Consuming “the unfortunate”: the violence of philanthropy in a contemporary Chinese state-run orphanage

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Abstract Following the Tocquevillian tradition and driven by a neoliberal concern, many China scholars interpret the rise of philanthropy in contemporary China as a sign of the growing “civil society” that will help to democratize the country and improve its citizens’ social well-being. However, this paper shows that philanthropy in the Chinese context works to reproduce social inequalities between philanthropists and the subjects they claim to help. My ethnography focuses on philanthropic activities in a state-run orphanage in southeastern China. In these activities, characterized primarily by donations and volunteer work, middle- and upper-class philanthropists label orphans as “the unfortunate” or even “the abnormal unfortunate” to create a clear-cut “they/unfortunate–we/fortunate” dichotomy that stigmatizes these children. Furthermore, they utilize this dichotomy as a tool to transmit class consciousness to their own children, “touristify” the orphanage, and even exploit the orphans for marketing or commercial purposes. The pragmatic rationale reflected in these representations and practices also provides an alternative to the current anthropological studies on humanitarianism, which have mostly focused on religious, ethical and moral motivations among philanthropic agencies.

Keywords Institutionalized children · Orphanage · China · Philanthropy · Humanitarianism · Civil Society

Introduction

On 1 June Chinese Children’s Day 2011, the children living in the Choujiang City Welfare Institute received numerous groups of visitors who came to *xian aixin* (give

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loving hearts) through making donations and/or providing volunteer services.¹ The first group came from a high-class and private kindergarten and was composed of students, their parents, and two teachers. After making donations, the visitors started to look around the baby rooms. Many adults expressed the idea that these institutionalized children were unfortunate as they had been abandoned. While saying so, one parent took out a camera and tried to take photos, but she was stopped by Nanny Fang, one of the institute workers. Being told that photography was prohibited in the baby rooms, the parent put away the camera and apologized; but she then went to another room and took out the camera again, and many students followed her example. They used cameras or mobile phones to take pictures of the babies one after another. Some babies were startled by the flash and started to cry. The institute nannies hurried to stop the visitors.

Adults also liked to hold the babies up and play with them, and some would also let the visiting children have a try. A male visitor carried a little girl to his group mates and exclaimed that she was very *haowan* (funny). He was so excited that he repeated it several times. To prove that she was truly *haowan*, he put the girl on the bed and then put a toy in front of her, asking her to pick it up. After she did so, he took the toy away and put it in front of her, again. Another female visitor found the girl cute and held her up. The male visitor then turned to play with another child.

Before the kindergarten visitors left, a group from a business association came with ten cartons of milk and many baby clothes. Soon after putting down the donations, these businessmen tried to have pictures of themselves taken together with institutionalized children. One of them suddenly hugged two toddlers, smiled and asked another businessman to take a photo, while the two children appeared stunned. Seeing this scene, Nanny Yu's husband whispered to me: "Look, isn't this a little bit like holding an animal for a photo when we go to the zoo?" Later, he also commented in private to me that he thought all these people came for the sake of publicity.

As time passed, the organizer of the kindergarten visitors called the participants to leave. One visitor had just picked up a little girl, but when she heard the announcement, she put her down in the crib. As soon as her feet touched the crib the girl started to cry, so the visitor had to pick her up again. But the visitor was in a hurry to leave and so asked Nanny Fang, who was standing nearby, to help her hold the girl. Nanny Fang already had a child in her arms, who had also been transferred from another visitor, but had no choice but to receive one more. I also had two crying children in my arms. We spent a lot of time settling the children down, but then more visitors came around and unsettled them again. In the late afternoon, after all visitors had left, Nanny Fang said she was too tired to have supper. I estimated that the welfare institute had received more than eight groups and about one hundred visitors on that day. The nannies told me that, whenever public holidays and Chinese festivals came round, many people came to the welfare institute to do

¹ State-run orphanage is the term Western scholars and media use to refer to the locally-named Child Welfare Institutes (*ertong fuliyuan*) and Children's Departments of Social Welfare Institutes (*shehui fuliyuan ertongbu*), which are operated by the Chinese government to care for orphans and abandoned children. In this paper, I use welfare institute to refer to the state-run child relief organization I study, and all the names are pseudonyms.

philanthropy. But every time, after receiving so many visitors, the people in the institute all felt exhausted.

Anthropological literature on humanitarianism in the West has been critical of the inequality and injustice that different forms of philanthropic activities have perpetuated. Elisha (2008) finds that the evangelical outreach activities in Knoxville, Tennessee in the United States, which initially aim to create interpersonal bonds that transcend social boundaries and status hierarchies, have ironically reproduced dynamics of social power and alienation between suburban evangelicals and less privileged charity recipients. He shows that the evangelicals hold cultural prejudices against, and religious expectations of, the non-Christian others, and try to make the latter accountable as a precondition for continued benevolence in the course of charitable outreach which is primarily defined as unconditional. At the national and transnational levels, Feldman (2007) suggests that modern humanitarian work has produced a regulatory category called “refugees” whose rights and welfare are sharply disadvantaged in comparison with those of “citizens.” Fassin and d’Halluin’s (2005) study further indicates that even these limited rights and welfare are granted based on strict and exclusive criteria. Along with the increase of asylum seekers, nation states have developed systematic measurements to evaluate eligibility for refugee status, in which professionally produced (and thus more “objective”) medical certificates replace the applicants’ own autobiographic accounts as the main evidence. Ticktin (2006) goes further to explore an irony behind this “humanitarian” immigration policy that favors the sick over the poor. She contends that humanitarianism “although is driven by the moral and ethical imperative to relieve suffering, can have discriminatory and even violent consequences” (2006: 34). In practice, this humanitarian reason excludes undocumented immigrants who are not sick from gaining rights to residency and welfare and maintains the sickness of those who have been sick in order to stay in France. Similarly, Fassin (2005) shows in another piece how contemporary humanitarian aid oscillates between sentiments of sympathy and concern for order. This ambivalence leads to the French state’s combination of compassion and repression in its immigration policies. Studies in this vein help us realize the potential violence philanthropic/humanitarian activities may generate.

However, the existing Chinese scholarly literature generally ignores this possibility but gives credit to philanthropy and humanitarian work by portraying the engaged individuals and organizations as “civil society” forces (i.e., Hsu 2008; Shieh and Guosheng 2011; Teets 2009; Xu and Ngai 2011; Xiao et al. 2009; Yu 2011). In the case of orphan relief, China scholars equally commend the philanthropic activities as efforts contributed by those “civil society” forces, and their involvement in the state-led relief system is therefore taken as a kind of “state—(civil) society” cooperation or negotiation. For instance, Shang Xiaoyuan and her colleagues cheer the flowering of domestic and foreign charities, non-governmental organizations, and individual philanthropists that provide monetary support, physical and medical care, and other kinds of assistance to institutionalized children. They view all these actors as positive international and local “civil society” forces (Shang 2002; Shang et al. 2005; Shang and Chuanjin 2010). Similar to Shang, Keyser (2009) argues that non-state or quasi-official organizations, which

are generally led by international philanthropic efforts, have made a significant contribution to the well-being of Chinese orphans by cooperating and negotiating with local state agencies. Without elaboration, Wang (2010) describes an infant special care unit, which is managed by a Western Christian organization within a Chinese state-run welfare institute, as a result of “a unique and innovative state-civil society partnership” (2010: 138).

Neither as critical as anthropologists, nor as positive as China scholars, local recipients may hold a much more ambivalent view of these philanthropic forces. Institute staff members at my field site believe that philanthropic work is good by nature; but it may have some “negative impacts” in practice, such as making infants cry and making toddlers naughty, which also overloads the staff with childcare work. I have also heard from Junwei (a 15-year-old boy attending a vocational high school), one of the very few older institutionalized children who is not impaired in intelligence and able to speak, who thought many philanthropists came to the welfare institute just for fun and for the sake of publicity. Even so, he admitted that he had benefited from their material donations and monetary support for private tutorial courses.² These natives’ points of view count as part of my analysis of philanthropic activities in the Choujiang City Welfare Institute, but I have observed much more disjuncture between the practical reality and the existing scholarly imagination among China scholars. During my field study, the Children’s Day was the day that the welfare institute received the most visitors, but the interactions between these visitors and the institutionalized children were no different from those coming on ordinary days: in every encounter, although the children also arguably manifest their agency,³ they are the objects of all philanthropic activities—the objects to be given love to; the objects to be visited and gazed at; the objects to be imagined as an unfortunate group who should be pitied; the objects to be entertained through games, but who actually provide the visitors with pleasure; and so forth. The goal of this paper is to reveal how most visitors, if not all, represent and interact with institutionalized children in philanthropic activities. In line with anthropologists of humanitarianism, I argue that these activities have reproduced unequal social relations between the visitors and the institutionalized children the visitors claim to help.

² Most philanthropic activities at my field site are conducted in the forms of material or monetary donations and volunteer work. Junwei has benefited from a special monetary donation from a local private enterprise for enriching institutionalized children’s extracurricular activities. However, as a public institution (*shiye danwei*) fully funded by the local government, the welfare institute does not rely on donations for its institutional operation in principle. The government budget covers all staff members’ salaries and benefits, administrative expenses, children’s living, schooling and medical costs, and so forth. Still, donations contribute in that they substitute for part of the governmental inputs (but I have not seen statistics about how much they actually substitute) and improve children’s quality of life. For instance, the government used to pay medical expenses for institutionalized children, but now the welfare institute often uses donations for expensive surgeries. Also, staff members believe that donations have improved children’s lives in the sense that they have more snacks, clothes, and other things to consume nowadays.

³ For instance, a few older children are participants, though not always active players, in the games with visitors. Many babies cry after being held and put back in the cribs; institute nannies and many visitors interpret this as natural because they assume that babies always want to be embraced, loved, and cared for.

This paper has two theoretical concerns. First, by exposing the complicity of philanthropy in the forms of discrimination and violence it maintains and reproduces, I want to make a critique of the overwhelmingly positive Chinese scholarship on philanthropy and its imaginary connection with “civil society,” which has roots in the Tocquevillian paradigm and neoliberal ideology. The intellectually constructed Tocquevillian paradigm sees citizens’ involvement in philanthropic activities in democratic countries as a form of participation in voluntary associations and nonprofit organizations (“civil associations,” as civil society theorists name such groups), which are crucial components of “civil society.”⁴ Such “civic engagement” is regarded as an important means for individuals to exercise their citizenship, through which they can influence social resource distribution as well as enable themselves to criticize, monitor, and participate in the state agenda and promote transparency in the government. On the other hand, the course of “civil engagement” generates more “social capital” among individual citizens, which further consolidates “civil society” and promotes deeper “civic engagement.” It is also through this process that citizens socialize and embed themselves with democratic values, learn to use communication instead of violence to solve problems, and develop/improve their “civic skills,” which will further contribute to the development of a well-functioning “civil society.” Nevertheless, the ultimate goal of developing a mature “civil society” is to mobilize more citizens to participate in public affairs and get involved in the formulation and implementation of state policies so as to ensure the democratic nature of state and society (Almond and Verba 1963; Jones 2006; Kramer 1981; McCarthy 2003; Putnam 1993; Smith 2000; Wuthnow 1991). Similarly, in the Western-defined non-democratic countries, especially in those seen as good candidates for democratization, the establishment of voluntary associations and nonprofit organizations is believed to play a critical role in their democratic transitions. Such organizations are viewed as autonomous social forces that citizens can use to protect themselves from the tyranny of the state and even to protest against it. Through these efforts, “civil society” helps to democratize the state from the bottom up (Foley and Edwards 1996). As noticed by some critics, the Tocquevillian “civil society” has become as an omnipotent mechanism and a universal good for many advocates: it sets the social foundation for liberal democracy; it can help to deepen the degree of democracy; it can monitor, restrict, and protest against state power; it can protect disadvantaged groups and ameliorate socioeconomic equality; it can help to resolve interest disputes and maintain social harmony; it can promote economic development; and so on (Alagappa 2004; Wang 1991).

As an established and omnipotent paradigm, the Tocquevillian “civil society” is well received when it travels to the China field both inside and outside the country. The enthusiasm for this idea basically comes from a neoliberal concern. Ma (2006: 16–17) observes that the import and spread of the concept of “civil society” reflects the ambition of Chinese intellectuals to promote political democratization in the course of market transition. Shang (2007: 27–28, 34–35) likewise points out that

⁴ By using quotation marks to cite the key terms throughout this paragraph, I attempt to show how the Tocquevillian “civil society” itself is an artificial construct building on all kinds of academic jargons.

neoliberalism exercises an overwhelming influence on Chinese scholars when they translate and (re)interpret “civil society” in the indigenous context. For these so-called liberals, a “civil society” grounded in a free market economy is an ideological weapon to resist statist and the state. The same fixation is also observed among many Western China specialists. Unger (2008: 3–6) suggests that these scholars, following their Eastern European counterparts, see “civil society” as the basic element of liberal democracy and also the dynamic to trigger democratic transition in non-democratic countries. The 1989 Tiananmen protests heightened their interest. After the protests were crushed, these scholars tried to unearth any potential autonomous activity in China that bears the potential to undermine and overturn the Chinese party-state and eventually achieve democratization. Similarly, Goetze (2008) finds that “civil society” is increasingly being seen as a synonym for democratic participation in the China field, and therefore, it is regarded as a sign of progress and should be supported.⁵

For the purpose of this study, the rise or not of “civil society” and democratization in China is less important than the fact that an academic/intellectual discourse connects philanthropy, civil society and liberal democracy, and makes it into a hegemonic paradigm to explain the political and social significance of philanthropic activities. Even if we grant the existence of a social entity appropriately called “civil society,” we cannot ignore the fact that, as a social institution, it may have its own limitations. The existing literature shows that, as interest groups, the voluntary associations and nonprofit organizations through which most philanthropic activities are carried out in North America and Western Europe are not necessarily or always in consensus. When they compete for different interests, the resulting “civil society” does not necessarily lead to democratization (or consolidation of democracy) and social harmony, but is likely to reinforce authoritarian rule and exacerbate social conflicts (Aspinall 2004; Chambers and Kopstein 2001; Riley 2005). More critical left-wing scholars have further targeted the undemocratic nature of neoliberal “civil society.” Wood (1990) contends that it deliberately constructs a “state-civil society” dichotomy that stresses the tyranny of the state in order to cover up the tyranny of capitalism. Although neoliberalism appears to advocate diversity, its “civil society” is grounded in a totalizing logic: civil society is bound to be linked with freedom and democracy, and must be good, so it must be developed and improved; in contrast, the state is bound to be linked with violence and oppression, and must be evil, so it must be limited and constrained. Wood argues that though the neoliberal discourse may enhance citizens’ capacity to resist the power of the state, it weakens their capacity to resist the power of capitalism. More broadly, Comaroff and Comaroff (2000) criticize the current “civil society” paradigm in the historical context of millennial capitalism in which this discourse is reconstructed to fit the neoliberal age. Against the political vacuum of postmodern nihilism, it provides people with

⁵ My personal experience also indicates the ideological position underlying many Chinese intellectuals and China scholars’ use of “civil society”. When I presented an early version of this paper in a China Studies workshop held in Nanjing University in late June 2013, I was criticized by some attendees for my “political stance”. They suggested that since China was an “authoritarian” country, I should support “civil society” as a force helping to trigger democratization.

an optimistic language to talk about democracy, moral community, justice, and populist politics, which, however, is more likely to be an illusory promise contradicting undemocratic, immoral, unjust and violent realities. Likewise, based on ethnographic gaze of the inequality and injustice perpetuated through philanthropic encounters in a Chinese orphanage, this study poses the following questions to those China scholars who are infatuated with philanthropy and “civil society,” and to neoliberal civil society theorists more broadly. If philanthropy, and thus the “civil society” of which it forms an important part according to the Tocquevillian tradition, themselves produce unequal power relations, can they contribute to the development and consolidation of democracy? Will the result be a democratic system with social justice and with equal treatment for all its citizens?

The second theoretical concern has to do with the anthropology of humanitarianism. While I too approach the ambiguity of philanthropy by exposing the tension between humanitarian concern and discriminatory/violent consequences, I try to further explore the underlying rationale behind the humanitarian reason that generates philanthropic activities. Anthropologists have written that humanitarian work in Europe and North America is motivated either by religious beliefs (i.e., Elisha 2008; Muehlebach 2013) or concern for human rights (i.e., Fassin 2005, 2011; Feldman 2007; Ticktin 2006). However, the following account situated in the context of Chinese orphanage indicates that individual rationality also plays an important (if not always the crucial) role in engendering philanthropic activities, together with compassion, moral sentiment, folk beliefs, and other motivations.⁶ In turn, philanthropic activities can serve multiple purposes in addition to relieving suffering, even though in my eyes they often appear discriminatory and violent. These observations push us to rethink the ambiguity of philanthropy: are discrimination and violence only unintended consequences as some scholars (i.e., Fassin 2005; Ticktin 2006) believe? Or they are something inherent to humanitarian reason, which itself is complex in nature?

I did 6 months (from March to August 2011) of participant observation in the Children’s Department of the Choujiang City Welfare Institute to investigate the visitors’ interactions with institutionalized children in their philanthropic activities. The Choujiang City Welfare Institute is the only state-run child relief organization in the city of Choujiang, Zhejiang Province in southeast China. Internationally famous for its commodity export industry, Choujiang has developed a booming private economy and has been continuously ranked as one of the richest county-level city in China by *Forbes (China)*. Since its opening in late 1992, the Choujiang City Welfare Institute has housed hundreds of orphaned and abandoned children. During my research period, although the figure changed over time, around eighty children were registered in this welfare institute. Among them, fifty were housed in the Children’s Department and the remainder were fostered in rural families. The vast majority (about 95 %) suffered from diseases and/or were

⁶ This may also be the case in Europe and North America but not yet have gained the attention of anthropologists. It is hard to believe that pure philanthropy, motivated only by human compassion, exists anywhere in the world.

physically impaired.⁷ Moreover, the majority (about 70 %) of children housed in the Children's Department were infants and toddlers who were estimated to be less than 3 years old. To care for and manage these children, the welfare institute employed thirty staff members, of whom six were institute nannies, all female, who provided childcare. During my field research, almost every day I spent my daytimes in the welfare institute and worked together with other institute staff members as an unpaid intern as well as a permitted researcher. It was also through this everyday participation that I observed the intensive interactions between philanthropists and institutionalized children.

Philanthropy and the making of the “(abnormal) unfortunate”

One of the ways in which the philanthropists maintain unequal relations with institutionalized children is through representation. The latter group is widely characterized as “unfortunate,” and their parents are condemned as irresponsible and cruel for abandoning them. For these philanthropists, the idea that institutionalized children are unfortunate and pitiful is something self-evident. Many of them could not explain their conviction. Some stated that it was because the children were abandoned by their birthparents and received no care from their relatives. Others also attributed it to the fact that almost all the children had diseases and “disabilities.” I have also heard a number of philanthropists categorize children into two types: “normal children in families” and “abnormal children in welfare institutes.” To the question of why children in the welfare institute were “abnormal,” the answers typically returned to the two key “features” of these children—“being abandoned” and “being diseased and disabled.” Furthermore, some philanthropists even added that because the welfare institute itself was an “abnormal” place, the children living in it were certainly “abnormal.” Here, we can see three main facets based on which the philanthropists construct the representation of institutionalized children as “the unfortunate”: (a) “being diseased and disabled—(being abnormal)—being unfortunate”; (b) “being abandoned—(being abnormal)—being unfortunate”; (c) “living in the welfare institute—(being abnormal)—being unfortunate.” Yet, these correlations, which conceptualize and generalize the children as the “(abnormal) unfortunate,” can also be viewed as a process of abnormalizing these children. In the following sections, I will examine the production mechanism that renders Chinese institutionalized children as the “abnormal unfortunate” and explore the “rules” and operations of power behind this stigmatizing label.

⁷ In the late 1980s and early 1990s most institutionalized children were female infants (and largely healthy) as Johnson (1993, 1996) reported; she suggested the situation was caused by the implementation of the one-child policy. Nowadays, however, many Chinese welfare institutes receive far more abandoned children who are born with diseases or physical impairments. Scholars believe that birth defects have replaced sex as the most significant indicator to categorize Chinese institutionalized children (Shang 2008). The same trend is found at my field site. A statistical report produced in mid-March 2011 stated that among the registered eighty children, thirty-nine had cerebral palsy or Down syndrome, nine had cleft lip and palate, two had congenital heart disease, and five had mutilated bodies. Another twenty-two children were reported to suffer from other kinds of diseases and impairments.

The “abnormal” social identity of institutionalized children

First of all, when philanthropists distinguish between “normal children in families” and “abnormal children in welfare institutes,” this distinction itself implies that “family” is a key marker to define whether a child (or, more generally, a person) is “normal” or not in Choujiang city (or even in Chinese society). Being brought up by one’s own parents and relatives in families is regarded as the social norm. In addition, family-based parental care is considered to be a necessary condition for a child to live a happy life. I suggest that these ideas are actually an integral part of the ideology of Confucian familism which has characterized Chinese social structure from imperial to modern times. This ideology emphasizes that family relations are the axis of all other social relations. Taking patrilineal kinship as central, Chinese people extend outward to establish other social relations. Therefore, it is said to be not only the organizing principle of the traditional Chinese family system but also the ideological and organizational foundation of the entire Chinese society prior to the family revolutions in the Republican and Communist periods (Brandtstadter and Santos 2009; Kulp 1966; Yuen et al. 2004). Confucian familism provided an ideal model for the family, stipulating standardized ways to deal with family relations between different age groups, generations, and genders. For instance, it stresses the importance of filial piety, including the duty of children to obey parental authority unconditionally and to carry on the family line. Parents, on the other hand, are obligated to raise and educate their children. The ultimate goal is to cultivate qualified future generations to take on family and social responsibilities and transmit the familist ideology in their turn (Bai 2005). This idealized process is held up as the only “normal” way of life. Those who meet this standard especially well are praised in the family and also in society as *xiaozi* (filial sons), but those who act against the rule are condemned as *nizi* (unfilial sons).

These ideas have a strong vitality. Even after a series of reforms and revolutions in the twentieth century, some of them, such as family loyalty and responsibility, can still be found in post-reform China. Family is still considered to be the basic organizational unit of society, family life is still an important part of individuals’ life courses, and the roles and the responsibilities of each family member are still emphasized (Brandtstadter and Santos 2009; Davis and Harrell 1993; Yuen et al. 2004). In addition, family responsibility is closely associated with individual well-being and happiness. Oxfeld (2010: 56–61) finds that, no matter whether migrating to urban areas or staying behind in their south China village, people attach great importance to family relations and the mutual responsibilities between family members as well as between village members. Those who do not fulfill these obligations are judged as *mei liangxin* (lacking in conscience). Similarly, though Yan (2003) emphasizes changes to the family, especially the increasing importance of private life, he also notes that some villagers in his north China research site intentionally highlight family as “a warm place for personal happiness.” In the eyes of some elders, fulfilling one’s proper roles and responsibilities are necessary to personal happiness (Yan 2003: 1–3).

Likewise, the familist ideology has prompted both visitors to the welfare institute and many other Choujiang city residents to use a familist norm to judge

institutionalized children. Mary Douglas's interpretation of the distinction between the clean and the unclean may help to illuminate the reason why institutionalized children become "abnormal" in the eyes of the public. For Douglas, the distinctions between the clean and the unclean, and between the safe and the dangerous, are all socially constructed. Things in the human order are seen as pure and safe; those outside it, as dirty and dangerous (Douglas 2001). In other words, if we put something in a "right" place, it is "normal"; if not, the very same thing is "abnormal." In this sense, it is not difficult for us to grasp the hidden logic behind the idea that since the welfare institute is an "abnormal" place, the children who live in it are "abnormal." Because the familist norm has approved the family as the appropriate and the "normal" place for children to grow up, children who grow up elsewhere are all "abnormal."

Douglas's idea carries even greater implications if we juxtapose the life course of institutionalized children with that of the "normal, in-family" children. Institutionalized children, unlike the children in families, have not been the objects of family responsibility and have enjoyed no family welfare (such as care and education) nor are they supposed to be able to enact the roles of family members and, by extension, members of a given society, which children in families are all supposed to enact. They are thus excluded from the category of "normal" people as defined by familism. Chinese familism places a heavy emphasis on the recognition of the relationships, especially the mutual responsibilities, among family members and by extension members of social groups, and this has a critical impact on defining whether a person is *socially* "normal." It is the *presumed unrelatedness* and *isolation from responsibility* (given or received) of the institutionalized children that make the visitors label them as the "abnormal unfortunate."

In a broad sense, this stress on relationships is associated with the Chinese idea of personhood. Many scholars believe that the "individual," or the "self," in Chinese societies is embedded in family-based social relations and the attached responsibilities and cannot be defined outside this matrix (Elvin 1985; Fei et al. 1992; Tu 1985; Wright 1962). Conversely, if an individual has no social relations, or loses them, and therefore cannot define his/her self-identity, it means this person also loses his/her "self." An individual with neither social relations nor a "self" will then not be accepted as a *socially* "real" person or at least not as a *socially* "normal" person. Institutionalized children thus become a *socially* "abnormal" group in Chinese society.

Given the perceived importance of family relations in producing "normal" persons, the philanthropists are especially critical of the children's birthparents and relatives, often condemning their cruelty and irresponsibility and sometimes suggesting that retribution is inevitable. In comparison, they considered their own visits to the welfare institute indicative of their sense of charity and social responsibility. They likewise praised the institute nannies as very caring, since otherwise they would not remain in the welfare institute to serve these pitiful children. As a researcher as well as an intern volunteering in the welfare institute, I was also frequently commended by visitors. They complimented me for my "loving heart," and said my parents must also be very caring people to have educated me so well; my volunteer work in the welfare institute would definitely add *yinde* (karmic

merit) to my family. Some commented that, though these pitiful children had been abandoned by their birthparents, the state and society had not; they were now receiving care and love from the “*shehui dajiating*” (the big family of the whole society) in the welfare institute. This statement equally implies the influence of the familist idea—it projects family structure and relations onto the social structure and social relations. For instance, the visitors regarded themselves, the institute nannies, and me as members of “the big family of the whole society,” and caring for the children fulfilled the “family” responsibilities attached to our memberships toward other “family” members. Moreover, my volunteer work was interpreted as both a result of parental education (a family responsibility that my parents had well fulfilled) and my own effort to fulfill my responsibility for my family’s interests (by accumulating karmic merit). Through the visitors’ narratives, we glimpse the powerful influence of familism in shaping their worldview.

If familist ideology has led the philanthropists to abnormalize institutionalized children by representing them as the “abnormal unfortunate,” their charitable activities through which they perform social responsibility in the name of “the big family of the whole society” in turn serve as a means of normalization. They transform institutionalized children from “abnormal” to socially “normal” by bringing them back to that imagined “family.” The food, toys, and daily necessities philanthropists donated to institutionalized children were the things that they would buy for their own “normal” children; the cultural knowledge, singing and dancing skills, and everyday common sense they taught institutionalized children were the same that they would teach their own children; the love and care they claimed to give to institutionalized children were like the emotional care that they owed to their own children.⁸ However, despite this series of normalizing activities, as long as these children retain their institutionalized household registration and are not adopted into ordinary families, they will never be “normal.” Here, the paradox in the operation of familist power surfaces: the only effective normalizing technique is adoption, which almost no philanthropists will try, because they think the children in the welfare institute are not only socially but physically “abnormal,” suffering from all kinds of diseases and physical impairments.

The “abnormal” social body of institutionalized children⁹

As the vast majority of the children in the Choujiang City Welfare Institute are physically diseased and impaired, they become an “abnormal” group in the eyes of the public, and have very little possibility to be adopted by domestic families. While being sympathized with, these children are often described by philanthropists as *guaitai* (deformed births) or *jixing ren* (freaks), and are stigmatized as the

⁸ Some philanthropists said that institutionalized children were so pitiful that they (the philanthropists) could not help themselves and had to spoil them. By lavishing love and care, they wished to make the children feel emotionally warm, so they would love other people in the future.

⁹ The term “social body” as used here refers to the social aspect of body representation, which not only emphasizes the social meanings of being physically “abnormal” but also the process in which social factors produce these meanings. For an anthropological discussion about the production and representation of the social body, see Turner (1995).

“abnormal unfortunate” because of their physical differences. Behind this label, there is a social norm that defines “healthy” and “able-bodied” as the “normal” way for people to live in the world, and only these “normal” people can have a happy life. Campbell (2009) names the institution that labels and excludes people with “disabilities” through discourses and practices as “ableism.”

Nevertheless, “ableism” is only an idealized state of human life. Scholars of Disability Studies in Europe and North America suggest that “disability” is not a fact, but a negative social label produced by medical and social policy professionals for the purpose of governing people with physical differences and maintain the running of the “nondisabled, normal” society. They argue that everyone has a good chance of becoming “disabled” or “diseased” at some stage of life, for instance, after a traffic accident, or when the body organs decline in old age. Therefore, the boundaries between “disabled” and “able-bodied” and between “diseased” and “healthy” are fairly questionable (Davis 1995; Linton 1998; Thomas 1999). These scholars also oppose the assumption that the lives of “people with disabilities” must be unhappy. Some politically conscious “disabled” people state that they have no difference with “nondisabled” people; they become “disabled” only because a society heavily influenced by capitalist industrialization and economic production defines those “nondisabled” people as appropriate laborers and rules out any population which fails to meet the needs of capitalist industrial production as the “abnormal.” In this fashion, these economic and political powers establish the “hegemony of normalcy” (Davis 1995: 49). Other “disabled” people stress that they also have the feeling of happiness, and identify themselves as “disabled” individuals. They call for building a community of “the disabled” to help all its members to gain equal rights (Campbell and Oliver 1996; Linton 1998; Thomas 1999).

The “social model of disability” emphasized by scholars of Disability Studies has revealed to us the hegemonic role of political and social powers in constructing a stigmatized representation of “disabled” people, and provides the ideological foundation to eliminate discrimination against these people. Like their Western counterparts, there are also physically “disabled” but rationally self-conscious adults in China stressing their own feelings, proclaiming their self-identities, and struggling for equal rights (Kohrman 1999a). But I shall admit that I am still looking for solid evidence that institutionalized children at my field site, most of whom are still in their infancy and many of whom are impaired in intelligence, can become subjects and express their own feelings, or even struggle for their rights and self-interests. I will not, however, turn down this possibility as many philanthropists did.

From what I have observed, though most philanthropists feel sympathy for institutionalized children, ableism dominates their representation of the latter as physically “abnormal.” The philanthropists then try to manage these children by “eliminating” them conceptually or putting them under control and then normalizing them. “Elimination” includes all kinds of ways to deny, or to deprive someone of, the right to live. Foucault has discussed the transformations in the discipline regimes in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in light of the Enlightenment, and one of them is the change from the torture that eliminates the bodies to the discipline that punishes the bodies and souls of criminals (Foucault

1979). Through cross-cultural and technological exchanges, these ideas and techniques of governance and discipline spread to China (Chen 2012; Dutton 1992; Dikötter 2002). However, this does not mean the disappearance of elimination in this country, as seen by the treatment of the bodies and human dignity of revolutionary and class enemies in the Republican and Communist periods. Furthermore, the idea of elimination is not necessarily rooted in evil and hatred; the affirmation of human rights and compassion may also, ironically, result in the denial of individual rights. For instance, in many societies, people who support reproductive autonomy are considered by Catholics and other anti-abortion groups to advocate the murder of unborn fetuses—while maintaining women’s reproductive rights, they deprive the fetuses of their right to live (Byrnes and Segers 1992; Schwarz 1990). The confrontation between the right to abortion of women and the right to birth of fetuses is a controversial problem in many societies, and both sides use discourses of human rights and morality to defend their own positions and argue against the other. The remarks of many philanthropists at my field site also had to do with this problem, even though they may not actually have been concerned with the right to abortion of birthmothers. They often expressed that institutionalized children here were too pitiful, and birthparents should have aborted them if found to be diseased and disabled. Sometimes I argued with the philanthropists by stating these children’s right to live. They might hesitate, but eventually they always stuck to their original point: in order to not let the children be born to suffer, we shall not recognize their right to live. Some might further add that as their births had increased the burden on family, society, and state, it would have been better if such pitiful children had not been born.¹⁰ Both statements deny that it is reasonable for institutionalized children to live in Chinese society and are a kind of “elimination” of their right to live.

Compared to this conceptual “elimination,” governing and rehabilitating techniques, which aim to normalize these children, are more practical. Of the techniques used by visitors to normalize the “abnormal” social identity of institutionalized children discussed above, some can also be used to normalize their “abnormal” social bodies. For instance, most volunteers try to accomplish this through education and social interaction. Teacher Huang was one such volunteer. With some experience in preschool education, she came to give several lessons to older institutionalized children with physical impairments or minor intellectual impairments. After the first class, she told me that she used to think children in the welfare institute might have less learning capacity than “normal” children in families; but now she found that, though there was a gap, it was not so large. She also shared with me her motivations for teaching in the welfare institute. She thought it sad that some institutionalized children who had reached their teens were unable to count or read. If she could help them to do that, she would feel very happy. She wished that these children would one day be able to read like “normal” children. In addition to these basic learning skills, Teacher Huang also hoped to teach them to be *shigu* (worldly) and know how to communicate with different

¹⁰ The view regarding imperfect births as a burden may have much to do with eugenic ideas in China. For a general review of these ideas, see Dikötter (1998).

people in different situations; otherwise, it would be very difficult for them to adapt to society when they grew up. Like many volunteers, Teacher Huang made it clear that her objective was to have these children eventually be able to live an independent life like other “normal” people; and only in this way would they not need to rely on others, and so not be discriminated against.

While Teacher Huang was giving her second class, a group of kindergarten teachers, students, and parents came for a visit, and brought many pens, jigsaw puzzles, badminton rackets, toys, and so on. Witnessing that the institutionalized children either did not know how to play with the toys or even destroyed them, she said to me she felt it was a waste to buy them such gifts given their levels of intelligence. But when she heard that the kindergarten teachers and parents, after looking around the children’s department, commented in private that the children in the welfare institute were all “abnormal,” she asked why, then, did they give them toys and games which even “normal” children could not use very well?

What is interesting in Teacher Huang’s reaction is that, although she questioned the words of the kindergarten teachers and parents, she did not notice the same bias in herself. She too believed that the children in the welfare institute were “abnormal,” and she hoped to normalize them by helping them to learn the language, to count, and to imagine, and to acquire socialization skills, so they could finally gain the happiness of “normal” people. But she gave up after several lessons, and one reason was that she felt that the children in the welfare institute were “too hard to teach and even could not be taught.” Kindergarten teachers and parents also regarded institutionalized children as “abnormal,” but they still, consciously or unconsciously, tried to normalize them through giving them the toys and games with which “normal” children play. They hoped to develop the children’s intelligence and physical agility as one would do with “normal” children, as well as help them be happy, like “normal” children, through the games. Many frequent visitors to the welfare institute who knew the situations of the institutionalized children quite well still tended to donate things like intellectual games and toys, books, sports equipment, and the like (in addition to food and baby products), which were considered to benefit the children’s physical and intellectual development.¹¹ In the summer of 2011, a group of college students came to investigate the situations of institutionalized children. After several visits, they designed a project and claimed they would build an intellectual stock room by obtaining donations from businesses. They stressed that it would help to enhance the intelligence of institutionalized children, and enable them to study and think like “normal” people. They too wished to transform institutionalized children into “normal” ones and enable them to enjoy the life and happiness of “normal” people.¹²

In considering the nature of donations in kind, we must also consider what is readily available on the market. As far as I know, philanthropists usually buy the food and toys for donation from big shopping malls and supermarkets in Choujiang city, and the selection is limited. Some philanthropists are themselves producers/

¹¹ I am not denying the value of these gifts, but trying to reveal the hidden agenda behind them, which is to normalize the institutionalized children.

¹² However, their project never materialized nor did I see them again during my field research.

providers of child-rearing products and services. Furthermore, the toys and games, books and sports equipment, which are designed to develop and enhance children's physical and mental potentials, are the primary types of regularly supplied popular commodities. They are thought to suit all children, but may not actually suit the needs of children with physical and intellectual impairments.

Here, the standardization of industrial mass production and the popular commercial market, in my opinion, act to normalize the "abnormal." They try to create, maintain and satisfy the "needs" of all people in society, including those of the "abnormal" people. But, sometimes the "abnormal" people may not be able to consume these products due to their "abnormalities." To address this problem, agents of industrial mass production and the popular commercial market (such as the producers and sellers of toys, games, books, and sports equipment) need first to normalize them. However, these normalizing techniques always fail, and the failures further reinforce the stereotype of institutionalized children as "abnormal"—and because they keep being "abnormal," the surrounding powers, including the state, the agents of industrial mass production and the popular commercial market, the individual volunteers (like Teacher Huang), and many others, constantly try to normalize them by repeating those normalizing techniques. In a very ironic way, these (re)normalizing projects become a dynamic mechanism producing and reproducing the bodily "abnormal" institutionalized children in contemporary China.

Beyond the "abnormal unfortunate": institutionalized children as the "abnormal useless"

Another less commonly expressed view of institutionalized children is that their extreme "abnormality" makes them become "useless," which explains their abandonment by their birthparents and dependence on state welfare. I observed this in some of my own relatives and friends who had visited the welfare institute. Although they did not judge institutionalized children on the spot, or call them pitiful, after leaving the institute, they said those children looked horrible and were completely different from "normal" children. Teacher Huang, the volunteer mentioned above, also told me that one of her friends who had once performed volunteer work in the welfare institute spoke to her straightforwardly, saying, "How can you bear it? That place was so dirty, and those children were so abnormal and useless even their birthparents did not want them. Don't go again." Thinking it over, Teacher Huang concluded, "Sometimes, love is only a kind of performance."

I too was often suspicious of the authenticity of some philanthropists' sympathy, and experiences such as Teacher Huang's and my own confirmed our doubts. While all visitors to the welfare institute represent themselves as philanthropists, I do not know how many of them understand their activities only as "performances" or lose their sympathy after a one-off donation or volunteer work. But one thing I have realized is that there are at least two groups of philanthropists, one of whom seems to detest institutionalized children, and another that seems to pity. I did meet many people with a seemingly strong feeling of sympathy, who insisted that institutionalized children must be considered as pitiful and unfortunate; and if anybody did not

feel/say so, they would criticize him/her for lacking compassion or even being *mei renxing* (inhumane). But no matter whether people pity or detest institutionalized children, they all conceive of these children as “abnormal.” Why, then, do different people have these seemingly contrasting attitudes toward them?

I propose that these different attitudes are rooted in the familism that creates the “abnormal” social identity, as well as the ableism that creates the “abnormal” social body, of institutionalized children. Those who take pity on these “abnormal” children tend to emphasize the responsibility of the outside world to these “unfortunates,” who are outside the familial responsibility system. The welfare institute and the common people are then obligated to nurture and educate them, and also to normalize their “abnormal” social identity and social body. Those who dislike these “abnormal” children stress the inability of these children to fulfill their responsibilities to the outside world. For instance, because of their diseases and physical impairments, these children may not be able to discharge their obligations to any future family members, to the state, and to the members of “the big family of the whole society.” They may even be a burden on the state and society forever. They are thus stigmatized as “useless,” as “human beings with no hope,” and as “human beings with no future.” These “useless” children are to be excluded from the “normal” world, denied their right to live, and marginalized completely. Both extremist representations of institutionalized children and their associated normalizing practices successfully define and exclude the other “abnormal” group. In so doing, the power of the “normal” establishes and maintains its hegemony over the “abnormal.”¹³

As noted above, scholars of Disability Studies in Europe and North America suggest that it is capitalist industrial production that produces and maintains the category of “the disabled.” Because they cannot make economic contributions to the same degree as those who fit into the capitalist labor regime, people in this category are then labeled as “useless” (Hunt 1966). In urban China during the late imperial and Republican periods, the poor, among whom were many “disabled” people, were also labeled by government officials and intellectuals as “useless,” or even “social parasites.” Chen (2012) argues that the stigmatizing of the poor and attempts to reform them through forced labor reflect the ideology of nationalist productivism. For Chen, this ideology promoted the belief that the nation state can reproduce highly productive and efficient citizens through discipline and labor reform so as to improve its economic development. Kohrman (1999b) writes that people in traditional China used terms such as *canji* (injured and diseased), *canfei* (injured and wasted), and *feiji* (wasted and diseased) to label “disabled” people. Noting that words including *fei* might be pejorative—*feiren* can mean “useless

¹³ In the context of my field site, the group of the “normal” includes almost all the visitors who represent institutionalized children as the “abnormal”. However, this group is actually more a dynamic imagined community than an objective social community with a clear boundary—its boundary is always changing in accordance with individual identity and recognition from others. For instance, the husband of a Choujiang City Welfare Institute staff member worked in the Choujiang City Federation of the Disabled. On a visit to the welfare institute, he also called the institutionalized children “abnormal”. Other people in the institute then commented privately that he himself was a “cripple”; how could he label others as “abnormal”, as if he himself was “normal”?

person”—the Chinese government has promoted the term *canji* since the mid-1980s. Even so, *canfei* is still widely used in contemporary Chinese society, because it indicates the public concern with the lack of “ability” or “productivity” of “the disabled,” who are perceived as unable to survive on their own and having to depend on others; in other words, they are useless *feiren*. In representations of Chinese institutionalized children, we also find such public concern with the “value” or the “usefulness” of these children to the rest of the social world (e.g., family members, society members and the state), which are primarily evaluated by their “productivity” and “responsibility” based on the ableist and familist ideologies.

I suggest that the epistemological basis of this public concern and of stigmatizing labels is the *pragmatism of the “normal.”* As a ruling ideology, the pragmatism of the “normal” governs human beings through evaluating their “values” or “usefulness,” then categorizing them into different groups, and maximizing the exploitation of “human values” based on these categorizations to maintain and consolidate the “hegemony of normalcy” (Davis 1995). It absorbs and relies on the group of “the useful,” excludes and marginalizes the group of “the useless,” and reforms and rehabilitates the group of people who are in between so as to increase and then maximize the exploitation of their “usefulness.” Serving as parts of the ideological whole, familism and ableism set up criteria to define and select “the useful” and rule out “the useless” for the power of the “normal,” with special emphases on individuals’ “productivity” and “responsibility.” Based on these criteria, people who detest institutionalized children exclude them completely from the category of the “normal”; people who take pity on these children may either deny their right to live or choose to normalize them. The goals for the normalization projects are twofold: on the one hand, they consider the interests of institutionalized children, hoping that they will not be discriminated against and have better lives in the future; but on the other hand, they also consider the interests of the state and society, hoping that these dependent children will finally be able to live on their own, becoming “useful” individuals for the state and society, or at least avoid becoming a “burden” on “normal” people forever.

Even the seemingly most loving words of the philanthropists to the Choujiang City Welfare Institute sound pragmatic. For instance, they frequently say, “I want to give love to these institutionalized children and hope that they will also return love to our society in the future.” This kind of statement also appears in media reports. A recent piece held up an orphaned and disabled woman as a model of paying society back, since she became a foster mother after growing up herself in the welfare institute (Chen 2007). I would argue that such representations of pity and love, as well as the visitors’ philanthropic activities, are a series of rhetorical stances—they are the discourses used by “normal” people, consciously or unconsciously, to cover up their evaluations of the “usefulness” of institutionalized children during their interactions with them. But they actually have already drawn the conclusion that institutionalized children are (at least temporarily) “useless.” They share the same value judgment, differing only in degrees, as those who reject these children openly. Both “the unfortunate” and “the useless” are suppressive discourses indicative of

the persistent power imbalance between the philanthropists and the institutionalized children.

Recreating “human values”: the alternative usefulness of the Chinese welfare institute

Despite the often sincere efforts described above, normalization projects often fail. Such failures further reinforce the stereotype of institutionalized children as the “abnormal,” who then require more intensive normalization. The running of this production mechanism implies the anxiety of the philanthropists regarding the existence of these “abnormal” and “unfortunate” institutionalized children—they are anxious not only about the burden these “useless” children have created but also about the challenges they present to the “hegemony of normalcy.” Motivated by anxiety and guided by the pragmatism of the “normal,” some people ask how one can make use of the children’s “abnormalities” to recreate their “value” and “usefulness” to “normal” society. I found many philanthropists had, consciously or unconsciously, developed methods and strategies to do just that. These methods and strategies also drive the welfare institute to perform alternative functions for the philanthropists.

Welfare institute as a forum for family education

Numerous studies have pointed out that Chinese parents in the post-reform era are facing challenges in child-rearing and education created by globalization and marketization. Globalization has led many urban middle-class parents to abandon traditional Chinese ideas and practices and embrace Western ways by encouraging their children to live more independently. However, marketization has intensified social competition, which forces Chinese parents to put pressure on their children, demanding of them not only good academic performance but also non-scholastic accomplishments so as to survive in this competitive environment. Many urban children are thus sent from an early age to after-school classes and extracurricular activities (Kuan 2011; Nafali 2009; Woronov 2007). Equally important, although education in China is still exam-oriented, students are encouraged to join in social activities, especially during the summer vacations, to broaden their experiences; this is considered an important part of the state-sponsored “quality education” movement (Kuan 2008).

The welfare institute provided a forum for such broadening experiences. Among many forms of visits, there is one that the institute staff members call “family visits,” in which (mostly) economically well-off local parents bring their primary or secondary school children to do charitable work. They usually come in their own cars and donate cash (often 1,000 yuan or more) and/or a lot of food, toys, and daily necessities. From what I observed, these family visits unfolded in a typical manner. The parents were usually very decent and generous, and spoke a great deal with the institute nannies and institutionalized children. The visiting children, by contrast, were often very shy or timid, either hiding behind their parents or standing outside

the door until their parents urged them to come in. The parents often asked the nannies whether this child had something wrong or that child had some “problems.” Upon hearing that the vast majority of institutionalized children suffered from diseases or physical impairments, they sighed and said these children were really pitiful and that their birthparents were cruel and irresponsible in abandoning them. Some even concluded that these institutionalized children must have been abandoned by non-local migrant workers, because local families, as long as their economic conditions were not bad, would try their best to give their children medical treatment.

Another scenario I frequently witnessed was that the parents stood in front of the institutionalized children and spoke seriously to his/her own children:

Look at these kids. They are so young but they have been abandoned by their parents. How pitiful they are! How about you? You have parents at home caring for you, and you have such good material conditions. How fortunate you are! Think about this and be grateful for everything you have!

Almost all parents said something along these lines. They then followed up in different ways. Some criticized their children for not studying hard and making good use of their fortunate material conditions, in particular the after-school classes and extracurricular activities for which the parents paid. Other encouraged their children to do volunteer work in the welfare institute or donate their pocket money to the institutionalized children in future. A lady who drove a BMW told her children that 1 month of their pocket money was enough to feed all the children in the institute. She then exhorted them to cherish their good life and learn to save. Usually, the visiting children just listened to these lectures and made no response. But they did not always keep quiet throughout visit. Sometimes they, like their parents, made sounds of surprise or fear upon seeing the institutionalized children, whose “strange” physical impairments they had never seen before. They sometimes also used mobile phones to take photos of the infants one after the other and whispered that all the infants looked horrible.

Many parents were also very interested in me. Hearing that I was a graduate of the best high school in the city, and now was doing an unpaid internship as well as research in the welfare institute, they praised me and asked their children to learn from my example: a person with a good academic record and also a loving heart. They explained the reasons for bringing their children to the welfare institute—they mainly hoped to expand their children’s horizons and develop their sense of empathy and responsibility. Some complained that their children did not study hard but liked playing on their phones; on weekends or holidays, the children would stay at home surfing the internet or playing computer games. What made the parents even more nervous was that their children disliked chatting with other people and lacked social skills. Therefore, they took their children out of the house to participate in social activities. By bringing them to the welfare institute, these parents aimed to give their children a sense of how others live to make them reflect on their own good fortune and learn to sympathize with the disadvantaged. They again held me up as a good example of integrating book-learning and social experience.

The parents' comments indicate their instrumental use of the welfare institute as a tool to educate their own children. Being embedded with familist ideas, they contrasted institutional life with family life and assumed that institutionalized children must be unhappy and unfortunate. Through this kind of comparison, they tried to teach their children to appreciate their own family lives. One way the parents hoped their children would express such appreciation was by taking full advantage of the material resources that their families could provide to study hard and to develop a wide range of hobbies and learn multifaceted skills.

Furthermore, the parents also hoped to develop their children's sense of empathy and responsibility through visiting the welfare institute. One parent said that his goal for doing charitable work together with his children was to set a good example for the next generation and teach them to sympathize with the disadvantaged. In this way, they would grow into "useful" people for their family and the whole society. In this frank narrative, institutionalized children were not only a tool the parents employed to train their own children to be "useful" people, but also the "stepping stone" upon which they, as well as their children in the future, were able to build their own identities as "useful" people. If there are no disadvantaged groups to act as the object of reference, then there will be no advantaged groups; if there are no "useless" people, then there will be no "useful" ones—and only the advantaged groups have the power and the leisure to sympathize with their opposites. The philanthropists' narratives and practices in this way articulate and perpetuate the unequal power relations between them and the ones with whom they sympathize.

The dilemma faced by contemporary Chinese parents between encouraging their children to live more independently and pressuring them to avoid academic and social failure, as scholars have pointed out, itself demonstrates anxiety about continued social mobility. Visiting parents at my field site want the next generation to maintain the middle-class (or even upper-class) status of their families; but it seemed difficult for their children to take on this responsibility given their "decadent" lives, which were rooted in their well-off family conditions. Therefore, the parents have to use various methods to educate them, including taking them to do charitable work in the welfare institute. Such philanthropic visits produced and utilized the othering representation of institutionalized children as an unfortunate disadvantaged group to impel their children to reflect on themselves and guide them to form a middle-class (upper-class) consciousness, a process which reproduced and reinforced the class differences between them and the institutionalized children. It also reproduced regional distinctions associated with class differences as local parents assumed that the birthparents of institutionalized children must be non-local working-class parents.

Welfare institute as a tourist site

Traveling to another place to experience a different way of life and learn about others, as the visitors to the welfare institute hope to do, can be seen as a kind of tourism. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, tourism means "traveling to and staying in places outside [one's] usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business, and other purposes" (World

Tourism Organization 1995). The last category includes educational tourism (Kalinowski and Weiler 1992; Ritchie 2003). Family visits and activities organized by visiting students or by their teachers and parents to the welfare institute thus may also be regarded as a form of educational tourism with the goal of enriching the children's/students' social knowledge and experiences.¹⁴ In like manner, if these visits are initiated for philanthropic purposes, they can equally be characterized as "philanthropic tourism." In fact, some researchers and journalists have noted that many philanthropists are turning relief organizations into tourist sites in other parts of the world. In Cambodia, Nepal, and some southern African countries, philanthropic visits to local orphanages have become a distinctive program for international tourists. "Orphanage tourism" has developed into a special industry in these countries and become an important component of the global volunteerism industry. Some foreign tourists make one-time donations before or after looking around the orphanages and watching performances by the orphans; others incorporate volunteer work as part of their travel (Richter and Norman 2010; Sicroff 2009; Tang 2011).

The philanthropists to the Choujiang City Welfare Institute are also "tourists." They have the will (as evidenced by their visits), the time (spending several hours or half a day making donations or doing volunteer work) and the necessary material conditions (they pay for their own travel and other expenses in addition to the cash and material donations). The welfare institute also has the necessary conditions to become a "tourist destination." First, the visitors have an exotic image of the welfare institute and the children living in it—they will be visiting "abnormal unfortunate" people who live in a very different way in an "abnormal" place. What interests them most are the "strange" physical impairments of the majority of institutionalized children and also the cute appearances of some of these children. The children themselves, the institute staff members, a longtime individual volunteer named Wang Fang, the organizers of voluntary organizations, and I act as "tourist service providers," among whom the children and the institute nannies are also the "indigenous residents." Although there are no musical performances as in Cambodian or Nepalese orphanages, the children and institute staff members often cooperate, intentionally or unintentionally, with the visitors in the ritual performance of philanthropic activities, which often take place in front of cameras. When the performances end, the tourists pay their "bills," and the tourist service providers receive "revenues" in the form of cash or material donations.

But philanthropic tourism should also serve the leisure and entertainment goals of the tourists. And once the welfare institute meets these requirements, it will have been completely touristified. Let us think again about the behavior of visitors on Chinese Children's Day. They were excited to see institutionalized children, especially those who looked "strange" or "cute." They took photos, picked up the babies, talked about, and played with the children with little regard to how such actions might affect them. The husband of one of the institute nannies felt that the visitors treated the institutionalized children much like animals in a zoo. His observation was confirmed the next day, when Wang Fang, whose daughter had

¹⁴ On summer camps as a kind of educational tourism in China, see Kuan (2008: Chapter 7).

been among the visitors, reported that her daughter had said that many of her classmates felt that the children in the welfare institute all looked very strange and like gorillas.

Such comments and behavior were common. Visitors consumed these “abnormal unfortunate” by observing the bodies and physical impairments of the children with “strange” appearances, and by playing with those who looked “cute.” They learned something new (such as different kinds of physical impairments) and satisfied their curiosity, and this made them happy. Some visitors said that taking a trip to the welfare institute gave them a look at all kinds of “strange” human beings that they had never seen before and that it truly made them “*dakai yanjie*” (broaden their outlooks). Thus, in the process of these visits, the institutionalized children, especially their bodily peculiarities, have become the objects of *tourist gaze* (Urry 1990), and the visitors’ observations and photographs of these children can be understood as collecting the signs of the objects. Based on these “strange” signs, the visitors constantly produce and reproduce the image of institutionalized children as the “abnormal unfortunate,” and their philanthropic tourism consumes precisely these signs and images.

Visitors’ curiosity about institutionalized children made great demands on the time and energy of the institute nannies, Wang Fang, and myself. We became passive tourism service providers who were assumed to be responsible not only for answering all kinds of questions but also holding up children for their careful inspection and assisting them to obtain direct “travel experiences” such as holding and feeding babies. Some older visitors joked that the welfare institute was a very suitable place for young people, particularly expectant parents, to receive childcare training. However, the babies who had been held would cry once they were put down in bed. When the visitors were in a hurry to leave, if they could not transfer the babies to institute nannies, they would put them back in bed and just let them cry. The institute nannies often complained that the visitors did not come to help but just to make trouble, because the babies would cry for the whole day and night after the visitors had left.

Despite visitors’ interest in broadening their horizons, some types of “travel experiences,” such as changing diapers, were not popular. Although no visitor said this directly, the institute nannies, Wang Fang, and I could perceive that they feared dirt. When we changed diapers, they would stand far away and pinch their noses; some even went out of the baby rooms until we had finished. Although almost all the visitors claimed that holding babies was a way to show care and love to them, the institute nannies and Wang Fang suggested it was more of a novelty-seeking “game.” Most visitors carried babies in turns and only held each one for a little while. Their explanation for the frequent changes was that it “let each baby feel the warmth of an embrace.” The institute nannies were very unhappy about this. In the early summer of 2011, many children at my field site came down with colds and fever because of the uncertain weather. Being limited in hands, as long as volunteers came, we would ask them to hold children in the clinic for intravenous fluids. Some volunteers pretended not to hear our requests, but some agreed. But as an IV often took 1 h or even longer, these volunteers were unhappy and would leave soon. One time, of seven college students who came for their social service activity, only one

agreed to help. She stayed in the clinic for no more than half an hour but looked at her watch all the time. When her classmates were ready to go and came to call her, she was very angry and shouted at them, saying that they had been having fun in the children's department while leaving her to hold children during an IV. After they left, the institute nannies, doctors, and nurses commented that these volunteers only came to have fun; if you wanted them to do some work, they were unhappy.

Compared to us, the organizers of voluntary organizations were more active tourist service providers. Having come to the welfare institute many times, they knew much more about the welfare institute and the conditions of institutionalized children than did fresh volunteers. They therefore became the "tourism experts" for visitors from their voluntary organizations. They mostly used the internet to organize volunteer activities: posting information about these activities, writing introductions to the welfare institute and the children in it, designing the activity schedules, and giving special notes and instructions.

Normally, such activities start at 2:00 p.m. every weekend and last for 2 h. Before it starts, all participants need to gather in front of the welfare institute, and the specific organizer in charge that day calculates the number and reviews the special notes. Participants are required to dress in plain and simple clothes. Those with long hair are recommended to tie it up to avoid it being pulled by institutionalized children. Each participant is required to bring tissues, so that when necessary, they can help institutionalized children to wipe their mouths and noses. They are asked not to bring purses; if they do, they should keep the purses away from the institutionalized children. They should try not to let institutionalized children play with phones to prevent them developing the habit of stealing. Also, they are encouraged not to bring snacks to the institutionalized children, because their stomachs may not yet be fully developed and able to digest such foods; snacks may give them diarrhea. Participants are asked to lower their voices after entering the welfare institute and wash their hands before entering the baby rooms. The volunteer services are designed to involve helping institute nannies to care for the children; cleaning baby rooms; feeding and bathing infants; taking older children to do outdoor exercises; and teaching them to read, paint, sing, talk, and tell stories. For small babies who are still in cribs, the organizers suggest that volunteers not pick them up, because the babies are weak and will easily get cold. Moreover, they are likely to cry after being put down; and crying too much will have bad effects on their health. For these reasons, organizers encourage volunteers to interact more with older children, but not to approach them immediately. They tell their members that if these children would like to have contact with strangers, they will take the initiative to approach you, and then, you should take this opportunity to talk with them and let them do something they are able to handle, such as painting and dancing, and praise them after they finish it; they will be very happy. The last special note is that volunteers are not allowed to take pictures without permission from the organizers. In sum, the organizers state that since institutionalized children are a special group of people, participants had better follow their instructions and pay serious attention to their own words and behavior in the welfare institute.

From the activity schedule to the special notes and instructions, we can see that the organizers, as experts in philanthropic tourism, have designed a clear travel

itinerary for their participants. They provide the latter with a detailed “travel checklist”: preparations prior to travel, organized programs at the tourist destination, special notes to guide them through the traveling process, and all kinds of “tourist tips” (such as different ways to interact with the various “indigenous residents”) to enhance the travel experience. Moreover, they also act as the coordinators between the volunteering tourists and the local tourist service providers. For instance, an organizer once required the institute nannies to affix a note on each child’s bedside telling his/her name, which he believed would be convenient for the volunteers who wanted to know this information. Hearing his request, the institute nannies fell silent. But Wang Fang reacted strongly, reminding him that the welfare institute was not a zoo, and it was not for the visits of tourists, so why did they need to affix the children’s names on their bedsides? The organizer felt very awkward. The institute nannies quickly tried to reconcile him and Wang Fang, saying that if his participants wanted to know the children’s names, they could ask the nannies directly.

Although the organizers tried to manage the volunteering tourists’ behavior and also expected the local tourist service providers to provide better services, they failed. Many volunteers did not follow instructions. They believed that their presence in the welfare institute and holding the babies were the right ways to do philanthropy, and no one had the right to criticize or impose restrictions on someone doing philanthropy. On the other hand, institute nannies thought that most volunteers simply came for fun. They were unhappy with the number of visitors, the activity schedule, the photo-taking and many other issues. One time, when they saw more than thirty participants chatting loudly, holding babies one by one, and littering in the children’s department, the nannies angrily told the organizers to never come again. But actually they have no power to stop philanthropic tourism. Whenever the organizers released the weekly activity schedule in their internet forum every Wednesday, it would be followed by many posts expressing the will to join. A typical post is like “I don’t have anything to do this weekend, so I will go to the welfare institute and provide care one time for the institutionalized children.” Sometimes, another member would respond by describing his/her last experience in the institute, usually saying that children there were very pitiful because they were “disabled” and abandoned by their parents, so the writer could not help but shed tears. He/she would tell other members, “I decided to have a look at them and hug them often, and let them know there is true love in the human world.” The words and actions of philanthropic tourists seem to take the institutionalized children as subjects and the emotional needs of these children as the starting point, but in fact mostly originate from the self-feeling and self-imagination of the tourists, in which the children are firmly objectified. By joining in this philanthropic tourism, the visitors reproduce and satisfy their need to imagine themselves as high-minded philanthropists, enjoy the uplifting experience of doing “good deeds,” and also gain the leisure and entertainment value this specific tourism activity can provide.

Welfare institute as a marketing tool

Sponsorship by businesses has long been an important means for charities to obtain resources, labor power, and public recognition of their causes. Supporters of such efforts regard corporate philanthropy as a primary way in which enterprises contribute to the public interest. In recent decades, however, corporate philanthropy has increasingly faced criticism in the Western world. One critical viewpoint argues that many enterprises use corporate philanthropy or corporate social responsibility (CSR) to market their businesses and manage their public relations, while covering up unethical conduct and exploitation (Banerjee 2008; Benson and Kirsch 2010; Orock 2013). In China, scholars have also noted the wide adoption of corporate philanthropy as a strategy to develop enterprises' public images (Shue 1998).

The Choujiang City Welfare Institute has also received many donations and offers of volunteer work from enterprises, most of which are private businesses. They cover a wide range of industries. Some are related to children's consumption, such as producers of infant formula, baby products and stationery, or service providers like kindergartens and early education centers. Others are not related to children's everyday lives, such as beauty salons, barbershops, travel agencies, and hotels. These enterprises, especially those which provide child-related products and services, often make use of the institutionalized children to market their businesses.

For example, I witnessed representatives of a domestic infant formula company visited the welfare institute along with reporters of a local TV station. They brought not only dozens of boxes of infant formula but also their corporate billboard. In the children's department, the company manager asked his entourage to have each toddler hold a can of infant formula and each baby have a can too at his/her bedside for the local TV reporter as well as the company cameramen to shoot. After that, the local TV reporter interviewed the manager about his reasons for coming to donate formula for these institutionalized children. He responded that, since the melamine milk scandal, the quality of infant formula had become a big problem for Chinese consumers. He spent a lot of time talking about the scandal and how Chinese people had lost their confidence in domestic milk products, which made foreign products well received, but his company's products were safe. He wanted these pitiable institutionalized children to have healthy milk to drink and also hoped that when his products entered the market they would rebuild confidence in domestic infant formula. However, later we found all the donations were stockpiled cans which would expire within 2 months.

Stationery companies likewise recorded how their employees taught institutionalized children to paint using the companies' color pens. The McDonald's restaurants captured the children wearing paper hats marked "Golden Arches" and eating their food. The kindergartens and early education centers either took their students and parents to do philanthropy in the welfare institute or invited institutionalized children to visit and play in their places; and all these activities were recorded. Even enterprises that did not market primarily to children made records of their employees' interactions with institutionalized children, including holding babies, feeding older children snacks, and playing with them. Such videos and photographs were often released by the media. Alternately, enterprises might

upload these materials to the internet themselves. A beauty salon's visit was not reported in the media. But when I happened to pass by the salon several days later, I saw many posters at the entrance showcasing its employees' recent philanthropic visit to the welfare institute.

In the above cases, the role of the mass media is apparent. In my observation, local media not only help enterprises with marketing but also manipulate reports about the welfare institute in accordance with their own agendas. For instance, a local TV station, when reporting a philanthropic visit by a travel agency, changed the date from May 4 to May 14 in order to mesh with its own theme of the May 15 "National Help-The-Disabled Day," and erroneously claimed that the travel agency initiated the activity because of this state-sponsored celebration. Let us now look in detail at a particular instance to explore not only how media create and manipulate the news in service of their own interests but also how organizers of voluntary organizations instrumentalize the welfare institute and its children to publicize themselves.

The Choujiang City Welfare Institute once received a 6-year-old paraplegic boy who often cried for his mother. The second weekend after his entry, Zhou Ning, the director of the "Aixin (loving-heart) Voluntary Organization," visited the welfare institute with members of his group. Witnessing the boy's cry, Zhou and other volunteers were deeply touched. That night they produced parent-tracing posters, and put up them in some big shopping malls and transport stations. They also contacted numerous media agencies. The next day, reporters of a local newspaper came to report on the paraplegic boy. They said the next day happened to be Mother's Day, and as the boy's story was so moving, it would touch the readers' hearts; and if it spread widely, it probably would help to find the boy's parents. The institute nannies, however, thought that possibility was extremely low even if the parents read the news. They suggested that the parents must have despaired of the boy; otherwise, they would not have abandoned a child of this age in the hospital. Moreover, they said that while it was a good deed for the Aixin volunteers to help the boy find parents, it would have been better if they had consulted with the welfare institute prior to their actions. Nannies told me that they worried the news might have some negative effects. Reading the news on its front page the next day, the institute leaders were very surprised at the actions of the newspaper and the Aixin Voluntary Organization (whose role was highlighted in the news report), of which they had never been informed. Like the nannies, they thought the news report, as well as the parent-tracing posters, probably would have a negative impact, resulting in more families abandoning their diseased and physically impaired children to the welfare institute. That would be good neither for the institute nor the children.

As time passed, the news report brought not the boy's parents but many other media representatives to the welfare institute. Reporters from another three regional newspapers came several days after the news broke. When they were taking photos of the paraplegic boy, the police brought in a new abandoned infant who was mounted in a black duffle bag. The reporters were very eager to record the event. After interviewing the policemen about how and where the infant was found, they turned to shoot the process by which the institute nannies checked the infant and her accompanying items. Because they had been busy interviewing the policemen, the

reporters missed the shot of the infant lying in the duffle bag. They asked the institute nannies to put the infant back in the bag and let them reshoot the scene. Thereafter, they also recorded the nannies bathing and dressing the infant. After settling the infant in the baby room, the nannies refused to allow them to continue taking photos, and the reporters had to leave.

One day a week later, Zhou Ning and many other Aixin volunteers took reporters from a local TV station to report on the boy again. When asked whether they had contacted the institute leaders for the report, they replied they had. I told Zhou the worries of institute staff members, but he responded dismissively, arguing that it was better to have the media report the case than do nothing. He stressed that everything had its positive and negative sides, and we could not refuse to do something only because it might have a potential negative impact. But when asked why he did not consult the welfare institute before taking action, he turned silent.

The TV reporters wanted to start interview as soon as possible, but Nanny He, who assumed responsibility for caring for the boy, was on holiday that day. A male reporter became impatient and asked the other nannies to call her back for the interview in a very arrogant tone. The nannies felt unhappy and asked whether they had contacted the institute leaders for such an interview. He answered no, saying that they had come to hold interviews here many times and had never contacted the leaders first. The nannies were very surprised to hear this answer and refused to say anymore until they got permission from the leaders. Due to their insistence, the reporter called the institute head, to whom he spoke softly on the phone. Later, the nannies received instructions from the head to cooperate with the interview and called Nanny He.

Nanny He had to come back. The interview was conducted in the room where the boy was settled. The male reporter requested that Nanny He have the boy sit against the wall and herself stand beside him. While the male reporter photographed the scene, another female reporter held the microphone to interview the boy. Although he had been calling for his mother just a moment ago, he fell silent and looked very uncomfortable. For several minutes, he made no response, and the female reporter had to give up. The reporters then interviewed the nanny about the situation of the boy when he entered the institute as well as his current physical condition. Next, the male reporter asked Nanny He to change the boy's diaper and he filmed the whole process from numerous angles.

The reporters then interviewed Zhou Ning as to why he wanted to help this paraplegic boy find his parents. But before starting, they asked Zhou to highlight the fact that the members of his organization came to do volunteer work in the welfare institute every weekend. I suddenly noticed that today all the volunteers were wearing hats and badges with the name of the organization. During the interview, Zhou did say what the reporters wanted and explained their actions as a result of sympathy for the boy. When the interview ended, the male reporter asked all the volunteers present to hold babies so he could photograph a typical love-giving activity. Zhou Ning also suggested that he shoot the volunteers playing with the older children in the lobby of the children's department. As the volunteers and the reporters were busy shooting, the paraplegic boy was left behind.

The local TV report was the final climax of the campaign; the media paid no attention to the paraplegic boy thereafter. Nor, during my time there, did Zhou Ning visit the welfare institute again. In fact, he had seldom come even before the campaign. Later, I inquired of some Aixin volunteers about their views on the campaign on different occasions. What surprised me was that, though wishing that the parents would come and reclaim the boy, they all knew that the chance of success was extremely small. An involved volunteer mentioned that before Zhou Ning decided to act, some other organizers had raised objections, questioning the feasibility of his plan as well as whether he should consult the welfare institute first; but Zhou was single-minded. This volunteer thought his motive was to publicize the Aixin Voluntary Organization and expand its influence. Another volunteer holding a similar view told me that many members of the voluntary organization saw Zhou's act as an expression of his personality, which was characterized as "*jigong jinli*" (expecting quick success).

My own experience with Zhou leads me also to believe that his high-profile campaign aimed at increasing the visibility of the voluntary organization in the mass media and expanding its social influence. Also as a participant, I found through observations and informal interviews that Zhou strongly identified with his organization and strove to have it better developed by all means. He, like many other leaders of Chinese non-governmental organizations (Lu 2009: Chapter 6), has a deep affection for his organization and sees it as his possession. At an annual meeting which I attended, Zhou told hundreds of participants that he regarded the organization as his "child." He encouraged all the volunteers to imitate him and put just as much effort into bringing it up.

As for the media, the above story shows that they had produced unequal power relations between them and other stakeholders in the campaign by exercising their discursive power. To serve its own reporting agenda of "National Help-The-Disabled Day," a local TV station lied about the time and the motive of a philanthropic activity. Similarly, the newspaper that first addressed the paraplegic boy's case had also considered the timeliness of the news as Mother's Day was coming. Neither the Aixin organizers nor the media consulted with the welfare institute prior to their campaign. They failed to recognize that the institute, as an administrative body, probably had its own interests in the campaign and might take a different stance. Although the welfare institute leaders allowed the media to report and asked the institute nannies to cooperate, they were unhappy with the self-assertive actions of the voluntary organization and the media.

Furthermore, when the media entered the institute to conduct interviews, we can clearly perceive the advantage they held over the interviewees. The reporters targeted their microphones and cameras not only at the paraplegic boy who wanted to find his mother (but did he expect to find his mother in this way? Could he refuse?), but also at other institutionalized children as well as the institute nannies with little regard for the feelings, dignity, or privacy of these people. The media acted as if neither the welfare institute nor individuals had the right to reject interviews or to deviate from the interviewers' requirements and time arrangements. They also went to great lengths to create a realistic environment for the audience and satisfy their curiosity. Yet, as we have seen, many of these scenes were actually

reproduced or even created. In other words, the bodies and the behaviors of institutionalized children and nannies, as well as the space of the welfare institute, were all made into the objects of media gaze and a kind of goods for mass consumption. From selecting and manipulating the news based on their own agendas to deliberately creating the scenes, the media exercised their power to fully exploit the newsworthy elements. Through the media representation, the image of institutionalized children as a group of “unfortunate” and “exotic” others was constantly reproduced and reified.

Conclusion

The 2008 Sichuan earthquake has heightened “philanthropy fever” and “civil society fever” in China. The flourishing of charitable donations and volunteer work for disaster relief greatly impressed domestic and international media and scholars. They advocated using “civil society” to describe these philanthropic activities as a whole, and celebrated 2008 as China’s “first year of civil society” (i.e., Shieh and Guosheng 2011; Xiao et al. 2009). A noticeable effort across the board is to relieve the orphans created by the earthquake. It was reported that more than eighty thousand people had expressed the will to adopt those “unfortunate” children, which again was held up as a sign of a rising Chinese “civil society.” But a recent news report revealed that only twelve of 630 orphans have been adopted, and the others are either cared for by their relatives or institutionalized in welfare institutes (Ye 2013). This large gap between the expected and actual results may also help us to rethink the enthusiasm for philanthropy and the fetish of “civil society” in China.

In this paper, I have investigated how philanthropists perpetuate unequal power relations with institutionalized children through their activities in the Choujiang City Welfare Institute. The majority of them represent the children as “the unfortunate” or “the abnormal unfortunate,” and the remainder represent them as “the abnormal useless.” The latter do at most one-off philanthropy and exclude the children completely from the category of “normal” people through their discourses and practices. The former may choose to do philanthropy frequently, but they either deny the children’s right to live in the name of sympathy or try to normalize them. But these normalization projects often fail, and the failures further reinforce the stereotype of institutionalized children as “the abnormal.” In a deep sense, both the people who detest and those who take pity on institutionalized children are driven by, and themselves reinforce, the pragmatism of the “normal.” This ideology prompts the philanthropists to evaluate the institutionalized children as (at least temporarily) “useless,” but at the same time to recreate their “usefulness” through various methods and strategies such as utilizing them as a tool for family and class education; as a tourist attraction; and as marketing instruments for enterprises, voluntary organizations, and mass media. This very pragmatic rationale adds an alternative to the current anthropological studies on humanitarianism, which have mostly focused on religious, ethical and moral motivations among philanthropic agencies.

Furthermore, if philanthropic sectors always form part of a “civil society” as Tocquevillian scholars believe, the “civil society” they constitute in Choujiang city exposes the diversity and difference inside it. A group of self-proclaimed “normal” people exercise their hard or soft—but in the end repressive—power over a group of “abnormal” people by representing, excluding, reforming, and utilizing them in order to maintain and consolidate the “hegemony of normalcy” over the entire society. This situation challenges the neoliberal China scholars’ imagination of “civil society” as a unified social entity against the undemocratic state: are all Chinese people (full) members of the given “civil society”? If yes, why are some marginalized and discriminated against? If no, who has full access to its membership, and who has only partial, or even no, access? Will, then, such an either internally repressive or overall exclusive “civil society” bring about a just democracy in China?

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