Social Standards in America and China: Family Life and Children

Childhood is spent enjoying beautiful, sunny days playing outside with a brother and/or sister, making mud cakes, sneaking eggs out of the house, and arguing over who had the best "chocolate" cake. Once can still hear the laughter, feel the coarse mud in the palm, and feel the freedom and joy of having someone to play with. This is one freedom of many that American's get to enjoy. In America, parents don't have to constantly worry about how many children they have—they have the power to choose! In China, though, life and parenthood aren't so simple: the effects of the one-child policy still linger, even though parents are now allowed to have two children. Both America and China value education, hard work and success; in fact, in cities such as Shanghai and Hong Kong, China is starting to outperform other countries in education (Sharma 2011). However, America is superior to China in freedom and opportunities, especially those concerning women and children. America offers greater protection for unwanted children, disabled children, abused children, and for women; China, however, is severely lacking in the opportunities for family-life, and the protection of abandoned children.

Family

Siblings play an important role in shaping and influencing the development of the other children in the household. Having a sibling establishes roles within the household, and has a lasting effect on their character in adulthood. Referring to an only child as "spoiled" and "self-centered" is common because society thinks of these siblings as not having learned the basic rule
that life doesn't revolve around them. Perhaps the greatest difference between America and China is the cultural standards and norms of family life.

In 1978, a law was introduced in China: the one-child policy, stating that couples could only have one child because of the increase in population. Parents were more likely to hope for a boy instead of a girl; if a son was born, he would carry on the family name, but, if a girl was born, she would take her husband's name. Even though the one-child policy is coming to an end, many parents are deciding against having a second child. One reason is because of the social standard that has been placed on China for nearly four decades. The values that were rooted in their beliefs are not easy to disregard, and some may fear what their family would think if they had another child. In addition, economics are an important part of China, and having an additional child puts a strain on parents financially. Because of this policy, many children will grow up without siblings. Without siblings, the children could face loneliness, and won't get to experience the joy of a sister or brother.

Siblings play an important role in developing personality and intellect. According to Xuefeng Chen, "Researchers and citizens from both the East and the West have been concerned with this issue. In China, many news-reports have expressed the worry that single-child families would produce self-centered 'little emperors' and 'empresses.' Theoretically, this concern is both reasonable and probable" (Chen 2015). Children who do not grow up with siblings are more likely to be self-centered; children who grow up with siblings realize that they have to compromise and be fair. Parents may spoil and smother their children with gifts and attention to make up for the lack of company from a sibling.

In contrast to China, parents in America don't have to worry over the gender of their child, or how many they can have: American's are free to decide. Such freedom has been expressed in
the media and on TV. The reality TV show, "19 Kids and Counting," reveals the life of Michelle and Jim Bob Duggar: the parents of nineteen children. Having more than one-child is common in America, and some even view this idea as being what God intended. The Bible states, "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it..." ("Genesis" 1:28). So, having multiple siblings is nothing shocking in America. Many get to experience the blessing of having a brother or sister. In American, parents do not tend to favor one child over the other simply based on gender; children are typically all treated as equal. In addition, siblings rarely feel the ache of loneliness. Americans sometimes take this freedom for granted, but siblings and family shape irrevocably shape character, attitude and intellect.

**Abuse and Abandonment**

In China, the one-child policy was especially detrimental for children with mental or physical disabilities: with only one-child being allowed, children with special needs were often times unwanted. Children with disabilities faced uncertain outcomes: abuse, abandonment, neglect, or, worse, death. With the easement of the one-child policy, most of the abandoned and abuse children are ones with disabilities. In addition, parents often times neglect their children, resulting in the child's death. This happens because the mother will then have a second chance at having a boy or a child without a disability. In some cases, children can simply disappear. According to Therese Hesketh, "So if the second (or subsequent) child is female, the pregnancy often “disappears,” allowing the couple to have another child in an attempt to have a son. What happens to all the missing girls is a matter of speculation" (Hesketh 1173). The children who disappear are most often overlooked; no one wonders about what happened to them.
Some children will end up in orphanages. Orphanages are flooded with disabled children; few will be adopted because of their unchangeable circumstances. In addition, many will face the harsh conditions of abuse and neglect. According to Will Ripley, "Last week, a newborn girl was rescued from a public bathroom in Beijing, where police found her wedged face-down in the toilet's pipe" (Ripley 2015). For many children, they will be punished because of an unfortunate situation that they cannot change.

A documentary directed by Kate Blewett and Brian Woods, "The Dying Rooms," investigated the mistreatment of children in some orphanages in China. The documentary displayed the horrific mistreatment of children: they were treated not as children, but like animals. The caretakers showed no compassion to the children, didn't comfort them in their arms, or give them a brief moment of genuine care. For them, caring for the children was only a job, and with so many children to care for, time spent with each child was limited. There was not enough staff to care for the children, and staff members would abandon children and neglect them. Throughout the documentary, the sound of infants crying and screaming is heartbreaking. According to a review of the "The Dying Rooms" by Tom Hilditch, "In one, a dozen or so baby girls sit on bamboo benches in the middle of a courtyard. Their wrists and ankles are tied to the armrests and legs of the bench. A row of plastic buckets is lined up beneath holes in their seats to catch their urine and excrement. The children will not be moved again until night, when they will be lifted out and tied to their beds" (Hilditch 1995). The psychological effects the children will face is saddening: many of the children do not receive any social stimulation at all. The children do not have anything to play with, but only sit on benches and cry. Such lack of stimulation means that the children are not likely to speak or communicate with others. The only exercise
and stimulation the children have is rocking themselves back and forth: something that comforts them and brings them pleasure.

Death is common in such orphanages in China. Possibly the saddest circumstance in "The Dying Rooms" is when the investigators come across a small baby girl, Mei-ming, in an orphanage in Guangdong. Bundled in blankets, the investigators unwrapped the little girl, and made a distressing discovery: baby Mei-ming had been neglected and left to die in the dying room. Her body was frail and weak from malnourishment, and she could barely utter a cry. She was bundled in urine-drenched blankets, and scabs of drying mucus was forming across her eyes. She had been like that for ten days; four days later, she died because of neglect, but the orphanage denied her existence there ("The Dying Rooms" 1995).

In addition, today, more orphanages in China are opening to house the abandoned children, but could lead to an increase in orphans because of the ease of access. The flaws of the welfare system in China is evident. According to Nathan Vanderklippe, "The orphanages, for example, have few standards of care – and what standards do exist go unenforced" (Vanderklippe 2014). With the rise in orphans, the amount of staff needed to care for them all is enormous, but China is taking steps to improve the quality of life for the children.

However, in America, children do not face as harsh circumstances as those in China. The Foster Care System was created to protect children from neglect, abuse and suspected neglect and abuse. In 1974, The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) was passed and brought attention to the need to protect vulnerable children in the United States. According to Child Welfare Information Gateway, "CAPTA provides Federal funding to States in support of prevention, assessment, investigation, prosecution, and treatment activities as well as grants to public agencies and nonprofit organizations for demonstration programs and projects" ("Child
Welfare Information Gateway" 2). America is far superior to China in the protection of children, yet some people complain about the system. One teenage girl who was adopted from a group home, Hannah Gaddis, explained her circumstances with dramatic horror: "I hate it in the group home; they make us count the sheets of toilet paper that we use, and I have no freedom at all! They're awful to us" (Gaddis 2014). The "harsh" circumstances individuals face in the welfare system in America are not as concerning as those in China. In addition, most children in the Foster Care System go to school and even have medical care.

Consider the Reality

Both China and the United States are concerned with success, education and economic advancements, but the two countries are different in social standards. America is referred to as "The American Dream" because of the freedoms and opportunities that are allowed. In China, however, individuals don't get the luxury of certain freedoms, especially those that concern family, children and women. China faces lingering effects of the one-child policy, despite the fact that China now allows more than one-child. However, some parents are reluctant to have more than one-child due to high expenses. In addition, China has come to favor boys over girls, aiding in the amount of girls in orphanages. The physically and mentally disabled children are also more likely to end up in orphanages. Orphanages are often times overcrowded and understaffed, leading to neglect. Women, too, are affected. Many women get abortions because they cannot afford to have another child. In contrast, America is a much safer place for children: laws are set in place regarding unwanted children or abused children, and a home, education and medical services are provided. Lastly, children in America get to experience the joy of having a brother or sister to grow up with. America is a breath of fresh air, a sigh of relief—the home of the free...The American Dream.
Works Cited


