

## A Mother's Ordeal: One Woman's Fight Against China's One-Child Policy

By Steven W. Mosher  
(Harcourt Brace & Company, 1993; \$12.95)

Reviewed by Leslie Bond Diggins

**A** *Mother's Ordeal: One Woman's Fight Against China's One-Child Policy* is not an easy book to read. Graphic and explicit, it shows the reader the human toll exacted by China's notorious "one couple, one child" population control policy, in force for over two decades. Author Steven Mosher and others have documented that this brutally repressive policy included forced abortions through the ninth month of pregnancy, forced sterilizations, and cold-blooded infanticide.

Gripping from the first chapter, the story is told from the perspective of "Chi An Yang" (a pseudonym used to protect her relatives still in China). Chi An was a victim of the coercive abortion policy, later, ironically, a zealous enforcer of the barbaric practice, and finally (coming full circle) a pregnant woman desperately trying to save the life of her unborn child.

While agonizing to read, the book is also impossible to put down. From the horror Chi An feels when she sees a perfectly formed hand amid the "stuff" in the collection jar after she performs her first abortion as a nursing student, we follow Chi An to the countryside, where she convinces herself that the countless women "escorted" into sterilization clinics by population control officials are actually there voluntarily.

The reader is filled with pity and horror when Chi An herself is subjected to the coerced abortion of her second child. She describes the grotesque experience as having her heart "torn into a thousand pieces." Given this, we are all the more horrified when Chi An - - motivated in part by her resentment that another woman should try to have a second child when Chi An was denied - - becomes the enforcer of the one-child policy at her 15,000-employee workplace.

Given a strict quota of allowable births annually, Chi An zealously saw to it that not only were there no second children, but even first children were aborted if the parents had not received one of the few available

"birth quotas." She describes the types of "persuasion" she and others routinely used to convince women pregnant with "illegal" children to abort - - from severe economic sanctions, to daily harassment, and eventually incarceration. And as if this were not enough, she goes on to describe the forced abortions performed on women who refused to submit and the murders after birth of babies born to women who somehow managed to make it to the end of their pregnancies.

One of the most haunting events described is Chi An's riveting recounting of "The Little-Boy-Who-Wouldn't-Die." A full-term infant born to a woman who did not have a "permit" to give birth, he survived one hurdle when a doctor recoiled from injecting him in the head with formaldehyde - - a preferred method of infanticide for some doctors - - as he lay crying lustily, still attached to his mother by his umbilical cord. But a second doctor had no such scruples, plunging the needle into the soft spot of the helpless little boy's head.

Expected to convulse almost immediately and weaken in his crying as he died, the little-boy-who-wouldn't-die cried louder and louder, prompting the doctor who refused to kill him to say that the baby's tiny soul was cursing them all. Finally, after a half hour, the baby, his face contorted in pain, died.

For a long time afterward, Chi An said, she could see his tiny, sad face looking on whenever she participated in a late-term abortion. Eventually, she refused to participate in late abortions.

But the memory of the little-boy-who-wouldn't-die was not even enough to stop Chi An from imprisoning women in very late stages of pregnancy until they finally agreed to undergo abortions. In fact, when her best friend, Ah Fang, became pregnant with a second child and fled to a sister's house in a faraway village to hide from the population control authorities, Chi An personally tracked her down and forcibly

brought her back, imprisoning her in a storeroom and pressuring her to abort.

But Ah Fang remained steadfast. Going into labor, she pleaded with Chi An to help her deliver the baby and pretend that the child had been born during the night, when no one was present. The call of friendship was not enough: Chi An called the authorities, who took the woman to the hospital, where her baby was killed and the mother forcibly sterilized.

But the death of Ah Fang's baby proved to be the turning point for Chi An. "Just as the little-boy-who-wouldn't-die had brought home to me the suffering of infants, so Ah Fang's futile resistance made real to me the damage I was inflicting on women," she stated. "So many women. So much sadness. *There are already too many women who hate you in this world, my conscience constantly reminded me, and too many little souls who will be clawing at you in the next.*"

Hoping to get away from the business of "population control," Chi An eventually received permission to take her son and travel to the United States, where her husband was studying as an exchange student. There, despite the fact that she had an IUD, Chi An became pregnant.

Still caught up in the mentality of "no second child," she at first saw no alternative to having an abortion. Prepped and ready on the table, with the doctor about to insert the suction device, Chi An suddenly jumped up, screaming, "Don't touch me! We want the baby! We want the baby!"

"The doctor looked at me in reproach at my change of heart - - a look I knew all too well from my own work with 'pleaders' - - and began peeling off his rubber gloves," Chi An recalled. "I realized that I had won. There would be no abortion."

However, Chi An's decision proved not to be so simple. She wrote to the population control authorities to ask if the one-child policy applied to couples living abroad. In no uncertain terms she was told it did; she must "fix her problem" immediately.

In a series of increasingly threatening letters, Chi An was told to abort immediately or return to China to have the "remedial measures" - - the euphemism used to refer to abortion - - taken there. If she refused, not only would her family suffer grave consequences, but her entire workplace would be

denied bonuses and raises for at least a year.

In addition, Chi An and her husband - - who fully intended to return to China after the birth of their "illegal" child - - feared a "revenge slaying," in which a parent whose child was forcibly aborted came after and killed the child of a population control worker.

Finally, Chi An and her husband contacted Mosher, who had written widely on the authoritarian "population control" program. They asked for his help in applying for political asylum in the United States. But the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) denied their request in February 1988, shortly after the birth of their daughter, Mei.

At that point, Mosher wrote a number of articles publicizing their plight, prompting hundreds of Americans to write urging the INS to reconsider its decision. Eventually, the case was brought to the attention of then-Attorney General Edwin Meese, who ruled that asylum should be granted. Since then, according to Mosher, perhaps a dozen families have been granted asylum under similar circumstances.

In one respect, the American reader might be tempted to feel removed from Chi An's terrible plight. It takes place, after all, in China, a Communist country in which the government routinely controls every aspect of its citizens' lives. But Chi An's story may not be as remote as one might first think.

Is it a gross overstatement to see in the Clinton Health Care Rationing Plan the seeds of such drastic programs here in the United States? Only time will tell. But consider this: under the current version of the Clinton Health Care Rationing Plan, if an unborn child were discovered to have a disability, the Clinton plan would readily pay for abortion - - but deny medical benefits to the child if the mother carried the pregnancy to term. Given the fact that denying health insurance to a child likely to need much specialized care could well bankrupt a family, how different is this, really, from the Chinese form of economic coercion for abortion?

Moreover, given the Clintons' quality of life ethos, would they feel justified in attempting to control medical costs by limiting population growth? While forced abortions certainly seem a far-off threat in our country now, powerful inducements to subtly or overtly limit the number of births could be closer than we realize.