

ASPIRATIONAL MIGRATION: THE CASE OF CHINESE BIRTH TOURISM IN  
THE U.S.

by

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

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The ways in which individuals navigate the globe today complicates previous conceptualizations of migration and mobility. Once such mode of contemporary movement which challenges scholars is known as "birth tourism." This research considers birth tourism to be a form of "lifestyle migration," which I label *aspirational migration*. By analyzing the motivations which drive many parents to give birth abroad, I shed light on the complex and risky process, which involves a host of players, including family, friends, and a global birth tourism infrastructure. Through this drawn-out process, which begins well before the decision to give birth abroad and continues into the distant future, I argue that birth tourists and their foreign-born children *become* aspirational migrants and acquire cosmopolitan capital.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

In Hong Kong, 2012 New Year's Day began with the most unlikely of scenes as 1,500 protesters took to the busy streets, many of whom were pregnant or pushing strollers.<sup>1</sup> One pregnant woman held a sign which read, "fix immigration policy loopholes now."<sup>2</sup> In the final weeks of 2012, on the other side of the Pacific Ocean, a group of 70 concerned residents in a southern California residential neighborhood stood at an intersection holding signs that declared, "Not in Chino Hills."<sup>3</sup> Although there were no reported pregnant participants on the streets of California, the protests in both regions were directed at an industry which had sprouted around them. That industry is called "birth tourism," and the source of the protests on both continents was pregnant mainland Chinese women seeking to give their child the birthright gift of "premium citizenships."<sup>4</sup>

Since the 19th century the transnational movement of ethnic Chinese has forced nations of the global north to re-evaluate notions of citizenship and ask an essential question: who is deserving of citizenship? At the height of the anti-Chinese movement, the 1898 landmark Supreme Court case *United States v. Wong Kim Ark* established the key interpretation of the Fourteenth Amendment which has served as the basis of

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<sup>1</sup> AFP News, "Hong Kong women protest against mainland mothers," Asia One, January 15, 2012, <http://www.asiaone.com/print/News/AsiaOne%2BNews/Asia/Story/A1Story20120115-321996.html> (accessed May 31, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> AFP News, January 15, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Jim Steinberg, "70 Protest Alleged 'Maternal Hotel' in Chino Hills, San Bernardino Sun, December 1, 2012,). <http://www.amren.com/news/2012/12/70-protest-alleged-maternal-hotel-in-chino-hills/> (accessed May 31, 2016)

<sup>4</sup> Manuela Boatcă coined the concept "premium citizenships" to illustrate valuable citizenships which provide more resources and privileges to citizens. The number of nations, which permit visa-free travel with the document, usually gauges these privileges. (Manuela Boatcă, "Commodification of citizenship: Global inequalities and the modern transmission of property," *Overcoming Global Inequalities*, Boulder, CO: Paradigm (2014): 3-18.)

birthright citizenship in the United States for over a century.<sup>5</sup> Although challenges have been made to the interpretation established in the case, *jus soli* (law of the soil) remains the law of the land in the United States today. In other parts of the world, *jus soli* is being rapidly altered to align with the principle of *jus sanguinis* (law of blood), in which citizenship is granted based on the nationality of one's parents. From Ireland in 2000 to Hong Kong in 2012, sojourning fetuses have led to exclusive reinterpretations of *jus soli* laws.<sup>6</sup> Today Canada and the United States remain the only nations of the global north that still adhere to *jus soli*.<sup>7</sup>

The 2012 Chino Hills incident was not the first time "birth tourism" had made the news in the U.S., nor was it the last. Earlier popular press reports showed instances of birth tourism from South Korea, Turkey, and China.<sup>8</sup> Possibly due to the large influx of mainland Chinese birth tourists, or perhaps due to the industry's visibility (since Chinese

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<sup>5</sup> H. G. Phan, "Imagined Territories: Comparative Racialization and the Accident of History in Wong Kim Ark," *Genre* 39, no. 3 (2006): 21-38.

<sup>6</sup> After the highly publicized 2000 case of a Chinese woman who successfully secured birthright citizenship for her child in Ireland, a movement emerged there to end the perceived "loophole" in citizenship laws, culminating in a 2004 referendum which abandoned the constitutional right of birthright citizenship to children of non-citizens. Similarly, in 2012 after an explosion in Mainland birth tourism, Chief-executive elect Leung Chun-ying proposed and passed a zero-quota policy which prohibited Mainland Chinese women from giving birth in Hong Kong (Eithne Luibhéid, *Pregnant on Arrival*, University of Minnesota Press, 2013, 164-5. J. M. Mancini and Finlay Graham, "Citizenship Matters": Lessons from the Irish Citizenship Referendum," *American Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (2008): 575-99. Yang & Li, "Transformation of Cross-boundary Governance in the Greater Pearl River Delta, China: Contested Geopolitics and Emerging Conflicts," *Habitat International* 40 (2013): 25-34.)

<sup>7</sup> Countries that have altered or abolished *jus soli* since the 1980s include the U.K., France, India, Portugal, Australia and New Zealand. According to Caroline Sawyer, changes to New Zealand's citizenship laws have also been linked to Chinese nationals, specifically reflected in the Supreme Court Ding and Ye cases. (Caroline Sawyer, "The loss of birthright citizenship in New Zealand," *Victoria U. Wellington L. Rev.* 44 (2013): 653.)

<sup>8</sup> Barbara Demick, "The Baby Registry of Choice, *Los Angeles Times*, May 25, 2002, <http://articles.latimes.com/2002/may/25/world/fg-birth25> (accessed May 22, 2017). Devin Dwyer, "A New Baby Boom? Foreign 'Birth Tourists' Seek U.S. Citizenship for Children, *ABC News*, April 14, 2010, <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/birth-tourism-industry-markets-us-citizenship-abroad/story?id=10359956> (accessed May 24, 2017). Jennifer Medina, "Arriving as pregnant tourists, leaving with American babies," *The New York Times*, March 28, 2011, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/29/us/29babies.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/29/us/29babies.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0) (accessed May 31, 2016).

maternity wards--termed "month centers"--<sup>9</sup> were often established in residential neighborhoods rather than high-traffic city centers), it was instances of Chinese birth tourism, however, which attracted the most public scrutiny. As protesters picketed in front of month centers, authorities in Arcadia, California began issuing safety and zoning violations; by May, 2013 some month centers had been shut down.<sup>10</sup> A series of raids on March 3, 2015 by Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in the Los Angeles area<sup>11</sup> helped catapult the issue of birth tourism and the resultant "anchor babies" controversy into the headlines during the 2016 presidential election cycle.<sup>12</sup>

The term "anchor baby," or its analog "anchor child," is thought to have been first used to refer to the case of Vietnamese families who put their children on boats hoping that they would resettle in the U.S. or Canada, where they could eventually apply for family reunification.<sup>13</sup> In the U.S., the term anchor baby is generally understood to be pejorative and racist,<sup>14,15</sup> and is frequently understood to refer to southern border crossers, typically pregnant women from Latin-American countries who cross the border hoping to

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<sup>9</sup>Month centers are facilities that cater to Chinese women who observe the traditional postpartum recovery tradition known as doing (or sitting) the month.

<sup>10</sup> June Chang, "Birth Tourists: Going for the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment," *China Daily*, May 17, 2013, [http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2013-05/17/content\\_16506471.htm](http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2013-05/17/content_16506471.htm) (accessed on May 31, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> Victoria Kim and Frank Shyong, "Maternity Tourism Raids Target California Operation Catering to Chinese," *Los Angeles Times*, March 3, 2015, <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-birth-tourism-schemes-raids-20150303-story.html> (accessed May 20, 2017).

<sup>12</sup> Carrie Dann, "Jeb Bush: Anchor Babies are Frankly, More Asian People," *NBC News*, August 4, 2015, <http://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2016-election/jeb-bush-chill-out-criticism-anchor-baby-term-n415051> (accessed May 25, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> Gabe Ignatow and Alexander T. Williams, "New media and the 'anchor baby' boom," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 17, no. 1 (2011): 60-76.

<sup>14</sup>One study that tracked the prevalence of the term anchor baby in cyberspace shows a clear increase in the term's usage, increasing on Google from 10 hits in 2000 to 436,000 in 2010. The news database Access World shows only one newspaper article using the term in 2000, 99 in 2005, and 502 in 2010. In 2010 "anchor baby" took the number six spot in *Time's* list of top ten buzzwords of the year (Gabe and Williams, 2011. Alexandra Silver, "Top Ten Buzzwords," *Time Magazine*, December 9, 2010, [http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2035319\\_2034745\\_2034740,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2035319_2034745_2034740,00.html) (accessed May 15, 2017).)

<sup>15</sup> Jenny Lederer, "'Anchor Baby': A Conceptual Explanation for Pejoration," *Journal of Pragmatics* 57 (2013): 248-66.

ensure citizenship for their child and themselves. Opponents of the phenomenon argue that anchor babies are a burden on the state.<sup>16</sup> Proponents argue that in most cases, parents are not actually trying to "anchor" themselves to the nation.<sup>17</sup> Proponents further argue that most parents have been in the nation for many years before giving birth and they cite the difficult process of citizenship sponsorship, which can only occur after the American-born child turns 21 years old and successfully passes a long list of bureaucratic hurdles--including financial requirements and health and criminal checks.<sup>18</sup>

However, what of "birth tourists," who rather than crossing the southern border "illegally," typically fly in from destinations around the world. Who are these individuals and what drives them to embark on such a journey? Although documented cases of parents trying to "game the system" exists,<sup>19</sup> generally speaking these individuals are economically advantaged and ready to flaunt their spending power. They come from Turkey, South Korea, Nigeria, and Russia--just to name a few nations--and aside from temporal, cultural, and political differences, the push and pull factors cited by media and the birth tourists themselves often have more similarities than differences, particularly the forces pulling them to the U.S.

For example, dodging compulsory military service is frequently cited for Taiwanese and South Korean birth tourists.<sup>20</sup> Escaping the fierce education environment

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<sup>16</sup> Andy J. Semotiuk, "The Citizenship and Immigration Problems of Anchor Babies and Surrogacy," *Forbes*, October 5, 2016, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/andyjsemotiuk/2016/10/05/the-citizenship-and-immigration-problems-of-anchor-babies-and-surrogacy/#5dd7fac955b3> (accessed May 24, 2017).

<sup>17</sup> Mariana E. Ormonde, "Debunking the Myth of the Anchor Baby: Why Proposed Legislation Limiting Birthright Citizenship is Not a Means of Controlling Unauthorized Immigration," *Roger Williams UL Rev.* 17 (2012): 861.

<sup>18</sup>Ormonde, 2012, 861.

<sup>19</sup>The L.A. raids led to the discovery of instances of fraud. For example, one family paid a fraction of their nearly \$30,000 hospital bill while having purchased Louis Vuitton and Rolex products during their stay (Winter 2015).

<sup>20</sup> Roxana Kopetman, "Why Do Chinese Mothers Look to Southern California, specifically Irvine, for Birth

is also a commonly stated motivation. Economic and political instability have been mentioned by Turkish<sup>21</sup> and Mainland Chinese citizens. Relatively unique to China, pollution and the one-child policy have been referenced as common push factors. But regardless of these particular domestic issues, the allure of U.S. citizenship is usually expressed in the media as access to cheaper and better education and health care. Also pointed out are the mobility possibilities for the foreign-born child and parents in the future. Although some instances speak of parents hoping to settle down in the United States--and in fact several eventually do--for the vast majority of birth tourism cases, the question must be asked: do parents really want to "anchor" themselves to the United States through a child whom will, in most cases, grow up abroad? After all, what does it even mean to "anchor" oneself to a nation in an increasingly mobile world? Are birth tourists anchoring themselves to something greater, such as an imagined lifestyle that may be possible independent of locality?

In attempts to better understand this phenomenon, I interviewed ten Chinese birth tourists who were living in China with their U.S. children during the summer of 2016. While migration, and many of the concerns mentioned above, were recurring themes for respondents, several other stated motivations rose to the surface, akin to what Nicholas Van Hear refers to as "mixed-migration" motivations.<sup>22</sup> My respondents' stories suggest that the case of Chinese birth tourism is much more complicated than the anchor baby

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Tourism? It's more than Just Baby's U.S. citizenship," *The Orange County Register*, March 10, 2015, <http://www.ocregister.com/2015/03/10/why-do-chinese-mothers-look-to-southern-california-specifically-irvine-for-birth-tourism-its-more-than-just-babys-us-citizenship/>. Joo-hee Lee, "Pardon Our Anchor Babies," *The Korea Herald*, September 2, 2015, <http://www.koreahealrd.com/view.php?ud=20150902001138>.

<sup>21</sup> Evren Balta and Özlem Altan-Olcay, "Class and Passports: Transnational Strategies of Distinction in Turkey," *Sociology* 50, no. 6 (2015): 1106-1122.

<sup>22</sup> Nicholas Van Hear, "Theories of Migration and Social Change," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36, no. 10 (2010): 1532-6.

argument suggests. The motivations of parents and the process involved in successfully giving birth abroad clearly transcend the politicized and often racialized debates surrounding the phenomenon. If giving birth in the U.S. is in fact intended to anchor the family to the country, it is merely a secondary motivation.

Research on birth tourism has only just begun, with the earliest articles published in 2015. So far scholars have analyzed cases of Chinese and Turkish birth tourism to the United States, as well as Chinese birth tourism to Hong Kong. Some have focused specifically on the rhetorical responses of host countries regarding the increasing visibility of incidents, keying in on racism and violence<sup>23</sup> and cultural superiority and ethnocentrism.<sup>24</sup> Others have focused on the individual motivations and agency of birth tourists, arguing that birth tourism is a new capital accumulation and class distinction strategy,<sup>25</sup> a means of gaining the privilege of 'valuable' citizenship<sup>26</sup> and a method (in the case of Chinese birth tourists to Hong Kong) to exempt families from the one-child policy and gain an "identity" for their child.<sup>27</sup>

Less well understood is the complex, expensive and risky process of successfully giving birth across the globe, the infrastructure in place which encourages and facilitates movement, and the obstacles parents and children face upon their return home. Furthermore, previous studies neglect to engage birth tourism with the migration literature and categorize the phenomenon as a specific type of migration. Through an

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<sup>23</sup> S. H. Wang, "Fetal Citizens? Birthright Citizenship, Reproductive Futurism and the "panic" over Chinese Birth Tourism in Southern California," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 2016.

<sup>24</sup> Sys Yam, "Affective Economies and Alienizing Discourse: Citizenship and Maternity Tourism in Hong Kong," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 45, no. 5 (2016): 410-33.

<sup>25</sup> Balta and Altan-Olcay, 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Evren Balta and Özlem Altan-Olcay, "Strategic Citizens of America: Transnational Inequalities and Transformation of Citizenship," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39, no. 6 (2016): 939-57.

<sup>27</sup> Xiyuan Li, "Seeking identity: the transborder lives of mainland Chinese families with children born in Hong Kong," *Global Networks* 16, no. 4 (October 2016): 437-52.

analysis of the reasons couples decide to give birth abroad I reveal the social process of decision-making that involves engagement of a variety of communities, brokers, and aspirations. I argue that birth tourism is in fact a form of migration, similar to "lifestyle migration,"<sup>28</sup> which I term *aspirational migration*.

Borrowing from Howard Becker's notion of *becoming*,<sup>29</sup> which he coined to illustrate the complex process of becoming a marihuana user in which "others point out new aspects of his experience to him, present him with new interpretations of events, and help him achieve a new conceptual organization of his world, without which the new behavior is not possible,"<sup>30</sup> I analyze how individuals are socialized into *becoming* aspirational migrants as they encounter media accounts, friends who have given birth abroad, a burgeoning birth tourism industry, and the ever changing policies and regulations of multiple nation states. I argue that through this labyrinthine maze of decision-making, border crossing, and upbringing options, parents take on a new identity and elevated class status through the accumulation of cosmopolitan capital.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Benson and O'Reilly, 2009.

<sup>29</sup>I recognize that using a term derived from a study of illicit drug use may risk casting birth tourism in a negative light. It must be stated that this is not my intention. Becker's analysis was instrumental in complicating the view that marihuana use occurred due to a "predisposition." It illustrated the process in which a behavior emerges through a social process that includes various social ingredients that transcend the individual. Likewise, my analysis presents the process of *becoming* a birth tourist and the various players involved along the way in helping individuals conceive of, carry out, and constantly create new pathways to cosmopolitan capital. The fact that both activities exist in a legal gray area in the United States is merely coincidence.

<sup>30</sup> Howard S. Becker, "Becoming a Marihuana User," *American Journal of Sociology* 59, no. 3 (1953): 235-42.

<sup>31</sup> Eileen M. Otis, "Bridgework," *Gender and Society* 30, no. 6 (2016): 912-34.



## CHAPTER II

### CITIZENSHIP REGIMES: THE BREEDING GROUND FOR BIRTH TOURISM

The increasing prevalence of birth tourism and the national responses to this unique form of movement has highlighted the precarious nature of citizenship and citizenship acquisition in the 21st century. When British sociologist T.H. Marshall first defined citizenship as inclusion in a shared community which offers to its members a set of rights and duties, he enumerated three distinct rights: civil, political, and social.<sup>32</sup> Marshall believed that each right developed in a specific chronological order relevant to the political and social progression of the Western world.<sup>33</sup> More recently, Marshall's conceptualization of citizenship has come under attack for its narrow focus on white men living in Western societies. Of the various scholars who have tried to envision a framework which reflects the multiple realities of citizenship, leading citizenship scholar Engin Isin's description of citizenship as "both a set of practices (cultural, symbolic, and economic) and a bundle of rights and duties (civil, political and social) that defines an individual's membership in a polity"<sup>34</sup> seems to have gained wide acceptance, particularly for its focus on practices.

Aihwa Ong's seminal work *Flexible Citizenship* illustrated some of these practices--the strategies of mobile subjects who respond fluidly and opportunistically to market conditions across borders.<sup>35</sup> Ong's work illustrates the way in which nation states attempt to attract capital and talent and also focuses on the cultural and social practices of

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<sup>32</sup> Thomas H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class*, Vol. 11, Cambridge, 1950.

<sup>33</sup> Engin Isin and Bryan Turner, "Investigating Citizenship: An Agenda for Citizenship Studies," *Citizenship Studies* 11, no. 1 (2007): 5-17, 7.

<sup>34</sup> Engin F. Isin and Patricia K. Wood, *Citizenship and identity*, London, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999.

<sup>35</sup> Aihwa, Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1999.

Asia's elites who acquire an assortment of passports to reap the benefits of multiple nation-states for themselves and their families. Her work essentially depicts a new type of global citizen who navigates the world and exists as a dual or multiple citizen. In addition to "flexible citizenship," scholars also put forth a notion of "global citizenship" in attempts to describe the increasing mobility of transnational actors. However, Bryan Turner argues that concepts such as "global citizenship" and "flexible citizenship" are misleading because they overlook the reality that "citizenship can only function in the context of the nation state."<sup>36</sup> Isin and Turner find it highly unlikely that citizenship will become global because "a citizen exists originally within the political confines of a state, and until a genuinely global state exists that has sovereign powers to impose its will, it is misleading to talk about a 'global citizen'."<sup>37</sup> The authors argue further that the concept of "global citizenship" needs to be distinguished from "cosmopolitan citizenship."<sup>38</sup> To Isin and Turner, the "right to the cosmopolis" is intimately linked with the concerns of crossing or interacting across borders (the right to residence, the right to enter a country, and the right to hold a passport, etc) and could be summarized as the "right to mobility" and "right to transaction."<sup>39</sup>

While debates continue as to whether "flexible citizenship" or "global citizenship" are adequate terms to capture the current realities of citizenship, Ong's later works accurately highlight its increasing de-territorialization. That is, "elements of citizenship (rights, entitlements, etc) are becoming disarticulated from each other, and becoming re-

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<sup>36</sup> Bryan S. Turner, "We Are All Denizens Now: On the Erosion of Citizenship," *Citizenship Studies* 20, no. 6-7 (2016): 679-92.

<sup>37</sup> Isin and Turner, 2007.

<sup>38</sup> Isin and Turner, 2007, 14.

<sup>39</sup> Isin and Turner, 2007, 14.

articulated with universalizing criteria of neo-liberalism and human rights.”<sup>40</sup> Ong was referring to the establishment of certain sites, for example nation states, where the pursuit of human capital has crafted a system in which the rights and entitlements previously reserved for citizens are altered in such a way so that entrepreneurial expatriates are able to share those rights and benefits, thus making the distinction between those with and without citizenship less distinct.<sup>41</sup>

Although Ong's argument primarily refers to wealthy transnational elites engaged in business, this conceptualization applies to other modes of mobility--specifically the aspirations of birth tourists. Returning to Turner's notions of the right to the cosmopolis, universal ideals such as the right to cross borders and the right to reside abroad are generally uncontested ideals. It is the fact that certain actors, typically wealthy or middle-class individuals from the global south, are able to mobilize resources gained from privileged positions in their home country to take advantage of global citizenship inequalities that emerges as a hotly contested issue in both the home country and host country. It is this geographic mobility that ensures class mobility and creates an avenue to cosmopolitan citizenship.

It is exactly this separation of rights and responsibilities that is alluring to potential birth tourists and problematic to opponents in host countries. Essentially, as illustrated with the case of Turkish birth tourists, second or dual citizenship serves the function of "disaggregating rights and responsibilities, to enhance opportunities and minimize obligations.”<sup>42</sup> As cited in the introduction, South Korean birth tourists often

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<sup>40</sup>Aihwa Ong, "Mutations in Citizenship," *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, no. 2,3 (2006) 499-505.

<sup>41</sup> Ong, 2006.

<sup>42</sup>Balta and Altan-Olcay, 2016.

point to dodging compulsory military service with their child's American citizenship.<sup>43</sup> A similar phenomenon has occurred with Taiwanese nationals who reside abroad and return to Taiwan to receive government subsidized healthcare treatment.<sup>44</sup> Thus, the case of mobile individuals in transnational spaces illustrates the reality that while citizenship practices and responsibilities have moved beyond the nation, rights and privileges are still entangled within individual nation states. In creating a new elite of the global south, the phenomenon has widened inequality across the globe.

The very way in which citizenship has traditionally been transferred illustrates the innate inequality of citizenship regimes. That is, for the vast majority of individuals, citizenship is granted by birthright. With the exception of *jus domicili*, in which a person acquires citizenship by naturalization outside of his country of birth,<sup>45</sup> all modern nation states limit access to resources through the birthright principles of *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis*.<sup>46</sup> Roger Brubaker's *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* explores both of these citizenship transmission models: France's *jus soli* and Germany's *jus sanguinis*. Brubaker argues that the way in which nations grant citizenship and understand the concept of citizenship is linked to its unique and particular history. Through his focus on the "civic" (*jus soli*) and "ethnic" (*jus sanguinis*) conceptualizations of citizenship in France and Germany, Brubaker illustrates how *jus sanguinis* in Germany created foreigners while the policy of *jus soli* in France assisted in assimilating would-be foreigners, essentially creating a more equal citizenship apparatus.<sup>47</sup> Beyond the

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<sup>43</sup>Demick, 2002.

<sup>44</sup> Tyler Grant, "Made in America: Medical Tourism and Birth Tourism Leading to a Larger Base of Transient Citizenship," *Va J. Soc. Pol'y & L.* 22 (2015): 159.

<sup>45</sup>Engin Isin, "Citizenship in Flux: The Figure of the activist Citizen," *Subjectivity* 29 (2009): 367-88.

<sup>46</sup>Boatcă, 2014, 10.

<sup>47</sup> Roger Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992.

domesticated notions of citizenship, Brubaker's analysis was critical in that it conceptualized citizenship beyond the confines of the nation-state, not as a voluntary association, as previously argued, but as an "ascribed status."<sup>48</sup> Additionally, it illustrated how the modern nation-state uses the institution of citizenship to enforce "social closure" on the global level and "shield[ing] prosperous states from the migrant poor."<sup>49</sup>

Legal scholar Ayelet Shachar continued where Brubaker's thesis left off to argue that the intergenerational transfer of citizenship resembles the mode of property transfer on a global scale. In the same way that property regimes ensure the transmission of scarce land resources, the inheritance of citizenship at birth ensures the transmission of the limited resources provided through citizenship.<sup>50</sup> Because citizenship is a status assigned at birth, citizenship not only maintains global inequalities, but reproduces them in the postcolonial present.<sup>51</sup> That is to say that in both the nation-state and in the world as a whole, the institution of citizenship protects the social and political inclusion of Western European nation-states while excluding the colonized and non-European populations of the same rights. Since birthright citizenship has led to the creation of inequality between core and periphery, migration to wealthy areas is the "single most immediate and effective means of global social mobility."<sup>52</sup> It is when viewing citizenship through the racist colonial past that the commonalities between various birth tourist sending nations -- Turkey, South Korea, and Nigeria, for example--all become evident. These nations are not within the Euro-American framework, and generally speaking, the bodies arriving

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<sup>48</sup>Boatcă, 2015, 186.

<sup>49</sup>Boatcă, 2015, 185.

<sup>50</sup>Ayelet Shachar, *The Birthright Lottery: Citizenship and Global Inequality*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009.

<sup>51</sup> Manuela Boatcă, *Global Inequalities beyond Occidentalism, Global Connections*, Farnham, Surrey, England; Burlington, VT, USA: Ashgate, 2015, 198

<sup>52</sup>Korzeniewicz and Moran, 2009, 107; mentioned in Boatcă, 2014, 11.

from these nations are not white.<sup>53</sup>

Not only does birth tourism bring to the forefront the racialized inequalities inherent in citizenship regimes, it also brings to the surface the commodification of citizenship in the neoliberal age. It highlights the unique strategies that a select few individuals from nations outside of the global north have conceived of to capitalize on the unequal citizenship values and the growing citizenship market. While American birth tourism opponents have argued that birth tourists are creating anchor babies, generally speaking the situation is quite different from the stereotypical image of poor women from the southern border illegally crossing the border to give birth. In fact, the vast majority of birth tourists enter the country legally and are members of the growing middle and upper-middle class in nations of the global south. In other words, the very essence of birth tourism, as an activity which requires acquiring visas to the global north, purchasing long-distance airfare, and paying expensive accommodation and medical bills illustrates that for many people, citizenship via birthright is only accessible to a small group of wealthy individuals who have the means to pay the exorbitant price tag for their child's citizenship.

Although generally requiring a much smaller sum of money, it could be said that birth tourism is similar to the fairly recent trend in citizenship by investment. First initiated by St. Kitts and Nevis in 1984 to keep its economy afloat after gaining independence from the United Kingdom,<sup>54</sup> citizenship by investment has been imitated in

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<sup>53</sup> One notable exception to the racialized nature of birth tourism is the case of Russia. A news report in 2014 estimated that between 40-60 Russian women give birth in Miami each month (Shura Collinson, "Russian Women Flock to Miami to Give Birth to U.S. Citizens," *The Moscow Times*, April 15, 2014, <http://old.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/russian-women-flock-to-miami-to-give-birth-to-u-s-citizens-video/498066.html> (accessed May 18, 2017).)

<sup>54</sup>Boatcă 2015, 192.

many other nations across the globe. Boatcă argues that even though any nation's citizenship could be commodified, it is only the citizenship of a few nation states "that lends itself to being commodified by virtue of being a scarce good awarding (relatively) rare benefits."<sup>55</sup> The United State's EB-5 investment visa is a prime example. First implemented in the 1990s, this relatively recent method of citizenship acquisition has been referred to by some scholars as *jus pecuniae*, or law of money.<sup>56</sup> In the United States the number of EB-5 investors has increased dramatically in recent years, from an average of 50 per year between the years 1992-2004 to nearly 1400 in 2010.<sup>57</sup> In 2016, more than three-quarters of the 10,000 EB-5 visas (this number includes dependents) awarded by the United States government went to Chinese nationals.<sup>58</sup> Nonetheless, the actual success and effectiveness of the investment visa scheme has been called into question by politicians and immigration experts.<sup>59</sup> Two things should be noted about *jus pecuniae* with regards to Chinese nationals. First, a similar model of citizenship by investment exists within Mainland China and is embodied in the marketable *hukou*, China's household registration document, which not only determines access to state benefits but is also linked to mobility both inside and outside of China. Additionally, Chinese birth tourists are also often simultaneously in the process of applying for an EB-5 visa or considering it as a possibility. In other words, the purchase of credentials that afford additional social rights and status is not a new concept to aspiring Chinese individuals, and for a select few cosmopolitan-seeking citizens, birth tourism and citizenship by

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<sup>55</sup>Boatcă 2015, 193.

<sup>56</sup>Jelena Dzankic, "The Pros and Cons of Jus Pecuniae: Investor Citizenship in Comparative Perspective," *European University Institute Working Papers, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies*, October 12, 2014, 1-18.

<sup>57</sup> David S. North, "The immigrant investor (EB-5) visa: A program that is, and deserves to be, failing," *Center for Immigration Studies*, 2012.

<sup>58</sup> Invest in the USA, "EB-5 Statistics," <https://iiusa.org/eb5-stats/> (accessed May 20, 2017).

<sup>59</sup>North, 2012.

investment go hand in hand.

### **Birth Tourists as Aspirational Migrants**

The diverse methods and motivations of birth tourists complicate our traditional understandings and categorizations of migration flows. What is more, the label given this form of movement brands it as a form of *tourism*, specifically a type of medical tourism. The very concept of tourism rests in stark contrast to the notion of migration in which individuals either resettle permanently or reside in a new country for an extended period of time. Recent mobilities research has illustrated the blurry lines that separate migration and tourism.<sup>60</sup> However, birth tourism seems to have eluded scrutiny by mobilities scholars.

From a statistical standpoint, international migration is typically considered to have occurred if the duration abroad lasts at least one year.<sup>61</sup> Even though there are cases of "birth tourists" who have been known to stay in the U.S. for extended periods of time, many of whom purchase homes and send their children to school, most birth tourists stay in the United States, at least initially, for three to six months. If we consider King's contention, however, that "migration is not always, by any means, a one-off event which ends in settlement, but an ongoing process that is reevaluated several times over the life-course,"<sup>62</sup> then an argument could be made that birth tourism is in fact a form of migration particular to the neo-liberal age. That is to say, birth tourism might best be conceptualized as a form of "lifestyle migration."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Karen O'Reilly, "When is a tourist? The articulation of tourism and migration in Spain's Costa del Sol," *Tourist Studies* 3, no. 3 (2003): 301-17. J. Urry, *Sociology Beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Twenty-first Century*, London: Routledge, 2000.

<sup>61</sup> Russell King, *Theories and typologies of migration: An overview and a primer*, Malmö University, Malmö Institute for Studies of Immigration, Diversity, and Welfare (MIM), 2013.

<sup>62</sup> King, 2013.

<sup>63</sup> Benson and O'Reilly, 2009.



In the most general sense of the definition, lifestyle migration is distinct from other forms of migration in that the main motivation is "lifestyle."<sup>64</sup> It is said to be "driven by consumption" and it privileges "cultural motifs of destination and mobilities."<sup>65</sup> In the migration literature, lifestyle migrants have been presented as "relatively affluent individuals, moving either part time or full-time, permanently or temporarily, to places which, for various reasons, signify for the migrants something loosely defined as quality of life."<sup>66</sup> This broad category has included such movement as international retirement migration, amenity-seeking migration, and residential tourism.<sup>67</sup> Lifestyle migration is perceived as just one step within a wider lifestyle trajectory in which a better way of life is hoped to be achieved gradually.<sup>68</sup> Much of the previous lifestyle migration literature has focused on the movement of individuals from wealthy countries to less wealthy or developed nations.<sup>69</sup> However, an increasing number of studies have begun to look at the trajectories of wealthy Asians, specifically Chinese, in migrating with the intentions of improving their lifestyle.<sup>70</sup> In seeking advanced medical treatments, escaping pollution, and enabling their children to study English abroad, just to name a few commonly cited reasons of birth tourists, it seems that birth tourism clearly qualifies as a form of lifestyle migration.

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<sup>64</sup> Michaela Benson, "How culturally significant imaginings are translated into lifestyle migration," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 38, no. 10(2012): 1681-96, 1682.

<sup>65</sup> Michaela Benson and Nick Osbaldiston, eds. *Understanding lifestyle migration: Theoretical approaches to migration and the quest for a better way of life*, Springer, 2014, 3.

<sup>66</sup> Michaela Benson and Karen O'Reilly, "Migration and the search for a better way of life: a critical exploration of lifestyle migration," *The Sociological Review* 57, no. 4 (2012): 1681-96, 1682.

<sup>67</sup> Benson 2012, 1682.

<sup>68</sup> Benson and O'Reilly, 2009.

<sup>69</sup> Pere A. Salva-Thomas, "Foreign immigration and tourism development in Spain's Balearic Islands," *Tourism and migration*, Netherlands: Springer, 2002, 119-134. 2002. David Truly, "International Retirement Migration and Tourism along the Lake Chapala Riviera: Developing a Matrix of Retirement Migration Behavior," *Tourism Geographies* 4, no. 3 (2002): 261-81.

<sup>70</sup> David Ley and Audrey Kobayashi, "Back to Hong Kong: Return Migration or Transnational Sojourn?" *Global Networks* 5, no. 2 (2005): 111-27. David Ip, Chung- Tong Wu, and Christine Inglis, "Settlement Experiences of Taiwanese: Immigrants in Australia," *Asian Studies Review* 22, no.1 (1998): 79-97.

Yet birth tourism is more complicated than many of the more common forms of lifestyle migration. Furthermore, although lifestyle migration is a fittingly fresh concept which is sufficient to describe many of the new forms of mobility in the contemporary age, it seems to fall short in fully conceptualizing birth tourism, particularly because upon return to the home country, movement does not have to reoccur and is often not recurring in the near future. This is in stark contrast to residential migration and retirement migration in which individuals are usually in transit between two locations each year. Particularly misleading about the notion of lifestyle migration is that all forms of migration and movement are arguably carried out in the hopes of improving one's "lifestyle." It is in light of this shortcoming that I develop a more fitting term to refer to the phenomenon of birth tourism: *aspirational migration*. I derive this concept from Caroline Oliver's notion of "aspirational movement"<sup>71</sup> which she coined to refer to the group of retired English lifestyle migrants residing in Spain in order to stretch their pensions. I believe *aspirational migration* aptly illuminates the complex nature of birth tourism because it recognizes that the initial act of birth tourism is in fact a form of migration, as evident in the noun "migration," but through its modifier "aspirational," it illustrates that the much-desired future movements enabled through the U.S. passport remains unrealized. Furthermore, referring to this type of migration as "aspirational" highlights the class aspirations and class anxieties of the middle-class birth tourists who mobilize their resources of social mobility to acquire an alternative citizenship for their children to guard against potential risks of an uncertain future.<sup>72</sup> In other words, the

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<sup>71</sup> C. Oliver, "Imagined communitas: Older migrants and aspirational mobility," ed. V. Amit, *Going First Class? New Approaches towards Privileged Movement and Travel*, Oxford: Berghahn, EASA series, 2007, 126-43.

<sup>72</sup>Balta and Altan-Olcay, 2015.

ultimate goal of *aspirational migration* is to gain status and various forms of capital which often have more value in the home country than abroad.<sup>73</sup>

### **Birth Tourism: Cultivating Cosmopolitan Capital**

Chinese international migration has undergone extensive changes in recent years and is generally understood as having occurred in three waves: family-reunion-oriented and students, skilled laborers and students, and wealthy emigrants.<sup>74</sup> The migrants of this third wave are "categorically different than their predecessors who 'immigrate.'"<sup>75</sup> That is, new migrants do not see their migration as a one-off event, or as an anchoring to one place.

On the surface, a few clear motivations have emerged among this new wave of migrants. Some scholars have argued that escaping China's pollution drives many wealthy Chinese to send their families abroad.<sup>76</sup> Others have shown that migration is carried out as a means of future retirement.<sup>77</sup> Still other scholars have argued that middle-class Chinese migrate to protect themselves against an uncertain political and economic future.<sup>78</sup> Johanna Waters argues that under the surface of the stated political reasons cited by parents, migration decisions are linked to education considerations. She illustrates how in her study the decision to migrate had often been made after children had begun

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<sup>73</sup> Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*, 1999, Balta & Altan-Olcay, 2015.

<sup>74</sup> Garcia Liu-Farrer, "Migration as Class-based Consumption: The Emigration of the Rich in Contemporary China," 226 (2016): 499-518.

<sup>75</sup> Weiqiang Lin, "Beyond Flexible Citizenship: Towards a Study of Many Chinese Transnationalisms," *Geoforum*, 2011.

<sup>76</sup> Robyn R. Iredale, and GuoFei, *Handbook of Chinese Migration: Identity and Wellbeing*, Handbooks of Research on Contemporary China, Northampton, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2015, 290.

<sup>77</sup> Ley and Kobayashi, 2005.

<sup>78</sup> Ong, 1999.

failing in the highly competitive education system back home.<sup>79</sup> Waters argues that many individuals viewed investment migration as cheaper and a better option than paying international tuition fees to send their child to school abroad.<sup>80</sup> It has been shown that middle class parents view overseas education as a primary means to secure privileges for children.<sup>81</sup> One study viewed migration for education more as a way to boost longer-term geographical and social mobility than to secure residency and resettlement.<sup>82</sup>

In a recent article which dissected migration of the rich in contemporary China, Liu-Farrer set out to search for the "social meanings of this trend of emigration."<sup>83</sup> Adopting a Bourdieusian approach, she argued that for the rising Chinese middle class, regardless of stated motivations (such as education, retirement, asset protection, etc), emigration is "in fact a form of class-based consumption, a strategy for class reproduction, and a way to convert economic resources into social status and prestige."<sup>84</sup> Through interviews with Chinese individuals who acquire investment visas and residency permits abroad, she illustrates a new trend of Chinese migration labeled *yimin bu yizhu*, a term which loosely translates to "emigration without settling abroad."<sup>85</sup> A process in which credentials are first acquired for wealthy investors who may or may not resettle abroad, *yimin bu yizhu* seems to parallel the realities of many birth tourists who envision resettlement of their child, sometimes with themselves, but almost always in the distant future.

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<sup>79</sup> Johanna L. Waters, "Transnational Family Strategies and Education in the Contemporary Chinese Diaspora," *Global Networks* 5, no. 4 (2005): 359-77.

<sup>80</sup> Waters, 2005, 368.

<sup>81</sup> Iredale and Guo, 2015, 290.

<sup>82</sup> Shirlena Huang and Brenda S.A. Yeoh, "Navigating the Terrains of Transnational Education: Children of Chinese 'study Mothers' in Singapore," *Geoforum* 42, no. 3 (2011): 394-403.

<sup>83</sup> Liu-Farrer 2016.

<sup>84</sup> Liu-Farrer, 2016

<sup>85</sup> Liu-Farrer, 2016.

As early as 1997, Chan Kwok Bun argued that Chinese family dispersal, referring to such arrangements as astronaut families,<sup>86</sup> are not simply consequences of migration but are in fact anticipated arrangements in which "the family in its physical, tangible sense is dispersed so as to realize, to make real, 'the family' as idea, ideal, or project."<sup>87</sup> It is within these dispersed families, Chan argues, that the Chinese cosmopolitan identity is emerging, which he captures with the coined term "*zhonggen*," or multiple roots.<sup>88</sup> Likewise, Julie Chu's exploration of migration from a Fuzhou village illustrates how mobility serves as a "qualisign."<sup>89</sup> Drawing on C.S. Pierce's notion of a qualisign, "a quality which is a sign" that cannot "act as a sign until it is embodied," Chu argues that for the villagers she studied "mobility is a privileged qualisign of modern selves."<sup>90</sup> To Chu, migration and mobility symbolized and created Chinese cosmopolitan identities.

More recently, Lin Weiqiang's analysis of migration from Singapore illustrates how Singaporeans are encouraged to study and work abroad, but are also pulled back home by parents and a government that sees overseas experience as a critical ingredient in forging the 21st century optimal worker.<sup>91</sup> Lin condemns literature that argues that Chinese travel for "economic benefit" whereas westerners travel for "experiences." In self-proclaimed opposition to Waters' migration for education thesis, Lin argues that

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<sup>86</sup> Coined by Aihwa Ong 1999, "Astronaut family" refers to the family structure of certain transnational Asian elites. In contrast to the "nuclear family," members of the astronaut family are spread across the globe, typically with the breadwinning father remaining in the country of origin to earn money while the mother accompanies children to the host country to receive education.

<sup>87</sup> Kwok Bun Chan, "A Family Affair: Migration, Dispersal, and the Emergent Identity of the Chinese Cosmopolitan," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 6, no. 2 (1997): 195-213.

<sup>88</sup> Chan, 1997.

<sup>89</sup> Julie Y. Chu, *Cosmologies of Credit: Transnational Mobility and the Politics of Destination in China*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.

<sup>90</sup> Chu 2010, 14.

<sup>91</sup> Lin, 2011.

foreign education is not necessarily a means to increase competitiveness in fixed markets but is "propelled by an almost taken-for-granted ambition to be cosmopolitan." He points out that some parents view foreign education as a "right of passage" which will instill in them an "outlook befitting of a globalization-conscious society."<sup>92</sup>

It would thus appear that the desire for a cosmopolitan identity is far from new for the growing number of increasingly mobile and newly wealthy Chinese. But what does it mean to be cosmopolitan, and specifically, what does it mean in China and to the growing Chinese middle class? Cosmopolitanism has been conceptualized in numerous ways across disciplines. In one of the earliest known references to cosmopolitan, the Greek cynic Diogenes referred to himself as a citizen of the world in direct criticism of his *polis* and its claims on his individual political allegiances.<sup>93</sup> During the enlightenment, Immanuel Kant envisioned cosmopolitan to mean a universal community of men to promote a strengthened moral obligation between individuals from different nation states.<sup>94</sup> In other words, it was philosophically envisioned as a moral and ethical attitude that extended beyond one's direct community.

In its most general sense today, cosmopolitanism suggests an ability to competently navigate multiple national and cultural domains in an empathetic and flexible capacity. It is widely believed that cosmopolitanism implies a freedom of social belonging, as a way of existing in the world without strong connections to any given culture, state, or society. Craig Calhoun argues that, on the contrary, cosmopolitanism is about belonging to specific social spaces, and he illustrates that the notion of

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<sup>92</sup>Lin, 2011.

<sup>93</sup> Andrew Linklater, "Cosmopolitan citizenship," *Citizenship studies* 2, no. 1 (1998): 23-41.

<sup>94</sup>Linklater, 1998.

cosmopolitanism is very much linked to culture and the nation,<sup>95</sup> as if to echo Appiah's notion of "rooted cosmopolitanism."<sup>96</sup> Taking this notion one step further, Calhoun states cosmopolitanism is "belonging to a social class able to identify itself with the universal."<sup>97</sup> Integrating Calhoun's observation of the links between class projection and cosmopolitanism and Bourdieu's idea of symbolic capital, Otis fashions the term *cosmopolitan capital* to depict the "material and symbolic benefits that accrue to actors whose traversal of space is enabled by the bridging labor of workers."<sup>98</sup>

According to Otis, *cosmopolitan capital* is "the privileges afforded by the ease of movement across borders of nations and culture." It is through the labor of bridgeworkers and the process of constant cultural learning that cosmopolitan capital is created. In her study of luxury hotels in China, which cater to the global elite, this cultural learning includes the acquisition of "body and feeling rules" which enable those elites to move comfortably and easily across transnational space, or as she concludes, "look good and sound right." In a similar fashion, the birth tourism industry, particularly month centers which cater to Chinese cultural traditions and expectations, enable China's wealthy and growing middle-class to move easily across transnational space and acquire cosmopolitan capital. Unlike Otis' elites, however, most birth tourists still encounter obstacles through visa restrictions and they must acquire a vast cache of knowledge about citizenship regimes in order to successfully carry out their plan. The freshly minted U.S. passport of their foreign-born child not only ensures unrestrained global mobility to their progeny but also becomes the ultimate symbol of their cosmopolitan capital.

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<sup>95</sup> Craig Calhoun, "Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism," *Nations and Nationalism* 14, no. 3 (2008): 427-48.

<sup>96</sup> Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Issues of Our Time, New York: W. W. Norton, 2006.

<sup>97</sup> Calhoun, 2008.

<sup>98</sup> Otis, 2016.

### CHAPTER III

#### GLOBAL BIRTH TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE

To be sure, long before parents from the affluent classes in China engaged in birth tourism in masse, individuals from nations such as Turkey, India, South Korea, Russia, Turkey, Taiwan, and many others travelled to the United States to give birth. Mainland Chinese were latecomers primarily due to limitations placed on their mobility by both the Chinese state and the restrictive visa policies of nation-states of the global north. This can be best observed in the case of birth tourism to Hong Kong after the occurrence of two extremely important events--the 2001 Chong Fung-yuen case which granted all Mainland citizens born in Hong Kong permanent residency<sup>99</sup> and the implementation of IVS (individual visit scheme) in 2003 which enabled Mainland Chinese the right to travel individually to Hong Kong without tour groups.<sup>100</sup> For example, in 2002 only 2,000 children were born to families in which both parents were from the mainland. By 2011, that number had increased to 35,736.<sup>101</sup>

Similarly, when the United States was granted ADS (Approved Destination Status)<sup>102</sup> in 2008, not only did Chinese tourism increase significantly, from 450,000 in 2008 to 1.8 million in 2013,<sup>103</sup> but also the number of Chinese birth tourists. Some of the more commonly cited numbers in the popular press in both China and the U.S. posit that an estimated 4,200 Chinese women gave birth in the U.S. in 2008. That number increased

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<sup>99</sup> Margaret Harris Cheng, "Hong Kong Attempts to Reduce Influx of Pregnant Chinese, *The Lancet* 369, no. 9566 (2007): 981-2.

<sup>100</sup> Li, 2016, 57.

<sup>101</sup> Ivy Cheng, "Population Profile of Hong Kong," April 16, 2015. <http://www.legco.gov.hk/research-publications/english/1415in07-population-profile-of-hong-kong-20150416-e.pdf> (accessed May 31, 2016).

<sup>102</sup> ADS was first implemented in the 1990s as a means of controlling and regulating travel outside of China. Once agreed upon by China and the other nation, both parties are free to mutually promote leisure trips; however, travel agencies are responsible for non-returnees.

<sup>103</sup> Li, 2016, 170.



to more than 10,000 in 2012.<sup>104</sup>

In 2013, a report released by an organization comprised of three month centers operating in the U.S. revealed numbers which estimated more than 40,000 per year from 2013 onward.<sup>105</sup> The Center for Immigration Studies, a conservative organization that promotes tighter immigration controls, estimated that in 2012 approximately 36,000 birth tourists gave birth in the U.S.<sup>106</sup> Statistics are simply unreliable because the U.S. government does not require hospitals to track the nationality of mothers who give birth in the United States, and although parents are required to report an address to receive the birth certificate, anecdotal evidence suggests that most parents report the address of their hotel or month center, particularly because this is the address where the passports are mailed before leaving.<sup>107</sup> Nonetheless, to put things in perspective, if the rate of increase in Chinese birth tourism in the continental United States was even just a fraction of the increase in the U.S. territory Saipan,<sup>108</sup> where the number of children born to Chinese nationals increased from just 8 in 2009 to 282 in 2012,<sup>109</sup> or even similar to the rate of increase in Hong Kong, which banned birth tourism on January 1, 2013, then 30,000-40,000 birth tourists annually certainly seems plausible.

Aside from governmental policies and political structures, it is critical to

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<sup>104</sup> Cao Dan, Wang Jialin, Deng Yafei, "Jingwai shengzi re beihou yinyou. [The Problems Behind the Birth Tourism Craze]," *CCTV*, April 21, 2014, <http://baby.sina.com.cn/news/2014-04-21/084263796.shtml>.

<sup>105</sup> Quan Mei Muiying Huli Xiehui [All America Mother Services Management Center INC]. "Nian fumei shengzi hangye shichang niandu fenxi baogao ji meiguo yuezizhongxin chanye fazhan diaoyan baogao [Analysis report of annual birth tourism market and research report of American month center industry development]." 2013. <http://www.a-amsm.com/whitebook2014-3.pdf> (accessed May 22, 2017). 2013

<sup>106</sup> Steven A. Camarota, "There Are Possibly 36,000 Birth Tourists Annually," *Center for Immigration Studies*, April 28, 2015, <http://cis.org/camarota/there-are-possibly-36000-birth-tourists-annually> (accessed May 31, 2016).

<sup>107</sup> Camarota, 2015.

<sup>108</sup> Saipan is the largest island of the Northern Mariana Islands, a commonwealth of the U.S. that began allowing visa-free travel for Chinese nationals in October of 2009.

<sup>109</sup> Gloria Riviera, "Pregnant Chinese Women Flock to US Territory to Give Birth," *ABC News*, February 10, 2014, <http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/video/pregnant-chinese-women-flock-us-territory-give-birth-22454405> (accessed May 31, 2016).

understand the network ties, organizations and relationships that enable the movement of pregnant Chinese across the globe. Interpersonal ties "connect migrants, non-migrants and former migrants in webs of friendship, kinship, and shared origin."<sup>110</sup> A form of social capital spanning social space, networks increase the likelihood of international migration by offering information, which lowers cost and risks.<sup>111</sup> In the case of birth tourism, such networks put migrants in touch with month centers, intermediaries, medical providers, and other potential birth tourists who form a community to share their stories of success (and failure) via social media platforms.

Month centers are hotel-hospital hybrids that cater to the Chinese postpartum practice called *zuoyuezi* -- "doing the month." "Doing the month" is an ancient tradition dating back at least to the Song dynasty (960-1279 CE) that involves a period of rest and recovery with a strict set of proscriptions and prescriptions to secure the health of the mother in the near and distant future.<sup>112</sup> The concept of the month center as a commercialized folk practice first emerged in Taiwan in the 1970s in response to urbanization and modernization, and the trend was soon emulated in other areas of the world where large pockets of Chinese had emigrated, such as the US and Canada.<sup>113</sup> Initially, month centers were established for the local populations of Chinese and other Asian groups that adhered to the custom, such as South Koreans, Taiwanese, and Hong Kongese. Over time, however, the early cohorts of mainland Chinese women engaging in birth tourism used and further developed these facilities.

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<sup>110</sup>King, 2013, 21.

<sup>111</sup>Massey et al 1998: 42-43, found in King, 2013, 21.

<sup>112</sup> Barbara Pillsbury, "'Doing the Month': Confinement and Convalescence of Chinese Women after Childbirth," *Social Science and Medicine* 12, no. 1B (1978): 11-22.

<sup>113</sup> Ngai Fen Cheung, Mander, Rosemary, Cheng, Linan, Chen, Vivian Yan, Yang XiuQun, Qian Hong Ping, and Qian Jie Yan, "'Zuoyuezi' after Caesarean in China: An Interview Survey," *International Journal of Nursing Studies* 43, no. 2 (2006) 193-202.

Intermediaries, known in Chinese as *zhongjie*, are migration brokers typically based in large urban areas in China that attract potential clients and link them to the established month centers and other services. Generally speaking, birth tourism intermediaries are primarily consultants that charge for their knowledge of navigating the birth tourism process. As will be illustrated, these birth tourism intermediaries reach out to and serve individuals who often have many of the same aspirations--tourism, investment immigration, and foreign education.<sup>114</sup> For example, in one of many similar cases, the advertisements for these centers are placed at the entrances of English training schools.<sup>115</sup> One of the most important, arguably the most important step in the process is securing a tourist visa to the prospective country. For some individuals, intermediaries in China often provide individual consultations assisting with document procurement and other techniques to increase the likelihood of passing the visa interview. In addition to visa application advice, these intermediaries offer testimonials from other birth tourists, step-by-step procedures of everything from going through customs to enrolling the yet-to-be-born child in primary school in either China or abroad. In some cases, intermediaries are linked to one specific month center or niche market, such as Meiguoshiguan.com (American Test-tube), an agency that assists in producing test-tube American babies.

Similar to a hotel, month centers also have a stake in linking customers to other business services in the industry. Usually the larger the month center, the more services

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<sup>114</sup>Duanfang Tao, "Chinese people are turning to 'birth tourism' to fulfill their American dream," *The World Weekly*, April 23, 2015, <http://www.theworldweekly.com/reader/view/storyline/2015-04-23/chinese-people-are-turning-to-birth-tourism-to-fulfill-their-american-dream/3657> (accessed May 31, 2016).

<sup>115</sup>Defang Kong and Shihua Luo, "Liuzhou peixunjigou da chu guanggao hua 12 wan yuan ke fumeichanzi. Liuzhou wan bao. [Liuzhou agencies advertise that one can have a baby in the US spending RMB120,000]," *Liu zhou wan bao* [*Liuzhou Evening Post*], July 13, 2015, <http://gx.sina.com.cn/lz/county/2015-2017-13/11056233.html>. (accessed January 5, 2017).

they directly provide. One perfect example is what may be arguably the largest name in the industry, that of LA Fat Dad,<sup>116</sup> an intermediary that also opened its own month center, Xiduoduo. Both company websites provide information on securing travel documents, crossing immigration, choosing hospitals and doctors, various options for different-priced month centers, and even buying travel health insurance.<sup>117</sup> In addition to other tourist adventures, month centers also provide shopping excursions to nearby shopping centers--in many cases having their own personal transportation--included in their packages. Purchasing luxury name brands often go hand-in-hand with the experience of the Chinese tourist, including that of the birth tourist. Acutely aware of this, the social media account of one popular intermediary, Jaiyoumeibao, attempts to lure potential clients to purchase promotional birth tourism packages with luxury name brand gifts.

The growth of the industry is not only profitable for the month centers and intermediaries, but also the medical field as well. In Saipan during an undercover reporter investigation, one doctor boasted of knowing everything of how to have an "American baby."<sup>118</sup> While there seem to be no cases of hospitals advertising directly to patients in the U.S., hospitals and medical clinics certainly have a large stake in the business and are fairly supportive of the lucrative industry. In a Chinese interview with several obstetricians and gynecologists that cater to Chinese birth tourists in the LA area, not only were all three doctors politically supportive of the industry, they also profited heavily from the business, with one clinic making over five million dollars on Chinese

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<sup>116</sup>Luoshanji pangbaba, <http://www.pangbaba.com/> (accessed May 31, 2016).

<sup>117</sup>Luoshanji pangbaba, <http://www.pangbaba.com/> (accessed May 31, 2016).

<sup>118</sup> Rebecca Shabad, "Chinese 'birth tourism' booming in US territory," *The Hill*, February 11, 2014, <http://thehill.com/policy/international/198078-lawmakers-concerned-about-chinas-promotion-of-birth-tourism-in> (accessed May 31, 2016).

births in the year 2014 alone.<sup>119</sup> Furthermore, in the search warrant preceding the L.A. month center raids in March of 2015, it was revealed that the owner received a thousand-dollar from a local Chinese doctor with "referral" marked in the memo line.<sup>120</sup> According to one attorney familiar with the industry, hospital prices in the area had also increased, presumably with the demand.<sup>121</sup> This is not unlike what happened in Hong Kong where both private and public hospitals quickly developed their maternity units to accommodate the large influx of mainland Chinese women giving birth to reap the large profits they brought the hospitals through increased fees.<sup>122</sup> Thus, while medical service providers may not actively recruit birth tourists, they clearly adapt to the influx and increase prices to earn greater profits, some of which they pass on to partnering month centers.

Growth in the industry also parallels the arrival of popular social media such as the high interactivity micro blog Sina Weibo<sup>123</sup> and Wechat.<sup>124</sup> Such platforms, which enable more personalized communication through short voice messages, videos, images, and text, have been shown to play a crucial role in the travel habits of Chinese citizens.<sup>125</sup> Weibo, a large component of which is related to tourism (in 2012 nearly 46 million users were fans of travel agencies) is useful for travel as it allows the sharing of not only

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<sup>119</sup> TengXun Shi Pin [Tencent Videos], "Zhuanzhi daiban xinsheng er zhengjian yewu fanmang meitian jiedianhua jie dao yao tu. [Professional agencies that handle newborns' documents are so busy that they are sick of answering phone calls]," November 12, 2015, <http://v.qq.com/cover/m/mywbxqu3lf8cpp.html?vid=u0018vpowd> (accessed May 31, 2016).

<sup>120</sup> Eric Blair, "Application for Search Warrant," *United States District Court*, March 2, 2015, <http://i2.cdn.turner.com/cnn/2015/images/03/03/birth.tourism.pdf> (accessed May 24, 2017), 54.

<sup>121</sup> Cao Li, "Yi min lv shi: zhongguo kehu bei zhize lai zhan meiguo pianyi [Immigration Lawyer: Chinese customers are accused of taking advantage of the US]," *Niuyue shibao zhongwen wang [New York Times, China Online]*, April 15, 2015, <http://cn.nytimes.com/china/20150415/cc15birthtourism02/> (accessed May 31, 2016).

<sup>122</sup> Adrienne Mong, "Birthrights Battle: China vs Hong Kong," *NBC News*, February 13, 2012, <http://behindthewall.nbcnews.com/news/2012/02/13/10394026-birth-rights-battle-china-vs-hong-kong?lite> (accessed May 31, 2016).

<sup>123</sup>a Chinese micro blog similar to Twitter

<sup>124</sup>a free smart phone application akin to WhatsApp

<sup>125</sup> Li, 2016, 260-4.

personal travel information but also commercial and government information.<sup>126</sup> Weibo has become a critical source of travel information for Chinese tourists before, during, and after travel.<sup>127</sup> Regarding general tourism, people typically acquire travel information via Weibo but share personal experiences through Wechat.<sup>128</sup> I also found these trends to be true during the course of my research, but in a recent email correspondence with an employee of Meibaozhijia, I was informed that Wechat is now becoming the platform of choice in the industry.

Through these types of online media, businesses are better able to share photos of birth tourists and information about their services, essentially creating a tight-knit group of individuals interested in birth tourism. These online tools, in addition to sites like Meibao.cn (a month center search engine) and Chineseinla.com<sup>129</sup>(a general want-ad search engine catering to Chinese in Los Angeles) have also led to a do-it-yourself trend which enables birth tourists to often bypass intermediaries and arrange their own accommodations, sometimes without the help of month centers.

Even with the infrastructure established, birth tourism was not widely heard of by Chinese until the release of the 2013 Chinese box-office hit called *Finding Mr. Right*, a blockbuster film which depicts a pregnant Chinese woman who travels to Seattle to give birth to the illegitimate son of her boyfriend, a wealthy, married, Beijing businessman. Having a child out of wedlock is all but illegal in China, making it extremely difficult to

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<sup>126</sup> Li, 2016, 261.

<sup>127</sup> Li, 2016, 265.

<sup>128</sup> Li, 2016, 265.

<sup>129</sup> Chineseinla.com is a want ads website which enables individuals to seek and advertise accommodations and services. For example, maternity matrons who are trained to take care of mothers and infants while doing the month can post their availability on these sites for prospective parents doing the month on their own.

obtain proper documents needed to live well in China, such as a *hukou*.<sup>130</sup> In May of 2013, two months after the film's release, an online survey conducted in China by Tencent, China's largest internet service, found that over two-thirds of 101,529 respondents said "yes" to the question, "will you choose to give birth in the US if opportunity allows?"<sup>131</sup> The existence of birth tourism also became highly visible around the same time thanks to Chinese media coverage which explored the advantages and disadvantages of giving birth abroad and raising children in China. Many of these news segments seem to focus primarily on the negative aspects, in one case interviewing parents who had worked in the United States in a professional capacity for years before returning to China. The coverage illustrates so-called advantages only to emphasize the risks and uncertainties involved in the future, including enrolling their children in schools without *hukous*.<sup>132</sup> It is interesting to note that many of the problems highlighted by state media reports illustrate domestic issues of legality that most middle-class individuals can overcome through the use of money and or *guanxi* (connections). In the state media's attempt to dissuade, they may have in fact increased the likelihood for wealthy, well-connected individuals to consider birth tourism as a credible option.

Even without definitive statistics, according to all parties involved, the industry in the US was massive by 2014. The Shanghai Newspaper National Business Daily reported that at least 500 companies offered birth tourism services in China in the year 2014.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> "Pariahs: Single Parents Have a Tough Time in China. So Do Their Children," *The Economist*, February 27, 2016, <http://www.economist.com/news/china/21693590-single-mothers-have-tough-time-china-so-do-their-children-pariahs>.

<sup>131</sup> Chang, 2015.

<sup>132</sup> Cao, Wang, and Deng, 2014.

<sup>133</sup> Calum Macleod, "Chinese flock to USA to give birth to U.S. citizens," *USA Today*, April 1, 2015, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2015/04/01/china-usa-birth-tourists-buisness-strong/24887837> (accessed May 31, 2016).

Pomona Valley Hospital, one of around 40 hospitals in Orange County<sup>134</sup> delivered more than 400 Chinese babies in 2014.<sup>135</sup> One woman who opened a document runner service in the LA area to help mothers procure birth certificates and apply for US passports said that from 2012 to 2014, she helped on average 10 clients a day.<sup>136</sup> The fact that such a niche company of document runners could exist and service upwards of 3,000 women annually in Los Angeles alone hints to the size of the Chinese birth tourism market.

Due to the uncertainty surrounding the industry, calculating its size and value is a difficult task. The price of month centers vary greatly, with most offering packages that range from the luxurious to the economical. Although various prices float around the internet, generally speaking, month center prices run from between \$15,000 and \$50,000.<sup>137</sup> Prices vary depending on location, services provided, and duration of stay. Of the individuals who willingly shared costs information with me, the average price was 326,000 RMB, or about \$46,000 at the current exchange rate for everything, including flights, month center stays, and discretionary spending. If parents spend on average \$30,000 on the entire trip, and if the numbers from Center for Immigration Studies are correct citing 36,000 birth tourists annually, then the value of the industry would be just over 1 billion dollars. A report by the *Wall Street Journal* reveals that Karthick Ramakrishnan, a public policy professor at the University of California who has studied the phenomenon, estimates that families spend approximately one billion dollars annually

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<sup>134</sup> State of California, "List of Hospitals in Orange County," *Healthcare Atlas*, <http://gis.oshpd.ca.gov/atlas/places/list-of-hospitals/county/orange> (accessed May 31, 2016).

<sup>135</sup> Tamar Lewin, "California apartments raided in federal investigation of Chinese 'birth tourism'," *The New York Times*, March 3, 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/04/us/california-homes-raided-in-federal-crackdown-on-chinese-birth-tourism.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/04/us/california-homes-raided-in-federal-crackdown-on-chinese-birth-tourism.html?_r=0) (accessed May 31, 2016).

<sup>136</sup> TengXun Shi Pin [Tencent Videos], "Luoshanji fuchanke yisheng: mei ren shuo ni bu neng zai meiguo sheng yi ge haizi. [An obstetrician in Los Angeles: Nobody says you cannot give birth to a baby in the US]," November 12, 2015, <http://v.qq.com/cover/m/mywbxqu3lf8cpp.html?vid=y00189c30yu> (accessed May 31, 2016).

<sup>137</sup> Blair, 2015.



excluding discretionary spending on shopping and eating.<sup>138</sup>

As the introduction makes clear, an interruption to the U.S. birth tourism infrastructure occurred on March 2, 2015 when a search warrant was issued by a U.S. District Court after Homeland Security Special Agent Eric Blair revealed that multiple Chinese month centers were suspected of a long list of criminal offenses, ranging from harboring aliens to visa fraud and tax evasion.<sup>139</sup> The raids had actually been in the works since late 2014 when undercover agents began investigating the prevalence of Chinese birth tourism facilities. Although the 2015 investigation focused primarily on three major month centers, 37 search warrants were issued and over 50 sites were searched.<sup>140</sup> In the end, the owners of the facilities which were operating illegally faced legal repercussions, but the birth tourists themselves and month centers that were operating in the confines of the law were free to continue operating.

It seems that similar to Hong Kong, the US has decided that rather than attempting to change a controversial law, one way to limit the practice is at its borders through visa applications and customs officials. Although potentially insignificant, the visa refusal rate of Chinese nationals increased by one percentage point in 2015, and by 2 percentage points in 2016, after having steadily decreased for six years prior.<sup>141</sup> Ken Liang, one of the major lawyers who represented several Chinese birth tourists following

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<sup>138</sup>Miriam Jordan, "Where 'Anchor Babies' can be a Lucrative Business," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 4, 2015, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/where-anchored-babies-can-be-a-lucrative-business-1446668720> (accessed May 23, 2017).

<sup>139</sup>Blair, 2015.

<sup>140</sup>Michael Martinez and Alexandra Meeks, "Feds fight 'maternity tourism' with raids on California 'maternity hotels'," *CNN*, March 4, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/03/03/us/maternity-tourism-raids-california/> (accessed March 18, 2017).

<sup>141</sup>"Adjusted Refusal Rate - B Visas Only by Nationality Fiscal Year 2015." U.S. Department of State, 2015, <https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/visas/Statistics/Non-Immigrant-Statistics/RefusalRates/FY15.pdf>. (accessed April 21, 2017). "Adjusted Refusal Rate - B Visas Only by Nationality Fiscal Year 2014." <https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/visas/Statistics/Non-Immigrant-Statistics/RefusalRates/FY14.pdf> (accessed April 21, 2017).

the raids, was arrested and charged with obstruction of justice for taking money to assist his clients leave the country during the course of the investigation.<sup>142</sup> Additionally, exactly one year after raids on California month centers, the State Department announced EVUS, the Electronic Visa Update System, specifically designed for Chinese visa holders to update biographic information every two years.<sup>143</sup> Even though a renewal system such as EVUS was mutually agreed upon during the 2014 talks to extend visa validity to ten years, some, such as Chinese immigration attorney and expert Gary Chodorow, have linked the announcement of the system which began at the end of 2016 to better restricting potential birth tourists and uncovering discrepancies in their visa applications.<sup>144</sup>

There are no current numbers tracking Chinese birth tourism, but by all accounts the industry was negatively affected. Following the California raids, several people in the industry lamented that their customer base had decreased significantly. An intermediary company based in Beijing that cooperates with several U.S. month centers reported that inquiring prospective birth tourists had decreased by 30%.<sup>145</sup> One L.A. agency that specifically procured birth certificates and passports for newborn Chinese children lamented that its business decreased by over 50% by the end of 2015.<sup>146</sup> A famous doctor

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<sup>142</sup>Scott Schwebke, "Irvine attorney convicted of obstruction of justice in birth tourism case," *The Orange County Register*, September 18, 2015, <http://www.ocregister.com/articles/liang-683639-attorney-birth.html> (accessed May 31 2016).

<sup>143</sup>"CBP Announces the Electronic Visa Update System," *U.S. Customs and Border Protection*, March 15, 2016, <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/national-media-release/2016-03-15-000000/cbp-announces-electronic-visa-update-system> (accessed May 31, 2016).

<sup>144</sup>Gary Chodorow, "Special Considerations for Visa Processing at U.S. Consular Posts in China," April 25, 2016, <http://lawandborder.com/special-considerations-visa-processing-u-s-consular-posts-china/> (accessed May 31, 2016).

<sup>145</sup>Cao Li, "Fu mei sheng zi zhongjie: haiqunzhima bu daibiao hangye da shi. [Birth Tourism agencies: A black sheep does not represent the general trend," *Niuyueshibaozhong wen wang* [*The New York Times, China Online*], April 15, 2015, <http://cn.nytimes.com/china/20150415/cc15birthtourism03/> (accessed May 31, 2016).

<sup>146</sup>TengXun Shi Pin [Tencent Videos], "Luoshanji fuchanke yisheng: mei ren shuo ni bu neng zai meiguo

who had attracted a Chinese clientele said his deliveries decreased by half in 2015, from around six a day to three.<sup>147</sup> Immediately following the raids, companies began adjusting their methods to keep business alive and started operating in a more legal zone. Almost every intermediary and month center website currently boasts of assisting in "honest visa applications," a reference to the visa fraud issue that was exposed during the L.A. raids. The end of the notorious one-child policy at the end of 2015, in addition to Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign also seems to have slightly impacted the industry. Nonetheless, while the numbers seem to have decreased, the industry itself endures.

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sheng yi ge haizi. [An obstetrician in Los Angeles: Nobody says you cannot give birth to a baby in the US]," November 12, 2015, <http://v.qq.com/cover/m/mywbgxuq3lf8cpp.html?vid=y00189c30yu> (accessed May 31, 2016).

<sup>147</sup>TengXun Shi Pin [Tencent Videos], "Zhuanzhi daiban xinshenger zhengjian yewu fanmang meitian jiedianhua jie dao yao tu. [Professional agencies that handle newborns' documents are so busy that they are sick of answering phone calls]," November 12, 2015, <http://v.qq.com/cover/m/mywbgxuq3lf8cpp.html?vid=u0018vpowd> (accessed May 31, 2016).

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **METHODS**

In July and August of 2016, I conducted semi-structured interviews with ten birth tourists who were living in two large cities in north China. I used both convenience and snowball sampling techniques to recruit respondents via friends I had made during the seven years I lived and worked in both cities. Conducted in Mandarin, the interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and were held in public spaces, including coffee shops, restaurants with private rooms, and in one case on a park bench. Each interview was audio recorded with the respondents' permission, and was later transcribed, translated, coded, and analyzed.

The interviews consisted of questions regarding respondents' background information, motivations for giving birth in the U.S., the role of family and intermediaries in devising and carrying out the plan, experiences once in the United States and upon return to China, and hopes and fears for the future. These questions were developed in early 2016 through an analysis of media reports and videos regarding Chinese birth tourism. My interview questions were developed before I had found relevant academic literature, and specifically before the publication of most of the articles cited above regarding birth tourism.

The interviewees consisted of seven women and three men. At each of the ten interviews only one spouse was present. Four of the women were part of a Wechat birth tourism group which was moderated by a personal acquaintance. This acquaintance, herself a birth tourist, organized our meetings and elected not to be part of the study. She was present during the four interviews which she organized, which may have influenced

participants' responses.

Before meeting with participants, I searched *Baidu*, China's largest search engine, for birth tourism websites. I easily found well over 100 such sites and agents, many of which were inactive or shut down following the Los Angeles raids in early 2015. I then searched each of the active sites for accounts on Weibo and narrowed my scope to the agencies which had the most followers and highest frequency of posts. For the purpose of this paper, I use social media posts of three companies—LAPangbaba, Jiayoumeibao, and Meibaozhijia<sup>148</sup>—to assist in illustrating some of the stated motivations for engaging in birth tourism. I analyzed these posts looking for common themes and topics relevant to the narratives recounted by respondents and the selling points enumerated by the industry, including things like travel and shopping, medical considerations, and cultural sentiments that I believed would be attractive to a potential birth on social media. Incidentally, two of these sites were mentioned by my respondents. The posts referenced in the following sections were documented between January and February of 2017. Additionally, in April 2017, I communicated via email with an employee at a Meibaozhijia branch in one of the cities where I conducted my study.

Potential limitations for this study include a small sample size from only two cities that may not reflect the experiences of families from other areas in China. Additionally, having only interviewed one spouse makes it difficult to verify the responses of interviewees for accuracy and to draw comparisons between gendered interpretations of birth tourism. Finally, because my interviews focused primarily on understanding who was engaged in birth tourism and their reasons for doing so, my data

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<sup>148</sup> These agencies translate to L.A. Fat Dad, Home Has American Baby, and American Baby Home, respectively.

misses steps of the process which would provide a fuller picture of the trajectory of birth tourists. For example, my data does not reveal much about the actual delivery process and the postpartum period spent recuperating before returning to China.

Fortunately, however, my interview questions were comprehensive enough to help better visualize the journey of *becoming* a birth tourist--from the conceptualization of the idea to the return to China. It is within the three-sited process of birth tourism—China before, the U.S., and China after--that I embed the various cultural, social, and individual motivations driving birth tourists to seek premium citizenship for their child.

## CHAPTER V

### BIRTH TOURISM: WINNING AT THE START LINE

One of the catchphrases of Chinese birth tourism is *ying zai qipaoxian*, or "win from the start line." This popular phrase refers to the competitive environment for children in China and is usually a reference to education opportunities that give children advantageous positioning against other children when they reach early schooling age. While birth tourism is appealing due to educational opportunities it may offer, as will be shown below, the phrase also implies that the race is beginning earlier and earlier, and that the start line is now is the womb. Thus, being born with American citizenship will give children a head start in life. But this head start is not merely in a race against other Chinese children who were unfortunate enough to be born in Mainland China, the head start, as displayed in some advertisements, shows that the race is against other nationalities. One of my favorite advertisements which I found on a site that has been shut down depicts babies of varying ethnicities superimposed on a racing track to Capitol Hill. A more popular image that has been used by various companies, including Meibaozhijia, is of two babies crawling in a race, the first child next to an American flag is Asian and has a significant lead on the child in the back, another Asian child next to a Chinese flag.<sup>149</sup> In a figurative sense American citizenship provides the children of middle-class Chinese parents the competitive edge against their Chinese brothers back in the Mainland. In a literal sense, it actually provides them with increased mobility. It was the access to mobility that their children would enjoy through ownership of a U.S. passport that was echoed by nearly all of my respondents.

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<sup>149</sup>Meibaozhijia, "Fumeishengzi ji da re wenti huizong [A collection of a few big concerns about birth tourism to the U.S]," *HNBTv*, August 31, 2016, <http://www.hljtv.com/2016/0831/840065.shtml> (accessed April 28, 2017).

Another popular saying found not only on birth tourism sites, but mentioned by just about every individual when asked why they chose to give birth in the U.S. was the slogan, *duo yi ge xuanze*, or "one more option." When probed about options, answers varied, but most of the answers revolve around the issues found below, specifically mobility and education choices. Interestingly, for many of the parents I interviewed, these additional choices were for themselves as well. Li Li, a stay-at-home mom from Taiyuan, captured the essence of this from the very beginning of our interview when she said:

You asked why I had baby in the US? It's one more option for the child in the future. Firstly when she grows up, she can choose to be an American. Secondly, education will be better. We give the child one more option, at the same time, we also give ourselves one more option if we want to immigrate. When he grows up, and we are old, we can immigrate easily. I think just these reasons, more options for the child and more options for us parents.

Guo Jianjun, a Taiyuan government official, summed up two of the most commonly perceived advantages of U.S. citizenship in a couple of sentences. When asked what are the advantages of birth tourism in the United States, he responded:

Just two advantages. First, my daughter can go anywhere with her passport. It's very convenient. Secondly in the future when she goes to college, she will have more choices, and she will receive a better education.

This freedom to go anywhere is an important underlying advantage of the U.S. passport, and one that was in fact at the heart of the additional options and choices that parents frequently cited as advantages of birth tourism. Nearly all respondents referenced their child's choice in deciding what they will do in the future, with an emphasis on where they



will travel and study. It is the freedom of movement guaranteed to American citizens that is one of the appealing perks of U.S. citizenship for Chinese parents.

## **Mobility**

Mobility has played a critical role in the modernization discourses of contemporary China for several reasons, including being seen as an aid to economic growth, viewed as a trait of modern (Western) societies, and related to the desire to modernize the countryside and civilize the population<sup>150</sup> Since the beginning of the Deng Xiaoping era, Chinese have been "challenged to travel," and this challenge has created a "spatial hierarchy" that linked success as a modern Chinese subject to mobility.<sup>151</sup> Such mobility, specifically domestic mobility, was critical in assisting the rural population cultivate qualities, such as competitiveness, which is necessary for survival in the market economy.<sup>152</sup> As the rural population becomes more competitive and enters urban areas in larger numbers, the urban population is forced to become more competitive as well. One such way for urbanites to increase their competitiveness and success is to travel abroad where they can gain firsthand knowledge of the outside world via tourism, business ventures, and study abroad. But all mobility in China, of both urbanites and rural people, begins with the household registration card, known as the *hukou*, and any attempt to understand migration in China must begin with the document's central significance.<sup>153</sup>

Initially implemented to control the movement of the population, the *hukou* also

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<sup>150</sup> Pal Nyiri, *Mobility and Cultural Authority in Contemporary China*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010, 7.

<sup>151</sup> Nyiri, 2010, 4.

<sup>152</sup> Nyiri 2010, 81.

<sup>153</sup> Jacques Delisle and Avery Goldstein, *China's Challenges*, 1st ed. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015. 45.

dictates the government's distribution system and individual citizens' eligibility for state benefits.<sup>154</sup> From its origins, the *hukou* system created a deep divide between the cities and the countryside because urbanites had access to many provisions not provided to rural people, such as food, employment, housing, and other entitlements.<sup>155</sup> Due to these entitlements, specifically education and housing subsidies, people with rural *hukous* faced difficulties moving to urban areas. More recent scholarship has moved beyond the rural and urban *hukou* divide to focus on the distinctions in welfare benefits provided by various cities.<sup>156</sup> In other words, the *hukou* does not only create a simple binary between urban and rural *hukou*, but also a hierarchy which ranks every location in China, with Beijing, Shanghai, and Tianjin at the top.<sup>157</sup>

However, the *hukou* has also been linked to restrictions on mobility outside of China as it is connected to the entry and exit administration in China.<sup>158</sup> For example, when Mainland Chinese were first allowed to travel individually under the IVS (Individual Visit Scheme) to Hong Kong during the 2003 SARS epidemic, approval was only granted to *hukou* residents from 10 top-tier cities including Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou.<sup>159</sup> In sum, the *hukou* is both a marker of one's position and treatment in society as well as the "basis of one's political identity and social status."<sup>160</sup> It is no

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<sup>154</sup> Cindy C. Fan, *China on the Move: Migration, the State and the Household*, London, New York: Routledge, 2008, 47.

<sup>155</sup> Fan, 2008, 52.

<sup>156</sup> Sophia Woodman, "Local Politics, Local Citizenship? Socialized Governance in Contemporary China," 226 (2016), 342-62.

<sup>157</sup> Terry Woronov, "Chinese Children," American Education: Globalizing child rearing in contemporary China," Jennifer Cole and Deborah Durham eds., *Generations and Globalizations: Youth, Age, and the Family in the New World Economy*, Durham: Indiana University Press, 2007.

<sup>158</sup> Elaine Lynn-Ee Ho, "Caught between Two Worlds: Mainland Chinese Return Migration, Hukou Considerations and the Citizenship Dilemma," *Citizenship Studies* 15, no. 6-7 (2011): 643-58.

<sup>159</sup> Li, 2016, 57-8.

<sup>160</sup> Jason Young, *China's Hukou System: Markets, Migrants and Institutional Change*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 1-2.

wonder that it has been referred to as "China's first credential."<sup>161</sup>

But just as the PRC began enabling increased domestic mobility and foreign mobility, Chinese who set off on their travels confronted the inconsistencies between the "image of the borderless globally modern Chinese and the often humiliating experiences in which the mobility of PRC passport holders was frustrated by an immobilizing global migration regime."<sup>162</sup> As developed nations began relaxing visa policies to attract the new big-spending Chinese tourists, due to the fear of overstaying Chinese international travelers, especially in the earlier years, the chance of passing a visa application remained very low.<sup>163</sup> To many Chinese international tourists, travelling abroad has been linked to a sense of national pride, and the narratives of international Chinese tourists illustrate their desire to have access to the world on equal footing with nations such as the United States and Japan.<sup>164</sup> Nonetheless, they "continue to endure humiliation at the hands of immigrant officers worldwide."<sup>165</sup>

For centuries, the Chinese have developed methods to overcome both the racist restrictions on their immigration to foreign countries as well as their own severe domestic prohibitions on travel through the use of smugglers and document forging.<sup>166</sup> Today migration brokers and smugglers continue to be brilliant manipulators of constantly changing policies which are aimed at restricting mobility, specifically of migrant workers, as observed in a study of Chinese migration to the United Kingdom.<sup>167</sup> Due to

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<sup>161</sup>Young 2013, 2.

<sup>162</sup>Nyiri, 2010, 6.

<sup>163</sup>Nyiri, 2010, 69.

<sup>164</sup>Nyiri, 2010, 76.

<sup>165</sup>Nyiri, 2010, 76.

<sup>166</sup> David Kyle, and Zai Liang, Migration merchants: human smuggling from Ecuador and China," *Center for Comparative Immigration Studies*, 2001. Wayne Hung Wong and Benson Tong, *American Paper Son: A Chinese Immigrant in the Midwest*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006.

<sup>167</sup> Frank Pieke and Xiang Biao, "Legality ad Labour: Chinese Migration, Neoliberalism and the State in

the traditional and even currently perceived difficulties of migrating and travelling for Chinese citizens, devising ways of overcoming mobility restrictions has been seen as praiseworthy in popular culture. Pal Nyiri illustrates this with a soap opera in which the hero who successfully arrives in Europe via smugglers is hailed for his "ingenuity and tenacity in the face of a challenge to his mobility."<sup>168</sup> Although many Chinese distrust agencies that assist in migration, even more feel dependent on the agencies as it is believed that agents know the latest techniques to overcome limitations placed on Chinese mobility.

Even as the growing middle class has increasing access to mobility as China loosens its grip on their mobility, and foreign governments have devised new visa policies aimed at attracting their purchasing power, the stigma of having a Chinese passport remains for many mainland individuals. The most recent good news for Chinese citizens wishing to travel conveniently to the United States was the implementation of the reciprocal 10-year tourist visa between China and the United States. Even though many of my respondents possessed the new 10-year visa, the remnants of the humiliation of years of visa denials of their friends and fellow countrymen remained on their minds. Thus they viewed giving their child a U.S. passport as an insurance policy to guarantee the freedom of mobility for their children regardless of arbitrarily changing visa and travel restrictions. The U.S. passport is the key to the "one more option" which has become the catchphrase of birth tourism, and at the heart of those options is the freedom to choose where to travel, live, study, and work in the future.

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UK and China," *Geopolitics, History and International Relations* 1, no.1 (2009): 11-45.

<sup>168</sup>Nyiri, 2010, 154.

### **Future *Liuxuesheng***<sup>169</sup>

Both in birth tourism advertisements and in personal interviews, the intimate links between education considerations and the choice to give birth in the US resonated clearly. Research has shown that education plays a significant role in shaping people's desire to migrate, especially Asian families.<sup>170</sup> Even though the majority of birth tourists are middle class families who could afford to eventually send their children abroad to receive a western education, one of the options that U.S. citizenship provides for their children is the right to have easier access to foreign education, a sort of insurance policy against the uncertainty of the notorious Chinese college entrance exam route if and when the child was no longer competitive and successful.

The allure of a foreign education, specifically a Western or Japanese education, has a long history dating back to the Republican period when the child and his education, much like the new woman, was linked to the future success of the nation. Study abroad took a hiatus during the Mao period, but following the Deng era reforms it once again became not only possible but even promoted as a patriotic nation-strengthening endeavor. Recently, as explored in Vanessa Fong's *Paradise Redefined*, the increasingly globalized nature of China has led to aspirations of belonging to "an imagined developed world community composed of mobile, wealthy, well-educated and well-connected people worldwide."<sup>171</sup> While there are multiple pathways to belonging to that imagined world, one such way is through the acquisition of a degree from a foreign university, particularly those of the first world. According to Aihwa Ong, "For many middle-class Chinese...the

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<sup>169</sup>*Liuxuesheng* means students who study abroad.

<sup>170</sup> Waters, "Transnational Family Strategies and Education in the Contemporary Chinese Diaspora," 2005, 359.

<sup>171</sup>Fong, *Paradise Redefined: Transnational Chinese Students and the Quest for Flexible Citizenship in the Developed World*, 2011, 6.

ultimate symbolic capital necessary for global mobility is an American college degree.”<sup>172</sup> An overseas education is viewed to embody extremely valuable social and cultural capital that can be utilized in international business and professional spheres. It is seen to illustrate the bearer's English language proficiency and qualities such as confidence, sociability, cosmopolitanism, and valuable social capital.<sup>173</sup>

After the reforms of Deng Xiaoping, when students could once again access study abroad opportunities, it was primarily the best and brightest students who had succeeded in the Chinese education system who were allowed and even financed by the government to study abroad. Liu Chao, a middle-aged Taiyuan businessman, was fully aware of this when he stated:

America has always been the place Chinese people want to go. A long time ago, people who went to the US were knowledgeable people, such as students who graduated from Beijing University or Qinghua University. They received full scholarships. It was basically free to go to school in the US. So a lot of talented people went to the US."

Liu Chao , who began college in Beijing the year of the Tiananmen crisis in 1989 and had youthful aspirations of studying abroad, was not only talking about the origins of *chuguore* (study abroad craze) but how the caliber of students going abroad has changed in recent years.

Study abroad was not only linked to providing individual students with capital and skills of the developed world, but also with helping China enter the developed

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<sup>172</sup> Ong, 1999, 90.

<sup>173</sup> Waters, "Transnational Family Strategies and Education in the Contemporary Chinese Diaspora," 2005, 362-3.

world.<sup>174</sup> As Fong illustrates in her Dalian study, individuals born after the implementation of the one-child policy viewed studying abroad as reasonable and natural.<sup>175</sup> In fact, several of the respondents in my interviews also had dreams of studying abroad when they were younger, but for various reasons, those aspirations were not achieved. The number of students studying abroad has increased steadily with the tremendous growth of China's middle class. As Terry E. Woronov stated ten years ago, "parents who only a decade ago imagined their children moving to the high-status cities of Beijing or Shanghai can now envision for them possible lives in New York, Sydney, or Toronto."<sup>176</sup>

In recent years, with the number of self-financing students reaching 90% in 2008,<sup>177</sup> study abroad has also been viewed as a means to escape China's competitive education system. In Fong's study, people viewed study abroad as a window of hope for students who would otherwise be relegated to the bottom of society due to low exam scores.<sup>178</sup> Moreover, studying abroad was viewed to surpass those who were more successful in navigating the Chinese education system.<sup>179</sup> Not only does foreign study enable students to escape the extremely competitive education system, it also provides students with something more valuable, a foreign degree.<sup>180</sup>

Like many things "foreign" in China, study abroad has been painted as glorious thanks in part to students who return to China and remain silent about any negative

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<sup>174</sup>Fong, 2011, 52-53

<sup>175</sup>Fong 2011, 69

<sup>176</sup>Terry E. Woronov, "Chinese Children." American education: Globalizing Child Rearing in Contemporary China." Jennifer Cole and Deborah Durham, eds. *Generations and Globalization: Youth, Age, and the Family in the New World Economy*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007, 36.

<sup>177</sup> Fong, 2011, 158.

<sup>178</sup>Fong, 2011, 71

<sup>179</sup>Fong, 2011, 73

<sup>180</sup> Waters, "Transnational Family Strategies and Education in the Contemporary Chinese Diaspora," 2005, 368.

aspects of the experience, except for with close friends. This phenomenon, as Fong illustrates, has created the notion that foreign countries are *tiantang*, or paradise, as implied in the title of her book: *Paradise Redefined*.<sup>181</sup> Not only is the lifestyle abroad romanticized, but overseas education is seen as opening job opportunities in addition to providing social and cultural capital back home.<sup>182</sup> For people I interviewed, study abroad was viewed as a rite of passage, as something expected of contemporary middle-class Chinese cosmopolitan citizens. Although a handful of parents said they would let their child decide where and when they wanted to study, the overall consensus was that study abroad was a natural course of events for wealthy and middle-class citizens wanting to succeed in the globalized market. As Yang Xing, a Shanxi local living in Beijing, mentioned, "nowadays most children go abroad for high school and college." While it is undeniable that the study abroad craze has been on the rise in recent years, her view that *most* people study abroad these days is a clear marker of her elevated class position and a confirmation that in her circle of friends, buying a foreign education was merely an expectation. In this regard, securing U.S. citizenship for one's child was viewed as a well-conceived plan to ensure the success and feasibility of foreign education in the future.

As the more than half a million Chinese *liuxuesheng* currently studying abroad suggests,<sup>183</sup> possessing U.S. citizenship is not a prerequisite for studying abroad. Even though study abroad is accessible without U.S. citizenship, the simple convenience factor was an important consideration. Liu Minjie, a Beijing local and journalist, was aware of

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<sup>181</sup>Fong, 2011, 31

<sup>182</sup> Waters, "Transnational Family Strategies and Education in the Contemporary Chinese Diaspora," 2005, 359.

<sup>183</sup> "A Record Number of Chinese Abroad in 2015 But Growth is Slowing," *ICEF Monitor*, April 6, 2016, <http://monitor.icef.com/2016/04/a-record-number-of-chinese-students-abroad-in-2015-but-growth-is-slowing/> (accessed May 15, 2017).



this fact, " Some people say if I have baby in China, my baby can still go study and live in America in the future. But I just feel that it's more convenient if my baby is an American citizen." When pressed about what she meant about convenience, she mentioned a recurring theme among my respondents, as well as much of the literature regarding Chinese migration--the difficulty of getting a visa. For Liu Minjie, one of the horror stories she cited was relayed to her via her sister who was studying in the UK. According to her sister, many of her Chinese classmates who returned to China for a visit were denied a visa upon their return to the UK. Similar situations have been reported in the U.S. as well. Even though she was unaware of the details, this story, like many of the visa horror stories so familiar to Chinese people, was just one additional reason to give their child US citizenship and avoid the great humiliation of immobility. This sentiment was echoed by Chen Mei, a Taiyuan resident and medical school graduate, when recounting her visa application process at the US embassy in Beijing.

It's easier to study abroad. There are a lot of limitation on Chinese students. For example, when I went for the visa interview, the boy in front of me wanted to go to college in the U.S. The interviewer asked him several questions. We happened to be able to hear him. He asked, what do your parents do? Why don't you go to college in China? I didn't hear the answer. Then he was denied. I don't know why. Obviously this incident was not the catalyst for her decision as she was already at the embassy when she encountered the young boy who was refused a student visa. However, stories similar to these of average Chinese being denied visas, particularly those seeking to study abroad, are common among the masses. Moreover, while not expressly stated, parents believed that their children would be able to meet lower admissions standards and

would essentially be guaranteed a spot at an American university if they were U.S. citizens, regardless of their child's own academic efforts and capabilities. Many parents viewed birth tourism similar to the respondents in Vanessa Fong's study, as a way to escape the competitive education system if and when their child was no longer successful.

For other parents, one of the clearest benefits of their child's U.S. citizenship was reduced tuition fees since they would not have to pay the exorbitant international student tuition rates. Similar to the parents in Water's 2004 study of transnational Chinese families who viewed immigration as a cheaper option over the long haul of educating their children abroad and paying high annual international fees,<sup>184</sup> some of the birth tourists I spoke to considered their child's birthright citizenship as a means of saving money on their eventual foreign education. When I asked Wang Yan, a secretary for an agency which opens shopping malls across China, whether she thought giving birth in the U.S. was an investment like often advertised in the media, she said, "I did not spend too much money anyways. People in Beijing like to send their children abroad, and it makes a difference to be an American citizen, so I think it will save me a lot of money." Wang Yan was sending her oldest child, a nine-year-old girl born in China, to public school while sending her second child, the American boy, to private school, a decision she rationalized in monetary terms.

### **Immigration Possibilities**

In addition to enabling their children the right to mobility and travelling visa free

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<sup>184</sup> Waters, "Transnational Family Strategies and Education in the Contemporary Chinese Diaspora," 2005, 370.

across the globe, many parents view their child's U.S. citizenship as an alternative route to citizenship for themselves and their families in the future. Thus, the additional choices implied with birth tourism specifically refers to the choice the parents must immigrate in the future. Every parent was aware that their American citizen children could sponsor them for green cards when they were adults, just as Meibaozhijia makes clear as one of the advantages.<sup>185</sup> According to U.S. State Department policy, children sponsoring parents must be 21 years of age.<sup>186</sup>

Several of my interviewees were either in the process of immigrating, had already tried immigrating, or considered immigration as an option for the future. Even for those who said they had no immediate interest in immigrating, especially those who were concerned with obstacles to earning income once abroad or leaving their own parents behind, the option to immigrate was always on the table, and the mere possibility of future immigration with their children was an important determining factor.

Take for example the case of Chen Mei. After returning from the US with her twins, Chen Mei and her family began the process of immigrating to the U.S. via the EB-5 investment visa. They had already put down a significant deposit for the one-million-dollar investment visa when Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign began. Since her husband, who owned a family business, also worked for the government and was trying to be promoted into a leadership position, the family was forced to give up their immigration plan and lost the deposit.

Although Chen Mei seemed to have given up plans for immigration in order to secure her husband's career, Yao Xi, a former Beijing journalist, was just beginning the

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<sup>185</sup>Meibaozhijia, <http://www.jiiaa.com/zixun/6821.html> (accessed May 15, 2017).

<sup>186</sup>U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, <https://www.uscis.gov/family/family-us-citizens/parents/bringing-parents-live-united-states-permanent-residents> (accessed April 15, 2017)

process to immigrate to the United States. Referring to giving birth in the U.S, she said:

It's the most convenient way for the child to get American citizenship. It's very hard for us to get American citizenship. It's not about money. Even if I wait 10 or 20 years, I still cannot get citizenship. Now we are already doing investment immigration. We won't wait till my child turns 24.

Yao Xi had done her homework and was extremely knowledgeable about not just birth tourism but also her future options to immigrate. For example, even though agencies propagate that U.S.-born children can sponsor their parents for green cards when they turn 21, Yao Xi apparently knew about the fact that sponsors required two years of tax returns before legally being able to do so. Apparently assuming that her child would graduate college at 22 years old before finding a job, she nonchalantly said she would not wait until he was 24 years old. Additionally, Yao Xi knew specific statistics about the investment visa route. When I asked if she wanted her whole family to immigrate to America, this time she used statistics to make her point, saying, "the chances of obtaining an investment visa are 1:5."

In the case of Chen Mei and Yao Xi, both parents were involved in the immigration process either just before or soon after the birth of their children. In other words, the idea to immigrate to the United States, for these two individuals, arose within to context of giving birth in the United States. Giving birth in the U.S., particularly for Yao Xi, was merely an alternative, if not very prolonged, route to securing her own U.S. citizenship in the future.

Liu Chao, who was in the U.S. doing business when his first U.S-child was born, was certain that he and his family would eventually emigrate outside of China. Although

he stated that the idea to emigrate arose after his wife had given birth to their second U.S. citizen child, he seemed to contradict himself later, when he said, "I know I will definitely emigrate from this country. I'm not sure if I will go to the US, but since I will emigrate, why would I let my children be Chinese?" After hinting to the fact that migration was an early consideration, he followed this statement by illustrating how, in his reckoning, the processing time for hypothetically immigrating to Canada in the future would be faster for his American son and daughter since they are both U.S. citizens. Liu Chao did not share with me how his business venture in the United States eventually fared. However, I was aware that he had recently applied to attend graduate school in the United States but was denied a student visa by the U.S. embassy. He seemed eager to bring his oldest son, who was in kindergarten, to the United States to attend school, but visa denial did not deter him. He also mentioned hypothetically immigrating to Europe during the course of our conversation, and though there were many uncertainties in his plans, he was confident that he would eventually leave China:

I'm not sure it will be the US, I don't know which country yet, but I definitely won't retire in China. I don't even have insurance in China. I pay all the social security for my employees, I pay 700,000 to 800,000 RMB every year. But not for myself.

Liu Chao 's comment illustrates how immigration abroad, hopefully via the sponsorship of his children, is a form of retirement insurance. Perhaps most surprising, however, it seems that to Liu Chao having a child in the U.S. facilitates immigration not just to the U.S. but to other nations of the global north.

Unlike the certainty exhibited by Chen Mei, Yao Xi, and Liu Chao, other

respondents mentioned immigration as a possibility in the distant future. When asked what advantages her child's American citizenship provided her and her family, Yang Xing said:

YX: In the future, when she's 22, she can help us apply to immigrate.

BF: So you want to immigrate? Did you have that thought before you had the baby or after?

YX: Maybe before she becomes 22, we will do investment immigration.

Everything's possible

Asked about the advantages of giving birth in the United States, Zhang Shenhua remarked:

I mean, if we did not have the second baby in the US, in the future if we want to immigrate or children want to study abroad, then we will have to find other ways to immigrate, or children will need to pass tests and stuff, which is a more difficult way. So when we had the chance, we chose to do it.

Unlike many other interviewees, Li Li was quite frank from the beginning. Recall her remark earlier in this section as to why she thought birth tourism was a good idea: "We give the child one more option, and at the same time, we also give ourselves one more option. If we want to immigrate, when she grows up and we are old, we can immigrate easily."

Li Li plans to bring her children to the United States to study when her second child, the one with U.S. citizenship, begins school in a couple years. When I mentioned the potential problem of her U.S.-born child having access to education in America while she and her oldest child did not have a long-term visa or green card, Li Li was not

worried. She said, "I know. After six months I can come back and go there again. I don't think that's a problem. I think if everyone else can stay there, it won't be a problem." She was referring to several friends who were living in America for long periods of time and had also been birth tourists. Through the new ten-year visa, at least in her mind, she could live in America in six month increments while accompanying her children to school. It appears that with the 10-year visa, Li Li had gained an important and liberating flexibility, sort of akin to the flexible citizens described in Aihwa Ong's *Flexible Citizenship*. Yang Xing also echoed the desire for flexibility.

One of the only interviewees who didn't give immigration much thought was Liu Minjie. Liu Minjie seemed more cautious about the potential problems of living abroad, but also more importantly her and her husband's duties as singletons with aging parents.

I haven't thought about immigration yet. For my generation, I need to consider my parents. Twenty years later, my parents will still be alive. I'm the only child. If I leave, what about my parents? If my child chooses to live there, she can. I choose to stay in China. At least when my parents are alive, I will not leave. After my parents die, I probably will not choose to immigrate either. It's not that easy. First of all, where do I get income? How do I live there? I think I might go there short-term to be with my child. Most of the time I will be in China, because my family, friends, everything is in China.

To many individuals who choose birth tourism as an option, future immigration to the United States is on the radar. However, Liu Minjie illustrates that for some parents who are products of the one-child policy, immigration abroad is not a viable option, at least while their parents are alive. For Liu Minjie, birth tourism appeared to be a brilliant

method to remain filial to her parents while also providing her child with the choice to live and study abroad without having to actually relocate with the child in both the short and long term. In this way, birth tourism provides prospective immigration without many of the problems found in astronaut families, but with the potential negative consequence found among parachute kids.<sup>187</sup>

Thus far, my analysis has focused on the most commonly cited motivations of Chinese birth tourists--the desire for mobility, specifically in relation to study abroad and immigration possibilities. These stated long-term motivations are not just limited to my interviews; they appear in the popular press in both China and the U.S. and are promoted as key perks on the websites of agencies engaged in the birth tourism industry. But beyond these long-term incentives (which are very much interlinked with global citizenship inequality), more class-informed, individualized, and arguably contemporary considerations rise to the surface of their accounts. The following section will explore the actual lived experiences of individuals as they make the decision to engage in birth tourism and some of the driving forces which inform that decision. It will key in on the experience of individuals at various points of the process in both China and the U.S. and conclude with a focus on the course of forging a new path for their children and themselves upon return to China.

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<sup>187</sup> "Parachute kid" is a term used to refer to children residing abroad alone or with a caregiver in order to receive education while the parents remain in the home country. For more information on this status enhancing strategy and its effects on family cohesion and emotional development. (Ken Chih-Yan Sun, "Transnational Kinscription: A Case of Parachute Kids in the USA and Their Parents in Taiwan," *Journal of Ethnic Migration Studies* 40, no.9 (2014): 1431-49.)



## **Conceiving Birth Tourism: Family Negotiations, Short-term Considerations, and Visa Acquisition**

For some respondents, especially the earlier pioneers, the idea to give birth in the United States was not fathomed until after their pregnancy was discovered. This was the case for the three individuals I interviewed who had their child in or prior to 2012--Chen Mei (2011), Wang Yan (2012), and Zhao Guangming(2012). These three individuals all learned of birth tourism through their friends and acquaintances who had already given birth in the U.S.

Chen Mei's friend who had given birth to two children in the United States in 2009 and 2011 introduced her to the idea. This acquaintance was actually attempting to open a month center in L.A. and attract more "friends;" however, in the end only Chen Mei joined her in the four-bedroom Arcadia house in the U.S.

I did not start thinking about it until after I was pregnant, and I happened to know that girl, so we talked. It was very quick, maybe a couple of days, about a week, we made the decision. I got pregnant in October, made the decision in December, got the visa in January.

Wang Yan had a similar experience. She was around three or four months pregnant when she learned of birth tourism through her husband's friend who had travelled to the US to give birth. Although not sure of the exact date, she was sure it was right after the U.S. opened the individual travel scheme (IVS) for tourists. This event inspired them to begin researching, upon which they realized it "wasn't too expensive." She said she would have never considered or carried out the plan without this acquaintance. For Wang Yan, the opportunity to have her child in the U.S. appeared to be one that fell into her lap. Her

husband did all of the research, even joining online groups.

For others, like Guo Jianjun, the plan became a possibility due to the presence of a family member in the U.S. He said that when his wife was pregnant for his first child in 2012 that they had considered going to the U.S. to give birth but since his wife's sister was still in college, they decided against it because she didn't have a private house and they didn't want to disturb her studies. For the birth of their second child in 2014, his sister-in-law was already working and owned a home. He said without his sister-in-law telling them about the possibility of birth tourism, and without her ability to translate for his wife, giving birth to their second child in the U.S. would have never become a reality.

Many other parents, especially those who engaged in birth tourism after 2013, used a host of means to learn about birth tourism, including friends, family, popular media, and consultations with intermediaries in China. Liu Minjie, who had her child in the U.S. in June of 2015, had begun researching information about birth tourism nearly two years before she became pregnant, the same year that the popular movie *Finding Mr. Right* was released. The year 2013 was also the first year in which birth tourism was banned in Hong Kong, and the tens of thousands of mainland women who had been giving birth on the island for years were left looking for an alternative, which some seem to have found in the U.S and its territories, such as Saipan.

She admitted that the first news she heard of birth tourism was negative. As mentioned above, with the increasing popularity of the phenomenon, numerous Chinese news and TV programs explored the issue with a heavy focus on the negative aspects.

Maybe at first I got some negative information because there are a lot of intermediaries in China who created some negative information saying it's illegal

to have babies in the US. They give some bad examples of how people get sent back to China, or some people get stopped by customs. Therefore they say they can help us do birth tourism successfully. At first I heard a lot of these negative examples, but then I searched online. I did not know too much about it, but after I searched online, I found out it was not illegal. There is no such law saying it's illegal to have babies in the US. In both Chinese law and American law it is totally legal.

Interestingly, Liu Minjie believed that in addition to the government's negative narrative, birth tourism agencies had a stake in spreading instances of unsuccessful attempts to create a dependency on agencies rather than outright deter prospective clients. It should be noted that of all the cases I encountered, Liu Minjie was the only birth tourist who didn't have a family member or personal acquaintance either suggest birth tourism as an option or help carry out the plan.

Spousal support of birth tourism varied among couples. For some, such as Wang Yan and Yao Xi, it appeared that it was their husbands who were the primary proponents of the idea to give birth abroad. Although somewhat hesitant at first, after discussing the benefits they agreed it was a good idea. For the majority of the individuals I talked to, however, the desire to travel abroad to give birth was determined primarily by the mother-to-be. For example, it was only once Zhao Guangming's wife got excited about it through the news from one of her coworkers and began preparing a trip there that he became serious about the plan. Chen Mei said that after learning of the opportunity through her friend, she discussed it with the entire family and everyone was on board. Liu Minjie said her husband was neither for or against it, but he supported her decision.

Yang Xing firmly declared that going to the U.S. to give birth was her decision, saying, "at first my parents were opposed to it, and my husband was kind of influenced by them. But I made up my mind... I told my parents the advantages of it, they accepted it. My in-laws never accepted it though."

Li Li was also very assertive in making the decision. She had this to say about the decision to give birth in the U.S.,

I'm not the kind of person who plans very well. I just follow my heart. It happened that a friend asked me if I wanted to go to America, because at first I wanted to go to Hong Kong. Then I found out Hong Kong did not allow it anymore. So I thought America was also okay. I figured I would give it a shot. I called my friend and asked about it. I was three-months pregnant, and she was already in the US. She told me about the process. She's my boss's relative. After I figured out the process and prepared enough money, I decided to go.

Parents and in-laws also had very little say in the process. In most cases, they were not very receptive to the idea. However, it wasn't necessarily because they did not agree with the concept of birth tourism and foreign citizenship but rather due to the fear of a pregnant woman travelling long distances at such a vulnerable period. Li Li had this to say about her parents' and in-laws' reaction to her idea:

My family was not very supportive, my in-laws thought it's not very convenient that I had to take a long flight with a big belly...old people don't think too much. Although they nagged about it, they did not stop me from doing it. I just did what I wanted.

In almost all cases, the older generations were against it only because of the risks of

travelling to an unknown place with no family and friends to give birth rather than any specific details related to the process itself.

### **One Child Policy and Fine Avoidance**

For the earlier cohort of birth tourists, one of the main advantages of giving birth in the United States was avoiding the one-child policy. A response to both a concern for rapid population growth as well as an ambitious economic development agenda, the one-child policy was enacted in 1979 by Deng Xiaoping, a long supporter of population control.<sup>188</sup> The national policy was implemented differently across urban and rural areas, regions, provinces, and even ethnicities.<sup>189</sup> Penalties also varied. The government found it easier to control urbanites over rural people due to their jobs at state-owned industries and dependency on state welfare distributions systems. Generally speaking, rural couples had two children, particularly if the first one was female, and urban couples had one.<sup>190</sup> Beginning in 2001, certain exceptions were written into the policy to allow a second child under specific circumstances, the most important of which was if both spouses were only children.<sup>191</sup> In November 2013, a partial policy relaxation was announced allowing couples in which only one is an only child to have two children.<sup>192</sup> Finally, at the end of 2015, after a nearly 40 year run, the one-child policy officially became the two-child policy, and families are not only permitted to have two children, but are encouraged to do so. It is estimated that over the 35 years the policy was in effect that local government

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<sup>188</sup>Junsen Zhang, "The Evolution of China's One-Child Policy and Its Effects on Family Outcomes," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 31, no. 1 (2017): 141-60, 144.

<sup>189</sup> Zhang, 2017, 145.

<sup>190</sup> Zhang, 2017, 145.

<sup>191</sup>Yijia Jing, "The One-Child Policy Needs an Overhaul," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 32, no. 2 (2013): 392-9.

<sup>192</sup> Wang Feng, Baochang Gu, Yong Cai, "The End of China's One-Child Policy," *Studies in Family Planning* 47, no. 1 (2016): 83-86.

officials collected between 1.5 and 2 trillion RMB in fines.<sup>193</sup> It is the constantly evolving nature of the one-child policy in recent years that serves as an important backdrop for viewing and understanding the reason some urban families chose birth tourism in the United States.

Among the ten birth tourists I interviewed, eight had given birth to their second child in the U.S. and two had given birth to their first child. Three of the eight were qualified under the various permutations of the policy to have a second child in China. For Guo Jianjun, an urban singleton from Taiyuan who had his second child in the US in 2014, the policy had already changed to permit couples in which at least one parent was an only-child to have a second child. Since Zhao Guangming and his wife were both only-children, giving birth to their second child in Beijing in 2014 was completely within the limits of the policy. Additionally, Zhang Shenhua and her husband, both non-Beijing *hukou* holders residing in Beijing, were also qualified to have their second child without facing fines. The only downside for them was that their second child would have a non-local *hukou* like them.

The other five respondents were not "qualified" to have their second child according to the policy of their *hukou* registration at the time of birth. When asked directly if they would have to pay penalties, however, two respondents said they had methods to avoid the penalty had they stayed in China to give birth. Li Li, a Taiyuan woman who gave birth to her U.S. baby at the end of 2014, said that unlike the mothers she met at the month center in the US who were from Beijing and Hangzhou where the policy was strictly enforced, she would be able to find ways around paying the fine. Comparing herself to those from other cities in China, Li Li said, "It's just about *guanxi*

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<sup>193</sup> Jing, 2013.

(connections). The laws and regulations are not so well enforced in Taiyuan."

Additionally, Yang Xing, a Shanxi resident married to a Beijing resident and living in Beijing, further complicates the issue. Had Yang Xing chosen to give birth in Beijing and attempt to register the child for a Beijing *hukou*, she would have certainly been fined 360,000 Yuan, or approximately 50,000 dollars, which was the going rate in Beijing in 2014. However, had she returned to her hometown in Shanxi province, she "could find a way to avoid it (paying the fine)."

Fine avoidance was not an option for the three other parents, all of whom had their second child in or prior to 2012. What this illustrates is that while the one-child policy and particularly fine avoidance played an undeniable role in the early cohorts of Chinese who engaged in birth tourism, it appears that over time due to the relaxing of policy enforcement, fines became a somewhat insignificant factor in parents' decision to engage in birth tourism.

In some of the cases in which parents were permitted to have a second child or could avoid fine, as in the cases of Zhang Shenhua and Yang Xing, *hukou* considerations emerged as significant considerations. For example, Yang Xing was permitted to have a second child in Shanxi, not in Beijing where she was currently living, but chose to go to the US instead. Zhang Shenhua and her husband were also both eligible for a second child, but their child would be registered as a non-Beijing *hukou*. In some cases, parents said it just sounded easier to have a child and get all the necessary documents in American than in China. In fact, both Zhang Shenhua and Yang Xing said it was "easier" to get an American *hukou* than a Beijing *hukou*.<sup>194</sup> It should be emphasized here that both

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<sup>194</sup> This sentiment, that it is easier to get a U.S. *hukou* than a Beijing *hukou*, was also echoed in a 2011 article by Elaine Lynn-Ee Ho (Lynn-Ee Ho, 2011).

mothers used *hukou* interchangeably with a U.S. passport.

When I began observing websites for birth tourism at the beginning of 2016, a clear transition was taking place in the way in which agencies were projecting their services. In listing reasons for birth tourism, some of the older websites touted the one-child policy as a significant reason to give birth abroad. In America, as recent as 2015, journalists in defense of birth tourism cited the one-child policy as the most evident reason that Chinese families travel to the U.S. to give birth.<sup>195</sup> However, in recent years, online agents who promote birth tourism are acutely aware of these changes in demographics and have been actively engaged in re-orienting the market. This has been especially visible after the change of the one child policy at the end of 2015. Now some sites make sure to mention that a significant number of Chinese birth tourists give birth to their first child in the United States. It is interesting to note that in my small sample, the only two individuals to give birth to their first child abroad were *Lao Beijing ren*.<sup>196</sup> For these two parents, the highly-coveted Beijing *hukou*, arguably the most valuable *hukou* in China, was their child's birthright. Their decision, then, perhaps speaks more to the anxiety of residents from top-tiered cities who fear the shuffling of the old *hukou* regime and incoming competition of the children of Beijing's new residents and China's new elite.<sup>197</sup> In other words, the way for average *Lao Beijing ren* to compete with the influx of extremely wealthy migrants to the city is to give their children foreign citizenship.

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<sup>195</sup> Dave Bier, "Chinese Mothers Give Birth in the U.S. To thwart China's One-Child Policy," *Niskanen Center*, March 5, 2015, <https://nikanencenter.org/blog/chinese-mothers-give-birth-in-u-s-to-thwart-chinas-one-child-policy/> (accessed March 20, 2017). Adam Minter, "China's Birth Tourism Isn't About the U.S.," *Bloomberg View*, November 10, 2011, <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2011-11-03/china-s-birth-tourism-isn-t-about-the-u-s-adam-minter> (accessed March 20, 2017).

<sup>196</sup> *Lao Beijing ren* is commonly understood to mean that at the very least one's grandparents were born in Beijing. This is an important form of distinction in the reform era following the massive influx of migrants into the city.

<sup>197</sup> Young, 2013, 2.



### **Advanced Medical Considerations**

Although getting around the one-child policy may be, or at least was, a concern unique to birth tourists from China in the past, access to advanced medical procedures is a consideration shared by middle-class parents in other developing countries. Take for example the case of Russian birth tourism, where many mothers desire the superior medical services offered in the United States. Miami has emerged as the central hub of the Russian birth tourist industry, an industry which attracts women looking to escape outdated medical technology and an indifferent and unfriendly medical service industry.<sup>198</sup>

The superior medical services provided in the United States were discussed at length by a few of my respondents. Through our discussions, it was sometimes difficult to distinguish if the praise given to the American medical system was something known about beforehand or reminisced about in hindsight. During the course of my interviews, it was striking that medical considerations were primarily discussed at length by the fathers. All three fathers had experience giving birth in China before having their second child in the U.S. When referencing the Chinese medical system during interviews, three themes seemed to recur when discussing the health system in China: inconvenience, limited resources, and outdated or incorrect notions of childbirth. These three common complaints are also recurring themes in the recent online social medical presence of Chinese agencies assisting in birth tourism.

Zhao Guangming, a Beijing businessman, spent the majority of our hour together focused on comparisons between his very different birth experiences in Beijing and the

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<sup>198</sup> In the news article, according to the leader of one Miami company catering to Russian birth tourists in 2014, between 40-60 Russian women give birth in Miami each month, and that number has been growing. (Collinson, 2014.)

United States. At five months pregnant, his wife's colleague returned from giving birth in the United States and heard that the medical conditions there were great. To Zhao Guangming, the lack of resources in Chinese hospitals and the disregard for people's time and convenience were key determinants in his and his wife's decision to give birth in the United States. One thing that was unique about Zhao Guangming's situation was that he and his wife were still undecided about birth tourism when they left China for a trip to the U.S. Just entering her second trimester, Zhao and his wife were planning to do some travel in the U.S. and inquire, face-to-face about the medical procedures. Since they were qualified to have their second child in China, they wanted to begin by comparing their options. After finding doctors and personally experiencing the medical procedures, his wife decided to stay and await the arrival of their new child, and he returned to China during the weeks prior to delivery.

Zhao Guangming recounted the unpleasant memories of spending the entire day in a hospital going for prenatal checkups with his wife for their first and second child and the sheer inconvenience of it all. In China when patients go to the hospital they must register and pay for each service separately. This often entails the inconvenience of waiting in several different lines for long periods of time.

In Beijing, most people go to the Women and Children's hospitals to have babies. Every time you go to get a pre-natal test, you need to spend half a day to a whole day in the hospital. You go to the hospital at around 8:00 in the morning, wait in line to register, and after that, if you need to do several tests, you need to register several times, and then wait in line to pay. For example, if you are getting an ultrasound, you need to go to a different place. After you do all that, you probably

won't be home until the afternoon, and it's likely you won't be able to have lunch.

Every week it's like this.

However, it was perhaps the near disaster of the birth of his first child that made Zhao Guangming and his wife consider alternatives to the Chinese medical system. During the birth of his first child, the infant's head was emerging improperly, but the inexperienced delivery doctor continued to have his wife push. It was only after a great period of time had elapsed that the doctor called his supervisor in, who determined that the baby was emerging from the back of his head rather than the top. He recounted the quiet first minute of the baby's non-responsive life.

If it was the experienced doctor he would know how to guide. So I think it was the lack of resources that caused this situation. It might well be a big accident. I was scared. From the pre-natal tests, to the delivery, everything was frightening. When I asked if he thought this fear had something to do with inexperience and stress of being a father for the first time, he adamantly disagreed.

A final consideration for Zhao Guangming and his wife was the freedom of choice in delivering the child on their own terms. Two conditions in particular were important to them: being administered an epidural and giving birth naturally. Zhao Guangming stated that his wife was very much interested in an epidural and having a painless experience. According to a few respondents, epidurals, although offered in China, are often arbitrarily administered. For example, when I mentioned that epidurals were offered at Chinese hospitals, Zhao Guangming replied:

Hospitals have this service but they can't always use it. There are eight people waiting to deliver, but there are only one or two anesthesiologists in the hospital.

The anesthesiologist needs to know all the details of the pregnant women...to calculate the dose...So one anesthesiologist can't take care of 8 women at the same time. Even if the hospital says they offer epidurals, when you're in labor it is uncertain if they can really do it. So I think everything was caused by China's large population and its limited hospital resources.

Additionally, Zhao's wife wanted to deliver her child naturally, but Chinese doctors wanted her to have a caesarean section (C-section). In 2003, the rate of C-sections in urban China was between 40-50%, while the rate in suburban China was between 50-70%.<sup>199</sup> It has been suggested that the high rate of C-sections have been created due to the growing prevalence of health insurance which has increased the desire to perform expensive, high-tech medical procedures.<sup>200</sup> Other research has suggested a correlation between the high rate of C-sections and individual choice.<sup>201</sup> In other words, C-sections are desirable as a result of the importance placed on the safety and painlessness of childbirth due to its relative rarity since implementation of the one-child policy. Although the number of C-sections have been reported to be on the decline in recent years,<sup>202</sup> some respondents seemed to feel as if they didn't have a choice in opting out of the C-section. For many who desire giving birth naturally, the U.S. seemed to guarantee the freedom of choice in determining the conditions of their own childbirth.

This idea of giving birth on one's own terms was also a key consideration for Li

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<sup>199</sup>Guang Shi, and Sen Gong, "An analysis of China's investment and performance in the health system since reform and opening up," *China Development Review* 7, trans. from original Mandarin (2005): 50-77.

<sup>200</sup> W. W. Cai, J. S. Marks, C. H. Chen, Y. X. Zhuang, L. Morris, and J. R. Harris, "Increased Cesarean Section Rates and Emerging Patterns of Health Insurance in Shanghai, China," *American Journal of Public Health* 88, no. 5 (1998): 777-80.

<sup>201</sup>Xie Hong, "Why Is the Rate of Cesarean Section in Urban China so High? Is the Price Transparency Policy Working?" *Journal of Health Management* 10, no. 1 (2008).

<sup>202</sup> Donald G. McNeil, "Study Finds Lower, but Still High, Rate of C-Sections in China," *The New York Times*, January 19, 2017, [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/19/health/c-section-births-china.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/19/health/c-section-births-china.html?_r=0) (accessed March 18, 2017).

Li, who described the process of finding a doctor in the U.S. To Li Li, even Chinese doctors in the U.S. were the same as those back home, in that they were authoritarian.

Thus, she wanted an American, specifically a "white doctor."

Li Li: I found a white doctor because I wanted to deliver naturally. My first baby (in China) was delivered by C-section. I told the Chinese doctors what I wanted to do, but they didn't accept it. They said no, I have to do C-section. So I wanted to see a white doctor. I saw an old white man, over 70 years old.

BF: Did this situation affect your decision to have the baby in the US?

Li Li: Yes, I went to the US to be able to deliver naturally and without pain. This is one of the reasons.

The friend who introduced me to Li Li, and who was present during the interview, was a nurse at a local hospital. After hearing Li Li talk about the inaccessibility of anesthesia, she was quick to argue that anesthesia was available in the local hospital, to which Li Li responded: "You couldn't do that here. China didn't have that anesthetic technique back then. In the US, they give anesthesia at three fingers." By three fingers she was referring to the width that the cervix dilates during labor. To this, her friend reemphasized that it was available in China at three fingers as well.

Here an interesting issue emerges. For both Zhao Guangming and Li Li, it wasn't a matter of whether certain services and treatments were available in China, it was the reliability of being able to receive those treatments in their own time of need. That is to say, the notion of individual choice and control resonates clearly. There seems to be a dissonance in the new middle-class sensibility with people who have been socialized in an era in which the "customer is god," but who are still subjected to socialist style

arbitrary practices, limited resources, and a perceived lack of human and personal care for patients. This is further complicated because of the myths which circulate due to the inconsistencies of labor practices between different doctors and hospitals and the rarity of childbirth itself due to the restrictive fertility policies in China.

For parents who have exceeded the age considered normal and safe for childbirth in China, birth tourism to the United States arises as an attractive option. Liu Chao and his wife had both their second and third child in the U.S. At the time of the birth of their second child, his oldest child was studying at a high school in the United States while he was doing business in Wisconsin. He said that his first pregnancy was not planned but since it happened while they were in the U.S when his wife was 39, they decided to go through with it. They were back in China, however, three years later when the planned third pregnancy occurred. To Liu Chao, age considerations and medical insufficiencies played a role in returning to the U.S. to give birth, this time as traditional birth tourists on tourist visas. When asked whether he considered having the third child in China, he responded:

No, I never thought of having the baby in China because the medical technique was not good enough. My wife was 42 years old... This situation was not considered suitable to have more babies in China. But in the west, it is not a problem. A woman can have 5babies by C-section. 42 years old is too old in China.

For the small percentage of people like Liu Chao and his family who want to have a second or third child later in life as a result of the less stringent one-child policy enforcement, the medical field in China is perceived as insufficient in providing care for

expecting mothers who are considered advanced in years. This is arguably a result of the effects of the one-child policy and the resulting stigma of late marriages and late pregnancies. Thus, due to health concerns of older women, giving birth in the United States sounds appealing.

It should be stated that there are marked differences between the services offered at private hospitals and public hospitals in China. Of course, the cost of childbirth at high quality public hospitals in China often exceed the cost of giving birth in the United States. But for parents such as Guo Jianjun who have encountered childbirth in both private hospitals in China and hospitals in the United States, the differences remain significant:

When my wife was doing tests in the U.S., she felt that the medical field was more advanced and more personalized because there were fewer people. When we had the first baby, in Shanxi Children's Hospital, which is the best hospital in Shanxi, the conditions were really not very good. It's totally different.

The agencies which promote birth tourism are acutely aware of the discontent that many parents have with the medical field in China and use those emotional hotspots as bait in their advertisements. This is not to say that the agencies fabricate stories and experiences, but it seems that with the increase in Chinese birth tourists in the United States has emerged an increase in the comparisons between US and Chinese medical techniques in the general population. As Zhao Guangming mentioned about his experience, the doctors who perform prenatal check-ups frequently alternate and patients often don't even know their doctor's name.

Many of the posts online strive to not only showcase the month center's

relationships to specific hospitals but use individual doctors' names in their posts in order to highlight individualized care. Posts also illustrate how comfortable the process of prenatal checkups are in the United States. One post begins like this, "This is how foreign prenatal checkups are: *relaxed* environment, comforting good care, refreshments provided, and it's over very quickly, extremely relaxing."<sup>203</sup> "Another agency, Jiayoumeibao, also highlights the "comfort" of medical facilities in the United States. One of their posts accompanied by photos boasts:

We bring mothers staying at our comfortable Los Angeles villa to the doctor's clinic to do prenatal tests. Look at how warm American doctor clinics are. They even provide comfortable seating for the moms to wait and rest. The walls are filled with baby pictures.<sup>204</sup>

Additionally, as to highlight the great care and concern of doctors, another post emphasizes the delicate medical care a woman received from doctor Li: "Congratulations to Mother Zhang who gave birth at Queen's Hospital. The responsible doctor is Mr. Li Yaokuan, who *carefully* stitched her up and provided a great *service* attitude."<sup>205</sup> This post highlights two things that appear to be important to some expecting Chinese mothers. Firstly, it emphasizes the caution and concern exhibited by doctors and the fact that doctors are providing a service to paying customers in United States. Additionally, using the names of doctors who provide such careful care seems to present the American health industry as friendly, personalized, and customer-based.

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<sup>203</sup>Meibaozhijia, Weibo Post, February 15, 2017, 11:45 AM.  
[http://weibo.com/1718579887/EvD2eCJAO?from=page\\_1006061718579887\\_profile&wvr=6&mod=weibo\\_time&type=comment#\\_rnd1497135998976](http://weibo.com/1718579887/EvD2eCJAO?from=page_1006061718579887_profile&wvr=6&mod=weibo_time&type=comment#_rnd1497135998976) (accessed April 2, 2017).

<sup>204</sup>Jiayoumeibao, Weibo Post, January 1, 2017, 09:44 AM.  
[http://weibo.com/u/5823273489?refer\\_flag=1005050003\\_&is\\_all=1](http://weibo.com/u/5823273489?refer_flag=1005050003_&is_all=1) (accessed March 5, 2017).

<sup>205</sup>Meibaozhijia, Weibo Post, January 16, 2017, 3:29 PM.  
[http://weibo.com/p/1006061718579887/home?is\\_all=1](http://weibo.com/p/1006061718579887/home?is_all=1) (accessed March 3, 2017).



Aware of the demographic like Liu Chao and his wife, some posts specifically target women considered too old to safely give birth in China. One post congratulates a mother on having her third child: "Travelling to America to have her third child, a 45-year-old up-in-age recovering mother, she chose Doctor Yao Guimei. She gave birth *smoothly* and healthily at Garden Grove Hospital, everything is safe and sound."<sup>206</sup> The successful birth for a woman in her mid-40s is probably a significant feat even in the United States, but in China it is considered nothing short of a miracle. Thus, highlighting success stories like this serves to attract potential parents who are middle-aged and want to have a second child now that the policy has changed.

While not a primary concern for every birth tourist, advanced medical care is perceived as an added perk of childbirth in the United States, especially for those who have special medical conditions or have firsthand experience from a previous birth. Although some private hospitals may offer medical procedures of similar quality as those abroad, the price is typically as much or around the price of the entire trip to America, including airfare and room and board.

### **Getting the Visa**

After discovering the idea and discussing it amongst family and friends, the next big step, and arguably the most nerve-racking, was applying for and obtaining a U.S. tourist visa. As explored above, securing a U.S. visa has traditionally been a very difficult endeavor, and many Chinese believe they are denied visas for seemingly arbitrary reasons. For potential birth tourists who are with child, the visa interview is even more

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<sup>206</sup>Meibaozhijia, Weibo Post, January 12, 2017, 09:40 AM.  
[http://weibo.com/p/1006061718579887/home?is\\_all=1](http://weibo.com/p/1006061718579887/home?is_all=1) (accessed April 5, 2017).

arduous as it must be done early enough so that the State Department official does not detect the pregnancy. This is one area where friends, family, and *guanxi* networks are not very helpful. Fortunately for many individuals, an entire industry has sprouted up offering advice on passing the visa interview. Intermediaries, similar to English language schools that prep students for study abroad and the student visa interview (which I played a role in for over five years), instruct individuals on which documents to prepare and coach them on how to present themselves positively to visa officials. For the birth tourists I talked to, the visa interview was risky business and everyone, with the exception of one individual, had lied to the visa officer about the purpose of their visit. By the time Liu Minjie applied for her visa, a new concept was floating around on the internet among successful cases called "honest visa application." The honest visa application was in response to the scrutiny which followed the government raids on month centers catering to Chinese birth tourists in Los Angeles. It is now hailed as the most effective way to be approved for a visa for would-be birth tourists.

Most of the people I talked to had opted out of hiring an intermediary to assist in the visa process. They instead decided to take their chances. This was the case for Yang Xing who was denied her visa the first time.

At first I didn't find a middleman... I wanted to get the visa and find a place to stay by myself. I did not plan to stay in a month center. I planned to DIY. But I was denied the first time I applied for a visa. It was when I was three months pregnant and my belly was not showing. The reason I was denied was because of my hair color, which was very light. My appearance and my job title did not match because I worked in the government where it is not acceptable to have

blond hair like this. I had prepared all the document perfectly. At the interview he asked me a lot of questions, about my job and my house. I thought I would pass, but at last he said sorry...So after I was denied, I was thinking, either he thinks I was lying about my job, or he thinks I'm not a trustworthy person. How can I work in the government with this kind of appearance? Fifteen days later I went to the visa interview again, with the same documents, and more pictures of me traveling abroad. I also wore a black wig. And I passed. The second time he did not even look at my documents. I have a friend who was denied twice, and she gave up. She wound up going to Saipan.

The difference is that for the second time Yang Xing used an intermediary. She continues,

After the first time my visa was denied, I did not have enough confidence that I could handle it myself. So I found an intermediary to look at my documents. They did not understand why I was denied either. So I had to try again. I had to pay a deposit to the agency beforehand so I couldn't just walk away after I got the visa. It was actually pretty convenient. At least I didn't need to worry about meals and going out. So I chose a month center. I chose a nice house, and the main bedroom.

Of the people I talked to, only two people's visas were denied. Guo Jianjun was denied due to his job. He worked as an investigator of police affairs and, according to his reckoning, was rejected due to his role in the government. He did not give more details. Fortunately for him, his wife was accompanied by her mother and their oldest child to visit his sister-in-law in Boston where they stayed for six months without him.

Some husbands appeared to play a supportive role as research assistants for their

wives. For example, Guo Jianjun said he added many month center social media groups to learn about the process, after which he deleted them. Li Li's husband also joined numerous groups to help research month centers and options in America. Through our discussion, she made it seem as if he had done all of the research, but when I probed her further about his role, she retorted, "He joined all the groups, but I made all the major decisions." In the case of Yao Xi, she had begun researching birth tourism on QQ<sup>207</sup> after she heard about it from a friend. However, her husband found a popular agency in Beijing to consult in person before getting on board. In the case of Wang Yan, it was she who played the supportive role. Her husband contacted month centers and intermediaries to plan the trip. She said they did not consult online resources, although she was aware that some did exist at that early stage. Wang Yan was an interesting case because she was the only person I spoke to whom didn't appear to take an active role in the process and seemed to be merely following her husband's wishes.

It is interesting to note the central role that mothers play in this process. Research has traditionally depicted men as principal migrants.<sup>208</sup> But as Pál Nyíri illustrates, stories of women playing an active role as agents in migration who develop strategies of capital accumulation and overcome restrictions of the Chinese family are not new in China.<sup>209</sup> Unlike traditional migration in which a "family predecessor,"<sup>210</sup> usually a male, is sent to establish roots in the host country to enable future migrations, in the case of birth tourism it could be argued that the mother, through her womb and her temporary stay abroad,

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<sup>207</sup> QQ is an instant messenger that was extremely popular in China before the advent of Wechat. The parent company of QQ, Tencent, also owns Wechat.

<sup>208</sup> Evangelia Tastsoglou, and Alexandra Z. Dobrowolsky, *Women, Migration, and Citizenship: Making Local, National, and Transnational Connections*, Aldershot, Hants, England, Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2016, 18.

<sup>209</sup> Nyíri, 2010, 123.

<sup>210</sup> Chan, 1997.

creates a family predecessor who is no longer required to physically live and toil abroad. The lead role that many mothers play is perhaps due to the fact that all women in my study, with the exception of one, were born in the one-child policy era and raised to be ambitious "winners."<sup>211</sup> Daughters of the one-child era have tremendous power to defy gender norms. Even in the cases in which respondents said their husband was the primary proponent, the women seemed to be the main agents in the process as they determined that the advantages typically outweighed the potential risks.

### **In America: Border Crossing, Month Centers, and Tasting American Life**

People's experiences crossing immigration were varied, but since it was essentially the last great obstacle to many parents' hope of having a child in the U.S., it was a stressful experience. Social media sites offer advice on what to wear during entry, the ideal cities to enter from where immigration officials are less assertive, and what to say if one finds themselves in the notorious interrogation room, known in Chinese as the *xiaoheiwu* (little black room). The ultimate goal for most parents is to be allowed at least three months stay but ideally six months depending on how many months pregnant they are upon entry. For Yang Xing, her problems did not just end with being denied a visa the first time. She also encountered difficulties upon her arrival to the United States.

When we passed the immigration, we were asked some questions and then we were brought to a room, and stayed there for four hours. At first he did not notice that I was pregnant. I am skinny and my belly was not too big, I was wearing loose clothes. He asked me what I was going to do in the US. I said I travel with

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<sup>211</sup> Vanessa L. Fong. *Only Hope: Coming of Age under China's One-child Policy*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004, 107.

my kid. He asked me if I was pregnant. I knew I could not lie, so I said yes. He was very surprised and kept looking at me. He asked how many months. I said 4 months, actually I was seven months. So I actually lied a little bit. I did not speak English. An interpreter came. He asked, "you are four months pregnant, so when are you due?" I did not have an answer to that so I answered vaguely, "around new year. "... He said he couldn't give me six months. He asked so many questions, even checked my cell phone...Then he stopped asking questions and gave me over a month. Actually, I stayed for three months. I hired an attorney and extended the visa. So I was legal.

Yang Xing's border crossing experience showcases her determination to give birth in the U.S. and her unrelenting perseverance. Furthermore, this incident also illustrates the amount of money and time she had at her disposal to become well-versed on how to overcome visa and immigration setbacks, and to hire outside assistance when necessary. She estimated that the entire process cost her 450,000 RMB, or approximately 75,000 U.S. dollars. Compare Yang Xing's experience to Liu Minjie, who crossed through immigration with her mother in tow and wearing a tight dress that was sticking to her eight-month pregnant belly. As she recalled, immigration only said three things to her. First they greeted her with a "hello." Then they asked her relationship with the woman besides her. Finally, they said, "welcome to the United States." One can only wonder if their different treatment is related to the new "honest" visa application or rather to what Yang Xing believed to be the case: not fitting neatly within the stereotypical framework of the typical birth tourist.

### **A Family Affair**

Although some men were very active in researching birth tourism and assisting their wives plan the trip, only two men stayed with their wives for the entire duration of the trip in the United States. Liu Chao lived with his wife in a month center in the master bedroom with their four-year-old son who was also the product of birth tourism in 2008. Li Li's husband stayed with his wife, oldest child, and mother-in-law for three months and played an active role in determining their daily agenda. A more common trend seemed to be for men to accompany their wives to the U.S. and stay for a short time, return to China to work for a few months, and then return to the U.S. before or shortly after delivery in order to accompany their growing family on the return home. That was the case with Chen Mei's and Wang Yan's husband, as well as Zhao Guangming. It is typically during the initial arrival while the mother is still relatively mobile that families engage in shopping and travel. Zhao Guangming talked fondly about the week he spent driving up the California coast on highway 1. In fact, the majority of social media posts for month centers refers to the comings-and-goings of fathers, either wishing them a safe return to China or awaiting their arrival to see the new baby. Yang Xing's husband couldn't make it to the U.S. due to work, and as previously mentioned, Guo Jianjun was denied a visa.

Luckily for many of the women I interviewed, grandmothers play an instrumental role in the process. In nearly every case, the maternal grandmother accompanied the pregnant woman to the United States and stayed there most or all of the time. The exact role grandmothers play is usually determined by the location women chose to stay in. In some cases they played the role of the maid, cooking and cleaning for their daughters.

This was the case for women who chose to rent a private apartment before and after pregnancy. In the cases of those who stayed at larger month centers, grandmothers merely played a supporting role since the month center provided care with *yuesaos* (maternity matrons) to take care of their needs, especially while doing the month.<sup>212</sup> Chen Mei's mother, similar to many fathers, came and went twice during the five months she was in the United States. Yang Xing's mother showed up just before birth but didn't have to do anything thanks to the maternity matron. Both Li Li's and Yao Xi's mother cooked and cleaned for them while renting their own place.

If having a close friend or acquaintance was usually instrumental in conceiving the birth tourism plan, then having accompanying husbands and grandparents seems to be crucial to the emotional well-being of expecting mothers. Zhang Shenhua recounted a story of a young woman who, in her estimation, had only decided on birth tourism because so many others were doing it, "I met a person who after arrival cried everyday wanting to come back. She was having her first baby and was probably very young. She felt lonely because she was there alone." Although no others shared similar stories, the fact that few people go alone hints to the importance of familial support.

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<sup>212</sup>The experiences of the women I interviewed seemed to parallel a similar trend which has taken place across much of urban China. The postpartum tradition of the doing the month was traditionally carried out with the mother-in-law. Today, however, there has been a dramatic increase in new mothers doing the month in their own households, and/or with their own mothers. One study argues that doing the month with one's own mother fosters mother-daughter kinship ties in a period of rapid social transformation. Additionally, various studies show that doing the month with one's own mother (or with hired help), as opposed to with one's mother-in-law, decreases the likelihood of postpartum depression. It is noteworthy that this trend seems to be linked to class and status and that rural people are still usually reliant on their mothers-in-law. (Eleanor Holroyd, Sheila Twinn, and Ip Wan Yim, "Exploring Chinese Women's Cultural Beliefs and Behaviors regarding the Practice of "doing the Month"," *Women & Health* 40, no. 3 (2004): 109-23. Sophie Grigoriadis, Gail Erlick Robinson Kenneth Fung, Lori E Ross, Cornelia Yin Ing Chee, Cindy-Lee Dennis, and Sarah Romans, "Traditional Postpartum Practices and Rituals: Clinical Implications," *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, Revue Canadienne De Psychiatrie* 54, no. 12 (2009): 834-40. Mark A. Strand, Judith Perry, JinzhiGuo, Jinping Zhao, and Craig Janes, "Doing the Month: Rickets and Post-partum Convalescence in Rural China," *Midwifery* 25, no. 5 (2009): 588-96.)



### **Fun for Mom; Fun for the whole family**

Another immediate selling point for potential birth tourists is filling the auspicious time of childbirth with fun-filled travel experiences. In other words, many are attracted to the actual travel and "tourism" component of birth *tourism*. The past 10 years have seen significant growth of the Chinese outbound tourism industry to the United States, particularly following the 2008 implementation of ADS.<sup>213</sup> Compared to the earliest demographic of Chinese tourists to the United States who were middle-aged, relatively wealthy, well-educated, and male-dominant, with most working in the government, today's tourists to America are much younger and wealthier, spend more during their trip, and include more females.<sup>214</sup> "Taking vacation" has recently emerged as the most frequent purpose of trips, and surveys illustrate that upper-class Chinese are dominating China's tourism market to the U.S.<sup>215</sup> Although various studies have found a range of motivations for travel to the U.S., a 2009 study by Li et al. found six key factors cited by Chinese for travelling to the United States. These reasons include: relaxation/escape, prestige, knowledge, job fulfillment, entertainment, and novelty.<sup>216</sup> Birth tourism, which offers the chance to partake in activities commonly associated with middle-class America by middle-class Chinese, such as shopping, gambling, house speculating, sitting poolside, and enjoying open spaces with natural scenery, not to mention the novelty and prestige of returning home with an American citizen, fits into just about all of the aforementioned categories.

A striking similarity shared amongst nearly all of my interviewees was never

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<sup>213</sup> Li, 2016, 170.

<sup>214</sup> Li, 2016, 170.

<sup>215</sup> Li, 2016, 170.

<sup>216</sup> Li, 2016, 172.

having travelled to the U.S. prior to giving birth. With the exception of Liu Chao who was running a small business and had first gone to the US three years prior to the birth of his first U.S. citizens child, and Guo Jianjun whose wife had been to the U.S. once to visit her younger sister prior to giving birth there, the extent of my respondents travel experiences was limited mainly to Asia. Yao Xi and Chen Mei had been to Europe and Wang Yan had been to Egypt, the only other time she had actually left China. Thus for some of these parents-to-be, travelling to the U.S. to give birth was also a new touristy experience. As Yao Xi explained how she rationalized the decision to go to the U.S. after being hesitant at first, she concluded:

I'm the kind of person who also likes to try different things in life. I told myself that going to the U.S. to have a baby is not that hard after all. I just thought of it as going travel and shopping and having a baby by the way, so I bought a plane ticket and did it.

Consider the case of Zhao Guangming and his wife who had first decided to go to America to research the conditions first-hand before deciding to give birth abroad. Because Zhao Guangming and his wife were qualified to have their second child in Beijing, they viewed the trip to America as a fun adventure for the whole family, including their oldest child and his grandmother. At five months pregnant his wife heard from one of her coworkers who had just returned from giving birth in the U.S. about her great experience there. By that time, Zhao's wife had already procured visas to travel to the U.S. Prior to that, he said his wife had not searched any information online. He further explained how he had rationalized with his wife:

We were just planning to go travel when she was 5 months pregnant. Because the

first 3 months were dangerous, when she was 5 months pregnant, everything would be normal and stable. She had plenty of vacation, so we traveled to the US. That was our plan. After we went there, we asked about the medical situation. I said, ' We can get ready for both ways. If we can't deliver in the US we can come back to China as well.'

Whether this was a random stroke of luck or a well-thought out plan on the part of his wife remains unknown, but Zhao had rationalized it as a vacation to the United States with the option of giving birth pending their reconnaissance mission. In fact, it could be argued that some birth tourists justified birth tourism as a cost-effective, pleasurable experience that was sweetened by acquisition to U.S. citizenship for their child.

For many expecting mothers, the most highly coveted tourist attraction in America is the numerous Outlet Centers and luxury shopping malls surrounding Los Angeles. According to some studies, "shopping is one of the major travel motivations and most important activity for Chinese outbound tourists."<sup>217</sup> When asking about which month centers parents stayed in, some interviewees used shopping malls and department stores, such as Costco, for references. Many of the areas surrounding L.A. which cater to Chinese birth tourists have sprouted up as a shopping Mecca which caters to Chinese tourists. During the course of my interviews, I didn't specifically ask respondents about their shopping experiences, although their expense tallies revealed that they had spent thousands of dollars shopping while in the United States. In 2013, the average expenditure of a Chinese tourist to the U.S. was \$7,000.<sup>218</sup> This is how La Pangbaba, one of the largest names in the industry, attracts would-be birth tourists: "It's nice weather for

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<sup>217</sup> Li, 2016, 174.

<sup>218</sup> Li, 2016, 175.

the New Year. Regardless if guests come to have babies, do IVF, or surrogacy, as long as they're women, what they want to do now is to go shopping at Outlets."<sup>219</sup>

Just about every month center offers packages which include shopping excursions to expecting mothers. Not only do they offer shopping excursions in their package discounts, they even use bribery to secure their business. Look at a recent Weibo post from Jiayoumeibao during the Chinese New Year

[New Year specials, some packages 10-15%off] 2017 new year specials start from today. In order to return the favor and trust of moms and family, Jiayoumeibao month center now offers package discounts and name brand handbags gifts.

Please inquire about details about package discounts. The first 5 guests who book rooms during the promotion will get MK, COACH, KATE SPADE handbags as gifts.<sup>220</sup>

However, shopping is not merely limited to women. Agencies also attract men as potential real-estate speculators. Chen Mei said that her husband spent a great deal of time looking at houses with the owner of the month center while they were in America. This was just before their immigration plan was cut short.

Beyond shopping, some respondents are also interested in experiencing what they believe to be the American lifestyle. To Yao Xi, this American lifestyle is best understood as suburban, middle-class, *white* America. According to her justification of the location she selected, "the place I chose was on a hill, it was very quiet. Also, I heard

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<sup>219</sup>Lapangbaba, Weibo Post, January 30, 2017, 3:32 PM.

[http://weibo.com/lapangbaba?is\\_search=0&visible=0&is\\_all=1&is\\_tag=0&profile\\_ftype=1&page=2#feedtop](http://weibo.com/lapangbaba?is_search=0&visible=0&is_all=1&is_tag=0&profile_ftype=1&page=2#feedtop) (accessed March, 15 2017).

<sup>220</sup>Jiayoumeibao, Weibo Post, January 21, 2017, 11:04 AM.

[http://weibo.com/iris0916?is\\_search=0&visible=0&is\\_all=1&is\\_tag=0&profile\\_ftype=1&page=3#feedtop](http://weibo.com/iris0916?is_search=0&visible=0&is_all=1&is_tag=0&profile_ftype=1&page=3#feedtop) (accessed April 1, 2017).

the Chinese community was very unsafe. I was thinking since I was going to America, I should stay in a *white* community to feel the American way of life."

But for others the American way of life is not so much a quiet suburban house, or an imagined white middle-class lifestyle, but instead a relaxing fun-filled day in the sun. Jiayoumeibao posts frequent images of families playing stress-free among their facilities:

Look at the community environment of our US month center villa. It's very good.

Its facilities include a swimming pool, basketball court, and a children's

playground. Dads always play basketball with neighbors in the community.

Haha, they have completely fit in with the local lifestyle.<sup>221</sup>

It should be noted that the photo above this post showed a group of Chinese people, not the white people that Yao Xi imagined.

Another consideration that emerged for some parents regarding American lifestyle, particularly those who were having their second child in the US, was staying in the U.S. long enough to give their oldest child the opportunity to receive English education and experience the American education system. While several individuals I talked to had enrolled their children in kindergarten classes, Li Li discussed her child's educational experience at length, pleased that her child was able to learn a little English and encounter the relaxed Western education system. Below is one such Weibo post intended for parents of school-aged children like Li Li and others:

[the older child goes to school in the US] The first child of this Beijing customer is 6 years old and is going to the school next to our month center Lake Forest Villa. In the US, the school zone is assigned in accordance with one's home

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<sup>221</sup>Jiayoumeibao, Weibo Post, February 2, 2017. 11:45 AM.  
[http://weibo.com/iris0916?is\\_search=0&visible=0&is\\_all=1&is\\_tag=0&profile\\_ftype=1&page=2#feedtop](http://weibo.com/iris0916?is_search=0&visible=0&is_all=1&is_tag=0&profile_ftype=1&page=2#feedtop)  
(accessed April 20, 2017).

address. You only need to provide your utility bill to prove that you live at this address. Children go to first grade at 6 years old, tuition is free, and food cost is \$2/day.<sup>222</sup>

For many of these parents, just the idea of fitting into what they consider the American lifestyle, free for a brief period of time from pollution and stress, was an opportunity that makes birth tourism seem worthwhile. Through testimonials with photographs of current birth tourists using their services, online posts serve the function of showing the experiences younger Chinese tourists in America desire, which were many of the same things my interviewees recounted fondly during the course of our interview. It should be stated that even as Chinese birth tourists seek to experience the so-called American lifestyle, they desire to do so on their own terms. With the exception of Liu Chao, due to limited English proficiency of my respondents, they required services from Chinese people in America and expect their doctors or nurses to speak Chinese and the food to be authentic Chinese cuisine.

### **Month Centers and Doing the Month**

Some of the earlier cases of birth tourism among my interviewees utilized family and friend networks to receive care while in the United States, particularly during the postpartum period. For example, Liu Chao stayed with his family in America for the birth of his first American child in 2008. Chen Mei, who gave birth to twins in 2008, boarded with her friend who planned to open a month center. More than half of my respondents

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<sup>222</sup>Lapangbaba, Weibo Post, January 16, 2017. 09:48 AM.  
[http://weibo.com/lapangbaba?is\\_search=0&visible=0&is\\_all=1&is\\_tag=0&profile\\_ftype=1&page=3#feedtop](http://weibo.com/lapangbaba?is_search=0&visible=0&is_all=1&is_tag=0&profile_ftype=1&page=3#feedtop) (accessed March 16, 2017).

stayed at a month center all or most of the time, ranging from private homes with individual bedrooms to apartment style complexes in which individuals had their own unit with communal rooms functioning as maternity wards. Unlike Chen Mei, they did not know the owners at the centers prior to their arrival.

As month centers typically cooperate with intermediaries in China, deposits are usually first required before leaving for America. That was the case for Wang Yan, who paid the remainder of the fee once she was picked up at the airport by the month center driver and taken to the center. Li Li used her month center as a sort of safety net to arrive successfully in the United States. After staying in the month center for a short period of time, her husband found a private home which they rented from a Chinese owner. Li Li did not explain her reason for leaving, but it is likely that she was influenced by other independent birth tourists she encountered while out-and-about being tourists with her family. It is important to note that in order to break away from the month center, she and her husband forfeited their deposit.

Online media is filled with horror stories of fly-by-night month centers and dishonest and unreliable agencies. In an interview one month after the L.A. raids, one individual interviewed by the New York Times referred to month centers as *jizhongying*, or "concentration camps".<sup>223</sup> Although none of my respondents had personal horror stories to share, these types of situations are not uncommon. Yao Xi talked about the nightmare of others whom she met while at the hospital in L.A.

When I was there at the doctor's, I talked to some pregnant women. They told me they were cheated by some month centers. The month center put them on top of a

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<sup>223</sup>Cao Li, "Daichan mama: yuezi zhongxin jiu shi ge da jizhongying[Expecting Mother: Month Centers are Concentration Camps]," *Niuyueshi bao zhongwen wang* [*New York Times, China online*], April 15, 2015, <http://cn.nytimes.com/china/20150415/cc15birthtourism04/> (accessed May 20, 2017).

hill, and the hospital they went to was opened by the month center. These hospitals were not professional and the women did not receive adequate and professional care. These women were segregated and could not communicate with the outside world. Even when they went shopping, they were followed by a driver. The month center said it was for their safety but they were just being watched. Then they found the chat group online and realized they were scammed. They eventually escaped and found their own place.

Similar to the path chosen by Li Li in which she left the month center after arrival, Yao Xi and Liu Minjie both opted out of using a month center. They instead utilized a growing trend in the Chinese birth tourism industry that may be a sign of the month centers eventual demise--DIY, or "do it yourself" birth tourism. DIY seems to be a new phenomenon that is popular online due to individually run, non-commercial Wechat groups. Both women utilized intermediaries and online information posted by intermediaries to learn of the most up-to-date news before embarking on their trips with their mothers in tow. It remains uncertain if this astute independence was the result of Liu Minjie and Yao Xi's training as journalists, or whether women can opt out of month centers when they bring their mothers with them, but it appears that others also seem to believe that the future role of intermediaries and month centers will be consultation for DIY rather than merely offering boarding.<sup>224</sup>

After the birth of their child, the length of time parents stayed in the U.S. ranged from just one month to nearly three. During this time, mothers recuperate from childbirth

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<sup>224</sup> Yi Cao, "What Does Birth Tourism Mean to Different Groups of People," June 12, 2016, <http://immigrantconnect.medill.northwestern.edu/blog/2016/06/12/what-does-birth-tourism-mean-to-different-groups-of-people-chinese-moms-americans-and-baby-care-center-owners/> (accessed May 15, 2017).



while following the Chinese postpartum tradition of doing the month. It is during this time that various services were used to assist parents in navigating the process of procuring the new passport and Chinese visa for their child. In nearly all cases, husbands were present during childbirth, a couple even cutting the umbilical cord (which is apparently uncommon in Chinese delivery rooms), and remained while waiting to depart. But in all cases, someone was there to accompany the mother and newborn with his freshly-minted U.S. passport back to China where a new journey awaited them. Of the seven respondents who willingly offered expenditure information, the total price tag of the entire experience ranged from as low as 120,000 RMB to as high as 500,000 RMB.

### **Return to the Motherland: "Quality Education" and Incubating Future Foreign Students**

Upon their return to China, the longest and arguably most unpredictable part of the birth tourism journey begins. While parents had to navigate various obstacles in the course of learning about and carrying out the birth tourism plan, after returning in China with their child, a new set of challenges awaits. As a result, some parents also join forums particularly geared to providing assistance and shared experiences of the process of raising a foreign child in China, including such topics as updating a U.S. passport, procuring a *hukou*, enrolling in Chinese schools, and even preparing for college.

In the course of my interviews, education emerged as an important topic. As mentioned above, education plays a critical role in the decision to give birth abroad. But education considerations transcend the frequently cited plans of sending their children to university, and in some cases high school, abroad. As most children will spend a

significant part of their childhood in China, they will be exposed to the Chinese education system--a system that Chinese parents and the general population are quite dissatisfied with. Through an exploration of parental views of the Chinese education system, not only do I further shine light on the educational motivations for birth tourism, but also a special new path which will be forged for the children who are products of birth tourism. By having access to education systems in two nations, and even, as will be explored below, two education systems which coexist within China, children with American passports will be exposed to a unique educational route which is only possible for a small group of wealthy, cosmopolitan families.

### **Parental Views of the Chinese Education System**

Views toward education in China was one area in which many of my respondents agreed. Although some thought primary school education in China was superior to education in the United States, everyone agreed that Western secondary and college education was better for developing more creative and flexible individuals capable of achieving success in life. Since nearly all the parents had grown up during the singleton era, they were acutely aware of the shortcomings of the Chinese education system and the stressful and joyless regiment it produced. To them, the question was not *if* they were going to send their children to study abroad, but *when*. This situation, whereby children born in the U.S. receive education in China while waiting to eventually return to the U.S. to be educated, presents unique opportunities and challenges concerning this new and relatively uncharted route.

It is critical to first grasp the increasing importance placed on "educating children

for quality" in recent years, what is referred to in Chinese as *suzhijiaoyu*. Education for quality is linked to Western, specifically American education, and is seen as a type of education that will foster creativity, as well as confident, entrepreneurial, and self-actualized subjects.<sup>225</sup> The adjective *suzhi*, which roughly translated to "quality," stems from a modern Chinese discourse which has been used by the state for various means<sup>226</sup> to stigmatize poor, rural, ethnic minority, and Third World citizenship statuses, while praising wealthy, urban, Han, and First World citizenships.<sup>227</sup> With regards to education, *suzhijiaoyu* is specifically defined in opposition to *yingshijiaoyu*, or education for test taking.<sup>228</sup> This discourse on educating for quality became popular as Chinese parents began asking themselves the best way to prepare their children for the changing environment wrought by economic reforms.

As Woronov points out, the emphasis on *suzhijiaoyu* occurred hand in hand with the reduction and in some cases elimination of welfare for individuals by the state.<sup>229</sup> Many parents believe that education must imitate the American system in order to create good, self-reliant capitalists.<sup>230</sup> This emphasis on human quality, as enabled through "quality" education, has also been brought about due to the state's reproductive restrictions which placed great stress (what Vanessa Fong refers to as the family's "only hope") on producing a single, "high-quality" child.<sup>231</sup> It is widely understood that the strict regimentation of childhood through the test-based education system does not enable

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<sup>225</sup>Woronov, 2007.

<sup>226</sup> Ann Anagnost, "The Corporeal Politics of Quality (*Suzhi*)," *Public Culture* 16, no. 2 (2004): 189.

<sup>227</sup> Vanesa L. Fong, and Rachel Murphy, *Chinese Citizenship: Views from the Margins*, London, New York: Routledge, 2006.

<sup>228</sup> Ann Anagnost, "Imagining global futures in china: the child as a sign of value," *Figuring the future: Globalization and the temporalities of children and youth* (2008): 49-72, 60.

<sup>229</sup>Woronov, 2007, 30.

<sup>230</sup>Woronov, 2007, 33-35.

<sup>231</sup>Anagnost, "Imagining global futures in china: the child as a sign of value," 2008, 61-63.

the production of a "fully modern subject, one who is independent, self-confident, and fearless in confronting new situations."<sup>232</sup>

"Happy childhood," a concept explored by Orna Naftali in her article "Recovering Childhood,"<sup>233</sup> also emerged as a theme during the course of interviews. It is generally understood that a "happy childhood" can only exist outside of *yingshijiaoyu*, the test-based education system. In publications, Chinese authors suggest that proper, so-called happy childhoods are not only critical to a child's well-being but also to the construction of a stable, harmonious society and a strong, vital Chinese nation.<sup>234</sup> Naftali views this conceptualization of childhood as one riddled with paradoxes due to parents conflicting desires to both produce children with western, middle class sensibilities while also fulfilling the native notion which views study and toil as the most important duty of the filial child.<sup>235</sup>

Arguably the largest roadblock to producing happy, creative children is the National College Entrance Exam (NCEE), known as the infamous *gaokao*. Administered only once a year across the nation during two solemn days in June, according to most parents in China, this single exam determines both the chances of getting into a good college and more importantly securing a good position later in life.<sup>236</sup> Even before the *gaokao*, several other critical exams determine the potential success of candidates, such as the middle school exam, *zhongkao*, and the primary school exam, *xiaokao*. These lower level exams determine enrollment eligibility at top-tier schools which better

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<sup>232</sup>Anagnost, 2008, 65.

<sup>233</sup>Orna Naftali, "Recovering Childhood: Play, Pedagogy, and the Rise of Psychological Knowledge in Contemporary Urban China," *Modern China* 36, no.6 (2010): 589-616.

<sup>234</sup>Naftali, 2010, 590.

<sup>235</sup>Naftali, 2010, 591.

<sup>236</sup> Naftali, 2010, 600.

prepare students for scoring high on the *gaokao*. These exams are the embodiment of *yingshijiaoyu* and its shortcomings, leading to numerous suicides each year.<sup>237</sup>

Interestingly, a couple parents believe it is *yingshijiaoyu* that makes Chinese primary education superior to American primary education. Echoing the desire to create good capitalists and self-sufficient individuals, Liu Minjie said, " I think the basic education of America is not as good as that in China. But education later on, on surviving, is more advanced than in China." Liu was referring to the highly disciplined environment in which young children memorize large quantities of information, including thousands of Chinese characters. This notion was echoed by Guo Jianjun and others.

Even though Liu Minjie believed that basic education in China was superior to education abroad, she had this to say when comparing the education systems of China and the U.S.:

I think Chinese education and American education are inverted. In China, when children are young and supposed to play, they are studying, but in college, when they are supposed to study, they are playing. It's backwards. In America, when you are supposed to play, you play, when you are supposed to study, you study. This notion of playing and, by extension, being happy and developing real-life survival skills was a commonly repeated theme by many interviewees. To most, it was *yingshijiaoyu* that was the primary roadblock which, while creating better-disciplined and perhaps more mentally sharp kids, was also preventing them from developing in other important ways like their imagined American counterparts. Below is Liu Minjie's

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<sup>237</sup>Xinying Zhao, "School Tests Blamed for Suicides," *China Daily*, May 14, 2014, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-05-15/china-exam-system-drives-student-suicides> (accessed May 20, 2017).

definition and assessment of *yingshijiaoyu*:

Education in China is like putting a frame on people, and teachers hope all the students are the same. Children are born with different personalities, but teachers will form them into one shape and restrict them into one frame. So during development, children's way of thinking becomes calcified. That is so-called Chinese *yingshijiaoyu*. So students are just studying for taking tests, not for life or survival in the future.

Zhao Guangming also expressed his distaste for test-based education and his desire to allow his child to access a "creative education system" that would better prepare for the new Chinese society where one's value is determined by "capabilities" rather than "credentials." He also, like many others, emphasized the importance of being *happy*:

Actually I don't care too much for test-based education...We (he and his wife) both dislike this. We think as long as our children can receive a normal education, grow up *happily*, and be creative that in the future we will see what they are good at and then they can do what they like.

It seemed that to Zhao Guangming, providing his children with an environment which promotes individualized and personal development was the key consideration. He followed up this statement by saying he planned to send his child to attend high school in the United States, in the same way and at the same age as one of his investors had done. This plan gave him some leeway in navigating China's *yingshijiaoyu* system.

Wang Yan, although unable to articulate what made American education better than Chinese education, stated quite frankly that she greatly disliked Chinese education. Echoing Zhao Guangming's emphasis on producing creative children, she said:

My husband and I, this generation, are not very satisfied with the Chinese education system. We prefer America, although I don't know too much about it... I graduated from a good university, I have friends who graduated from Qinghua University and Beijing University<sup>238</sup> but I don't think the (Chinese) education system is good for talents...The creativity of people, under this education system...to be honest, a lot of people are not happy about the education system in China.

Yao Xi was able to essentially sum up the observations of the others in a few short words. When explaining her decision to give birth in the US, like so many other parents, the first justification she cited was access to a better education. When asked how the U.S. education system was better than China, she responded, "A very simple reason is that children will be happy over there. Children are more stressed in China." When I asked for clarification, she quickly retorted:

Firstly, to be simple, my child will be happy. Personally, I don't like the education in China, which only gets children prepared for tests. Because that was how I grew up in China. I think most people are copy machines, with no creativity and no imagination.

Liu Chao, when talking about the first time he went to the U.S. to travel, noted how the children in the U.S. were happier than Chinese kids: "It was only after I arrived in America that I realized children could lead a life like that."

Li Li also cited test-based education as key to the Chinese education system's shortcomings. Influenced by the personal experience of sending her first child to school

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<sup>238</sup>Qinghua (Tsinghua) University and Beijing (Peiking) University are commonly believed to be China's two premier universities.

in the States for the brief period awaiting to give birth to her second child, Li Li touched on two important factors which she used to gauge the value of education. Speaking of Chinese education, she complained:

The teachers are not responsible. They put pressure on children, *yingshijiaoyu*...Parents and teachers put too much pressure on children. All Chinese people are...scared of teachers. They are suppressed from a young age. But I think foreign children, of course there are bad ones, but the whole culture is good. My son went to kindergarten there (in the U.S.) for two months. The result was very good. He learned English and he was very *happy*.

From this excerpt by Li Li, two important and recurring means of evaluating the effectiveness of non-traditional Chinese education can be observed. Firstly is the children's happiness, as mentioned several times above. Secondly is the access to learning the English language. As Yang Xing mentioned when considering the consequences of sending her children to international schools in China: "I know that compared to public school, their Chinese level will not be as good. But I will try. I can teach them Chinese but I can't teach them English." For many parents, mastery of the English language is the ultimate marker of the cosmopolitan identity they dream for their children.

### **Incubating *Liuxuesheng*: Chinese Private Schools and the Coexistence of**

#### ***Yingshijiaoyu* and *Suzhijiaoyu***

In recent years, a growing number of private schools have sprouted up around China offering, in most cases, an education option for non-local *hukou* holders and in



some cases,<sup>239</sup> an alternative to *yingshijiaoyu*. These schools' curriculum and tuition fees vary tremendously, but generally speaking they cost much more than public schools. A more recent phenomenon has been the popularity of so-called "international schools." Unlike the handful of international schools in top-tier cities such as Beijing and Shanghai which use Western curriculum and cater to the children of foreign diplomats and businessmen, hundreds of international schools only catering to Chinese students have rapidly developed in cities across China, often in partnership with top-rate and well-known public schools.<sup>240</sup> These schools are primarily designed as an alternative to the *gaokao* route and focus heavily on teaching English. Students spend their last few years of high school preparing for TOEFL and SAT exams. As study abroad has become more popular in recent years, the establishment of private "international" middle and elementary schools, and especially kindergartens, have flourished. Due to the often exorbitant tuition fees, enrolling one's child at these private international schools speaks volumes of a family's socioeconomic status.

For parents who return to China with their American child, many private and international schools pose a perfect opportunity, a sort of *suzhijiaoyu* and *yingshijiaoyu* blend that enables students to encounter Western curriculum hand-in-hand with Chinese curriculum, which fosters a certain degree of creativity and happiness conjointly with strict Chinese discipline. For example, an international school which I worked for in Beijing that only catered to Chinese citizens taught all courses in both English and Chinese. For each subject, students took two classes with two different teachers,

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<sup>239</sup> Li Qian and Jing Anlei, "Urban Community Development and Private Education Dilemma: Based on a Field Study of a City in East China," *Universal Journal of Educational Research* 2, no. 6 (2014): 437-45.

<sup>240</sup> I worked at three such schools in China: two in Taiyuan which were affiliated with some of the best public schools in the city, and one in Beijing which was attached to a premier university.

curriculums, and teaching styles. Take chemistry, for example, which was taught twice a week by a Chinese teacher in Chinese and twice a week by an American teacher using English. These schools also enable parents to address one of their greatest concerns: educating a child who still thinks and behaves culturally like a Chinese but with enough knowledge of foreign culture and language as to make them more competitive cosmopolitans.

A handful of birth tourists I spoke to maintained an earlier-the-better attitude, hoping to send their child abroad as soon as possible to completely bypass both private and public education in China. Typically, this attitude was expressed by parents who had the means to accompany their child to the U.S. Yao Xi would have left immediately had the opportunity arisen, and Li Li said she was hoping to accompany her child to study in kindergarten in a couple years. It should be noted that both of these women were willingly unemployed and more closely resembled Ong's global elite. However, the apparent consensus for most parents was that their child would remain in China until he or she was old enough to take care of him or herself, with high school being the most frequently cited age before allowing children to leave. The solution while waiting for that day to arrive was, generally speaking, private and international schools. Only one respondent, Liu Chao, said he refused to send his child to a private, international school. As the owner of a private English training school, he knew the problems of often poor and misleading curriculums found in such schools. Interestingly Liu Chao was in the process of attempting to open an international kindergarten but was having trouble securing an American curriculum.

Public and private primary education in China, in addition to being perceived by

some as superior to American primary education, was also viewed as essential for their child to develop a "Chinese" identity. With regards to first forging a Chinese identity, Chen Mei mentioned when talking about her children going to the U.S. in primary school, "I think if they go to America too early, their way of thinking will be different from ours. I want them to receive some education in China." However, Chen Mei's actions and words seemed somewhat contradictory since she had, in fact, attempted to immigrate to the U.S. shortly after the birth of her American twins. Had they been able to immigrate, it seems unlikely that her children could have received what she called "traditional" Chinese education. In sum, the notion that Chinese primary education played an essential role in forging a Chinese cultural identity seemed to be an important consideration for nearly all respondents.

The fact that many birth tourists' children have not begun school yet makes it difficult to discuss schooling possibilities in the future, and much of their ideas are currently mere conjecture. Those individuals with older children had already begun sending their children to private or international schools. The only exception was Liu Chao who had used *guanxi* to enroll his son at a good public elementary school without a *hukou*. For some parents, international schools were necessary because their child did not have a local *hukou*. For others, they desired to have their children attend English kindergartens to begin their English language studies as early as possible. Regardless of their present rationalization, one thing was certain: every parent had the intentions to send their child abroad eventually. Even though some said they would respect their child's decision in the future if he or she didn't settle abroad, being foreign educated was determined before they were born and guaranteed by their birthright. The key concern

for these parents is figuring out the perfect age and time to send the child abroad as to reap the benefits of both education systems and create a perfectly balanced child that is both culturally Chinese and but who possesses an abundance of cosmopolitan capital. It seems that the availability of alternative education routes via private international schools made returning to China with their American child (the China-raised, American *liuxuesheng* of the future) a more feasible choice to accomplish this objective.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

What influence does this long, multi-sited and multi-player process have on the participants? In other words, what and whom do these individuals become upon their return to China? In the case of young children—the majority of whom have not reached schooling age—conclusions are mostly guesswork. However, clues which emerged during the course of my interviews may assist in shining light on the range of possibilities. This final section will explore the situation these children face upon return to China and whether this situation aligns with parents' expectations and aspirations. By keying in on the divergent motivations, experiences and aspirations of two particular parents--Liu Minjie, a journalist at a Beijing TV station, and Li Li, a wealthy stay-at-home mom who did not attend college--I will conclude by illustrating how the experience of becoming a birth tourist and utilizing freshly acquired cosmopolitan capital is rich and varied. Having been gained over an extended period, the capital has different values and meanings which can only be fully realized, likewise, over an extended period of time. It appears that the exact value of this capital may have more to do with the idiosyncrasies, education, and attitudes of individual parents than other external factors.

The question of what and who these children will become in the future is one that many people, on both sides the Pacific Ocean, are intimately concerned about. But because little has been written about the earliest cases of birth tourism, the development and identification of the child in the future remains somewhat of a mystery. Fortunately, one PBS documentary on birth tourism shares the story of Jennifer Xi, a 23-year-old born in New York to a Taiwanese mother who was in the U.S. on a tourist visa visiting

relatives.<sup>241</sup> At three months old, baby Jennifer returned to Taiwan where she grew up for 15 years. Unable to speak English and unfamiliar with U.S. culture, she returned to the U.S. to attend high school. Asked about her experiences and identification, Jennifer said that she will always see herself as more Taiwanese than American because she grew up in Taiwan. Mentioning that she was "used to Taiwanese culture," she added: "It's going to be hard for me to consider myself as an American."<sup>242</sup> Upon college graduation, Jennifer returned to Taiwan where she landed a job, but had to return to the U.S. upon the discovery that she couldn't work in Taiwan on a tourist visa. The documentary didn't discuss whether she attempted securing a work visa, or the level of difficulty in doing so.

This Taiwanese example seems to resonate with mainland China's birth tourism today, and thus the way in which mainland children view themselves culturally and socially as they age may have parallels to Jennifer's case. However, for mainland Chinese birth tourists, it appears that one's ability and willingness to obtain a *hukou* may likewise influence the children's experience both during youth and throughout the life course. With the end of the one-child policy, parents who birthed children in the U.S. in part to avoid consequences of the policy are now able to apply for a *hukou* for their U.S.-born child. For parents who had their first child in the U.S., such as Liu Minjie and Yao Xi, their children possessed both a Chinese *hukou* and an American passport when I met them, essentially providing them with a form of dual citizenship, which is technically illegal in China.<sup>243</sup> While some parents, such as Liu Chao refused to get his child a

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<sup>241</sup> Bonnie Erbe, "New Americans," *PBS: To the Contrary*, May 17, 2013, <http://www.pbs.org/video/2365013663> (accessed May 20, 2016).

<sup>242</sup> Erbe, 2013.

<sup>243</sup> Mainland China officially abolished dual nationality in 1958. However, the law is loosely enforced and there are reported cases of individuals finding ways around such enforcement, in some cases even traveling via Hong Kong to avoid detection (Lynn-Ee Ho, 2011).

*hukou*, other parents said they were in the process of doing so or seriously considering the possibility. With a *hukou*, children officially have access to medical, educational, and other types of benefits offered by the state without having to utilize *guanxi*.

It seems safe to say that having access to these benefits via a *hukou*, that is, being recognized with the same citizenship rights of other domestic Chinese citizens, will play a significant role in the child's emerging self-identity. This will also be determined by the way in which parents raise their own children and the experiences families encounter along the way. For example, Liu Chao, whose son was eight years old at the time of our interview, talked at length about how his son was ostracized at school and felt different from others. He complained about how the teacher announced to the class that one student among them was an American. It should be pointed out that this was probably not malicious on the part of the teacher, as Chinese individuals who possess foreign citizenship are often viewed as a source of pride. He further revealed how his son had gotten into fights with other students because he didn't like being grabbed and hugged by other Chinese boys. Liu Chao credited this inability to fit into Chinese school life to the fact that his son had attended school in the U.S. several times over the years and has grown to think and act differently. He also mentioned his own upbringing strategies as a factor in his son's behaviors and mindset. It is interesting to note this dichotomy that many parents face: attempting to create a first world citizenship consciousness in their child and raise them accordingly while also desiring to conceal the child's citizenship so as to enable cultural acceptance and belonging and provide for the child the semblance of a somewhat normal childhood.

Liu Minjie was also quite adamant about keeping her daughter's U.S. citizenship a

secret from others, perhaps from even her own daughter in the future, saying she didn't want her child to act differently from other Chinese, but rather to "just to do what she is supposed to do at her age." Although a distant fear, Liu Minjie worried about how others will treat her daughter differently, and complained about how her visiting family members say things like, "look at this little American." As in the case of Liu Chao's son's teacher, pointing out the child's foreign identity is both a source of status distinction and pride but also, it would appear from Liu Minjie's worries, a marker of difference and potential ostracization. The key to the child's development and identification then relies on how parents and other social actors (teachers, neighbors, and friends) interact with their U.S.-born child in China. Just as parents hope to marry the best of both *yinigshijiayu* and *suzhijiaoyu*, it appears that raising a child to have a proper identity is also a careful balancing act. In the case of parents who have contempt for various ills of Chinese society, it seems more likely that an emphasis will be placed on foreign citizenship in attempts to instill in the child a different, arguably superior "quality" identity.

Regardless of the individual lived experiences of the now tens of thousands of American-born Chinese children currently living in China, and irrespective of the negative characterizations of news media and online message boards, these children become, even before they can walk or talk, the symbol of China's modernity. They are born with what could be called unrealized cosmopolitanism, which will only be converted through a course of education and eventual mobility. It seems necessary here to return once again to the notion of Chinese cosmopolitanism. As some authors have argued, searching for the existence of cosmopolitanism in China is a difficult task. Tyfield and Urry argue nationalism and cosmopolitanism are not necessarily notions in



conflict in China. Cosmopolitanism has been promoted as an openness to the world while also a preserver of Chinese characteristics. In other words, they argue that a distinctly Chinese cosmopolitanism emerged that linked the national to the global.<sup>244</sup> Likewise, Lisa Rofel mentions that domesticating cosmopolitanism has a long history in China, what she playfully refers to as "cosmopolitanism with Chinese characteristics."<sup>245</sup> Rofel discusses a contradiction of modern China, that of "transcending China to become a cosmopolitan self and domesticating cosmopolitanism within China." This contradiction, Rofel argues, rests within the bodies of women.<sup>246</sup> Rofel argues that because young women "literally embody Chineseness, both reproductively and as objects of desire, they serve as the ideal site for learning how to domesticate cosmopolitanism."<sup>247</sup> Applying Rofel's argument--that the bodies of Chinese women domesticate cosmopolitanism--to the case of birth tourism, an argument could be made that women who give birth in the U.S. to children born with credentials of the global north but who are raised culturally and socially in China are clearly engaged in a form of cosmopolitan domestication. That is, the U.S.-born children are a form of raw cosmopolitan capital, the product of the transversal of transnational space that will hopefully enable future transnational movement for both the child and parents.

If American-born children are in fact the embodiment of cosmopolitan capital, then that would mean that the parents, as guardians of these children, actually possess cosmopolitan capital. This capital was accumulated through a process which began long before birth tourism was fathomed; and the drive for such capital was molded by the

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<sup>244</sup> David Tyfield and John Urry, "Cosmopolitan China?" *Soziale Welt* (2010): 277-93.

<sup>245</sup> Lisa Rofel, *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

<sup>246</sup> Rofel, 2007, 129-130.

<sup>247</sup> Rofel, 2007, 129-130.

state's construction of consumption-driven and desiring subjects.<sup>248</sup> While the birth of a child abroad may be the ultimate symbol of parents' cosmopolitan capital, the process of birth tourism--which involves learning how to cross transnational space--provides parents with highly coveted and valuable skills and experiences. These individuals learn to navigate the complex Chinese kinship and cultural networks spread over the globe--both physically and through cyberspace. They not only emerge as travel wise 21st-century trailblazers, risk takers often envied by their friends, but they actually become nodes in the very cultural and kinship networks that link China to the world. In addition to emerging as individuals with "one more option" and providing their child with "one more option," they become the "one more option" for friends and acquaintances interested in transnational movement and attaining the skills and resources required to confidently and successfully embark on such status and capital-acquiring journeys.

As discussed above, Liu Minjie was one of the few respondents who seemed uninterested in the prospects of immigration decades down the road. She was also unconcerned with accompanying her child abroad to attend school, preferring to send her when she was old enough to take care of herself. This is not to say that immigration to the U.S. down the road hadn't crossed her mind, but to say that she had carefully calculated her resources and ability to survive in a new country without her support network. Liu Minjie seemed both career-driven and concerned with her filial duty of keeping her family together for as long as possible.

Remember also that Liu Minjie was adamant about keeping her daughter's citizenship a secret from family and friends because she didn't want her child to act

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<sup>248</sup>Rofel, 2007. Erika Kuever, "In Today's china, You Don't Starve, You're Poisoned," *Consumer Welfare and Citizenship in Urban China*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 2013.

differently from her peers. One of the more striking comments she made over the course of our interview was in response to the question of why she chose to give birth in the U.S. To this she responded, "One of your questions is what advantage this has for me. I did not think about myself because I do not intend to change my own identity because of her." Whether we take Liu Minjie's statement at face value, her actions, worries, and words do seem to reinforce that she perceived birth tourism as being purely for the sake of her child.

Li Li, on the other hand, was quite clear about her motivations. She talked at length about her friends who had already given birth abroad or who were living abroad for many years. She keyed in on how their children were different, "less timid" and "more mature," from Chinese children. In one of her justifications for engaging in birth tourism, she evoked famous movie stars who had previously travelled abroad to give birth: "Why did Sun Li have her second child in Hong Kong, Zhang Zi Yi have her baby in the U.S.? They are very famous and rich, if they do it, that means it's good." Unlike Liu Minjie, Li Li was open to giving birth in any nation of the global north, as long as it was not in China: "This place is backwards. Shanxi, Taiyuan is backwards. So, I thought having my baby outside was good for everybody because I am an 'advanced' person." Unlike Liu Minjie who viewed having her baby in the U.S. as inconvenient for herself but beneficial down the road for her daughter, Li Li viewed her child's foreign citizenship to be good for everyone--which, of course, includes herself.

Li Li recounted various stories that assist in grasping her own valuation of birth tourism. For example, although she had dreams to study abroad as a youth--like many individuals in my study--she was unconcerned with the exact location: "I just wanted the

*feeling* of going abroad. I did not have any goals.<sup>249</sup> Furthermore, while talking to her friend who was preparing to give birth to her second child in the U.S., Li Li asked, "why don't you go somewhere else?" This rhetorical question illustrates that to Li Li there was no distinction between countries of the global north and their individual citizenship values, rather it was in fact the collection of citizenships as evident in the multiple passport booklets that held the most value to her. In other words, it wasn't so much the specific perks of better education or the power to stay abroad for extended periods of time that future citizenship might offer, nor was she particularly concerned with the various forms of capital her child could earn in the future, to Li Li it was about being, and *feeling* like she was part of the global cosmopolitan class in the present. Li Li was one of the few respondents who outright said that birth tourism was a means of providing her child with an identity, yet through her actions, it seems that it was the identity she gained through the process that was more, or at least equally, important.

As the comparison between Liu Minjie and Li Li hopefully illustrates, birth tourism involves a host of variables, often beyond the immediate control of individuals. However, it is the social viewpoint of the parents and how they see themselves in relationship to China and the rest of the world that will most likely have the greatest impact on the experiences of their children and themselves in the future. If cosmopolitanism is understood as being rooted to a nation and its culture with a sense of being connected to the larger world through education, then Liu Minjie is the epitome of cosmopolitan. If it is understood as a lack of rootedness, as a flexibility and a longing to be constantly in motion and in possession of symbols that provide that feeling of

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<sup>249</sup> As Vanessa Fong illustrates in *Paradise Redefined*, "going abroad" is commonly understood to mean Western, non-Asian nations.

connectedness to the world, then Li Li is arguably a cosmopolitan. What Liu Minjie lacks in her unwillingness to relocate she makes up in her education and confidence as a Beijing resident with membership to the nation's educated elite. On the other hand, what Li Li, the wife of businessman who owns multiple establishments in a third-tier Chinese city, lacks in her education and domestic status credentials, she makes up in her desire to see and *feel* the world. In other words, the answer to who these women *become* is very much dependent on who these women *were* before engaging in birth tourism.

The process of becoming a birth tourist is a prolonged and arduous one which begins well before the notion of childbirth occurs and continues long into the future. That is to say that while the phenomenon of birth tourism is thought to take place while parents are "tourists" abroad, it actually begins much earlier when individuals begin discussing possibilities and procuring visas, and it continues well beyond the initial return to China. *Becoming* a birth tourist involves a host of individuals, ranging from family, friends and agencies who influence the decision, and it extends into the uncertain future with common Chinese people, such as Liu Chao's son's teacher, who through "othering" the foreign-born child actually play a role in creating meaning of the experience. This meaning will be in no small part shaped by governmental policies and politics in both nations.

Both as a prerequisite and a consequence of birth tourism, birth tourists brace for the uncertainties of China's future, hope for its continued ascent on the global stage, and reap the dividends of the various forms of capital that life has dealt them. Through their own savvy actions, birth tourists give birth to cosmopolitan capital, a capital which has immense value universally but is invaluable within China. Whether admired or despised

by their countrymen,<sup>250</sup> these parents have shown great acumen in navigating transnational spaces--a highly coveted skill in contemporary China.

But much of this narrative remains untold. Future studies which track the way in which parents utilize their cosmopolitan capital comparative to non-birth tourists with similar backgrounds and wealth would be greatly insightful. Furthermore, a better understanding of how parents negotiate the meaning, significance, and value of birth tourism over time would also help shine light on the phenomenon. Finally, and perhaps the greatest challenge of all, a longitudinal study tracking the trajectories and emergent identities of the children themselves, their values, and the ways in which they continue to earn and utilize their cosmopolitan capital over the lifespan would be a welcome addition to the growing academic literature which attempts to better conceptualize the multiple modes and meanings of the various forms of aspirational migration in the 21st century.

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<sup>250</sup> For one interesting and somewhat related discussion of popular opinions towards children who are born with foreign citizenship, see the translated comments of Chinese netizens regarding the nationality of NBA basketball star Yao Ming's child. (Fauna, Chinese Netizens Discuss Yao Ming's Baby's Nationality," *China Smack*, 2010 <https://www.chinasmack.com/chinese-netizens-discuss-yao-ming-baby-nationality> (accessed May 25, 2017).)

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