



ARTICLE 24  
THE RIGHT TO REST AND LEISURE

XIAOLU GUO  
AN INTERNET BABY

Here are the reasons why Weiming and Yuli have to sell their baby on the Internet, a baby who's only seen the light of this world for five days.

Yuli is still at school, in her first year at Chongqing Technical College. For an eighteen-year-old girl from a rural village, the scandal would be huge; she would certainly be expelled and lose all the time and money she and her parents have invested to get her where she is: on the way to some better life. She has lied to everyone – from the dean of her department to her class and dormitory mates. To all of them she said she had hepatitis and needed to stay at home for a while. That's after she'd managed to hide her growing belly in a large coat for five months. And now, in a shabby and dirty clinic in a suburb of Chongqing, she's given birth to a screaming little thing.

Yuli is a determined girl. She will study, get her diploma and start a career in a big city. She won't raise a child now. Therefore she won't let anyone know from her village, in a mountainous region in Sichuan where the only income is from growing chilli peppers, and the villagers take family things too seriously. If they learned she'd given birth to a son, they'd come to Chongqing straight away and do everything they could to keep the child. Yuli's mind is clear and certain while the baby is sucking her nipple with a small, wet face. She won't keep it.

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Yuli's boyfriend Weiming has one very simple motive for selling their baby: lack of money. Weiming is from the same village as Yuli. They are childhood lovers. As a nineteen-year-old man, he's had trouble surviving in this city ever since he left his hometown to follow her. There's no way he can imagine helping Yuli with her college fees, sending money to his family back in the village and bringing up a baby here at the same time. Not possible. He's already working twenty hours a day, on two jobs: during the day he cleans cars, private ones and government ones, and at night he stands by a door as the porter of a karaoke parlour. He can only sleep from 3 a.m. to 7.30 a.m. He's been exhausted from the day he arrived in this city; his sight is blurred from lack of sleep and his mind is as foggy as the permanent clouds hanging on the Yangtze River. But he understands: to help his girlfriend and his poor family in the village, he has to work like a donkey. A donkey can sleep while standing still, and Weiming has to learn to do that too. He has no choice. He doesn't complain either.

So the young lovers agree to sell their baby on the Internet. Yuli studied computer technology at college, she knows how it works. What people normally sell online are machines, things like TV sets, Walkmans, bicycles, cameras, or sometimes a banned book. Selling a real baby is not very usual.

'But what's so different?' Weiming says. 'Selling a baby is the same as selling a car, the only difference is the price. If China could sell some of its population to the West, then there would be less people starving here, and we would have more money.'

Yuli takes some photos of the baby and chooses the cutest one to put online. And after a discussion with her boyfriend, she also puts up a price.

Healthy newborn baby boy for sale – 8,000 yuan.  
Contact: 13601386243

The number is Weiming's mobile phone, given to him for his night job. Although both of them know 8,000 yuan is really much too little money for a healthy baby boy, they reason that most people in the provinces are not rich and as they are in a hurry to get rid of the baby, asking for little money could sort things more easily and more quickly. And Weiming also thinks that his girlfriend can always get pregnant again if this one works out.

After putting the ad online, Yuli feeds her son a bit of milk and changes his wet nappy. What she's worried about is that if the baby doesn't go soon, she'll miss her end-of-term exam, then she won't get her diploma.

The Internet ad proves effective. After just a few hours, the phone starts to ring continuously. The first few people want to know whether the whole thing is just a joke, which makes Weiming shout back at them impatiently. He's got no time to joke about life, he needs money. Sounding like a snappy businessman, he yells back that if they're not interested he'll just hang up, while his grumpy boss is cursing him from behind his back.

But then a woman with a shaky voice explains on the phone that she's from a seaside town near Qingdao, that she is forty-six years old, her husband has been very ill, that's why they didn't have a child, and now he just died, and she would like to buy the baby, a boy would be ideal. She sounds nervous.

'Can you pay 8,000 yuan cash in one go?' Weiming asks hastily.

'Yes. But I first need to check whether the baby is really healthy.'

Weiming assures the woman that his boy is in perfect shape and that he'll call her back after discussing things with his girlfriend. Weiming knows that he shouldn't say yes to the first interested person. Through negotiation, prices can always be improved.

A few more useless calls later, a couple rings from Wenzhou, a rich industrial town in Zhejiang province. They want the

baby as soon as possible: 'We can get on the first morning flight to Chongqing and meet you.' The couple speaks on two handsets at the same time. Weiming learns that they run a shoe factory in Wenzhou, that they're wealthy but cannot have babies.

'Well, I have some other customers interested. How do you want to convince me to go with you?' Weiming asks, a clear hint that an auction is on. The couple are quick businesspeople; they immediately offer double the price to get the boy.

So the deal is done. Weiming will receive 16,000 yuan in cash. But he doesn't want the couple to come to Chongqing where he and Yuli live. To avoid any risk of being found out by neighbours, Yuli's school friends or his own colleagues, they agree to meet in a city where no one knows them: Shanghai. The meeting point will be Shanghai's People's Park, the next day at 4 p.m. in front of the park gate.

The young couple grab a bag, wrap up their sleeping baby and hurry to the train station to get on the next train to Shanghai. Both Weiming and Yuli hardly ever took the train before and they are over-excited like children on their seats, eagerly observing every station the train passes, picturing themselves ending up working in Shanghai, thanks to those 16,000 yuan. From time to time, Yuli feeds the baby, but the moody little thing doesn't appear to like the trip and keeps screaming all the time. Every passenger knows them and hates them. At one point the conductor even comes to ask whether they need some medical assistance.

After fourteen hours, the young couple arrive, pale and exhausted, in the shiny city of Shanghai. Yuli is deeply impressed. People here are more beautiful, fashionable, the houses are much taller and more luxurious than in Chongqing. But Weiming is hungry; he can't enjoy the new city, he's starving and feels even more powerless in Shanghai's busy streets than he is in Chongqing. They enter a wonton restaurant and eat two bowls of wonton soup each. Weiming swallows half a roasted duck as well. The food is eaten quickly,

brutally and silently, only the baby sometimes coughs in Yuli's arms, no one knows why.

Twenty minutes before 4 p.m., Yuli and Weiming stand in front of the iron gate of Shanghai's People's Park. The baby is crying again and Yuli has to swing him in her arms all the time, wearily, until he falls asleep.

The Wenzhou shoemaker couple arrive on time. They both are about thirty-five and look more humble than they sounded on the phone to Weiming. He thinks they look even more sleepless than him, worn out. But as soon as they see the baby in Yuli's arms, the couple's eyes start to glisten. Their eyes are glued on him as if on a magnetic object. The woman can't help but scream: 'What a beautiful little boy! How cute! How sweet he is!' Her husband stretches his stiff finger, which must be overworked polishing his factory's shoes, and touches the baby's red cheeks and caresses his soft hair. He seems to be fond of the boy, too. The woman takes the baby from Yuli's hands, holds him and now starts to feel how a mother feels when her son is asleep in her arms.

The little baby wakes up from his nap, his big eyes stare at the strange woman who keeps kissing him and speaks some incomprehensible Wenzhou dialect.

'What about the money then?' Weiming asks cautiously.

The man opens his leather suitcase, takes out a heavy blue plastic bag, but doesn't give it to Weiming straight away. Instead, he says:

'Let's get into the park. We need to check if the baby is as healthy as you said.'

The two couples agree and enter the People's Park. It is May, the willows are green, the bamboos lush, flowers blooming. Some old people are doing tai chi. Kids are flying their kites, with their grandparents running after them.

The baby boy is now in the Wenzhou couple's arms. In turn, both the wife and the husband thoroughly check him, studying him like a pair of newly made shoes; they turn him upside down, check his ears, eyes, nostrils, fingers, legs, toes,

as well as his bottom and his front. Oddly enough, the baby doesn't cry this time. He seems to enjoy this sudden attention, and he starts to giggle.

Finally, the Wenzhou woman is satisfied and asks the young couple:

'Do you have a name for him?'

'Not really. Just for the hospital registration we called him Wei Yu, that's a combination of our family names,' Weiming answers.

'In that case we will give him a great name, the best name a man can bear!' the Wenzhou man says in an inspired voice.

They find a quiet area of the park, a lake surrounded by leafy willow trees. There, no one can watch and find out what's going on. The water is clear, one can see red carp swimming on the bottom. Lotus plants grow lush, dragonflies are skating on the surface of the water. The Wenzhou woman volunteers to stand guard and leaves. The Wenzhou man puts his suitcase on the ground and takes out the blue plastic bag. Picking up a bundle of money, Weiming starts to count, carefully. From time to time, he also checks whether the notes are fake.

It takes too long, half the money is still uncounted. The Wenzhou man begins to look impatient and Yuli gets restless, too. She lays her baby on the ground, facing the lake, and starts to count another bundle of notes.

After an intense silence filled only with the flicking of the bank notes, they reach their conclusion: exactly 16,000 yuan, no cheating. Weiming starts to gather the money, when suddenly there's a scream.

'Where is my baby?' Yuli is crying in panic.

The three scan the surroundings, but there is no baby around, only an empty suitcase lying on the soil.

The Wenzhou woman is just returning. As she approaches, her face changes colour. All follow her look to the quiet lake. As their eyes settle on the water, they see a baby silently drowning, drifting towards the clear bottom of the beautiful lake.