent the dead child to a special Christian heaven, fitted easily into the repertoire of techniques for dealing with ghosts. So, for example, a Christian woman who had been called to visit a very sick baby took out a little bottle of holy water to baptize him. When the child's mother and grandmother realized what the woman was doing, they accused her of trying to make the child's ghost her servant, and drove her out. That night, the grandmother had a dream in which the dying child appeared, threatening terrible vengeance because he had been prevented from getting into paradise. She rushed off to fetch the Christian woman, who arrived just in time to baptize the child before he died. When the child's father found out, he was furious and decided to conduct a divination ritual to see what had happened to the soul: he took the family's big iron wok off its brick stand and examined the marks underneath, finding only a few crosses, from which he deduced that the child had indeed joined the Christians. This grandmother had a child baptized because she thought that the ritual would help the child, not because she herself intended to convert to Christianity. Nor did baptism in any way change the life of children who survived the crisis. They remained with their parents and could be expected to follow their family's beliefs and practices. Far from being the moment of dramatic rescue depicted in the association's fundraising activities, these baptisms were actually deeply embedded in the ideas and practices of Chinese folk religion.[36]

Raising abandoned children was the Holy Childhood Association's other main activity, and the one that absorbed the bulk of its funds, but here again the interaction between the association's institutions and local culture produced results that were far from the images used for fundraising in France. The Holy Childhood's method of caring for foundlings developed in the 1850s and remained substantially unchanged into the 1940s. What was supposed to happen is well illustrated by the story of Han Meigui, who was neatly dressed in the shiny black cotton jacket and trousers of well-to-do old women in north China villages when she was interviewed in 2005. She uses her husband's surname, which is most unusual for a Chinese woman, and this is because she began life as a foundling. After being taken in by the village's Catholic orphanage, she was sent out to a wet nurse until she was about six years old. Then she returned to the orphanage, where she lived until she was married at age eighteen to a farmer who held a position in the village office. Although she never went to school and spoke at length about how hard she had to work as a child in the orphanage, hers is a success story: she has four sons and three daughters and has lived into a prosperous and respected old age.[37]

Most children arrived at Holy Childhood orphanages as infants, usually brought in by their parents, neighbors, or women who had attended the birth. If family members were present, they were required to sign a contract breaking off relations and absolving the orphanage from any responsibility if the child died. The child was then

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Symonds, *Weep Not for Me: Women, Ballads, and Infanticide in Early Modern Scotland* (University Park, Md., 1997), 167.

[36] *Annales* 21 (1869): 229–231; 35 (1884): 317.

[37] Interview, Qingyuan County, Shanxi, September 8, 2005. In the summer of 2005, I conducted interviews in the north China village whose orphanage is depicted in Figure 3. I spoke at length with four women in their seventies and eighties who had spent their childhood in the orphanage. For a more generalized account of this system, see Edoald Berden, "A Question about Orphanages," *China Missionary* 2 (1949): 665–666.

sent out to a wet nurse. As in other foundling homes in China and France, arranging and paying for wet nurses was the most difficult problem faced by the institution. A north China missionary described a deaf old woman whose duty it was to stand at the gate of a village orphanage and spoon-feed the babies who arrived a mixture of ground millet and sugar. Her deafness was an advantage, as it meant that the crying did not tire her. Accounts generally conclude that children who were fed in this way seldom survived, and in 1889 this missionary reported that 34 percent of the children taken into the orphanage he was running in the last nine months had died, and nearly 60 percent of those taken in four years earlier had died. He added that many had been brought to the orphanage through the mountains in winter with hardly any clothing, but in fact an equally serious problem was the failure to pay for wet nurses; the local bishop pointed out that finding a wet nurse for every child who entered the orphanage would have cost far more than the institution's total annual budget.[38]

Some children were adopted by their wet nurses, but the majority were taken back into an orphanage when they were about five years old. Although the overall system of caring for abandoned children did not change significantly between the 1850s and the 1940s, the nature of the orphanages did. The early orphanages were small, informal institutions. A typical one in the 1890s had four orphan girls living with six of the Chinese religious women known as virgins; the missionary commented that the little girls he had brought back from their wet nurses were polite, could talk well, were very good at caring for chicks, and were trying out foot-binding cloths on their feet, which would be bound at Easter. The girls in such institutions did housework and helped with the younger children; apart from the time they spent chanting prayers, their lives were not all that different from those of other village girls their age. Over time, the institutions became larger and more formal. The arrival of large numbers of European nuns in China in the early twentieth century intensified these changes. The growth of religious orders for women in Europe had brought with it an ever-increasing demand for missionary opportunities for women, and they gradually began to take over some of the orphanages. They wanted large, prestigious institutions with fine buildings, and in many cases brought with them their own funding for this purpose. Within these new institutions, they imposed their own system of values, stressing discipline, industry, and cleanliness. Long hours of labor, usually sewing, embroidery, and laundry, were performed in silence. Boys had mostly been adopted out by this stage, and most of the girls had marriages arranged for them by the church around the age of fourteen. Sick or disabled children could expect to spend the rest of their lives in the orphanage.[39]

As was the case with baptism, the operations of Holy Childhood orphanages were shaped as much by the society in which they were located as by the ideas of the French

[38] "Lettera del Padre Ugolino di Doullens M.O. alla R.ma Madre Generale delle Suore Francescane Missionarie di Maria," *Le Missioni Francescane in Palestina ed in altre regioni della terra* 3, no. 11 (1893): 660; Franciscan Order Curia Generalizia, Archive, Rome, Sinae 1870–1872, SK541, Relazione dell'origine progresso e stato presente della Missione dello Xan-si in Cina 1870; POSI C431, Hugolin Villeret, July 17, 1889; C432, Louis Moccagatta, August 1883–July 1884. The total income for Holy Childhood operations in Shanxi diocese was 51,890 francs, the total expenditure 69,199 francs (because the mission was subsidizing the work). The cost of providing wet nurses for all the children admitted would have been 100,000 francs.

[39] Kerval, *Le R.P. Hugolin de Doullens*, 163; *Annales* 15 (1863): 306–307, 319–320; Zhongguo fulihui, *Children's Tears* (Shanghai, 1952), 34.



FIGURE 3: A village orphanage run by Chinese virgins in the 1890s. From Giovanni Ricci, *Barbarie e Trionfi: Ossia le vittime illustri del San-si in Cina nella persecuzione del 1900* (Firenze, 1910), 180.

donors. Chinese society had an elaborate market in people, and particularly in children: a father had the right to sell his wife or children, and poor men did so in times of trouble. This was unacceptable to the traditional Chinese elite, for whom the patrilineal family bound with ties of sentiment and blood was a key ideal, and later to modernizers who passed laws against it. Nevertheless, the families of the poor dissolved in times of crisis through sale, desertion, or abandonment, and were built up in times of prosperity through purchase and adoption. In such a situation, it was inevitable that any institution running foundling homes would become involved in the market for children, and this was indeed what happened to the Holy Childhood Association.[40]

On behalf of the association, the bishops, priests, nuns, and virgins who ran orphanages bought children. They were denounced for this practice by both Chinese and European critics and regularly denied the charge. In the aftermath of the Tianjin riots of 1870, the nuns asserted that they had never paid cash for a child, but one of these very nuns, in her account of her arrival in China, had described the purchase of a little girl "whom we bought for heaven for a few cash."[41] In fact, when those

[40] For alternatives to the strict patrilineal family, see Ann Waltner, *Getting an Heir: Adoption and the Construction of Kinship in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu, 1990); Matthew H. Sommer, "Making Sex Work: Polyandry as a Survival Strategy in Qing Dynasty China," in Bryna Goodman and Wendy Larson, eds., *Gender in Motion: Divisions of Labor and Cultural Change in Late Imperial and Modern China* (Lanham, Md., 2005).

[41] *Annales* 15 (1863): 93; *The Tientsin Massacre, Being Documents Published in the* Shanghai Evening

who ran the orphanages said that they did not buy children, what they seem to have meant was that the sums involved were very small, especially from a European point of view, and that the association did not pay the going rate for marketable children. Occasionally bishops might even authorize such a purchase, as when a missionary running a boys' orphanage received permission from his bishop to buy an eight-month-old boy who had been put up for sale by his opium-smoking father. When the missionary became involved, there were alternative purchasers, bargaining about the price was conducted through an agent, and there was a formal act of sale. Much more common, however, was for Christians who took in unwanted infants to pay out small sums for which they were then reimbursed from Holy Childhood funds. A missionary in Shanxi in 1855 mentions a sum of 100 cash for each child, although an 1866 account from the same diocese gives the much larger figure of one to two taels (approximately 2,000 cash). In 1862, the diocese, which was then supporting about two hundred children, listed in its annual accounts 37,796 cash as money reimbursed to Christians who had paid for children. Sometimes these sums were interpreted as a fee paid to those who brought the children in. So, for example, in 1886, anyone who brought in a child was paid 100 cash and given a meal; the bishop commented that they went away pleased and eager to find more children. This was not surprising, because 100 cash was a good day's wage. People were still bringing children in for money in the 1920s. One of the men who regularly did this in Taiyuan would tell the children that he had brought them in to save their souls, and then he would ask the nuns for his hundred cash.[42]

The effect of the orphanages' buying children was to expand the market for otherwise unsalable children—that is to say, very young infants plus children who were sick or disabled. Able-bodied older children could usually be sold; thus, except in times of famine, when the market collapsed, the vast majority of older children taken in suffered from what the missionaries described as "deformity, sickness, or lack of intelligence."[43] A great many were blind, and these children had often had some kind of accident as a result, as in the case of a boy blind from birth who had fallen onto a pan of boiling water, which left him with burns that did not heal. When his widowed mother remarried, she gave him to some local Christians, who took him to the orphanage. He died there the year after his arrival. There were also girls who had lost their feet to gangrene or frostbite as a result of particularly harsh foot-binding and could no longer walk. The contracts that parents signed often spelled out the disability and why it was a problem: one boy was lame, so he could not work as a hired laborer; another "did not understand enough" to support himself. Some children who entered the orphanage might otherwise have died of neglect: one girl who went blind at the age of ten had been taken by her parents to her fiancé's family, who dared neither to reject nor to kill her, but instead tried to help her die by beating her and

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Courier*, from June 16th to Sept. 10th, 1870, with an Introductory Narrative*, 2nd ed. (Shanghai, [1870]), 27.

[42] POSI C431, Gregorio Grassi Mission dello Chan-Si in Cina État de l'Oeuvre, August 1, 1886–July 31, 1887; C432, Shansi Notes pour servir à connaître le sens de la lettre Gabriel [Grioglio] da Moretta du 3 Octobre 1855, and Antonio Feliciani Compte-rendu de Exposés du Xansi, January 1, 1862–January 1, 1863; C433, M. Immaculée, September 9, 1920; C436, Hugolin Villeret, September 27, 1890; *Annales* 18 (1866): 388.

[43] *Annales* 24 (1873): 39.

not giving her enough to eat. Many children were undoubtedly rescued from horrible situations, but others were taken from their families because the orphanage's willingness to purchase them made this a plausible option for the poor, like the blind three-year-old girl given to an orphanage by an impoverished grandfather to whom she clung and who the nuns could see was obviously very fond of her.[44]

The orphanages also sold children: as brides or adopted sons. In France, the adoption of foundlings was rare, partly because of the belief that children would inherit the characteristics of their immoral parents, and partly because the parents might one day come back for them. In China, where elite commitment to the ideal of patrilineal descent, though much discussed, was less effective in constraining behavior, adoption was common. Contracts giving children out for adoption ensured that disputes would be referred to the parish priest, and the church regularly went to court to prevent non-Christian parents from reclaiming their children. Girls who married out treated the orphanage as their natal home, to which they could appeal if they were in trouble. They wept ritually at their weddings as girls did who were leaving their natal homes, and surviving orphans remember going back to the orphanage for festivals, just as other village women would go to their families at such times. In effect, the intermediary position of the church made the contract of adoption or marriage a more effective transfer of rights over the child than an adoption or marriage directly from the natal family in the area. Moreover, since the Holy Childhood Association only allowed its children to be adopted by or marry into Christian families, the price was also lower than usual.[45]

The result was a level of demand that consistently surprised foreign missionaries. When the diocese of Southern Shanxi was established in 1892, the bishop decided not to run orphanages at all, but to have all children, girls as well as boys, adopted by Christians as early as possible. The diocese found that adoption rates varied with the quality of the harvest: in good years, the local Christians could afford to adopt and did so; in bad years, fewer children were adopted. Surviving contracts from another diocese provide for an orphan boy to inherit an equal share of the family property with any natural sons, which suggests that the clergy could place quite heavy demands on those who wished to adopt. The greatest demand, however, was for girls as brides. In the 1880s, one bishop reported having ten young men asking for each girl, and fathers coming to him in tears begging for the girls as daughters-in-law. His orphanages were even able to marry off the blind and disabled girls. In documents contained in Shanxi's early-twentieth-century diocesan archives, worried parish priests describe young men turning up at the orphanages to demand brides, sometimes with considerable sums of money, and the constant disputes this occasioned. For Chinese Catholics, the ability to obtain adopted sons and brides at a relatively cheap rate was one of the major advantages provided by their religion. Indeed, many men are said to have converted simply to get brides from the orphanage.[46] Mis-

[44] POSI C432, Hugolin [Villeret] de Doullens, February 15, 1888; C433, Chan-si septentrional (soeurs), August 31, 1910; *Annales* 27 (1876): 160; 30 (1879): 381; Geliaogou cunweihui dang'anju, Woman Zhou, 1904/3/26, and Qiao Jingxing, 1907/9/19.

[45] Interview, Qingyuan county, Shanxi, September 8, 2005; Fuchs, *Abandoned Children*, 30–31; POSI C431, [Gregorio] Grassi, July 24, 1887; Geliaogou cunweihui dang'an ju, Gao Renyi, 1909/7/20; *Annales* 18 (1866): 97; 26 (1875): 267–268.

[46] POSI C432, [Louis] Moccagatta, October 1, 1883; C437, Chan-si meridional [Jean] Hofman, 1892;

sionaries were more or less aware that these transactions in people did not fit with the European Catholic models of the family, with their emphasis on sentiment and domesticity. Hugolin Villeret, who ran a village orphanage in Shanxi in the 1880s and wrote articles for the European mission press in which he laughed at his own inability to play up to the image of the heroic missionary, satirized himself for having become "a merchant in little girls."[47]

As the orphanages became more and more embedded in local society, they also began to function as general welfare organizations for Chinese Catholics, who used them to keep their families together through periods of crisis, depositing children and then coming back later to collect them. Contracts for children entering the orphanage state that they should have no further contact with their families, but in fact many parents came to visit their children. Indeed, during the riots in Tianjin in 1870, some children in Holy Childhood orphanages in other parts of the country simply went home. On other occasions, parents might request that their children be permitted to come home for a few days or even several months to stay with their families. One former orphan remembered her father coming to visit her in the orphanage and was still, in her eighties, in touch with her family.[48] Non-Christian families could sometimes get their children back by converting to Christianity; for example, when Ren Wutao signed his six-year-old son over to the Holy Childhood in 1910, the contract included the words "If his father hereafter converts and is baptized and obeys the Commandments and respects the Lord, then this child can return to him."[49] A register of orphans in one of the central Shanxi orphanages in 1918 included several girls who were actually living there with their mothers. This use of orphanages was common in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Europe, too; in both cases it showed that the organization was being used to assist poor families rather than to rescue children from savage parents.[50]

The Holy Childhood Association operated in a larger social world as well. And it was in this larger world that the fears of the poor interacted with the rising nationalism of elites and ultimately forced the association to end its activities in China. Despite constant hostility to Christian missions, elite opposition to the orphanages was not particularly apparent in the early years of the Holy Childhood's work. Chinese-run foundling homes occasionally copied features of the Catholic orphanages, most notably the revolving wheel through which children could be taken into the home anonymously. Officials also made some donations to Holy Childhood orphanages. During the great north China famine of the 1870s, for example, Zeng Guoquan, the brother of Zeng Guofan, one of China's most famous conservative statesmen,

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ibid., Mission du Chansi Méridional État de l'Oeuvre, July 15, 1904–July 14, 1905; ibid., Oeuvre de la Sainte Enfance Année 1917 Mission du Shansi Méridional; Geliaogou cunweihui dang'anju, Gao Renyi, 1909/7/20; Shanxi beijiaoqu dang'an [Archives of the North Shanxi Diocese], 1901–1949, Zhongguo tianzhujiao lishi ziliao zhongxin, Taiyuan, Zhang Baolu, March 6, 1905, and Du Yongqing [February 13, 1905]; William Hinton, *Shenfan* (London, 1983), 531.

[47] Kerval, *Le R.P. Hugolin de Doullens*, 161.

[48] *Annales* 22 (1870): 389; 26 (1875): 267; Shanxi beijiaoqu dang'an, Zhang Baolu, December 20, 1904, and Tian Jingshi, November 12, 1904; Interview, Qingyuan County, Shanxi, September 8, 2005.

[49] Geliaogou cunweihui dang'anju, Ren Wutao, 1910/8/20.

[50] [Register of Orphanage Residents, 1917–1950], Zhongguo tianzhujiao lishi ziliao zhongxin; manuscript missing front pages. Cf. Lydia Murdoch, *Imagined Orphans: Poor Families, Child Welfare, and Contested Citizenship in London* (New Brunswick, N.J., 2006).

gave the equivalent of 2,000 French francs to a Catholic orphanage in Shanxi. Another case occurred in Guizhou, where the province's main foundling home had been rebuilt by the governor in the 1830s but ran out of money in the 1860s as the result of a series of rebellions. When a new governor, Lao Chongguang, was posted to the province with the task of placating its Catholic bishop (one of whose missionaries had been executed by his predecessor), he handed the orphanage over to the bishop along with its sizable landholdings. At his death in 1867, Lao left this joint establishment the huge sum of 8,000 taels. Officials could even accept the high death rates, as did government minister Li Hongzhang when he wrote in a discussion of Catholic orphanages that children were bound to die in any foundling home.[51]

From the start, however, the association's activities had also been the subject of rumors: that the missionaries were kidnapping children, eating them, tearing out their eyes and hearts, or burying them under the foundations of the huge churches they were building. The stories varied only in guesses as to how the missionaries could profit from the children's organs: by making opium, medicines, communion wafers, an unguent for fortune-telling, potions to bewitch people and make them convert, or even chocolate and photographs.[52] These rumors spread among the poor, whose children were the ones threatened, but they were always available to members of the elite who wished to use them for their own political ends. They expanded as the association's operations grew, reaching a peak in 1870, when many anti-Christian texts were published and circulated in response to international political tensions. The result was rioting in the port city of Tianjin, which ended after a mob burst into the Holy Childhood orphanage, killing the foreign nuns and mutilating their bodies.[53] At one level, when we consider the numbers of blind and mentally handicapped children in the orphanages, it is not hard to see why some of the rumors might have made sense, but rumors of children being stolen and their souls or body parts taken have also been current in other times and other countries: Philip Kuhn has described them in eighteenth-century China, and Nancy Scheper-Hughes in late-twentieth-century Brazil.[54] Scheper-Hughes interprets them as a response to the inability of the poor to protect their children in a highly commercialized society. This makes sense as much for nineteenth-century China as for the Brazilian shantytown she describes. A more common response than rioting, however, was the sort of behavior seen in Shanxi in the aftermath of the trouble, when parents did not let their children out for a month, and those who did come out were accompanied by their parents

[51] *Annales* 16 (1864): 93–98; 17 (1865): 8; 20 (1868): 362–367; 27 (1876): 12; POSI C432, Louis Moccagatta, September 1878; He Changling, *Naian zouyi* [Collected Draft Memorials of Naian], 12 *juan* (1918), 4: 33–34; *Guizhou tongshi* [General History of Guizhou], 5 vols. (Beijing, 2002), 3: 287–494; Li Hongzhang, *Li Wenzhong gong quanji* [The Complete Works of Mr. Li Wenzhong], 165 *juan* (1905; repr., Hainan, 1997, under the title *Li Hongzhang quanji*), yishu hangao 20: 34.

[52] *Annales* 11 (1859): 115–116; 15 (1863): 306; 18 (1866): 18; 19 (1867): 232; 23 (1871): 19; Edoardo Manini, *Episodi della Rivoluzione Cinese, 1900* (Parma, 1901), 19; Antonius Maria Fu, "Relatio de ultima persecutione in Sinis," *Acta Ordinis Fratrum Minorum* 20 (1901): 176; Barnabas [Nanetti] d'Alsazia, "L'Infanzia in Cina," *Oriente Serafico* 4 (1892): 402; *Jiaowu jiaoan dang*, series 2: 866; series 5: 685.

[53] *Annales* 22 (1870): 362–366; *The Tientsin Massacre*; Chen Fangzhong, "Tianjin jiaoan zai tan" [A Further Investigation of the Tianjin Religious Case], *Furen lishi xuebao* 11 (2000): 133–160.

[54] Philip A. Kuhn, *Soulstealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990); Nancy Scheper-Hughes, *Death without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil* (Berkeley, Calif., 1992), 233–242.

and had yellow paper talismans pinned to their clothes to protect them from sorcery.[55]

After the 1911 revolution that overthrew the Qing dynasty, official and elite attitudes toward Christianity generally became more positive. That year, revolutionaries in Shanxi offered to hand the provincial foundling home over to the church to run. This was partly because of the perceived links between Christianity and modernity and partly because of the charitable activities inspired by the Protestant social gospel movement (which also encouraged Protestants to begin to set up orphanages, although the huge numbers of Catholic orphanages and the history of attacks on them seem to have discouraged Protestant missionaries from ever taking this up on a large scale).[56] Popular fears continued, but in this political atmosphere they did not result in riots or organized protests. However, even as the Holy Childhood appeared to have been accepted in China, its institutions were beginning to look very old-fashioned from a European point of view. By the early twentieth century, as the pasteurization of milk and then the use of baby formula superseded wet-nursing, European institutions for abandoned children finally managed to escape from the constraints that had left so many children dead. This left the association's orphanages in China dangerously exposed, their high death rates now easily interpreted as the consequence of foreign imperialism. Interestingly, the most vocal critics of the Holy Childhood Association in the 1920s and 1930s were the Chinese clergy. Senior Chinese priests were well-educated, and they were well-informed about conditions in Europe; many of them also had strong nationalist feelings. They repeatedly objected to a system that effectively condemned so many children to death on arrival in the orphanages. As one bishop wrote, "No doubt the little innocents have the joy of going to Heaven after their baptism, but nevertheless it is no less sad to see them setting off. And we hesitate sometimes to take them in knowing that they are pledged to a certain death."[57] The correspondence of the new Chinese-run diocese of Xuanhua is full of similar efforts to get the association to appreciate the children's dreadful condition and to obtain cows for milk.[58] The difference between the Chinese bishops' writings and those of the foreign missionaries is striking. Ermenegildo Focaccia, a typical old-fashioned missionary from Italy, was still writing in 1939: "Many of the children have been so neglected and suffered so much before arriving at our doors that it is difficult to save all their lives, but those who die are already children of God by holy baptism and fly up to heaven."[59]

The operations of the Holy Childhood Association in China ended in 1951, when the Chinese Communist Party ran a campaign against missionary orphanages that mixed ideas of nationalism and anti-imperialism with long-standing popular fears: Canadian nuns in Guangzhou were accused, among other things, of tearing out children's eyes. In a mass trial that was broadcast on radio, they were charged with killing

[55] *Annales* 25 (1874): 175.

[56] POSI C433, Eugenio Massi Mission du Chansi Sept. État de l'Oeuvre, August 31, 1911–August 31, 1912; Ryan Dunch, *Fuzhou Protestants and the Making of a Modern China, 1857–1927* (New Haven, Conn., 2001); Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China* (London, 1929), 464.

[57] POSI C327, Franciscus Liou, March 22, 1931.

[58] POSI C450, Pierre Tch'eng, September 21, 1934; Pierre Ly, October 6, 1935; and Joseph Tchang, November 3, 1936, August 22, 1938, September 30, 1939.

[59] POSI C493, Hermengildus Focaccia, November 1, 1939.



FIGURE 4: Communist-run demonstration against the Wuchang orphanage in 1951. From Zhongguo fulihui, *Children's Tears* (Shanghai,1952), facing 25.

more than two thousand children. The campaign then spread across the country. In Wuchang, eighty thousand people were brought to inspect the children's remains: rows of skulls and coffins full of bones. In the city of Taiyuan, Bishop Luca Capozi and the mother superior, who against all advice had insisted on taking children in throughout the war when there was nothing to feed them, were accused of the infanticide through neglect of 80 percent of the children entering the orphanage there.[60] The formal accusations were framed in explicitly anti-imperialist terms, and when the bishop responded to his interrogators by saying that they had "done whatever we could to prevent these children from being eaten by dogs, and the many deaths could not be attributed to us," his response seems to have come from another world.[61] Many children did die in Holy Childhood orphanages, but accusations of children's eyes being torn out and Capozi's response that he was saving those same children from being eaten by dogs tell us that to understand the activities of the Holy Childhood Association in China only through the framework of imperialism, as the Communist Party did, is scarcely to understand it at all.

The history of the Holy Childhood Association is indicative of the complexity of transnational aid organizations. It is important not only because it was one of the earliest charities of this sort, but also because of the scale of its operations: it was

[60] Su Ruoyi, *Zhongguo jindai jiaonan shiliao (1948–1957)* [Materials on China's Modern Religious Persecution (1948–1957)] (Taibei, 2000), 51-44–45; Zhongguo fulihui, *Children's Tears*, 21–25; Nicola Cerasa, *Breve Storia della Missione di Taiyuan Shansi* (Rome, 1998), 204; *Shanxi ribao* [Shanxi Daily News], July 8, 1951, 1.

[61] Nicola Cerasa, *Gioioso Centenario: Biografia di Mons. Luca Domenico Capozi* (Pofi, 1999), 204.

immensely successful at collecting vast sums of money and funding orphanages across the globe. Despite the obvious similarities in the problem of child abandonment in China and France, which made the association's operations imaginable and acceptable, its early success was built on a fundraising formula (the idea of rescuing Chinese babies thrown to wild beasts by their savage mothers) that emphasized cultural difference rather than similarity. Moreover, this formula bore almost no relation to reality on the ground in China, so it was inevitable that the Holy Childhood's activities would be quite differently understood there. The result was that instead of introducing to China the sentimental version of the modern bourgeois family from which the association drew its strength in France, missionaries were encouraged by the association's funding to treat children in ways that exacerbated the commercialization of poor families, which reflected local custom but was as unacceptable to Chinese elites as it was to their French counterparts. The result was a globalizing institution that promoted cultural difference rather than encouraged the development of a homogeneous global modernity.

But if the Holy Childhood Association teaches us something about the nature of early transnational institutions, it is also interesting because of the light its history casts on very contemporary problems. The difficulty of attempts to help others in cultures that we imagine to be very different from our own has not gone away, and China is still a land that is easily identified with cultural difference. The 1980s saw the reemergence of widespread child abandonment in China, driven by the introduction of a market economy combined with the government's one-child policy, although both Chinese and Western writers have continued to blame "traditional thinking," making the practice again a national rather than a class characteristic. There have also been dramatic accusations of neglect and abuse in orphanages, sometimes the very same orphanages that the state inherited from the Holy Childhood Association in the 1950s.[62] And since the 1990s, there has been an outflow of children to the West for adoption that strikingly re-creates the Holy Childhood's model of individual connections between donor and the recipient child, but is also highly commercialized. The idea of rescuing children as a building block for transnational charitable organizations is one that continues to be extremely powerful in relation to China today.

[62] Nara Dillon, "New Democracy and the Demise of Chinese Charity in Shanghai," in Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz, eds., *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People's Republic of China* (Cambridge Mass., 2007), 98.

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