



**CENTRE FOR THE HUMANITIES AND MEDICINE**  
**THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG**

**Child Health and Humanitarian Emergencies**

**22 May 2012**

**9:15am – 12:30pm**

**Council Chamber, 8F, Meng Wah Building**

**The University of Hong Kong**

The desire to protect children and to promote healthy ‘childhoods’ constitutes a profoundly important motivation for humanitarian action today. Undergirding such action is the concept of children’s rights, formalised through humanitarian law and human rights law and advanced under the aegis of the United Nations and other international agencies. This state of affairs has grown out of a long and deep entanglement between childhood and humanitarianism, and this workshop aims to shed new light upon current practices by bringing together historical perspectives on the connections between the protection of children/childhood and humanitarian concern.

Drawing upon evidence from the Soviet Union, Japan, China and colonial East and Southeast Asia, this workshop will explore the impact of natural disasters, forced migration and trafficking, state welfare systems and healthcare systems upon the lives of children. The contributors will consider how child health and ‘humanitarian’ intervention, underpinned by liberal universalism, were elaborated and how both helped to shape modern definitions of ‘childhood.’ They will also consider how the discourses and practices of humanitarianism were implicated in the (re)production of social systems that silenced, repressed and denied agency to the very children they claimed to protect.

Participants: *Dr Janet Borland, Dr Rosaria Franco, Prof. Ping-chen Hsiung, Dr David M. Pomfret*

Discussant: *Prof. Didier Fassin*

## Schedule

9:15 – 9:20	<b>Welcome/ Introduction</b>
9:20 – 9:50	<b>“Human Livestock”: Sentiment, Colonialism and Child Trafficking on the China/Indochina Border</b> Dr. David M. Pomfret, The University of Hong Kong
9:50 – 10:20	<b>A Matter of Life or Death: The Soviet State’s Assistance of Abandoned Children (1920s-1940s)</b> Dr. Rosaria Franco, The University of Nottingham, Ningbo
10:20 – 10:40	<b>Q&amp;A</b>
10:40 – 11:00	<b>Break</b>
11:00 – 11:30	<b>“I am an earthquake”: The Political and Pedagogical Use of Stories by Children Who Survived Japan’s 1923 Catastrophe</b> Dr. Janet Borland, The University of Hong Kong
11:30 – 12:00	<b>The Humanitarian Implications of Chinese Childhood History</b> Prof. Ping-chen Hsiung, The Chinese University of Hong Kong
12:00 – 12:10	<b>Discussant’s Response</b>
12:10 – 12:30	<b>Q&amp;A</b>

## **“Human Livestock”: Sentiment, Colonialism and Child Trafficking on the China/Indochina Border**

Dr. David M. Pomfret  
Associate Professor  
Department of History  
The University of Hong Kong

### Abstract:

On 10 April 1891 two Vietnamese girls aged eighteen and nine years old stumbled upon a French army base in Lao Kay, in Tonkin, not far from the recently delimited boundary between French Indochina and China's southernmost province, Yunnan. The two girls, fleeing unpaid domestic bond-service, emerged at the heart of a borderland standoff between these two empires as the Chinese fort commander, Wei, demanded the return of the missing bondservants. The French Resident's portrayal of his stance against the trafficking of children out of Vietnam as part of a wider defence of the girls' "sacred" liberty not only brought the border and its meanings into sharper relief, it inspired appeals to redemptive action through the fight against the scourge of the cross-border trafficking of children which reverberated into the interwar years.

The need for humanitarian intervention to stop this 'odious traffic' intensified as recurrent crises in famine-hit areas of rural Tonkin stimulated child divestment by poor families and the cross-border flows of these children into China. Sentimental narratives of suffering and compassionate relief underpinned the competitive assertion of claims to civilisational dominance by the French administration in Hanoi. This was imposed upon, and embodied in the Asian landscape, by consular offices in Yunnan, Guanxi, Longtcheou, Nanning, Hoi Hau and Hong Kong. Consular officials found themselves in the front line of a seemingly neverending struggle to enforce humanitarian interventions intended to produce the repatriation of trafficked children. At the heart of this entanglement lay a concept of childhood as an ideally vulnerable, protected and non-economic realm. The flow of children across the border served to delimit the boundaries of modernity, civility and incivility, even as it raised questions as to the precise boundaries of childhood. This paper shows how, as border patrols failed to stem this crisis, budgetary constraints, doubts over victimhood and evidence suggesting official interventions were inadvertently recirculating children into slaving networks prompted agents of the French state to openly question the protection of childhood and the limits of humanitarian intervention.

### Biography:

David M. Pomfret is Associate Professor of Modern European History in the Department of History at The University of Hong Kong. He researches nineteenth and twentieth century European history, with a particular focus upon the comparative and transnational history of childhood and youth in Europe and its empires, and in urban history.

## **A Matter of Life or Death: The Soviet State's Assistance of Abandoned Children (1920s-1940s)**

Dr Rosaria Franco

Assistant Professor in Modern European History

The University of Nottingham

Ningbo, China

Abstract:

In this paper I shall discuss the social policies concerning abandoned and homeless children (*besprizorniki*) in the Soviet Union in the period 1920-1940s. Designed in the Late Imperial period, but introduced only in the early years after the Revolution to deal with abandoned children left behind by the devastation of the First World War, these policies took pride of place alongside the raft of new welfare services for vulnerable children at the core of an emerging nationalised Soviet child welfare, or “child protection” system. While this initiative was analogous with contemporaneous developments in many Western states, the Soviet Union was unusual in that it gradually phased out all other welfare providers but the State and, following the Civil War and a major famine in 1921-22, took on the role of assisting millions of abandoned children.

However, under Stalin's rule the combined impact of policies of collectivisation, the forced resettlement of rich peasants and national minorities, political repression, famine (1932-33 and 1946-47) and mass population displacement, produced the breakup of families and growing numbers of “unaccompanied” children who were dubbed “abandoned” or “homeless.”

This reclassification allows us to explore the contradictions in the ‘humanitarian’ role of a totalitarian State which produced social policies in crises of its own making and set out to rescue the child victims of violence it had generated, while also presenting itself as a State committed to the welfare of children, who, after urban workers constituted its second most privileged group. The arguments made in this paper are supported by archival evidence drawn from the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF).

Biography:

Rosaria Franco is Assistant Professor in Modern European History at The University of Nottingham, Ningbo. Her current research explores the links between welfare and social order in the Soviet Union in relation to mass child abandonment caused by rapid urbanisation and collectivisation, man-made disasters (wars and three famines), forced migration, and political repression. In addition, she is currently completing several projects arising from the a EU-funded 4<sup>th</sup> EU-China Dialogue on ‘Left-Behind Children: Problems and Solutions’, Ningbo 20-22 February 2012, linking Chinese and U-organisations.

## **“I am an earthquake”: The Political and Pedagogical Use of Stories by Children Who Survived Japan’s 1923 Catastrophe**

Dr. Janet Borland

Research Assistant Professor

Department of History

The University of Hong Kong

### Abstract:

On 1 September 1924, people across Japan stopped to recall the moment one year earlier when the Great Kantō Earthquake destroyed much of Tokyo and virtually all of Yokohama. Out of all the various commemorative events and activities held that day to mark the anniversary—including political speeches, religious ceremonies, and disaster awareness exercises—one stood out as being unique: the Tokyo Municipal Government published a collection of more than two thousand essays written by school children. Even among Japan’s extensive records of major earthquakes dating back centuries, historical materials written by children documenting their experiences of natural disaster are scarce. Why did the government collect and publish these materials? What do the essays tell us about children’s unique experiences of the Great Kantō Earthquake? Furthermore, what do these materials reveal about the place of children in state and society in interwar Japan?

In this paper I will provide insights into how children dealt with death, dislocation, and the overall experience of having their world turned upside down. I will also examine how and why educators compiled and used the memories of children for larger pedagogical, sociological, and political ends. By examining the children’s essays in the context of recovery and reconstruction issues in post-disaster Japan, I suggest that this large cache of children’s experiences were also used with the aim of helping galvanise public opinion in support of reconstruction projects associated with schools and education.

### Biography:

Janet Borland is Research Assistant Professor in the History of Child and Youth Health at The University of Hong Kong. Her current research explores the impact of the Great Kanto Earthquake that destroyed Tokyo in 1923 on children, schools and education. She is writing a manuscript entitled “Showcases of New Tokyo: Rebuilding Schools and Society after the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake.” In addition, she is translating a collection of children’s essays which will form the basis of a manuscript entitled “Voices From the Ruins of Tokyo: Children’s Memories of the 1923 Earthquake.” Janet has published three articles on the earthquake in the journals *Japanese Studies* and *Modern Asian Studies*.

## **The Humanitarian Implications of Chinese Childhood History**

Professor Hsiung Ping-chen

Professor of History

Director of Research Institute for the Humanities

Department of History

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

### Abstract:

What was the pediatrician's role in imperial China? This paper examines how concerns for the physical survival of infants and children in a patriarchal society prepared the social ground for the emergence of child health as a vocation pursued by specialists in the pre-modern era. Analysis of the career development of China's first pediatrician, Qien Yi in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, illustrates discussion of the conditions of children's health, especially those of the newborn, and the critically ill, during the Sui-T'ang period. Through discussion of the philosophical concept of the collective responsibility to save lives this paper connects pre-modern precedents with Chinese pediatricians' efforts in the late imperial era to meet the challenge of dealing with lethal, epidemic, and infectious diseases. Analysis of this earlier crystallization of a mostly Chinese Buddhist commitment to navigating the "bleak journey" with a shared compassion (慈航 Tzu-hang) also permits, first, an examination of the implications of this pre-modern history of the Chinese childhood (and in particular the tripartite division of childhood into the biophysical, the social, and the existential) for the development of child health in modernity; and, second, the exploration of the potential ambivalences of child health in the post modern era.

### Biography:

Professor Hsiung Ping-chen is Director of the Research Institute for the Humanities at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. She served as Dean of the Faculty of Arts at The Chinese University of Hong Kong (2009 to 2011), and Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Central University (2004 to 2007). She has served as Research Fellow at the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taipei since 1990, and K.T. Li Chair at Central University in Taiwan since 2006. Professor Hsiung researches in the areas of women's and children's health, gender and family relations, and intellectual and social history of early modern/modern China and Europe. She has served as Director of the Humanities Centre at the Central University in Taiwan, and is a founder member of the interdisciplinary group 'Ming-Ch'ing Studies' at the Academia Sinica. Over the years, Professor Hsiung has held visiting professorships at leading academic institutions including UCLA, Cornell University, University of Michigan, Freie Universitat Berlin, and Keio University, Japan.