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Review of *Young People Leaving State Care in China*. Xiaoyuan Shang and Karen R. Fisher. Reviewed by Mingyang Zheng.

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life, all the while struggling to reach agreement on the best interests of the child. The 'norm' of family in the space of borders where culture, language, and relationships are complicated by nationality exposes the intersectional oppression of race, class, nationality, disability, and geography under the child protection and the immigration systems.

While criticizing social workers for actions leading to tragic stories, Rodriguez acknowledges the challenges they face under a system established to objectify children as 'cases,' and 'placements,' while at the same time scrutinizing marginalized families through a normative Western white middle class standard of good parenting.

Based on in-depth field work and literature review, this book provides immeasurable value in our understanding of the experiences of key actors, including social workers, biological parents, and foster parents, under the systems whose establishment is based on narratives surrounding 'worthiness' and a Westernized norm of family life. The fragility of these families as illustrated in the stories throughout the book also reveals the fragility of the systems that do not guarantee safety and protection, let alone the best interests of the child. Rodriguez's book also provides insightful implications for social workers, legal advocates within the systems of child welfare, as well as the issue of immigration as a whole, through the engrossing stories of the families entangled within these convoluted systems.

Yue Xu
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Xiaoyuan Shang and Karen R. Fisher, *Young People Leaving State Care in China*. Policy Press at the University of Bristol (2017), 264 pages, \$120.00 (hardcover).

There are many circumstances that lead children to living in state care, such as losing parents, being abandoned, or experiencing maltreatment. A United Nations Children's Fund report for 2012 estimates that about 153 million orphans lived in state care worldwide in 2009, and even this large number does not include children living in state care for other reasons. Due to limited social and family supports, children in state care usually

experience more barriers in the process of growing up, transitioning to adulthood, and gaining independence, compared to children living with their families. The research consensus is that simply providing food or shelter to fulfill the basic needs of children in state care is not nearly enough. It is also important to prepare them to transition to adulthood and be able to live independently. Although there is a growing body of research exploring young people leaving state care, few of these studies focus on the context of China.

The book *Young People Leaving State Care in China*, written by Xiaoyuan Shang and Karen Fisher, professors at the Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, addresses some gaps in the existing literature of children in state care in China. In this book, the authors use a broader definition of state care, which includes institutional care, foster care, family group home care, and informal care that receives support from the state. Guided by the social inclusion framework and social network theory, the authors used a phenomenological approach to interview 54 young adults in 4 regions who have lived in state care and compare the impacts of different types of state care on the young adults' childhood experience and the experience of transitioning to adulthood. The authors argue that all children in state care experience barriers and challenges when transitioning to adulthood. However, such barriers and challenges are greater when children grow up in institutional care instead of family-based care (e.g., family group home care and foster care) because they have less emotional support, little access to social resources, and no family support at all. The authors also provide an overview of the education, employment, healthcare, and housing security policies related to young adults leaving state care and discuss how these policies support and impede the transition to adulthood.

This book is divided into three parts. In the first part, chapters one to four, the authors provide background information regarding types of state care in China and the policies related to state care. In the second part, chapters five to eleven, through the voices of the young adults themselves, the authors present their early experiences in different types of state care and how they transitioned to adulthood. Guided by the theoretical framework of social inclusion and social network theory, the authors try to understand and compare different types of state

care in four areas: development of self-identity; employment and economic independence; independent housing; and social participation, friends, family and social networking. In the last part, the authors provide a summary of the book and identify some implications for policy.

Overall, Shang and Fisher provide an up-to-date, clear, and comprehensive description about the young people leaving state care in China. The book is very easy to follow. A short summary is provided at the end of each chapter. Moreover, the authors always provide a concise description when a concept or theory is introduced. Thus, a strong theoretical background is not required to follow the concepts presented in this book. In addition, the authors' conclusion that young people in state care experience multidimensional disadvantages in transitioning to adulthood, in part due to limited policies and services available to support them, is well grounded. The qualitative approach is well suited for this research, as understanding the experience of children in state care is vital for guiding policy change and service delivery. Finally, the research lends a voice to the children in state care to talk about their barriers, hopes, frustrations, and supports in transitioning to the adulthood, which I believe is the best part of this book.

However, the book could be strengthened in some areas. First, the gender aspect is left untouched, which is surprising, as China has a long tradition of favoring boys over girls. It would be interesting to know if females and males have the same experiences in state care and in transitioning to adulthood. Second, while presenting the current policies related to state care, it would be helpful if the authors could discuss some rationales behind the implemented policies or government actions that were obviously harmful to children. For example, the authors do not discuss why Beijing authorities asked children in foster care to move back to institutional care, even though it was well known that this would create psychological issues. Third, the final summary chapter seems underdeveloped. The discussion regarding policy implications is limited, and the reader is left curious about what can be done at the policy level regarding children in state care in China.

Although the book has some limitations, its contribution to literature, practice, and policy should not be ignored. Through the stories of young adults in state care, it sheds some light on

the potential policy change which could assist children's transition to adulthood. The major audience for this book would be policy researchers, social work practitioners, or graduate students who are interested in foster care or child welfare in China. Also, this book is a great resource for policymakers in China who make child welfare policies and allocate resources for the children in foster care.

Mingyang Zheng
University of Minnesota

Qin Gao, *Welfare, Work, and Poverty: Social Assistance in China*. Oxford University Press (2017), 176 pages, \$35 (hardcover).

This book provides the first comprehensive evaluation of the impact and effectiveness of China's primary social assistance program, Minimum Livelihood Guarantee, or Dibao. The work examines its background, development, and impact on poverty, welfare and work. The most appealing feature of the book is its systematic evaluation of the Dibao program since its inception in 1993. As the author argues, Dibao has been introduced and implemented for 20 years. That is time enough to review and evaluate the program's short-term and long-term impact and look for directions for future development.

The coverage of the book is comprehensive, including nine chapters. It is helpful that the author gives a preview of scope of the book and the main findings in the first chapter. Subsequent beginning chapters trace the background, inception, and development of Dibao, and describe the patterns in Dibao thresholds, financing, beneficiaries, and its decentralized implementation. Chapters 4 through 8 focus on evaluation of Dibao's impact on various outcomes and its effectiveness, such as targeting performance, anti-poverty effectiveness, welfare-to-work initiatives, family expenditures, social participation as well as subjective well-being. A final chapter discusses policy solutions and research direction for the future.

The style of writing is clear, precise and straightforward. In each section, the author clearly states main research questions and organizes the chapters accordingly, which is a helpful feature for readers. For readers who have particular interests in certain topics,