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INTIMATE
RELATIONSHIPS,
FAMILY, AND LIFE
COURSE

Children of the Land: Adversity and Success in Rural America, by **Glen H. Elder Jr.** and **Rand D. Conger**, with **Valarie King**, **Lisa S. Matthews**, **Debra Mekos**, **Stephen T. Russell**, and **Michael J. Shanahan**. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. 373 pp. \$35.00 cloth. ISBN: 0-226-20266-6.

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This book addresses two basic questions. First, do farm families (and other families with ties to the land, such as part-time farmers) have more social capital than other rural families? And second, do these social ties and resources have implications for children's developmental trajectories and achievements?

To answer these questions, the authors relied on data from the Iowa Youth and Families Project. This project began as a study of 451 two-parent rural families in Iowa with a target child in the 7th grade. The researchers collected data each year between 1989 and 1992, and then again in 1994, during the target child's senior year in high school. The study also involved multiple data sources, including interviews with children, parents, siblings, and grandparents, as well as videotaped family interaction.

The authors examined families living in multiple ecological niches. These niches, defined by ties to the land, included full-time farm families, families engaged in part-time farming, former farm families, nonfarm families with parents who grew up on farms (and retain close ties to rural life through networks of family and friends), and families without ties to the land. The latter category served as a comparison group in many analyses.

How did children with ties to the land fare compared with other rural children? In general, these children had more involved parents, stronger ties to grandparents, participated more often in productive work, and were bet-

ter integrated into supportive networks of community institutions, including churches, schools, and civic organizations. As a result of these resources, children with ties to the land were more likely than other rural children to be doing well in school, to be socially competent, and to avoid behavior problems.

This book makes several important contributions. First, it provides a good example of how the life course perspective can be used to guide, interpret, and integrate a complex set of questions and data. Second, the authors carefully document a way of life that is rapidly becoming an "endangered species" in America. Third, because the children in this study grew up during the farm crisis of the 1980s, the book has much to say about how adolescents in disadvantaged settings manage to overcome adversity. And fourth, the book goes beyond the typical focus on parent-child relations to demonstrate the role of parents as facilitators of children's involvement in the larger community.

Although occasionally repetitive, *Children of the Land* is clearly written and well organized. Seven of the ten chapters were cowritten by postdoctoral fellows and trainees. In spite of the large number of authors, however, the book has a consistent style and the chapters seem unified. Most of the tables and complex analyses appear in an appendix to facilitate the flow of material in the chapters. Moreover, the presentation of results in the book involve a nice balance of quantitative and qualitative data.

With respect to limitations, the book was restricted, as the authors point out, to one particular rural setting at one time. Consequently, it is not clear whether the patterns observed in rural Iowa apply to other rural regions, such as the South that is not only more diverse racially, but also has a longer history of rural poverty. In addition, because the study has no urban comparison group, it is not possible to know how urban and rural children compare, or if children in cities have access to compensating resources (not generally available to farm families) that also facilitate development and achievement.

As the authors note, farming is declining in profitability, and large numbers of families leave farming every year. Even in the Iowa study, few youth planned to work as farmers or to live on a farm. What then, are we to make of the advantages of rural life as settings

for child and adolescent development? Perhaps as Ross Parke points out in the foreword, the challenge is to design little communities within larger communities—environments in urban areas that foster overlapping networks of families, churches, schools, and civic organizations.

Children of the Land has a strong theoretical foundation, high-quality data, and intriguing findings. For these reasons, it will appeal to family researchers, life course scholars, and those with an interest in child and adolescent development. The findings of this study also will be of interest to community and rural sociologists. The book would be appropriate for a graduate seminar in any of these areas.

West Meets East: Americans Adopt Chinese Children, by **Richard Tessler, Gail Gamache**, and **Liming Liu**. Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1999. 189 pp. \$55.00 cloth. ISBN: 0-89789-657-2. \$18.95 paper. ISBN: 0-89789-658-0.

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Adoption, including international adoption, is a popular way to build families. Indeed, international adoption in particular is contributing to the changing face of American society.

As I prepared this review, I noticed that the season premier of the television program, *Family Law* (October 2, 2000), centered around a poignant story about international adoption. With the increased popularity of international adoptions, the media frequently report stories about adoptive families. Besides being of human interest, such stories have raised important issues, questions, and concerns about international adoption.

Although Americans have adopted children from abroad since the late 1940s, the countries that they adopt from more recently have changed. During the 1990s, thousands of infants, older children, and sibling groups came from Russia and Eastern European countries, China, and Central and South America.

Adoption is an important topic for sociological investigation. To date, however, few sociologists have conducted or published research about the current wave of interna-

tional adoptees. *East Meets West* is the first book to address the issue of bicultural socialization of Chinese adoptees. In this path-breaking, detail-packed book, Tessler, Gamache, and Liu offer a sociological analysis of the importance and complexities of bicultural socialization. They address the dichotomy involved in coming from an Eastern society yet being raised in a Western society that has world views, language, and cultural traditions different from those of the children's birth country. The authors also recognize bicultural socialization as an issue that touches the children, their parents, and American society in general.

The core of the book rests on data from a questionnaire survey conducted in 1996 with 526 American parents of children born in China that explores bicultural socialization and society's response to these biracial families. The authors also incorporate qualitative sources including first-person stories, historical accounts, and the perspective of a key informant about Chinese values and culture.

West Meets East is intensely personal, social, and political. This book is personal to the principal author who is the parent of two Chinese-born daughters, and to the study participants. It is social because it explores the challenges and complexities inherent in raising foreign-born children to know and value both their birth culture and the culture in which they are raised. Because international adoption has political implications, this book makes clear that the circumstances surrounding the availability of some children for adoption by foreigners are culturally defined. In China, being female is a major determinant of a child's availability for foreign adoption.

This brief book consists of seven well-organized chapters. The first chapter sets up the study by describing, in broad strokes, the phenomenon of international adoption over the last 50 years. Chapter 1 also includes an update of immigration from China and demographic projections for the changing racial composition of children aged 5–18 during the twenty-first century. In the second chapter, the authors present a how-to guide for preadoptive families that includes the principal author's personal experiences in adopting from China. This chapter describes the procedures and regulations that existed in the United States in the early to mid-1990s.