

unprecedented global transformation State Grid is one of the companies whose networks form the ‘sinews of power’.

Jing Xu, *The Good Child: Moral Development in a Chinese Preschool*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017; xiii + 231 pp. with figure, tables, bibliography, index, and notes: 9781503602434, US\$27.95 (pbk)

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In *The Good Child: Moral Development in a Chinese Preschool*, Jing Xu discusses a question which in recent years has attracted the attention of people in China: has China become a callous society, and why? (p. 78). The author’s main aim is not to directly address this dichotomic ethical question but to discuss teachers’ and parents’ anxieties over the moral development of only children. The perception among many is that China is ‘a dangerous place, a place that negates the practical value of empathy and altruism in real life’ (p. 79) and, as a result, people are extremely worried that Chinese society does not provide a conducive educational environment for their children. Based on 12 months of fieldwork conducted at Biyu Preschool, an elite preschool located in a middle-class neighbourhood in Shanghai, Xu describes socializers’ conflicting values situated between ideology and reality. These dilemmas regarding moral cultivation become even more apparent in the context of Shanghai’s contemporary educational culture which is described by teachers and parents as highly competitive and overwhelmingly stressful for children.

The first educational dilemma described in the book is the gap between the ideal of raising an empathetic, caring child and reality, which seems to demand other traits. Socializers explain that while qualities such as empathy and compassion are considered precious, parents are also aware of China’s ‘moral crisis’, and they wonder whether one should ‘teach his or her own child to be nice, loving, and empathic toward others in a perceived selfish and callous world’ (p. 78). Another important issue explored in the book is children’s understanding of property distribution and exchange. Xu takes a very close look not only at how teachers and parents transmit knowledge of ownership to children, but also at the ‘nuanced motivations, tactics, and notions of property ownership and fairness in these children’s social interactions’ (p. 101). Focusing on the understanding of ownership within the Chinese context is extremely important in view of China’s family planning policy and the popular perception that singleton children are self-centred.

Bridging psychology and anthropology, in addition to conducting participant observation and informal interviews with preschool teachers, parents and children, Xu also incorporated other research methods such as questionnaires on child-rearing and field experiments. These controlled experiments are interesting because they allowed Xu to closely explore children’s perspectives. For example, in Chapter 4, Xu argues that in order to understand children’s sharing strategies ‘one needs to go beyond mere observation’ (p. 134). Using different types of sharing games, Xu demonstrates not only that children express norms fostered by parents and teachers, but that there is a close connection between culture, education, and children’s developing minds. Xu demonstrates that

Chinese children's sharing strategies are closely connected to the cultural context of *guanxi*. For example, children are witness to *guanxi* practices when they see their parents' endeavours to cultivate good relationships with their preschool teachers so that children would be favoured. Another interesting aspect of the book's methodology is the author's position within the field. Xu reflectively describes her engagement in the field as a Chinese person who left China to pursue higher education in the United States and then returned to China to conduct research. Xu explains that she was surprised to discover that the practices she encountered were not transparent to her at all. One main reason is that not only had she returned to China after several years, she also returned as the mother of a 19-month-old baby boy. The duality of her identity as a researcher and as a mother turned out to be extremely significant because it enabled her to establish close connections with teachers and parents.

While Xu stresses the nuanced tensions between different socialization agents, the role of the state as a socializer seems to be missing from the analysis. Upon discussing discourses and practices of child-rearing and education in contemporary China, the role of the state and its part in cultivating educational ideas and norms should be emphasized more clearly, especially in light of China's political culture. At the same time, this is an important book which highlights key challenges that caregivers and educators face in contemporary China. The ethnographic data is rich, and the detailed quotes of caregivers and children are fascinating and thought-provoking. In contrast to psychological literature, empathy is a relatively new topic in anthropological literature. The detailed ethnographic evidence that Xu documented and the complex analysis that Xu carried out bridge this gap and contribute to the understanding that culture and education play a significant role in cultivating empathy, as well as other moral ideas. The book is intended not only for an academic audience but for anyone interested in education and social change in contemporary China.