

G8 HEADACHES P.16 | CLEARING AWAY ILLEGAL FOREIGNERS P.24

# BEIJING REVIEW

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## MOMS WANTED

Tough standards discourage prospective mothers from foster care

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THE DESK

2 The Plight of Adoptive Mothers

THIS WEEK

COVER STORY



WORLD

18 Rediscovering China in Africa  
Western misconceptions of Sino-Africa affairs

20 Asia-Pacific Remains the Anchor  
Maintaining growth in Asia

NATION

24 Tightening up Checks  
Cracking down on illegal foreigners



26 Your Life Up in Smoke  
Anti-smoking measures imminent



10 Cover Story

Giving orphans a family

FEATURES

10 Seeking SOS Mothers  
Promoting a job to make orphans feel loved

14 Living a Life of Love  
SOS mother Han Chunmei's 21-year devotion

16 G8 Speaks Loudly, Carries Small Stick  
Much talk, no action at G8 summit

28 The Ongoing Housing Dilemma  
Slowing the bubble

40 Fast and Furious  
Microfilms spawn young directors

BUSINESS

30 Making the Big Bucks  
China's stock market open wider to foreign institutional investors



32 Frontier of Cross-Straits Ties  
Fujian capitalizing on Taiwan-mainland trade

35 Building a Brighter Future  
A Taiwanese designer eyes the mainland for further success

36 Market Watch

CULTURE



42 State of Art  
Teaching art to rural students

FORUM

46 Is Tiered Pricing for Electricity a Good Idea?

EXPAT'S EYE

48 Hiking the Huashan Mountain  
A German's peak experience

Cover Photo: Children in the SOS Children's Village in Fuzhou, southeast China's Fujian Province (Jiang Kehong)



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# The Plight of Adoptive Mothers

In SOS Children's Village, a charity specializing in foster care, the "mother" plays a crucial role. Every village is composed of many families, with seven or eight children to a home. Hermann Gmeiner, an Austrian philanthropist, founded the organization in 1949 to give children a chance to be raised in families, so that the orphans could enjoy a mother's love and family warmth and thus grow up healthily and happily.

Gmeiner made a list of requirements for each prospective mother: they must be unmarried, divorced, or widows. They can have no children of their own, and divorced women cannot have custody of their kids. To be an SOS mother is to make a commitment to being single or having no child, and agree to remain in the state for life.

After the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, the Chinese Government decided that the state should play a major role in taking care of the country's orphans. A lot of babies were abandoned at that time and state-owned welfare houses across the country were responsible for raising children.

In the past decade, however, the concept of foster care has spread and become more popular in China. The first SOS Children's Village in the country was set up in 1984, and since then the number of such villages has increased.

Each SOS Children's Village in China is composed of 12 to 18 families, with a mother taking care of the children as they grow to become siblings. Each village has a head (male), who plays the role of father. Every village has kindergartens, youth's flats and flats for retired mothers.

According to statistics released by the China Association for SOS Children's Village at the end of 2011, China villages had fostered about 2,300 orphans. Half of them have already left the village to enter society; more than 300 children are college graduates; and one third of them had graduated from technical schools. They have gone on to be civil servants, businessmen and servicemen, proving to make a positive contribution to society in different ways.

However, running an adoption community is not always a smooth operation. Children's employment and housing proves to be a bottleneck for the village. Recently, some villages have offered many job openings for adoptive mothers, but few applied. SOS villages are in desperate need of mothers, or some children might again face the heartbreak of losing a mother's love. Many potential applicants are deterred by the strict relationship standards, low pay and a difficult life after retiring.

The SOS children's villages in China are in need of not only huge donations from the whole society, but also the arrival of a large number of devoted, caring, selfless people, who may sustain this wonderful cause forever. ■

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Please provide your name and address along with your submissions. Submissions may be edited.

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LUI XIAOQUANG

## Hi-Tech Show

A boy interacts with a robot on display at the 15th China Beijing International Hi-Tech Expo on May 23.

Opened at the China International Exhibition Center that day, the expo showcased China's major scientific and technological achievements in the next generation of information technology, energy conservation and other emerging areas in 12 themed exhibition halls.

The show concluded on May 27.

**“The Huangyan Island is an inherent part of China’s territory. China has consistently used diplomatic means to urge the Philippines to correct its mistakes and ease the situation. The Philippines’ decision to draw a third party into the incident will further escalate the situation and change the nature of the issue. China firmly opposes it.”**

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei, reiterating China’s stance and voicing firm opposition to the Philippines’ decision to involve a third party in the Huangyan Island issue, at a regular press conference in Beijing on May 22

**“The Chinese Government attaches great importance to protecting intellectual property and is endeavoring to create a sound environment for the development of Chinese companies. Governments at all levels should earmark the cost of purchasing software in the budget, and set up or improve management and supervision systems.”**

Chinese Vice Premier Wang Qishan, pledging consistent efforts to crack down on software piracy, during a meeting with Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer in Beijing on May 23

**“It is impossible to play a one-way game when the government is expected to unconditionally implement the plan while the opposition has not been restricted and, in effect, is encouraged to continue armed provocations. The end could be very bad.”**

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, accusing Syrian opposition of undermining Kofi Annan’s peace plan in an interview in Moscow, Russia, on May 23

**“I reiterated the Commission’s strong desire that Greece should remain a member of the euro area and that we will continue to do everything in our power for this to happen. Without this solidarity, Greece will not be able to return to growth and prosperity. I therefore underlined the importance of Greece maintaining the commitments it has made.”**

European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso, after meeting with Greece’s interim Prime Minister Panagiotis Pikrammenos in Brussels, Belgium, on May 23

## Maritime Network

China's new regulations on maritime observation and forecasts will take effect on June 1.

Shi Qingfeng, a spokesman for the State Oceanic Administration, said at a press conference on May 20 that the regulations stipulate the planning and building of a maritime observation network, the protection of observation stations, the collection and sharing of observation results, as well as the publication of early warning information in cases of maritime disasters.

International organizations, foreign groups and individuals should abide by related regulations when conducting observation and research in China's territorial waters.

The regulations prohibit Chinese institutions or individuals from providing maritime observation results to foreign organizations or individuals without permission.

The regulations say local governments in coastal areas are responsible for publishing maritime forecasts and early warning information on maritime disasters via local media or warning issuing platforms.

## Altitude Sickness Insured

Altitude sickness insurance for tourists to Tibet Autonomous Region was introduced on May 22.

**DELICIOUS XINJIANG** Local residents visit a gourmet fair in Urumqi, capital of northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, which kicked off on May 20



The insurance covers compensation for accidents and medical bills related to altitude-related diseases, as well as funeral expenses for applicants, said Wang Songping, deputy head of the region's tourism bureau.

Tourists arriving in Tibet can pay 50 yuan (\$7.88) or 100 yuan (\$15.76) each for a valid period of 15 days with a maximum compensation of 100,000 yuan (\$15,768) or 200,000 yuan (\$31,536) respectively in case of severe altitude sickness.

According to Wang, the largest risk for people visiting Tibet is altitude sickness. Related diseases, such as swelling to the lungs or brain, may be life-threatening, but these problems were not covered by previous travel insurance categories.

The altitude sickness insurance package, designed and initiated by the Tibet branch of

the China Life Insurance Co., aims to ensure the health of tourists so they can visit the region without fear, he added.

## Biodiversity Protection

China will conduct safety management over transgenic organisms and invasive alien species in 2012 to preserve biological diversity, a senior environmental official said on May 22.

As of the end of 2011, a total of 2,640 nature reserves had been established on the mainland, covering 14.9 percent of the country's land area, said Li Ganjie, Vice Minister of Environmental Protection.

"Although rapid progress has been made in the last five years, China is still faced with arduous tasks in this field, including unstable ecological environments and deteriorating



**KELP HARVEST**  
Fisherwomen dry kelp on the seashore on Meizhou Island in Putian City, southeast China's Fujian Province, on May 22

## Writer Honored

**Su Shuyang**, a renowned author and screenwriter, was presented with the outstanding contribution award at a ceremony jointly held by China Film Association and *Chinese Writers* magazine on May 17.

Born in 1938, Su started to write in middle school. After graduating from university, he taught at several academic institutions. During his time at Beijing College of Chinese Medicine, Su composed the play *Song of Loyal Hearts*, a drama about intellectuals dedicating themselves to the research of traditional Chinese medicine. The play became a huge success in the 1970s and established Su as a professional writer.

At 40, Su became a screenwriter at Beijing Film Studio, where he wrote the script for the movie *Sunset Street*, reflecting the life of Beijing residents during China's economic reform. He went on to write a number of screenplays and novels about the lives of Beijing residents, as well as Chinese intellectuals, such as the novel *Homeland* and the poetry collection *About Love*. Su is now a member of the Board of the Chinese Writers Association and the China Film Association.

Su's famous work *A Reader on China*, a general introduction to the immense country, has been published in 15 languages with about 12 million copies in circulation. The work has become a top example for Chinese books entering the international publishing market.



ecological functions,” Li said.

Satellite monitoring conducted by the Ministry of Environmental Protection last year showed that 80 percent of China’s 335 national-level nature reserves are being adversely affected by human activities.

Li reiterated that China will further improve the environmental evaluation system and strengthen supervision on the protection of nature reserves.

## Digital Geographic Project

More than 260 prefecture-level Chinese cities are building digital geographic systems to provide better services to citizens, the National Administration of Surveying, Mapping and Geoinformation (NASMG) said on May 23.

The NASMG said in a statement that over 100 of those cities have put their systems into full operation.

In the meantime, about 10 lower-level counties have also finished the construction of digital geographic systems.

The statement said the country will build a digital geographic framework by 2015.

It said that the NASMG will choose some cities with well-developed digital geographic systems as pilot sites to build “smart cities,” referring to urban centers administered with intelligent technology such as cloud computing.

## Growing Mobile Users

China’s mobile phone users hit a record high of 1.03 billion at the end of April, data released on May 23 by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology showed.

During the first four months this year, mobile phone users saw a net increase of nearly 43.8 million from the end of last year, the data showed.

Meanwhile, users of terminals based on third-generation technologies increased 30.55 million during the period, reaching 159 million as of the end of April.

During the first four months, the country’s telecom sector reported 339 billion yuan (\$53.6 billion) in main business revenues, up 10.1 percent year on year.

Revenues from mobile telecommunication services accounted for 72.6 percent of the sector’s total revenues during the period, up from 70.8 percent in the same period of last year.

## Chronic Disease Challenge

China currently has 260 million patients with chronic diseases, and these illnesses have resulted in some 85 percent of the country’s total deaths, according to the Ministry of Health.

A 2012-15 blueprint on chronic dis-



**MIGRATION RECORDS** Visitors stand in front of a painting at an art exhibition depicting the lives of migrant workers in Beijing on May 22

ease prevention and control released by the ministry on May 21 show as a result of fast urbanization and industrialization in an aging society, chronic diseases are becoming more prevalent and have taken up some 70 percent of China’s total treatment costs.

The major chronic diseases include cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, virulent tumors and respiratory diseases, among others.

The blueprint set goals of reducing the adult smoking rate to below 25 percent and promoting at least 32 percent of citizens to engage in rigorous physical exercise.

Meanwhile, the document plans to lower the adult obesity rate to under 12 percent and set up major cancer treatment projects in high-prevalence areas.

## Money for Water

Beijing has planned to spend 118 million yuan (\$18.66 million) by the end of the year to improve the quality of drinking water drawn from wells.

The quality of drinking water for about 300,000 people will be greatly improved following technical modifications to 54 wells, the Beijing Water Authority said on May 23.

Improvements will first be made to wells that are known to have safety risks, as well as those that serve areas that do not have access to tap water.

Beijing has been plagued by droughts for 13 consecutive years, with its fast-paced economic development and ever-growing population exacerbating the water shortage.

The available per-capita water availability in Beijing has dropped to less than 100 cubic meters, far less than the internationally acknowledged warning level.

Beijing has about 4,000 wells to supply water for both drinking and industrial production.



**ACROSS THE STRAITS** The opening ceremony of the 2012 Jiangsu-Taiwan Week is held in Taipei, Taiwan, on May 23

## Home Prices Drop

New home prices in nearly two thirds of major Chinese cities decreased in April as the country continues to regulate the real estate market.

In April, 43 of 70 major cities saw drops in new home prices from March, while new home prices in 24 cities remained at the same level. Only three cities, down from eight in March, saw slight increases of less than 0.2 percent last month, according to the National Bureau of Statistics.

Compared with April 2011, new home prices in 46 cities declined. But 23 cities saw the prices up by less than 1.7 percent from a year earlier.

Prices of newly built homes in big cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen and Guangzhou fell further on both monthly and yearly bases in April.

## Direct Buying

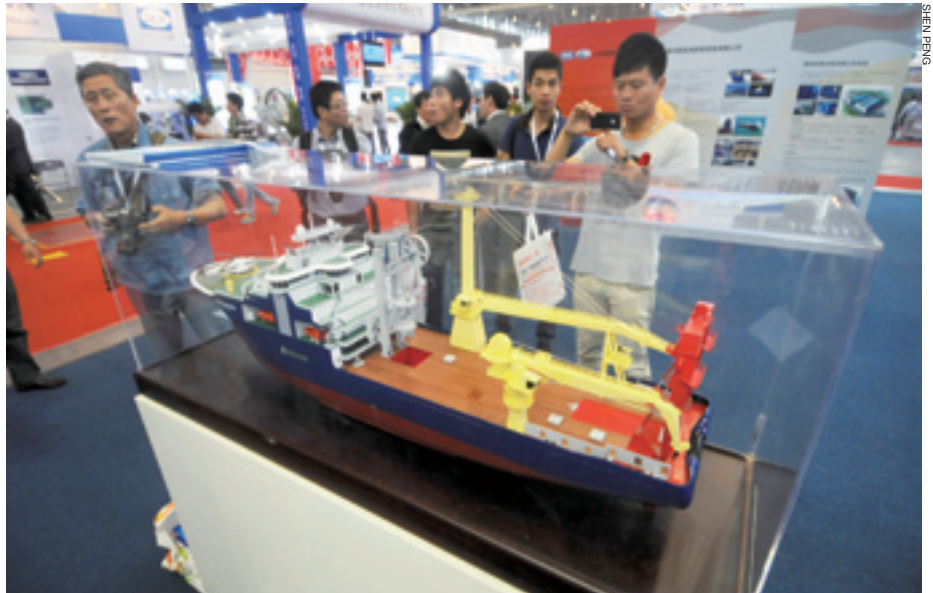
China now has direct access to the U.S. Department of the Treasury to buy U.S. government bonds, though “the buying amount is not significant,” a source close to China’s central bank told the Beijing-based *Global Times*.

While all other countries have to go through primary dealers on Wall Street to buy and sell U.S. bonds, China now only has to sell, not buy, through these brokers.

“The direct access is an acknowledgment of the critical importance of China to the U.S. ability to fund its deficits. It gives China more power in bidding without showing its hands to Wall Street banks and other potential competition,” Dariusz Kowalczyk, a senior economist at Crédit Agricole CIB told the *Global Times*.

## Buyback Deal

Alibaba Group, a leading Chinese e-commerce company based in Hangzhou, capital of east China’s Zhejiang Province, announced it will spend about \$7 billion in repurchas-



**SHIPBUILDING EXPO** Models of large vessels are on display during the China International Marine, Port and Shipbuilding Fair in Nanjing, capital of east China’s Jiangsu Province on May 23, 2012. A total of 617 exhibitors from different countries and regions took part in the fair

ing up to one-half of Yahoo! Inc.’s stake in the company, or approximately 20 percent of Alibaba’s fully diluted shares.

According to an agreement reached with Yahoo, Alibaba will repurchase the shares with \$6.3 billion in cash and no more than \$800 million in newly issued Alibaba preferred stocks, said Alibaba in a statement.

Previously, Yahoo was the largest shareholder of Alibaba with a stake of approximately 40 percent and Japan’s Softbank Corp., another major Alibaba shareholder, holds 29 percent of Alibaba’s shares.

After the deal, Yahoo and Softbank will see their voting rights diluted below 50 percent in the company’s new board.

“The repurchase deal is a very clear signal that Jack Ma, Chairman and CEO of Alibaba, wants to take back control of the company

soon,” said Fang Xingdong, Chairman of the Beijing-based IT think tank Chinalabs.com.

## Anti-dumping Measures

The Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) announced that China will continue to impose anti-dumping measures against catechol imports from the United States and Japan for another five years starting from May 22.

“If such measures cease to be implemented, the dumping of imported catechol from the United States and Japan may continue to occur in China and cause damage to the domestic catechol industry,” said the MOFCOM in a statement.

The MOFCOM handed down the ruling after a one-year review of the previous anti-dumping measure. China implemented a five-

## Numbers

# \$23.16 billion

China’s non-financial outbound direct investment surged 72.8 percent year on year to \$23.16 billion in the first four months, said the Ministry of Commerce.

# 2,500

China will buy more than 2,500 aircraft from 2011 to 2015 and the country’s total number of civil aircraft will exceed 4,500 by 2015, said Li Jiaxiang, Minister of the Civil Aviation Administration of China.





**PORCELAIN OR COUCH?** A decorative couch with matching blue and white porcelain furniture on display at the 2012 China Hotel Exposition, held in the China World Trade Center in Beijing, on May 22. With over 100 businesses from China and abroad, the three-day event demonstrated the latest technology, products and development trends in the hotel industry

year anti-dumping duty of 4-46.81 percent on catechol imports from the United States and Japan on May 22, 2006.

Catechol is a chemical material that can be used as an antiseptic or photographic developer.

### Cinema Chain Acquisition

Dalian Wanda Group Corp. Ltd., a private Chinese firm based in Dalian, northeast China's Liaoning Province, announced that it will purchase U.S. movie theater chain AMC Entertainment for \$2.6 billion, creating the world's largest movie theater franchise.

Dalian Wanda Group is a leading commercial real estate developer that also owns Wanda Cinema Line, Asia's largest movie theater chain.

The group will invest no more than \$500 million to fund operations after finishing the acquisition, bringing the total payment to \$3.1 billion.

After buying AMC's 346 multiplex theaters and 5,028 screens in North America, the group will become the world's largest movie theater operator.

The deal needs approval from the Chinese and U.S. governments before being formally closed.

### Nestle's New Farm

Swiss food and beverage giant Nestle signed an agreement with a county government in north China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region to build a new dairy farm.

The government of Old Barag Banner

### Lighter Penalty

**Wu Ying**, who was sentenced to death early this year for financial fraud, received a lighter penalty on May 21. The Higher People's Court of east China's Zhejiang Province made a final judgement, sentencing the 31-year-old businesswoman to death with a two-year reprieve. The court also ordered that all Wu's personal property be confiscated.

Wu, 31, is the former boss of Bense Group, a business conglomerate based in Zhejiang. She received a death sentence for cheating investors out of several hundred million yuan in January. The sentence upheld the result of a previous trial in December 2009. This once sparked public outcry for a lenient punishment.

From May 2005 to February 2007, Wu raised 770 million yuan (\$122 million) by promising high returns to investors. She still had 380 million yuan (\$60 million) in unpaid debt with creditors when the case was uncovered. Wu amassed the fortune by fabricating facts, deliberately hiding the truth, and promising high returns as an incentive.



confirmed on May 22 that it has signed a memorandum of understanding with Nestle to build a 2,000-cow dairy farm by the end of 2013.

The county is located near the Hulun Buir grasslands, where Nestle built a dairy plant in 2007.

According to the agreement, Nestle will not have ownership of the farm, but will help the owners manage it.

**290 million**

Credit cards in circulation rose to 290 million at the end of March, an increase of 20 percent year on year, said the China Banking Association.

**49**

China currently has 49 listed publishing media companies, said Liu Binjie, Minister of the General Administration of Press and Publication.

# THIS WEEK WORLD



PHOTOGRAPH BY AP/WIDEWORLD

Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa rides in a jeep during a Victory Day parade in Colombo on May 19. The ceremony was held to mark the third anniversary of the end of Sri Lanka's civil war

## SRI LANKA



PHOTOGRAPH BY AP/WIDEWORLD

## THE UNITED STATES

Protesters take to the streets in Chicago on May 17, demanding an end to NATO involvement in Afghanistan ahead of the 2012 NATO Summit





Policemen collect evidence at the site of a suicide bomb attack in Sanaa on May 21. A Yemeni soldier with explosives packed under his uniform blew himself up during a military parade drill, killing at least 80 troops

**YEMEN**



An H-IIA rocket lifts off from the Tanegashima Space Center on the southern island of Kyushu on May 18. Japan successfully put a South Korean satellite into space in its first foray into the world of commercial launches

**JAPAN**



**THE PHILIPPINES**

Performers swim inside an aquarium during the Flowers of May Festival at the Manila Ocean Park on May 18. The festival is celebrated through May, with native activities reminiscent of traditional town fiestas



People touch a public phone booth decorated as a brain in Sao Paulo on May 21. A local phone company has replaced 100 phone booths in the city with artwork

**BRAZIL**



DEVOTED MOTHER:  
Zhang Yuxiao with her  
children in the SOS  
Children's Village in  
Yantai City, east China's  
Shandong Province

# SEEKING SOS MOTHERS

Marriage ban and low pay turn prospective mothers away from foster care communities By Wang Hairong

A group of independent houses in a beautiful compound stands out from regular apartment buildings in Huangcun Town, Daxing District in Beijing's southern suburb. Rather than villas housing the rich, these buildings are home to orphans and needy children in the SOS Children's Village in Beijing.

Currently, 36 children live in the village. In each house lives a family, including a "mother" and her children.

SOS mothers usually cook meals, do chores such as washing clothes and cleaning rooms, accompany children to classes outside the facility and buy clothing and other supplies for children.

Officially launched in July 2009, the village in Beijing is the 10th such facility in China.

Ever since the village was built, Jin Linde, the village head, has been busy recruiting mothers and assistants, a task that has so far proved to be challenging.

## Marriage ban

In the beginning, Jin did not foresee any difficulty in recruiting mothers. After the first vacancy was posted, hundreds of resumes streamed in.

"We wanted to recruit 21 mothers, and there were hundreds of applicants to select from, so I thought there should not be any problem," Jin said.

But it turned out that many avid applicants did not really understand the job requirements, Jin said.

The village's recruitment advertisement posted online specified that a mother should be single, or divorced/widowed without her own children, and be between 25 and 35 years

old. She should believe in the cause of SOS Children's Village; have at least finished high-school education, and know how to educate children and run a home; abide by relevant rules; be healthy and free of contagious diseases; and be virtuous, good-tempered, outgoing, hardworking and thrifty, respect the elderly and love children.

Jin said that the village expects a mother to bring up at least a generation of children in the village, which takes at least 15 years assuming a child enters the facility at 3 years old.

"Many applicants did not know that after accepting the job, they cannot marry and have their own children. Once they learned this requirement, most gave up," Jin said.

The remaining applicants were required to go through several procedures, such as face-to-face interviews, written examinations, a psychological test and background check. Few candidates eventually made it through the screening process.

"After the vacancy was advertised for the first time, we were able to recruit three mothers; the second time, nine mothers; the third time, one mother; the fourth time, no mother; and the fifth and the sixth advertisement brought four mothers into the village," Jin said.

The average age of the first 10 mothers recruited was 31, they all have at least a college education, and half of them were born in Beijing.

But in less than a year's time, six mothers quit the job. The village had to recruit mothers again.

"Many of the recruited mothers found living with the children interesting at the beginning, but after a while, some got bored and chose to leave," Jin said.

Some mothers left because they wanted to get married. On May 1, a mother got married and left the job.

Mother Song Zhihong lives with four children in the village, including a girl in junior middle school and three younger boys.

Song was born in Beijing and used to be an office worker. When she was recruited in 2010, she was 36 and single. Song said that her parents strongly objected to her working as an SOS mother in the beginning, due largely to the marriage ban.

Personally, Jin believes the marriage ban should be lifted, and the age limit should be relaxed to include women in their 40s and 50s.

"The SOS Children's Village International's rule does not fit well with China's society. In China, people value family life very much, and young people are under family pressure to get married," he said.

But the no-marriage rule set 60 years ago is part of the SOS Children's Village International's tradition, and the tradition enables the international charitable organization to attract donations and sustain its cause for long term.

"If we break the core tradition, whether the organization can continue to thrive is a question," said Li Jinguo, Chairman of the China Association for SOS Children's Village, a quasi-government non-profit organization under the Ministry of Civil Affairs.

## Low-paid mothers

Another major reason that mothers and assistants are difficult to recruit is their low pay, said Li.

Mothers and assistants are paid by the SOS Children's Villages International. New ►►



A HAPPY FAMILY: A mother and her children in the SOS Children's Village in Kaifeng, central China's Henan Province, have dinner on October 31, 2009

mothers are paid 2,650 yuan (\$420) per month, while an assistant is paid 1,100 yuan (\$174) monthly in their first year and 1,300 yuan (\$206) monthly in the second year. Li admits that the salaries are not attractive because of soaring prices in China.

Mothers have to work for at least 20 years and be at least 55 years old to enjoy retirement benefits from the SOS Children's Village International.

When the SOS Children's Villages first operated in China in the 1980s, the pay to mothers was impressive because at that time, Chinese people's overall income was low, said a staff surnamed Wang at the SOS

Children's Village in Yantai, east China's Shandong Province.

Back then, the SOS motherhood was particularly appealing to rural women because mothers automatically got permanent urban residency. "Now, it is easier for rural residents to get urban residency, and the urban household registration status is no longer associated with many privileges, so it is no longer very attractive," he said.

Although Wang agreed that it is more difficult to recruit new mothers now, he did not see high turnover among existing mothers in the facility in Yantai.

"Whether mothers stay in the job for long

depends on whether they really understand their goals. Those who have made up their mind to take good care of the children are devoted to the job," Wang said.

Among the 16 mothers in the SOS Children's Village in Yantai, at least five to six mothers have worked there for more than 25 years, and even the youngest one has worked there for more than five years now.

Mother Zhang Yuxiao was one of the mothers who came to the village in 1986. She once worked as a primary school teacher and a rural doctor. A dedicated mother who has raised 19 children, Zhang was named one of the Top 100 Excellent Mothers in China in 2007 by the All-China Women's Federation.

## 'Bending' the rules

The China Association for SOS Children's Village said that it is discussing with SOS Children's Village International about relaxing recruitment standards.

On May 3, Li announced that SOS children's villages across China are recruiting short-term mothers. Li said from last year, mothers and assistants' annual leave has been extended from 60 days to 80 days. Every village is allowed to recruit two additional mothers or assistants to fill in the gap.

But so far, many mothers can't yet take the extended leave because new assistants have not been recruited in most children's villages, Li said.

Li said that they now want to recruit volunteer mothers serving only two-year terms, and require them to remain single only during the service period.

In regions with local regulations on volunteer services and volunteer organizations, volunteers can be recruited to substitute mothers and assistants, said the China Association for SOS Children's Village in a regulation posted on its website.

By being more flexible in its recruitment strategies, Li hopes to engage more people and attract high-quality applicants to help orphans and needy children. ■

## SOS Children's Villages in China

SOS Children's Village International was founded by Hermann Gmeiner in Austria after World War II to provide war orphans and homeless children a family-like environment.

Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs and the SOS Children's Village International reached a cooperative agreement in 1984 to establish adoption communities in China. In nearly three decades, such facilities were set up in Tianjin, Yantai in Shandong Province, Qiqihaer in Heilongjiang Province, Nanchang in Jiangxi Province, Chengdu in Sichuan Province, Kaifeng in Henan Province, Putian in Fujian Province, Urumqi in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, Lhasa in Tibet Autonomous Region, and Beijing.

Moreover, affiliated facilities such as SOS youth apartments, kindergartens, social centers, and the like have also been built in the villages. In Yantai, the SOS Hermann Gmeiner Middle School was also established to provide education for children from the SOS Children's Village.

As of the end of 2011, a total of 2,263 children (including those who have grown up and left) had lived in SOS children's villages in China. Among these children, 225 have received two-year college education and 120 have studied in Chinese and foreign universities.

(Source: China Association for SOS Children's Village)

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BIG FAMILY: Han Chunmei with her children at their home in the SOS Children's Village in Qiqihaer City, Heilongjiang Province, on November 17, 2011

## COVER STORY

# LIVING A LIFE OF LOVE

An SOS mother brings sunshine to the life of her children By Wang Hairong

In 1991, Han Chunmei, then a petite 26-year-old worker in Qiqihaer City, northeast China's Heilongjiang Province, learned that an SOS children's village had been set up in the city and was seeking mothers for orphan children living there. She applied and became the mother of eight children.

Now after bringing up 18 orphans, Han

has proven to be a devoted mother.

"Over the past 21 years, I have learned a lot, and have grown up and toughened up together with my children," said Han, who remains single and does not have any children of her own.

Han studied education at a local open university, as well as receiving training in sewing, knitting and cooking. She likes to

make warm and beautiful clothes for her children, and is famous in the SOS village for the big and white steamed bread she makes.

On weekends, Chinese mothers are usually busy chauffeuring their children to classes to cultivate their special skills. Han is no exception.

Her twin daughters Han Wei and Han Xiao, now third-year high school students, came to the family when they were 2 years





GROUP STUDY: Han's children do their homework as Han tutors



RIGOROUS TRAINING: Daughter Cui Lunyue plays *Zheng*, a traditional stringed instrument, while Han looks on



HAPPY GRANDMA: Han poses in front of a picture of her grandchildren

old. When they were 6, Han began taking them to classes where they learned to play *zheng* and *pipa*, two traditional Chinese stringed instruments popular with girls.

"As orphans, when the children first came to the SOS village, they were not confident. I want them to develop talent in art so as to boost their confidence. Now, they are much more confident than before," Han said.

Han's children learned to play various musical instruments, painting and traditional Chinese calligraphy. On holidays, the family often holds a concert, with the children playing instruments, singing and dancing.

One of Han's sons, Gao Cheng, now 27, was timid and did not like to socialize with others while at school.

However, Gao liked calligraphy. Once he wanted to take part in a national calligraphy contest, but hesitated for fear of failure. Han encouraged him to go for it and accompanied

him to training classes. Gao eventually won a silver medal in the contest, and he was happy that he could compete with others and do well. Over time, Gao became more confident and outgoing.

Like other mothers, Han would like to invest in her children's future. When her eldest son, Gao Xiang, was admitted into the Chinese People's Public Security University more than 10 years ago, he needed a notebook computer, which was an expensive item then in China. Han bought one for him with her personal savings.

Han Xiao was admitted into a good middle school in 2009, but the SOS Children's Village's budget could not fully afford her tuition. Han paid the extra tuition out of her own pocket.

Han believes it is important for a mother to be positive so that the children will be optimistic. In her spare time, Han has made her

own life colorful. She enrolled in dancing and yoga classes, and joined a volunteer group organized by a local evening paper.

To Han, the greatest reward is to see her children grow up and have their own careers and families.

Gao Xiang, now 33, is a policeman. He got married in 2002.

"At the wedding, my daughter-in-law presented a flower to me and called me mother. I was so happy that I did not know what to say," Han recalled.

One year later, a baby boy was born to Gao, and Han went to the hospital to take care of the baby as a grandmother.

"Seeing that Gao Xiang has a job he likes, a wife he loves, and his family is so happy, I am fully contented," Han said. ■

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