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PERSPECTIVES AND ANALYSIS FOR THOSE WHO SERVE CHINA

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Amy Lewis

Mel Sletch

## Chinese Children at Risk

**C**hina is riding a wave of dramatic economic development. Historically, countries that have experienced significant change discover there is a wide range of social ramifications, both positive and negative. Negative ramifications tend to be seen in the society's weakest members: children, women, the elderly and the disabled. This article is a compilation of insights, observations and trends noted by persons working across China. It is by no means academic, but descriptive, focusing on those social trends that place China's children at risk.

For this article these trends have been separated into two categories labeled Wave One and Wave Two. Wave One includes works with a base broad enough that people coming to China can build on them. They do not require pioneer type work. Wave Two is pioneering work, or work that is not well understood because few are involved in it. The chart on page 3 shows the characteristics of these two waves.

### Wave One

**Orphans.** When China reopened in the 1980s, Western workers typically obtained access through educational routes, often teaching English. These teachers built bridges of trust allowing them access to

the "cutest" children of their local orphanage. Often they were asked to help provide improved facilities and enriched educational opportunities for these children. The loving nonjudgmental responses of these early workers have allowed for teamwork and outside intervention to affect the lives of these children. For example, where Chinese officials initially held the intentions of adoptive parents as suspect, now thousands of Chinese infant girls are adopted internationally every year. Volunteers are now allowed into orphanages to provide training to childcare workers. Experiments in foster homes, for newborns to children six years old, that try to decrease the institutionalization of in-

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fants are being seen as successful by both volunteer agencies and orphanage management. Other programs train Chinese families and place one or two long-term foster children in a local home.

One particularly exciting new trend is that local Chinese are initiating programs to help the children in their local orphanage. These model sites are typically in urban areas, but they have laid a foundation and set a precedent. Orphanage management, leery of allowing outside assistance into their sites, can be pointed back to successful teamwork at a number of high-profile Chinese orphanages.

More Western and Chinese workers are needed to help meet the needs in the vast rural areas of China. Chinese persons who already run programs that reach out to the orphans in their community need training and financial support. Workers in the area of orphans also note that international adoptions are only a temporary answer, exacerbating the present inequality in the number of women versus men particularly noted in China's rural areas. Creative interventions need to be made that will allow China to not only keep its already rare infant girls, but to value, educate and socialize them, and to somehow integrate them back into Chinese society.

**Disabled in orphanages.** As trust increased in the 1980s, relief workers were introduced to previously hidden children. These children were often in need of surgery to repair their cleft lip or clubbed foot. With time, volunteers were ushered into rooms housing progressively more severely disabled children. With the consistent experience of nonjudgmental assistance, more and more orphanages are opening up to outside assistance in the care of their disabled population. Although these are typically in more urban settings, the precedent has been set. More workers, both foreign and Chinese, are needed to build on this foundation and take assistance out into the many under-funded, understaffed and under-trained orphanages of rural China. Workers presently in the field note that strategies need to begin now to address the large number of severely disabled children that would have normally died who are becoming adults and still require long-term care.

**Disabled in the community.** The decrease of funding through the central government for children in orphanages is

a major force resulting in disabled children remaining in the community. Previously orphanages turned a blind eye to persons who abandoned children. Now, parents are tracked down and required to pay for the care their child receives in an orphanage. Faced with this cost, parents often choose to care for the child at home.

At the same time, government funding of services for the disabled in the community is increasing. Spearheaded by Deng Pufang, the son of Deng Xiaoping, who is spinal cord injured, these changes are also encouraged by the 2008 Olympics. Community-based programs are starting for the blind, deaf and physically disabled in Chinese cities. Trainers and mentors in all areas of therapy, special education and social work are in demand. Not only are foreign and Chinese workers needed to take similar programs out to the rural areas, they are also being called into the new field of parent support groups and parent training. Patience and creativity are needed to model the value of these children to their parents and the value of these families to the surrounding community.

## Wave Two

**Children of migrant workers.** The economic lure of the city increasingly displaces migrant workers and their families from the countryside into urban areas. Residing illegally in the city, they are at the mercy of unscrupulous landlords. Unable to go to the authorities, these families are regularly cheated as well as forced to live in unsafe conditions. Without "gifts" of money or *guanxi*, they remain locked out of the educational and health care systems. Some parents have started cooperative classrooms using out-of-date textbooks and taught by parents who are barely literate themselves. Western workers, seeking to provide education or health benefits to these families, discover they must walk a fine line between meeting the felt needs of the people and meeting the felt needs of the local officials who are called to discourage lawless behavior. The issues are complex. There is little or no foundational groundwork started. Workers are needed who are willing to put in the years necessary to allow for dialogue in this difficult area. Wisdom is needed to seek out culturally relevant answers to balance the growing



Category	Wave One	Wave Two
Types of Children in this Category	Orphans Disabled children	Children of migrant workers Single parent homes Street children Children affected by HIV/AIDS
Western Workers & Programs	Increasing access since 1980s Workers are relatively numerous Some established programs Many new projects	Still no official access Workers are rare/relatively few Few scattered pioneering sites
Chinese Workers & Programs	Chinese workers being trained Some Chinese starting up their own programs	Rare
Society Awareness	Seen in TV shows and newspapers Seen as an embarrassment that needs to be "helped"	Rarely seen in the media Seen as an embarrassment that needs to remain "hidden"
Social Trends	Foundation in place for general improvement	Anticipate escalation of the underlying issues

needs of these children at risk along with the government's very real need to maintain law and order.

**Single parent homes.** Increasingly, men seeking employment in urban building projects leave their families back in their rural homes. These workers typically return home only once a year and often are not paid enough to send any significant funds home. Western organizations doing healthcare work in rural areas have found that these functionally single parent families are consistently in the lower socioeconomic levels of their village. The mothers in these homes have few work skills. The children of these families have poorer nutritional levels, lower educational abilities, and more behavioral issues than the other children in their village. Prevention, through community development projects, is one important tool in the fight against the increasing number of rural functionally single-parent homes. Scattered throughout China are projects and workers who have been building the relationships needed to work alongside rural Chinese. Together, they seek out creative ways to

facilitate the improvement in economic, health and educational standards in their village. The effects of development work on these functionally single parent families have only just begun to be understood. More workers are needed to join these projects. Others are needed to start up similar community development projects in the vast areas of rural China.

**Street children.** Street children have been a hidden issue in China for a number of years. Current social trends lead us to believe that this will become an even greater issue in the future. Significantly lower numbers of women than men in the villages, coupled with loosening social mores, mean that more rural women who are functionally single parents choose to remarry, and traditionally children of the first marriage are "sent away" by the new husband. Many street children report they chose to leave their rural homes with a dream of helping their family by finding work in the cities. Urban children, who are unable to succeed in the highly competitive educational system, increasingly choose to run away rather than continue to "fail" their par-

ents. The skyrocketing increase in urban divorce and remarriage is resulting in children either being "sent away" or choosing the streets rather than remaining at home in abusive situations.

Only a few Westerners have begun to look into the culturally taboo area of street children. What they report is that those with behavioral or emotional issues do not make it in those workshops that illegally hire children. Those unable to make it in a workshop are prey to whatever adult is willing to use them in return for some form of food and shelter. Prevention, as noted above, is paramount. For the growing number of children already on the streets, workers are needed who are willing to commit to the years required to build healthy relationships. Work with street children in any culture is not for the faint of heart. Time, patience and wisdom are required to help work through the complex needs and baggage they bring with them. Those few people pioneering this area in China not only see the present intervention needs of these children but recognize

**Continued on page 6**



Michelle Woods

Mel Sletch

# Children, AIDS and the Church

**Z**hang Moumou<sup>1</sup> is twelve years old. He kneels down before his parents' gravestones. As he sees their pictures before him, he cannot help but cry. Zhang Moumou's parents died of AIDS, leaving him and his two sisters behind. His younger sister is HIV positive. His elder sister has been kicked out of school. Zhang Moumou also had to leave school in order to earn some money for the family. He works in a brick factory and earns a bit more than a dollar a day. Even though he is still young, he is disappointed in life. He has carved the characters for "hatred" in his arm...

## Children Affected by AIDS

China is facing a major challenge now that AIDS is spreading rapidly. Up to one million Chinese people are HIV positive. That number could easily grow to ten million by 2010 according to the United Nations. If current trends continue, China could overtake Africa, where 29 million people have been infected with the virus. Though many HIV infected people are adults, many children are affected in some way or another. They are affected because they belong to a family that is marked by HIV/AIDS. They are affected if their parents have died of AIDS and

they have become orphans. Among these children are the ones that have contracted the virus themselves. They are fighting their own fight and are having very specific problems.

## Social Exclusion

Chinese people who are HIV positive face much discrimination and stigma as many Chinese people have no idea how the HIV virus is transmitted and are afraid of people who have HIV/AIDS. Many children are discriminated against, and stigmatized as well, if their parents are HIV positive. Parents of other chil-

dren do not allow their children to play with children from AIDS families. Children are not allowed to come to school anymore because staff is afraid that the virus will be transmitted to other children. Once they are excluded from the community, children start suffering and problems get worse.

## Dropping Out of School

Children drop out of school because of discrimination but also because of factors like increasing poverty in the family. Parents have to pay medical expenses and therefore cannot pay the school fees for their children any longer as is the case with Limou.<sup>2</sup> "I am 15 and want to go to school, but we don't have money. I cried several times, but I'm afraid to cry in front of my parents." Some children need to start working because the parents have fallen ill and cannot continue working. When parents become ill with AIDS, children often start caring for them. As they are not used to this type of work, they face pressures and responsibilities that are beyond their abilities.

## Bereavement and Grief

Some children are afraid that they have caused their parents illness or death. Though children realize something is wrong when their parents fall ill, they often do not know that the parent will actually die. Talking about death is still very much taboo in China. Once their parents die, the children face new

problems. They need to process the loss of their parents, but in most cases there is no one around to help them with that. Many AIDS orphans have already been excluded from the community before their parents die, and that leaves them without anyone caring for them. In some way or another they have to survive, and that, of course, is a major challenge in itself.

### Property Taken

AIDS orphans have no legal rights which makes them very vulnerable. Some children have grandparents who start caring for them. Others, however, like fourteen year old Gaoli,<sup>3</sup> are treated terribly by their relatives. Both her parents died of AIDS. After their deaths, her uncle took all the family property. For Gaoli and her younger sibling, there is nothing left. They cannot even pay their school fees.

### Dongdong's Story

Dongdong's<sup>4</sup> parents sold their blood in order to earn some money for their children's education. Through blood selling they were infected with HIV and later died of AIDS. Dongdong writes: "Right now, our home has changed from a place with happy voices and laughter into a cold and quiet place. Whenever I enter the yard of another family, I want to cry out, 'Daddy, Mommy!' But during the daytime I'm afraid others will laugh at me, so only at night I quietly cry/call, 'Daddy, Mommy, I miss you; I want to be with you so much, to see your faces. I really, really want to hear your voices; I want you to care for me and give me some love, even if it's only for one second, even if it's only for one second! Mommy, do you hear the voice of my heart?'"

### Responses to the AIDS Problem

**The extent of the problem.** In 2001, China already had 76,000 children (aged 0-14) who had been orphaned by AIDS.<sup>5</sup> The China Centre for Disease Control predicts that by the end of 2010, China will have 138,000 AIDS orphans in the best case scenario and 250,000 in the worst.<sup>6</sup> The problems of these children are enormous, and there is hardly any help available. Though there are still many problems and challenges, there are also some positive developments.

**Responses started.** The national government has launched several programs to fight the spread of AIDS. In 2005, President Hu Jintao shook hands with an AIDS patient. The first AIDS orphanage has been built. Some Chinese and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have started AIDS projects. Most of them focus on awareness and prevention. Though there is a great need for training in that area, there are hardly any projects focusing on children affected by AIDS. This is of major concern for several reasons. First of all, the number of children that are affected by AIDS will grow rapidly. We need to prepare ourselves for this future problem. Secondly, if these children do not receive acceptance and help while they are young, they will de-

**Most Chinese will agree that children are the future, and that we need to care for them.**

velop major emotional and social problems. As we are looking at a bigger group of children affected by AIDS, this could cause social instability in the future.

Thirdly, if children do not receive help soon, emotional problems will take root in their lives and will be much harder to deal with later on.

### Outreach to Children Affected by AIDS

**Importance of focusing on children.** Most Chinese people will agree that children are the future, and that we need to care for them. We want to see happy and thriving children instead of children marked by despair. By focusing on children, we also work on an integrated program of outreach to people with HIV/AIDS. In order to reach children early on, we need to have contact with their families. If we get to know their parents and understand their family background, we will better understand their needs and will be better able to make preparations for later on. If children are sick

with AIDS, there will be a need for good medical care. That leads to a focus on the medical aspects. If the children are not allowed into schools because of discrimination, we need to make sure that people understand what HIV/AIDS is and how it spreads. This will result in awareness and prevention work. A focus on the child will identify gaps in care and support that will also affect adults and others in the community.

**Outreach by communities.** The number of children affected by AIDS will increase in the coming years. As a result more people are needed to reach out to them. If each community would start taking responsibility for the smaller number of children in their own community, there will be hope. Communities need to

Duane Jeffries



understand the needs of the children affected by AIDS among them. They also need to learn that they have all that is required to help their own children.

**Simple ways of outreach.** There are many simple ways in which children can be helped. For instance, if community volunteers would start visiting families with AIDS patients, they could help a child take better care of his or her parents. If a number of volunteers would start caring for sick parents, children would have opportunities to attend school again. If families would be visited regularly, volunteers would get to know them, including the children. After the parents' deaths, they would already have a relationship with the children and could give emotional and other kinds of support. They could help the children grieve over their loss simply by spending time with them and allowing the children to talk about their parents and cry. Collecting some things from the parent in a treasure box would make a valuable memory for the child and help him or her to process the

loss of the parent. Teaching a child how to make some simple meals could be crucial in keeping a child healthy. For simple ways of outreach like these, the community has all the resources needed available.

## Opportunities for the Church

**Called to share God's love.** In the Scriptures, we read about the responsibility of the body of Christ to reach out to people in need. The Lord Jesus touched the lives of people who were sick, blind or paralyzed. He brought healing and hope. We know how the Lord Jesus called children to him and blessed them. Scripture says that the care of orphans is at the core of pure religion.<sup>7</sup> The church has a responsibility. It also is a great community that should reach out to children affected by AIDS. Besides bringing hope to them for this life, believers can bring eternal hope to these children! Moreover, the outreach can be as simple as that mentioned above.

**Current outreach by believers.** Several Chinese believers have already started to reach out to people living with AIDS. For example, one church did awareness and prevention training for the believers in their church. As a result, the believers were no longer afraid of contact with AIDS patients. They were willing to meet with them and support them. They have discovered how the Lord has used the love they have shown to AIDS patients for the furtherance of His Kingdom. It is a great witness if believers accept and welcome people with AIDS in a society where these people are rejected and stigmatized. One man who had lost his wife and daughter because of AIDS, and who was HIV positive himself, was touched by the love of the believers in his area. After some time, he became a believer and has now become one of the trainers of the AIDS awareness and prevention training.

The Lord has called more Chinese brothers and sisters to reach out to people with AIDS. Recently the pastor of a house church in central China had a dream of an AIDS patient calling out to him and asking him for help. He sensed that the Lord was calling him and his church to start an outreach to people with HIV/AIDS. He is looking for training and exploring the different types of outreach they could begin while the church has started praying specifically for this new

ministry. These are hopeful signs that the church is standing up and responding to the AIDS challenge in China. However, it seems that the need for outreach to children affected by HIV/AIDS still remains to be discovered.

## Hope for Zhang Moumou

*Zhang Moumou—twelve years old with the character for "hatred" carved in his arm...*

When hearing stories like his, one wonders whether there is hope for children in deep despair. We know where hope can be found and so do our Chinese brothers and sisters. The Father of the fatherless is still standing with open arms and has told his children to seek what is lost! Let us pray that our Chinese brothers and sisters will take on this challenge, and let us pray for them as they begin to step out in faith.

### Endnotes

1. Gao Yaojie, *Ten Thousand Letters* (China Social Sciences Press), 133.
2. *Ibid.*, 95.
3. *Ibid.*, 107.
4. *Ibid.*, 83.
5. "For every child; Progress Report for UNICEF China 2003/2004" (UNICEF China, 2005).
6. *Ibid.*
7. James 1:27

*Michelle Woods has an MA in Special Education. She has been working in China for children at risk for four years. ■*

### Chinese Children at Risk

continued from page 3

that long-term vocational training will be needed to help plug these young adults with no *guanxi* relationships back into society in a meaningful way.

**Children affected by HIV/AIDS, prostitution, drugs, abuse, etc.** In any society, but particularly in one like China, it takes time and relationship to be allowed to enter these very taboo areas of children at risk. Although there are a few pioneers working in the area of children affected by HIV/AIDS, this author was not able to interview any of them. As for other areas of risk, those seeking to work in these areas have yet to build the kinds of relationships necessary to get even a basic understanding of the needs or issues.

With the assumption that these are also on the rise, prayer for workers as well as openness in their Chinese counterparts is desperately needed.

## Summary

Economic development brings with it both positive and negative social consequences. To truly understand the intricacies of these consequences, to wisely develop intervention strategies as well as to earn the right to implement these options requires time. It requires time in the West where instant answers are an acceptable norm. It requires even more time in a relational society like China where a deep level of trust is needed just to be ushered into a basic level of confidence.

Following the example of workers in Wave One issues, we can see that the time invested in building relationships has placed a foundation where not only these workers but others, both foreign and local, are able to start making a difference in children's lives. In our instant society where long-term volunteer experiences are three to four weeks, the concept of years is daunting. Yet, every worker interviewed for this article asked for more people willing to invest in learning Chinese, to invest in building relationships, and to invest in facilitating local Chinese workers. All mentioned the need for specialists with children such as therapists and social workers, as well as specialists in development such as agriculturalists and engineers. Those interviewed also regularly noted a desperate need for persons with skills in management and strategic planning.

As social services the world over are rarely able to be totally self-supporting, the need exists for funding to support both Western- and Chinese-initiated programs. With relationships being so important, all mentioned the need for prayer to prepare the hearts of those Chinese persons God has intended to be the champions, who will come alongside Western volunteers and help open doors into Chinese culture and communities. We need to learn from our experiences in Wave One and begin building relationships now before we are overwhelmed by the needs of those children at risk in Wave Two.

*Amy Lewis has been volunteering with disabled children in northern China for more than five years. ■*



Patrick McDonald

Mel Sletch

# China's Children

A New Generation, New Opportunity and New Commitment

**G**od is on the move. Could this tiny article change the lives of many? Could it do more than inform and challenge? I think so. Those of you reading this could be part of a journey, led by the Holy Spirit, that commenced about a year ago. Intrigued? Read on.

## China is Taking Over the World

History is amusingly being rewritten as China gains confidence and exerts its claims on, not only today's Asia, but yester-years world. Was golf a Chinese invention? Did the Chinese discover America first? Were the first humans Chinese or Africans? Was Jesus, in fact, Chinese?

The economic miracle of China holds the potential of transforming the region, and if the liberalising process extends to include the rural poor, the world could soon have itself a new superpower. Growth, though, can be stunted by environmental catastrophe, by epidemic disease like AIDS, SARS or Avian flu, by global conflict ensuing around either

Taiwan or North Korea, or by a communist backlash against liberalising forces.

Regardless of geopolitics, the eternal destiny of China's billions is vitally important to God. The question to ask is: "What is God doing to reach these multitudes of people, and what can we do to accelerate that agenda?"

## God's "Number One Strategy"

Arrogance and assumption is the mother of all failure, and to suggest that we know God's primary strategy is a dangerous—perhaps even foolish—assertion. However, allow me to perhaps overstate the case in order to redress the balance.

To change a nation takes 30 years—and it starts with children. Children are

the key. They are curious, fun-loving, and they have time to learn and explore. There are more children in China than people in America, and many of them—especially in the country—are facing great risks: they are hungry, hurting and homeless. Children are strategic—biologically, spiritually, emotionally and educationally.

A friend pointed out his experience from southern China where for five years the church saw growth, and then it stopped for two years. It was a dry barren time. Many people prayed but nothing happened. Then, in 2003, through a fostering project, some of the Christians started to take the children from the orphanages and, amazingly, many were added to the church, many more than before. Local



As we look at God's world, we have to acknowledge that children are important. **Children are the single greatest opportunity to advance the Great Commission** in our generation.

people needed to see faith in action.

As we look at God's world, we have to acknowledge that children are important. Children are the single greatest opportunity to advance the Great Commission in our generation.

### A Critical Accelerator

The people I speak to working in China are still careful, but they are clear that the doors are wide open. The opportunities to teach and care are there, but we need more people to seize them. As I talked with people, they were keen to emphasize that they needed more volunteers. A good friend of mine wanted a disability therapist to come and help her minister to disabled children. Another wants an expert on HIV and addiction issues to run a 10- to 14-day training course to help local leaders respond to these issues. Another friend needs great project managers to run a fostering program. There are opportunities to set up day care programs for the rich and the poor, for holding AIDS awareness workshops, for running summer camps, for working with migrant workers—and the

list could go on.

What people point to as missing is a clearing house—a China's Children Ministry Connection Centre. This type of agency would connect needs with resources. It would be a place that could proactively scout for opportunities, develop a website listing them appropriately, screen interested parties, make introductions and perhaps organize a child-specific meeting with concrete opportunities at China conferences. This clearing house would beat a drum for China's children, especially in the churches of Australia, North America, Singapore, Britain and South Korea.

Could you—yes, you reading this article—help pull this together? You can help in a number of ways.

- **Prayer:** This will be a battle as it will accelerate critical ministry work in a critical context. It will need enduring prayer. Could you pray?

- **People:** Finding a champion for this concept is a critical need. A person or a team of people, that would develop and drive this concept forward, is crucial. Might you be that person?

- **Plan:** Next, we need a thorough

business plan which would develop the self-sustainability mechanism of this work. From fees for successful introductions or from grants raised, this program should become self-sustainable over a period of three to four years. Can you develop the first draft?

- **Pennies:** Another great way of helping this along would be to contribute money, either towards the development of the clearing house or as working capital that could be placed with specific opportunities such as camping ministry, orphan care or evangelistic work. Can you pledge support for this?

Friends, I could go on but I won't. Rather than read, fold your hands, bow your head and pray right now that this comes together—this is the day!

Come on; let's go help a bunch of children!

*Patrick McDonald, a well known writer and speaker on children at risk, is the founding director of Viva Network and the Senior Associate for Children at Risk for the Lausanne Movement. He can be reached by emailing [pmdonald@viva.org](mailto:pmdonald@viva.org). ■*

## When Can I Go Home? Caring for China's Homeless Children

Huo Shui

**M**id-January in Zhengzhou, the temperature dipped to -7C after a snowstorm. Chuan, a 13-year-old boy from the far west province of Gansu, was rummaging through a trash bin in a corner inside the Zhengzhou train station. His face was covered in soot; he was wearing an ill-fitted, filthy cotton jacket, lightweight trousers and a pair of tattered tennis shoes. The previous night, he had stowed away on a coal car headed for Zhengzhou. Cold and starving, he searched frantically for anything edible. Alone in a strange city, without money and not knowing a soul, Chuan wondered aimlessly.

Chuan has no memory of his father who left home for work many years ago. Then, a few years ago, his mother divorced his father and Chuan went to live with his grandmother. When his grandmother died in the summer of 2003, Chuan

stroll among shoppers in bustling shopping centers, drift from quiet city parks to dark underpasses to all-night clubs and Internet cafes. At night, curled up in abandoned buildings, concrete cylinders, bridge arches or public rest-

**They fend for themselves**  
by begging, collecting trash, working  
as cheap labor or even committing  
petty crimes.

ran away and began his life on the street. A large nylon bag contained everything he owned. All his life, he had not known love from his parents or the fun of being a kid. Instead, two and a half years on the streets had taught him the harshness of life. He had heard that Zhengzhou, the capital of Henan Province, was the largest railroad hub in China and thought that perhaps his luck would take a better turn there.

Chuan's story is not unique. Homeless children from everywhere wander the streets of China's big cities including Beijing and Shanghai. Ragged and dirty, they roam about hectic train and bus sta-

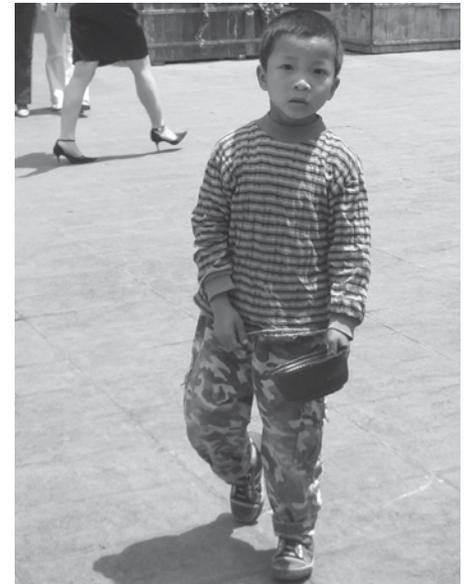
rooms, these children wrap themselves in plastic bags to keep warm. When hungry, they look for scraps of food in restaurant garbage containers. There are no adults looking after or protecting them. Basic health care and hygiene are nonexistent. Falling victim to scams or discrimination, being yelled at or chased away are all commonplace occurrences. They fend for themselves by begging, collecting trash, working as cheap labor or even committing petty crimes. In the shadow of skyscrapers, they barely survive. They are the "homeless children."

The term "homeless children" is controversial in itself as society still cannot

agree on its definition. According to a publication by UN Children's Fund in 1998, the Chinese government officially defines homeless children as, "Youth or children who are under the age of 18, have separated from the supervision of family members or guardians, have lived on the streets for more than 24 hours and are without basic living and safety conditions."

Based on this definition, the Chinese government statistics show that there are approximately 150,000 homeless children in China each year. However, according to experts on this subject, the actual number is much higher. Eighty-three percent of these children come from the rural countryside and seventeen percent are from towns and cities. The

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majority of them are between the ages of eight and fifteen. Most are illiterate or semi-literate.

The root causes for this social phenomenon are complex. Conventional wisdom generally recognizes four reasons that cause children to become homeless. First is economics. Currently in China there are 48 million people below poverty level. Lacking family income, many children of laid-off workers or poor farmers are forced out onto the streets. Sometimes even parents, along

with their children, become beggars to stay alive. Second are family issues. A large number of children become homeless after their parents' deaths, divorce or remarriage. For others it is family unconcern, abandonment or breakdown. Third is academics. There are children who leave home to escape the pressure, by parents and teachers, of obtaining good grades and the consequence of poor grades. Lastly there is abuse. Some children leave due to abuse at home while others are abandoned due to deformity of some kind. Statistics show that approximately 100,000 children are abandoned each year in China, the majority of them handicapped or girls. This number continues to rise.

Faced with the enormous challenge of properly caring for and educating homeless children, in the 1990s the Chinese government created the "Homeless Children Protection Center" with shelters nationwide. Ten metropolises were included in the initial phase of the program. By mid-2003 the number of centers had grown to 128. This growth shows that the problem of homeless children has captured the attention of the media, the general public and the government at all levels.

In 1992, the shelters in the city of Shanghai took in over 3,000 homeless children. From 1990 to August 1992, the city of Shenyang took in 1,600 children under the age of 16, the youngest being four years old. Another midsize city received 112 children in 1996 and 203 in 1998. The average number of children coming into shelters each month in Sichuan Province in 2003, 2004 and 2005 was 449, 970 and 1298 respectively. Those same years, shelters in Guangdong Province assisted 330, 626 and 853 children. The upward trend is widespread.

If you include those children who spend the day on the streets while their parents are at work, but who return home at night, the number of "homeless children" is well over 300,000. Of those who have actually received some kind of service from the shelters, about seventy percent, or 105,000, are boys; thirty percent, or 45,000, are girls. The vast majority of these children is either illiterate or has had only an elementary level education. They are from provinces such as Hunan, Sichuan, Henan, Shandong, Anhui, Guizhou, Guangxi, Yunnan and Xin-

jiang. Cities with influxes of children are Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Nanjing, Zhengzhou, Wuhan and Shenyang.

Only a fraction of all homeless children receive assistance. Over seventy percent choose to survive on their own. A Henan Province official says, "We can estimate the number of homeless children by the total number of cases we assist each year. On the average, we serve about 100,000 individuals annually, and about ten percent of them are children—or about 10,000."

Homeless children have almost become a class by themselves. Threat of death, disease and abuse as well as exposure to the elements day in and day out make them gaunt and emaciated. However, the impact of homelessness on their childhood is much more than physical. Their innocence is replaced by a survival instinct that operates regardless of laws or morals, and in time, they become a "bad element" of society, detested by other city dwellers. Alcohol, brawls, prostitution, theft and scams soon surround them—they are sheep who learned to be wolves and become a menacing social problem.

Statistics show that eighty-three percent of the homeless children in the city of Guangzhou have committed some type of petty crime. In another city, between March 2002 and October 2003, of all the homeless children who had gone through the system, seventy-five percent had committed theft, sixty-two percent regularly stole, and for forty-six percent stealing and mugging were the only means to obtain money. Not only their safety and well-being is in jeopardy, but the stability of the entire society is being jeopardized as well.

In March 1991, Premier Li Peng, speaking on behalf of the Chinese government, solemnly assured the rest of the world that "the Chinese government will make every effort to improve the living, safety and developmental condition of the Chinese children." Fifteen years have passed, and the problem of homeless Chinese children has increased and worsened. Presently, the 120 shelters across the country are only able to accommodate 70,000 children. The approximately 150,000 children on the streets far exceed the shelters' capacities.

In addition, shelters in all cities face serious funding shortages as well as crises in space, facilities and human resources.

The Chinese government has repeatedly held summits and called on administrations at all levels to fund more agencies and update existing ones. In spite of the intention of making government efforts more effective, real answers are hard to come by. One crucial error is that the government has monopolized the solution and has kept all private organizations out of the so-called "charity market." Vast private human and financial resources are systematically rejected. The Chinese government has always viewed nongovernmental and religious organizations with excessive suspicion and held them under strict control, not allowing them the freedom they require to be effective.

Nevertheless, this mode of total governmental control and monopoly is beginning to soften. After more than twenty years of reform, the Chinese government is gradually realizing that it must relinquish its power to the free market to give hope to the plight of homeless children. Government will be the manager rather than the provider of such services, promoting diversified funding channels. Currently, several children's charitable organizations outside China have obtained approval from the Chinese government to operate in China. Also, organizations and individuals outside China may partner with those inside to create a variety of programs. These partnerships can be with the government or private parties.

Since 1843, Catholic and Protestant churches have established numerous charities. Through nurturing, training and laboring they launched a new wave of child services in China. Their contribution in the effort to rescue homeless children in modern China cannot be overlooked. Today, foreign religious organizations are officially prohibited from operating as such in China. However, as China opens its door a little wider to the rest of the world, through unofficial and private parties, the impact outside charities can make in helping homeless Chinese children get off the streets can be enormous and far-reaching.

**Huo Shui** is a former government political analyst who writes from outside China. Translation is by Alice Loh. ■

## The 4/14 Window

### A Special Opportunity for Chinese Churches?

Dan B.

**“People Group” thinking was a significant concept from the first Lausanne Congress in 1974.** The “10/40 Window,” from Lausanne II in Manila, may have been the most important contribution of that gathering. Another “window”—what I call the “4/14 Window,”<sup>1</sup> is becoming a key focal point for the next quarter century.

The “4/14 Window” refers to children and young people between those ages. It is well documented<sup>2</sup> that most people who are going to make a decision to follow Christ sometime in their lifetimes, will do so before the age of 15—thus, the “4/14 Window.”<sup>3</sup> This new window lets in the light on the foundations for the future of the church.

While this topic is extremely sensitive in the context of China, many opportunities may be lost if we are not more sensitive to the potential of and the mandate for the church in China to care for needy children.

#### The People of the 4/14 Window

The category “children” is much too broad to fit the normal definition of a people group. However, if we do view the children of China as a people group, what can we learn? We find the following:

- **An enormous people group.** Current estimates suggest that the total population in China is about one billion three hundred thousand. Of these, according to the population reference bureau, some twenty-two percent, or 286 million, are under the age of fifteen.<sup>4</sup> This figure is approximately the same as the total estimated population of the U.S.

- **A suffering people group.** The people in the 4/14 Window are the most affected and vulnerable to every kind of disease and suffering. UNICEF data tells us that nearly 30,000 children die every day,<sup>5</sup> most from preventable causes. China does reasonably well in managing the “Under 5 Mortality Rate” (U5MR), ranking 93rd in the world, but its enormous population means that over 500,000 Chinese children die before reaching the age of five.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the stories of child neglect and the general lack of parenting skills, especially in the rural areas, means that many Chinese children are suffering.

- **An unwanted and victimized people group.** Many of the people of the 4/14 Window are un-

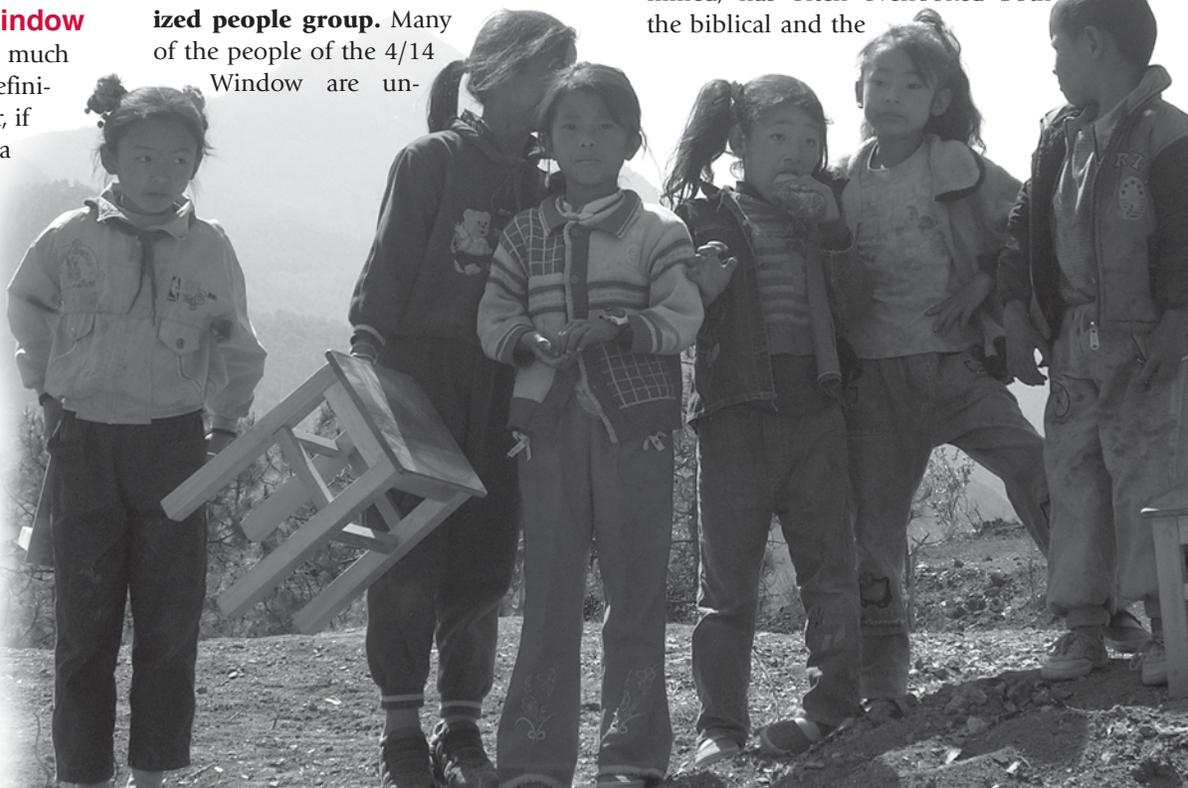
wanted. One indicator of this is the still appallingly high rates of abortion, especially in the so-called developed nations. Indeed, in China, abortion is not just an option for women but mandated by the One Child Policy established by Deng Xiaoping in 1979 to limit the country’s population growth.

Abortions are not the only result of this misguided policy. There is alarming evidence that the intense pressure on couples to make sure their only child is a boy has prompted a resurgence of female infanticide, despite official attempts to stamp out the centuries-old practice. In other cases, according to reports, girls are hidden from the authorities or die at a young age through neglect.<sup>7</sup>

- **A Receptive people group.** At the same time, children are also the most receptive population on earth. In the US, nearly eighty-five percent of people who make a decision for Christ do so between the ages of four and fourteen. There is a growing body of research which suggests that roughly this same receptiveness is true in populations outside of the US, including China.

#### Children “Outside the Door”

Children warrant holistic ministry to address both their spiritual and physical needs. The Chinese church, in a sensitive milieu, has often overlooked both the biblical and the



strategic importance of ministry to needy children. Again, while acknowledging the sensitivity of mentioning children in the context of China, there are possibilities which could be important for the growth and direction of the church.

Many churches in China do have programs for the spiritual nurture of the children in their churches. However, for many church leaders, the idea that the church has a responsibility to care for needy children outside its door is a very new idea. Workshops and training events are now being undertaken which challenge Chinese churches to understand the biblical significance of children as well as their strategic importance. In one of their discussions, since no Chinese character was found for “children at risk,” a Chinese symbol for children “outside the door” was adopted. Some Chinese church leaders are seeing exciting new possibilities for both church growth and outreach in China through strategies to do holistic ministry with children both inside and outside the door.

### Care for Children “Outside the Door” is Biblical— for All Churches

There is no question that such ministries are biblically sound. We see from Scripture that many of the same things we are concerned about today in China and elsewhere were problems in biblical times as well.

- **Seizure for debts.** The fatherless child is snatched from the breast; the infant of the poor is seized for a debt (Job 24:9).

- **Hunger and nakedness.** Lacking clothes, they spend the night naked; they have nothing to cover themselves in the cold (Job 24:7).

- **Trafficking and prostitution.** They cast lots for my people and traded boys for prostitutes; they sold girls for wine that they might drink (Joel 3:3).

- **Abuse.** They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name (Amos 2:7).

Though these things happened, and still happen to children, God is not silent. Throughout Scripture, we see that he is a defender of the orphans and the fatherless, and he expects his people to be the same.

### Ethics of Ministry in the “4/14 Window”

The prohibition in China against forcing children to believe in religion is widely construed to mean that it is still illegal to influence them religiously, and many churches are over-cautious in this area. But it does of course happen. There are, in fact, many Sunday Schools and other Christian ministries to children. Moreover it should and must happen. Ministry to children may be a remarkably effective way to find sensitive inroads into unreached communities and people groups.

A common argument among Chinese church leaders is that children are not

Mel Sletch



psychologically mature enough to make an informed decision or to choose their own religion. Hence, directing a child towards a particular religion is not ethically correct. However, this position is not scriptural. The biblical pattern of evangelism is to proclaim the gospel to everyone. No one is excluded.

Evangelism or providing Christian training to children of non-Christian parents is neither exploitative nor unethical. At the same time, we must be very clear about the particular sensitivities of ministry to children in China. It should go without saying that:

- Children should not be subjected to

religious teaching and training without the knowledge and consent of their parents.

- Children should not be baptized until the parents are also ready to be baptized, in order to ensure that the child has support and encouragement in his or her new faith.

- Where a commitment to Christ may involve ostracism, rejection, persecution or suffering, the consequences of a commitment to follow Christ must be clearly presented in a manner commensurate with the understanding and maturity level of the child.

### The One Child Policy— A Special Opportunity for Chinese Churches?

China’s One Child Policy was noted above as one of the ways in which children are victimized. Unfortunately, when one seriously examines the One Child Policy, it is clear that the problems already mentioned are not the only ones that have emerged. One acquaintance, who works in China, made the obvious point that the One Child Policy means that children today have no brothers and sisters. If the policy is continued for more than one generation, it also means that the child has no aunts or uncles, no cousins, nephews or nieces. In short, the policy totally destroys the extended family. The children have no relatives except their parents and living grandparents.

Nevertheless, this policy may provide significant ministry opportunities for Chinese churches. Today’s couples in China often prefer career success to children. Educated and economically better-off couples typically have either one child or no children. Since the third generation under the shadow of this policy is already being born, a very unique phenomenon has emerged: these little ones receive the full attention of six adults—their parents and four grandparents. This, coupled with families’ economic improvement, often produces children spoiled by material supply—but with a spiritual and mental emptiness. This may open the doors of opportunity for local churches to reach out to these children. For instance, churches can organize ministry to help build a correct value system among these children or to provide supplementary tuition to meet their academic needs. In demonstrating their love for the children, churches may

be able to win the confidence of the parents and win their hearts for Christ.

In the countryside, the dynamic is quite different but still presents the opportunity to reach out with the gospel. In remote places where agriculture remains the main economic activity and people are less educated, families often break the One Child Policy for reasons such as a lack of knowledge of contraception or the traditional cultural preference for boys. Breaking the policy will cause suffering for both the “non-first” children and their parents. The “non-first” born will not be entitled to any social benefits, such as free education. In general, as these families are poor, their children will rarely have the chance to go to school, and may also suffer from lack of access to proper medical treatment. The parents and the children are viewed as outcasts. However, this too presents special opportunities for the church. If churches are willing to love these children by caring for their practical needs, they will not only minister to these needy children but have a good chance to reach out to their families.

### Children as Resources for Their Parents

In this article, I have been careful not to suggest that the main reason for caring for children is to gain better access to their parents or other adults. Ministry to children as children is inherently valuable in and of itself. It is true that in many cases the Chinese children may be significant sources of, and resources for, Christian truths for their parents. While this should not be the only reason to reach out to children, it needn't be either illegitimate or manipulative.

Children, especially those in non-Christian contexts, are often influential in bringing their parents to Christ. They are often the first to understand the love of Jesus. They may be the ones who learn to pray for their parents. Since the children may be learning to read, while the parents are illiterate, the children may be the ones who are able to tell or read the stories of Jesus to their parents. Our programs are replete with stories of just those things happening. Countless parents testify that it was their children who first heard of Jesus and who influenced them to make a decision to follow Him.

### Let the Children Come

There is a tendency among Chinese church leaders to stereotype ministries to children saying either that it “can't be done, that ministry to children is not serious mission, or it is the work for the less able or creative church members.” In their enthusiasm for development of global evangelism strategies, Chinese Christians have at times acted as though we did not have time to wait for young Christians to mature into their place of leadership. This is shortsighted and dangerous.

Today's Chinese children are still tomorrow's Chinese leaders. Maturity in future Chinese Christian leadership requires strategic and sustained investments in the nurture of Chinese children today. The “4/14 Window,” so neglected by much of the Chinese church, may be a very effective way to further and enrich church growth, develop new Christian leadership and reach adults and unreached peoples.

#### Endnotes

1. The article “The 4/14 Window: Child Ministries and Mission Strategy” first appeared in the book *Children in Crisis: A New Commitment* edited by Phyllis Kilbourn, published by MARC, 1996.
2. See for example, George Barna, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions* (Ventura, California: Regal, 2003).
3. Just as the “10/40 Window” includes countries and peoples outside of those geographical markers, so the “4/14 Window” should be seen as referring to children and young people under the age of 18.
4. Population Reference Bureau, [www.prb.org/datafind/prjprbdata/wcprbdata6.asp?DW=DR&SL=&SA=1](http://www.prb.org/datafind/prjprbdata/wcprbdata6.asp?DW=DR&SL=&SA=1)
5. UNICEF, State of the World's Children, 2006 Statistical Tables.
6. UNICEF, State of the World's Children, [www.unicef.org/infobycountry/china\\_statistics.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/china_statistics.html)
7. McCurry, Justin and Rebecca Allison, “The Guardian,” London, Tuesday, Mar 23, 2004, quoted in *The Taipei Times*, [www.taipetimes.com/News/editorials/archives/2004/03/23/2003107449](http://www.taipetimes.com/News/editorials/archives/2004/03/23/2003107449)

**Dan B.**, Doctor of Missiology, has worked for some 30 years in various roles for agencies involved in holistic child and family development. He has written and taught widely promoting and managing child development programs, and has been involved in planning and monitoring child and family development or relief projects in more than 50 countries. ■

### Children: At the Heart of Mission

continued from page 14

ers where children are in churches and asks why they are strategic, what children themselves contribute and what more they could contribute.

Finally, the whole gospel considers “Love in action, not just words.” The authors claim: “Where children suffer and are abused, godly mandates are systematically broken and ignored. To be very blunt, when Christians fail to reach out to hurting children, either by omission or commission, their Christian faith must be suspect” (p. 11). This section works through biblical ideas with some helpful references and quotes. In fact, the whole document is meticulously and comprehensively referenced, a resource in itself.

So, why do we need to read *Children—the Great Omission?* I think there are two critical reasons for understanding our calling and furthering our work.

First, we need it so that we will deliberately include China's children in our strategic thinking. Of China's population, 27%, a massive 358,887,000 are children. Of the general population, 17% live on incomes of US\$1 per day (UNICEF, State of the World's Children, 2006). These are huge numbers betraying significant social needs. Our concern for the individual children behind these numbers gives credibility to our witness and also testifies to our likeness to the God who is best pleased to be called “Father.”

Second, reading this will assist us in explaining to our supporters, potential partners and workers why holistic outreach to children is essential. For years, agencies have used pictures of children to tug at people's heartstrings—and not always in appropriate ways. Brewster and McDonald give us, in strategic terms, a theological, missiological and sociological rationale so we can explain why we need to put children back into the heart of mission.

**Ian A.** is a social worker who works with Viva Network. In addition to *Children—the Great Omission?* a helpful video presentation and other useful materials can be downloaded free of charge from [www.viva.org/lausanne](http://www.viva.org/lausanne). ■

## Children: At the Heart of Mission

*Children—the Great Omission?* by Dan Brewster and Patrick McDonald. Viva Network, 2004. May be downloaded from [www.viva.org/lausanne](http://www.viva.org/lausanne) without charge.

Reviewed by Ian A.

“As Christians seek to demonstrate the love of Christ to a skeptical, cynical world, there is no better focus to have than children” (p. 11).

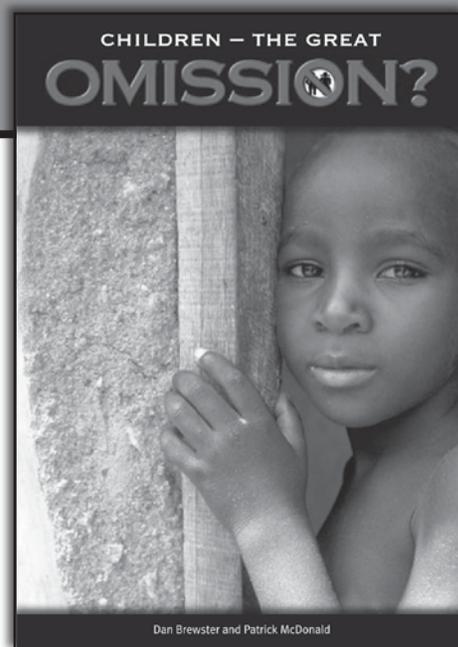
Nevertheless, the Victorian saying, “Children are to be seen and not heard” too often resonates with churches and Christian agencies around the world. According to Dan Brewster and Patrick McDonald, only 15% of Christian giving goes to children. Since that includes our “own” children, who, if United Kingdom

risk themselves. Their roles with Compassion International and Viva Network respectively force them to consider these issues daily.

Out of their experience, they state boldly and baldly: “We believe that children and young people should be the single greatest priority for Christian work in the coming decade” (p. 3).

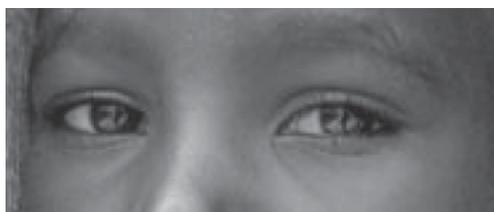
“Christians are commanded to reveal the love of Christ to a hurting world and no group of people is hurting more than children. Their needs are enormous, their numbers are exploding and their age group could not be more strategic—spiritually, biologically and educationally. They are the future.

“If we cannot demonstrate the love of God to children dying on our doorstep, what kind of gospel do we proclaim? Our credibility as messengers is at stake.



cious and valuable in God's sight, being significant individuals before him now. They need—depend upon—investment in their lives so that they can grow to reach their God-given potentials.

This helpful booklet was first written for the 2004 Lausanne conference, commissioned by international Christian agencies concerned for children, including those at risk. In the intervening 18 months since that conference, it has proven very helpful for many who need a clear and concise understanding of chil-



**“Where children suffer and are abused, godly mandates are systematically broken and ignored.”**

statistics are any guide, would take most of that, it leaves maybe 8% of the funds for the 92% of children growing up in the developing world.

*Children—the Great Omission?* is a timely and helpful overview of what Christian responses to children and children at risk need to be. Dan Brewster and Patrick McDonald (the first a valued colleague, the second my boss) write out of over 40 years experience working with and for children at risk. They have covered most of the globe, talking to and hearing from Christian and secular leaders, children's workers and children at

Love is selfless in nature; we need to help children regardless of what they might do for us” (p. 3).

Brewster and McDonald tread carefully the fine line between three different, and sometimes competing, adult agendas: first, the agenda that seeks to see as many children “saved” as possible; second, that which longs to provide temporal hope to hurting children ranging from adequate nutrition to loving parenting; and third, that which sees children as investments for the future. Somewhere in the middle of these three they point to the truth—children are pre-

dren for strategic Christian thinking and planning.

The book is structured around three headings: the whole world, the whole church, and the whole gospel. The whole world presents helpful statistics to understand what issues are facing children today, from the “consumerization” of children to the still remaining rampant malnutrition and lack of clean water. It also addresses the consideration of children developing into their adulthoods while the “clay is still soft.”

The whole church section consid-

Continued on page 13

# Resource Corner

## The Story of Jesus for Children

Americas-Pacific Edition

A 62-minute DVD in Cantonese and Mandarin



Based on the biblical book of Luke, this DVD follows the fictional account of a group of children who lived in A.D. 30, the approximate date of the crucifixion and death of Jesus. It answers questions in

clear and concrete terms, provides fast action and ends with an invitation for children to choose to invite Jesus into their lives.

In addition to Cantonese and Mandarin, this DVD edition contains the story in six other languages and offers subtitles in both English and Spanish.

**Cost: \$12.95**

**To order the Americas-Pacific Edition:** visit [www.jesusforchildren.org](http://www.jesusforchildren.org). (Other languages are also available on the Americas-Atlantic version. See the web site.)

“[My son’s] heart was really touched by the video and after watching it he asked Jesus into his heart— watching the video enabled my son to visualize what Jesus actually did for us and ask him into his heart.”

—a parent

## Intercessory Notes

### Please pray...

1. That Christians would understand the importance of **reaching China’s children** and become active in some aspect of working towards that end.
2. For **workers willing to commit to serve** for the long-term in the difficult areas of WAVE 2 (See article, p. 1).
3. For **Chinese “champions”** who, working with Western volunteers, will be able to open doors into Chinese culture and communities.
4. For the **children and their families** affected by AIDS. Pray that churches would see their responsibility to them and reach out in love with activities to help them.
5. For **China’s street children** and the agencies currently serving them. Pray that additional organizations will be formed so that a greater number of these children might be served.
6. That the **parents of China’s children**, living in difficult and changing times, will make wise choices, love their children, teach them good values and turn to Christ so that their children, in turn, will learn of Christ.



# China Perspective

Brent Fullton, Editor

## Twice Forgotten

The widening gap between rich and poor that has emerged as a prominent feature of China's rapid but uneven economic development has been the topic of much discussion both inside and outside China. Less obvious, however, have been the millions of children who have fallen into this chasm and now constitute a particularly needy yet forgotten segment of society.

For Christians serving in China, these "children outside the door" have been largely forgotten as well. On the one hand, it is difficult to ignore the disheveled migrant girl begging from patrons at a sidewalk café or the boy with an obvious physical disability obstructing pedestrian traffic on a busy street corner. The needs are glaringly obvious. Yet over time, these children blend into the urban landscape to the point that they become invisible to those going about their busy lives, who, if they did stop to notice, would not know where to even be-

gin thinking about how to bring change to these young lives.

The pages of this issue of *ChinaSource* chronicle the seemingly overwhelming needs of these children, whether they be orphaned by AIDS, challenged by a physical disability, scarred by abuse, abandoned or simply neglected. The obstacles standing in the way of meeting these needs are similarly overwhelming.

At the most basic level is a lack of awareness, exacerbated by a system that punishes those who bring social problems to light and rewards those who cover them up. Related is the question of who is responsible and a tradition—including in the church—of not getting involved in the needs of those outside one's own network of relationships. Economic pressures mitigate against parents fulfilling their primary care giving and nurturing roles, and an incomplete legal system offers little protection to children at risk. Finally, there is the centuries-old stigma that surrounds disability (and, today,

HIV/AIDS), creating an invisible barrier between the concern of society and those who need it the most.

Add to these the staggering price tag of actually providing the services that these children need, and it is not surprising that many in the Christian community who do want to help despair at knowing how they can make a difference. As individuals it is easy to become overwhelmed by a feeling of helplessness in the face of so many obstacles. However, by working together as the hands and feet of Jesus, there is much that can be done.

This issue of *ChinaSource* is a joint project of several individuals who have dared to get involved and who are making a difference, both in the lives of children in China and in the society in which these children live. Through their efforts and the work of others like them, the lives of the forgotten have become a tablet upon which God is writing the stories of His grace. A coalition is being formed of likeminded servants who are committed to seeing this hope spread to children at risk across China. Together we invite your partnership. How will you respond? Let us hear from you.

**Brent Fullton, Ph.D.,** is the president of *ChinaSource* and the editor of the *ChinaSource* journal. ■

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