Voluntourism as a Manifestation of the Neoliberalisation of Development

A Case Study of a Chinese Short-term International Orphanage Volunteering Program in Phuket, Thailand

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Disclaimer:

This document represents part of the author's study programme while at the Institute of Social Studies. The views stated therein are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Institute.

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Content

Acknowledgements

List of Graphs

List of Acronyms

VT   Volunteer Tourism/Voluntourism

SO   (Volunteer) Sending Organization

SOP   (referring to the Sending Organization which organized the volunteering
             program I participated in the fieldwork)

Abstract

Despite the various views on voluntourism around the world (mostly in the West) and potential problems (especially considering orphanage voluntourism) raised by many, the heat around it has never been seriously challenged. Chinese short-term international voluntourism has gained its popularity among Chinese volunteers in the last decade, with orphanage volunteering programs as one of its most demanded type of programs. This research is aimed at understanding what are the underlying dynamics that contribute to the constant demand of Chinese short-term international orphanage volunteering programs through the ways it was portrayed by the main actors involved: Chinese sending organizations, Chinese volunteers, and host communities. Ethnography was adopted in a combination with covert participant observation (in a two-week Chinese orphanage volunteering program in Phuket, Thailand) as the main methodology.

With the observation from the fieldwork, Chinese volunteers from Chinese short-term international orphanage volunteering programs were only one type of the many actors who help to reproduce and participate in the commodification of helping the vulnerable children experience at the care centers. Motivated by or trying to evoke the emotional bond generated from humanitarian imaginary vulnerability of the children, the volunteers, the sending organization, the care center director and the donors presented intimacy (care and love) as the main way to contribute as individual. And by consuming or selling the experience, they each benefited in different ways. The various way to for people to engage in helping experiences, including voluntourism, reflects the essence of the neoliberalisation of development where responsibility of social change is placed on each individual; meanwhile, they help to expand the neoliberalisation of development by transforming new areas into the market.

Relevance to Development Studies

Voluntourism has been associated with a type of alternative development strategy because of the shared concerns about "'local people' as well as environmental, economic and sociocultural impacts" (Mowforth & Munt, 2008, Tomazos & Cooper, 2011, as cited in Mostafanezhad, 2013: 319) on development. By looking into Chinese short-term international orphanage voluntourism, a relatively new phenomenon compared to its western counterpart, and its relationship with neoliberalisation of development, this research contributes to the understanding of the role the neoliberalism and alternative development strategies (voluntourism) play in the current development landscape.

Keywords

Chinese Short-Term International Voluntourism, Orphanage Voluntourism, Vulnerability, Commodification, Neoliberalisation of Development, Chinese Volunteer Sending Organizations, Host Communities, Phuket, Thailand, Ethnography, Covert Studies

Chapter 1
Introduction

In this Chapter, I will present the background information on Chinese short-term international orphanage volunteering program, the focus of this research. Solving the puzzle about the driving forces behind the program will then be brought out as the purpose of the whole research. The relevance of the research will be discussed at the end of the Chapter.

International Voluntourism and its Development in China

The volunteer tourism (voluntourism or VT) has gained its popularity, perceived by many as an alternative to traditional tourism. It is viewed as a more sustainable and responsible type of tourism as it is expected to respond to need of host communities (Rattan, 2015:107). It is based on the idea that by doing volunteer work, tourists can get closer to the local communities and experience culture differently from traditional tourists. The term VT is defined as a "type of tourism experience where a tour operator offers travellers an opportunity to participate in an optional excursion that has a volunteer component, as well as a cultural exchange with local people" (Brown, 2005, as cited in Wearing &McGehee, 2013: 121). In VT, there are usually three main types of actors: volunteer sending organization (SO) – responsible of organizing the volunteer program and recruiting volunteers; volunteers – the participant of the VT program; and host communities – communities where volunteers carry out their volunteer work (Wearing &McGehee, 2013: 124).

VT, especially international VT where volunteers from a relatively more developed country travel to a less developed one, is viewed by many as closely connected to development aid (Wearing & McGehee, 2013: 121). Mainly focusing on humanitarian and environmental issues, many people are drawn to VT by the idea that their volunteer work can contribute to the development of the communities where they volunteered.

Various view about VT

There are different opinions about VT. Some of them praise VT as an innovative alternative to the traditional tourism. Most of these views came from the leisure and hospitality studies, with the two main views dominant the field: VT industry, as part of the civil society, has the potential to transform the tourism sector (Wearing & McGehee, 2013: 127), or once some of the improvements were adapted VT will have this potential (McGehee, 2012: 85; Vrasti, 2013: 6). Some views against VT claim that it is doubtable if volunteers are motivated by the altruistic desire to contribute, questioning the transformative potential of VT (Vrasti, 2013: 8). Some others see VT as potentially harmful for the host communities it claims to help (Conran, 2011; Rattan, 2015; Frilund, 2014; Raymond & Hall, 2008), or as focusing on the benefits of volunteers and SOs instead of that of the host communities (Duffy, 2008; Holmberg, 2014; Mostafanezhad, 2013; Sin et al., 2015), therefore not focusing on developing the host communities (Vrasti, 2013: 9). Others consider VT as a way for some travellers to pursue a higher level of authenticity than tourists, hence irrelevant to development for the host communities or the benefits for volunteers and SOs (ibid.).

In this research, I am not going to discuss whether the VT has the transformative power to develop host communities. Rather I am interested in discover what are the factors that

contribute to the rising demand of VT, especially of short-term international orphanage volunteering program in China, through the way it was portrayed by the main actors in VT.

Trend of Chinese VT

In the past, most of international volunteers came from the Global North (European/Western) who went to the Global South to volunteer (Brassard et al., 2010: xv). In the recent years, there is a growing trend of South to South international volunteering and notably in orphanage volunteering (Better Volunteering, Better Care Steering Group, 2014: 3). In the past few years, especially after the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the voluntourism in China began to develop quickly (Tian, 2007: 56).

It is estimated by ALATS and TRAM in 2008 that globally voluntourism has a 1.6 million volunteer tourists participate in one year with a market value between $1.7 billion to $2.6 billion (as cited from Butcher & Smith, 2015: 2). In 2010 a study on Asian VT shows that China was the sixth most common receiving countries in the Asia where international volunteers were placed, and the first among East Asian countries (Brassard et al., 2010: 15). Within China, there was a high participation of domestic volunteering work before VT was popular, creating a solid base for future development of VT in China. In 2001, 7.69 billion Chinese adults have participated in formal or informal voluntary work, with estimated 189 billion working hours (Ding, 2004: 1).

In China, there has been a long tradition of valuing selfless contribution to the society, with a symbolic figure called Lei Feng who embodies this value. He is still used by the Chinese government to promote the importance of volunteering work in national building and socialism spirit (China Volunteer Service Federation, 2016). There are many government-funded volunteer organizations across China, including the most important China Volunteer Service Federation, and its sub-organizations: China Volunteers Association, Chinese Young Volunteers Associasion, and China Volunteer Service Foundation. Three main points keep appearing in the charters, missions, or introductions of these major volunteer organizations and proposals from the government. Firstly, it is said that volunteering can help to build up the socialism spirit and a stable and harmonious society (China Volunteer Service Federation, 2013; China Volunteers Association, n. d.; Chinese Young Volunteers Associasion, 2015; Wenming Net, 2009; Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee et al., 2016). Secondly, volunteer work can help Chinese citizens, especially young people, to foster their social responsibility and civic awareness, and provide training for their skills (Chinese Young Volunteers Associasion, 2015; Wenming Net, 2009; Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee et al., 2016). It is also mentioned that motivation mechanism should be built up to encourage people to participate in voluntary work (China Volunteers Association, n. d.). In some place, Zhejiang Province for example, volunteer service hours have been made officially convertible to academic credits for students to get into schools, and reference for joining Communist party or its young group (Xinhua News Agency, 2016). Thirdly, volunteer service is considered as one of the main forces to contribute to social welfare system, socialist economic building, rural and urban development, community building, poverty alleviation, and natural disaster relief (China Volunteers Association, n. d.; Chinese Young Volunteers Associasion, 2015; Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee et al., 2016). With these narratives that focus on the volunteers' personal development and its contribution to the national building, there is a strong basis for voluntourism industry to develop in China.

Similar to Chinese domestic VT which has its most promising market among the Chinese students and middle-class (Song, 2007: 39), international VT may attract the same population. Because, firstly, most of volunteer programs are rather pricy. Secondly, lots of world

renowned higher education institutions overseas associate short-term volunteering – usually called 'service learning', domestic or international, as part of the education necessary for students to become global citizens (Butcher &Smith, 2015: 90) or be competitive in the job market (Lyons &Wearing, 2008: 148). As more and more Chinese students are considering studying abroad for their higher education, VT has a growing importance for Chinese young people. Some Chinese studying abroad agencies that help Chinese students to apply for higher education overseas also recommend VT, especially international VT, or promote their own international volunteering programs as one of the key element students need to add to their CVs.

In China, lots of commercial SOs appear following the growing demand of international volunteering programs, especially the demand from Chinese young people. These organizations recruit volunteers through student organizations, study aboard agencies, trip booking websites, their websites or directly in Chinese universities and schools. It is difficult to have a comprehensive idea about how many SOs are operating in China as there is not a system to manage or keep the information about them. But after some research online, eleven SOs that operate in China kept coming up[1] as the most commended or most famous ones. I did some research on their websites and summarized some of their common features as follows: 1) most of the volunteer programs are offered in short-term – one to two weeks (this is one important reason why this research focus only on short-term programs); 2) the expense of the programs are relatively expensive with around 2100 to 5600 RMB (300 to 800 euros) per week excluding flights, visa and insurance fee; 3) many programs have a strong emphasis on the traveling competent with lots of their destinations located in tourism locations; 4) as for the types of volunteering, all of the SOs have a relatively large portion of programs related to children (e.g. teaching English or Chinese) and especially children in orphanage; 5) most programs have a main target on young people who are in high school or universities. Most of the SOs describe their programs as beneficial to volunteers with the following points: 1) the SO is experienced in organizing volunteer programs and can provide safe and trustworthy support for volunteers; 2) volunteers can get legalised volunteer certificates after the programs; through volunteering, volunteers can obtain 3) various skill-trainings; 4) international experience and global citizenship; and 5) authentic cultural learning experience. There were several types of images that repeatedly appearing: 1) pictures of happy children or children having fun with volunteers; 2) Chinese volunteers being with volunteers from different countries; and 3) travelling pictures with beautiful sceneries from different places all over the world.

Under the influence of global popularity of the international VT, Chinese international VT market is developing steadily with Chinese government's supportive attitude towards volunteering work and benefits VT is believed to bring to the Chinese volunteers.

International Voluntourism related to Vulnerable Children

Popularity of VT related to vulnerable children

In this research I will focus specifically on orphanage volunteering programs, one of the most controversial yet very popular types of VT. Organizations and institutions against orphanage volunteering (including UNICEF, Save the Children UK, LSE, the Better Care Network, ChildSafe, VolunteerCorrect) voice out concern about using children as "tourist attractions" (ChildSafe Movement, n.d.) in orphanage VT. Exploring how these programs

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[1] These SOs include: Greenway China, Project Abroad China, EASIN, Lean In, OCIVA, Gapper, intvolunteer.com, Vtripoo, youwow, Chongqing Holiday Cultural and Tourism Exchange Center's SPP, ZIVA.

operate well under these oppositions can contribute to the in depth understanding of why the demand for these volunteer program is always high. Volunteering programs related to children are considered as one type of programs that are most welcomed by volunteers (Jonsson, 2010, Sin, 2010 and Mostafanezhad, 2013; as cited in Holmberg, 2014: 2). Similar to orphanage volunteering, there are other kinds of voluntourism that focus on children, especially vulnerable children: disabled children, and children who lack education resources. Just by searching a few Chinese SOs' websites, programs related to children will appear at the first few recommended options, while orphanage volunteering is the most common type.

Definition of Orphanage volunteering & its Potential Problems

Orphanage is often also referred to as residential care center. Here is one definition of the international orphanage volunteering: "International volunteering in residential care centres can take the form of short visits, sometimes associated with gifts, performances and day-visits, or longer term stays at the residential care centre where a volunteer cares for, or interacts with the children, on a daily basis for a period of time" (Doore et al., 2015: 1). What needs to be emphasized is that the word 'orphanage' does not necessarily indicate that children at the care center lost their parents but children with limited access to parental care.

Some of the reasons why orphanage volunteering program got lots of negative attentions are explained as follows. It is argued by some experts that many volunteers may not be aware that 80% of children who live in the residential care centers have one or more living parents, and that residential care system may not be of the best interest for the children (Doore et al., 2015: 1). The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 advocated the importance of family environment for children based on various scientific findings (Berens &Nelson, 2015: 388). Putting children into orphanage is one way of child institutionalization which is defined as "a social strategy to raise children lacking access to safe family care" (ibid.). Experience of institutional care in early childhood is believed to contribute to "profound developmental delay" (Berens &Nelson, 2015: 389), including "significant deficits in intelligence quotient" (Marinus et al., 2008; as cited in Berens & Nelson, 2015: 391), "physical growth" (Marinus et al., 2007; as cited in Berens &Nelson, 2015: 391), and "attachment" (Dries et al., 2009; as cited in Berens &Nelson, 2015: 391). Also children in residential care centers may have higher possibility to encounter "physical or sexual abuse" (Browne, 2009; as cited in Better Care Network &Save the Children, 2016: 3). The reason why orphanage volunteering is controversial is that it can contribute to the continuation of the orphanages or the establishment of new ones by raising the demand for creation of orphans and orphanages (ibid.). Some also argue that orphanage volunteering help intensify the problem of easy access to children. As intimacy with the children is one of the key elements that makes orphanage volunteering more 'authentic' than traditional tourism, orphanages usually allow volunteers to be close to children to meet this demand, leading to the commodification of the children – the intimacy with the children as an experience can be exchanged with money (Conran, 2011: 1459&1460). With the easy access to children, some point out the possibility that people who have criminal records of sexual assaulting kids may harm the children or people who have never sexually assaulting children may be triggered to do so (Doore et al., 2015: 3).

Research Questions

Despite all the oppositions, it seems like that the existence of orphanage VT has never been seriously challenged. It might be too simple to conclude orphanage VT is only sustained by the intrinsic motivations of volunteers to help. In this research, I am interested to find out what contributes to the popularity of orphanage VT. To solve this puzzle, it is important to

understand how do the three main actors – sending organizations, volunteers and host communities – benefit from the volunteer program. It will be difficult for the industry to be maintained if any one of the main actors has never experienced any advantages brought by the volunteer program. Therefore, by understanding how different actors benefit, more insights about how Chinese short-term international orphanage volunteering program sustain itself may be obtained. It may be difficult to measure how exactly different actors benefit from the program, but the way they portray the benefits of the program, in the daily interactions, on social media and websites, can serve as a good indicator.

This research was, hence, carried out in the guidance of the following research questions. In Chapter 4, I am going to present my findings following the order of the sub-research questions.

Main research question:

How are Chinese short-term international orphanage volunteering programs portrayed, and how and to what extent does this portrayal contribute to the rising demand for such programs?

Sub-research questions:

1) How are these programs portrayed by sending organizations? And how do sending organizations benefit from these portrayals?

2) How is the program portrayed by the volunteers? And how are these portrayals beneficial and meaningful to them?

3) How do people presented in the care center portray the care center or contribute to the portrayals of SOP and volunteers? And to what extent are these portrayals beneficial to them and/or the children in the care center?

Relevance of the Research

There is very limited amount of researches done on South to South voluntourism. Among these researches, there are only a few studies about VT in China, despite of its growing popularity. The ones found usually only describe the Chinese VT in a positive way - different from the diverse opinions academics hold towards Western VT in literature, or solely focus on domestic VT. This research will contribute to the knowledge of Chinese international VT.

At last, most of the researches on VT focus on the volunteers, other researches target the SOs, only a few researches look at the host communities where the volunteer work take place (McGehee, 2012: 86) and the real experience of the volunteering trips (Vrasti, 2013: 10). There are also research gaps on how do volunteers and SOs have impact on other volunteers (McGehee, 2012: 87). By using ethnographic research methods and taking on the role of a volunteer in a Chinese volunteer trip, this research has the potential to generate insights on the host communities' perception of the program and the dynamics between different actors involved in the VT experience. Knowledge on the dynamics will help to achieve the purpose of this research on finding out the driving forces behind the Chinese short-term international orphanage volunteering program.

With the growing interest of many Chinese volunteers in international volunteering programs related to vulnerable children, this research aims to understand what keeps these programs in business despite of the controversy, through the portrayals of these programs by different actors. In the next Chapter, I will explain what research methods I chose to collect data and what ethical issues I encountered during the research process.

Chapter 2
Methodology, the Case & Ethical Concerns

In this Chapter, the research method – a combination of ethnography, case study, and covert research– and the case studied will be discussed. I went on a two-week Chinese short-term international orphanage volunteering program with other 21 Chinese volunteers (ten in the first week and eleven in the second week) in Phuket, Thailand to gather data on this subject. I carried out my fieldwork with two identities: a researcher (hidden) and a volunteer (apparent). Because of the covert nature of my fieldwork, I will address the ethical concerns about the research methods and moral dilemmas I faced during the fieldwork.

Ethnography

Ethnography, as a "methodology based on direct observation" (Gobo, 2011: 31), also using "other sources of information (such as interviews with participants or documents)" as "ancillary" (ibid.), is the main methodology in my research. Using one of the key strategies used in ethnography – participant observation, I was able to 1) establish "a direct relationship with the social actors" (Gobo, 2011: 17); 2) stay "in their natural environment" (ibid.); 3) observe and describe "their social actions" (ibid.); 4) "by interacting with them and participating in their everyday ceremonials and rituals" (ibid.); 5) "learning their code (or at least parts of it) in order to understand the meaning of their actions" (ibid.). Immerged as one of the volunteers with my researcher identity in the shadow, the elaborative record I made of daily activities enabled me to get a comprehensive picture of why different actors behave in certain ways.

However, I could not claim that because I took on the identity of a volunteer, I am therefore the same as my research subjects (here only refer to volunteers) (Moss, 1995: 84; as cited in Rose, 1997: 313). I got interested in VT three years ago when I joined a two and half month volunteer teaching program with Hong Kong university and was introduced to the concept of volunteer tourism. Before that, I never thought of tourism or personal benefits as part of my motivations to join the program or that of other volunteers. I was triggered to explore the driving forces beside pure altruism underlying the popularity of different types of VT over the world. My knowledge and experience in VT and my purpose of doing research can result in different lens from that of other volunteers through which we look at the same volunteer program. It is crucial for me to realise my positionality and how it may be different in relation to other volunteers (Nast, 1994; as cited in Crossa, 2012: 114).

Covert Study: Participant Observation

In definition, 'covert study', also called 'unobtrusive research' is defined as the research that "is not disclosed to the subject – where the researcher does not reveal that research is taking place" (Spicker, 2011: 119). During my fieldwork, I engaged in a specific type of covert study: 'participant observation' "where the researcher attempts to blend in so that respondents will get used to the researcher's presence" (Payne &Payne, 2004: 4), also one of the main research methods used in ethnography to collect detailed descriptive data as described above.

The data gathered from the websites and social media can only be taken as one side information deliberately presented by the SOP (referring to the Chinese SO that organized my volunteer program), it is not sufficient enough for me to conduct meaningful discussion

on how volunteers and host communities benefit from being part of the program. One of the most obvious benefit of the unobtrusive methods is that it allows the research subjects to act more naturally than when they are aware that they are being studied (Payne & Payne, 2004: 2). Without knowing my researcher identity, the data was collected without much intentional change from my subjects. However, without the open inquiries or interactions available with the research subjects, researchers may be limited to probe deeper. Even though I encountered some difficulties in getting direct answers for some of my questions, I was able to found most of them out through indirect ways like observation or carefully crafting my questions into ones that would be proper for a volunteer to ask.

Case Study

'Case' in the 'case study' is defined as "a spatially delimited phenomenon (a unit) observed at a single point in time or over some period of time" (Gerring, 2007: 19). In this research the case refers to as the two-week Chinese orphanage volunteering program in Phuket, Thailand I participated in. As for case study, it is "the intensive study of a single case where the purpose of that study is - at least in part - to shed light on a larger class of cases (a population)" (Gerring, 2007: 20). The population I try to generate knowledge about in this research is Chinese short-term international orphanage volunteering programs.

Case study helps with identify hypothesis and theory building according to Charles Ragin (as cited in Gerring, 2007: 40) and has high internal validity. This means it can provide a clear and detailed causal mechanism to explain how various factors influence each other (Gerring, 2007: 43, 44). By concentrating my focus on this one case, I was able to conduct careful observations on all main actors, their dynamics, and how they portray the program.

The Case in Phuket, Thailand

Because of the limitation of financial resources and time, I was only able to study one volunteer program. One (SOP) of the most famous Chinese volunteer SOs that was very active at the time was chosen. All the programs provided by SOP are short-term (one or two weeks) and have a specific target on Chinese volunteers. It offers various types of volunteer programs to different locations (mostly tourist destinations). It also has a fairly informative website that explains the purpose, schedule, travel information for each program, and sufficient knowledge about the organization's vision and focuses. This organization has actively updated on their official WeChat account (the most used social media and chatting platform in China). The updates include blogs from the previous volunteers and volunteer programs promotion and other VT related articles. All the content on the website and the WeChat account will be useful data for the analysis on the portrayal of programs by the SO.

During the two weeks, I was one of the only two people who booked for two-weeks. I was able to meet ten volunteers from the first week and other eleven of them in the second week. All of the volunteers are Chinese. Most of the volunteers are around twenty years old in their undergraduate studies, beside two girls in the first week who were only sixteen years old at high school. Most of them were planning to study outside of mainland China, or already had done so, indicating their relatively good economic family backgrounds. For most of the volunteers, this program was the first time they participated in international volunteering or went out to travel outside of mainland China on their own.

Phuket is one of the richest provinces in Thailand with a huge number of tourists throughout the year. However, the rapid growth brought by the tourism also raised up the living standards here. Many migrant workers who wanted to have a better life came to Phuket

only to found out that their earning was not enough to pay for their children's education or living expense. In some other cases, these parents were sent to prison for involving in illegal activities and were not able to take care of their children. Many of them turned to different residential care centers in the Phuket, hoping that their children would have a better life at the care centers[2].

While all the volunteers live in the same hostels arranged by the SOP, there were two locations for volunteering (this information was not mentioned by the SOP). One of them was a residential care center (referred to as center A in this paper), with around 90 children under 18 years old. It has a small playground with some recreational facilities for children, a kitchen, some offices for the staff, a visitors' room, and some houses where the children lived in. Children who were old enough would go to school in the day time. Most of the time when the volunteers were at the center A, there were only a few young children staying at the day care room. Therefore, most of the work assigned to the volunteers at the center A was not directly related to the children. According to the introduction by the manager of the center, none of the children's parents had passed away. All of them were sent here because their parents were either too poor to raise the kid or in jail for different reasons.

Another center (referred to as center B) was more like a small kindergarten. There were only two main rooms the size of a classroom each, a kitchen, a washing room, a bathroom and a tiny backyard. The center could take maximum 50 children at once, but usually there were only around 35 children. All the children there only came for the weekdays usually from 8 am to 5 pm. After 5 pm they would go home. All the children here were under six years old. Most of the children here had at least one of their parents in jail and were taken care of by other family members. It was free for all the children to go to the center. The government paid for salary for all the staff, however, all the expense of maintenance came from different donors. Different from center A, volunteers who were at the center B were able to have direct contact with children. I was assigned to center B at the beginning of the first week. Except two days of holidays for the center B, I spent eight out of ten days of my volunteer program at center B. Other two days I stayed at center A. Usually there were only four female volunteers at center B.

One important similarity between the two centers was that, both of them mostly rely on donations from various donors to sustain the operation of the center. Donors' visits were thus very frequent for both centers.

Most of the data I acquired was from observation and conversations with volunteers, host communities and other people I met at care centres, or the public social media posts and blogs from the SOP, volunteers, and online chat groups. For each week, the volunteers participated in the program were added into one WeChat (most used Chinese chatting app) chat group for volunteers to get instructions from SOP, communicating with other volunteers and sending inquiries to SOP. Through the WeChat group I was able to gain access to some of volunteers' social media posts about the volunteer program. I also got some of my data from the news related to the care centres, host communities' social media posts, care centres' websites and Facebook pages.

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[2] All the information related to the care centers in Phuket came from an ABC news report. However, as the name of the care center A was mentioned in the report, I was not able to refer to it in this paper.

Ethical Concerns & Double Identities

By using the covert study as one of methods, there certainly will be ethical concerns on absence of consent from all the research subjects in my research. The main arguments against covert study are that it invades the privacy of the subjects and limits the autonomy of subjects in choosing what they want to do with the information about themselves, potentially causing the distress and mistrust of the public against academic researches. While there are also arguments that support covert studies. Depending on the context, some argue that covert study may not be avoidable (Lugosi, 2006; Spicker, 2011). On causing distress of the public, Denzin claims that other research methods including survey and interview can also lead to the same effect (1968: 503). Others point out that the roots of the discussion on the ethical issues related to covert studies should be about whether the research really cause harm to the subjects rather than if the method is covert or overt (Lugosi, 2006: 557; Spicker, 2011: 119).

No matter what research methods are employed all the researchers have the same obligation to protect subjects from being harmed because of the research and to respect their general rights (Spicker, 2011: 122, 127). In this research, I will not mention the information that can be used to identify the volunteers, the SOP, host communities and other actors.

Double Identities

Beside my hidden identity as a researcher, my identity as a volunteer also has determining influence on my positionality throughout the research. My experience in the fieldwork was a constant negotiation and struggle between these two identities.

As mentioned before, it was impossible for me to be truly immersed into other volunteers. My identity as a research would always influence my volunteer identity. All my research and information collection before I joined the program gave me a different perception about the volunteer experience from other volunteers. Firstly, the motivations of other volunteers and me for participating in the program can be very different. My whole purpose of being part of the program was to gather useful data for my research. While other volunteers might come here for the volunteering experience, traveling, or for practical use like applying for future schools. Secondly, my knowledge about the potential problems the volunteer program can bring to the children at the communities made me feel uncomfortable when other volunteers were doing things that could cause harm to the children. For example, at the introduction meeting the manager made it clear that volunteers should not take close-up pictures with the children for the concern of children's privacy. The manager explained that: "If you want to take pictures, you can take pictures in a group from far, not too close." However, many volunteers went on to take close-up pictures or selfies with the children. Not doing the same made me felt awkward among them. Even though I thought of stopping them, I did not try very hard because I felt that it was not very natural with my apparent identity as a volunteer to stop what other volunteers were enjoying doing. To put aside the inner conflict as a volunteer, I did make all my efforts to finish all the tasks assigned to me well and fast. I also tried my best to take care of the children without being too intimate to them.

My researcher identity could also be constrained by my identity as a volunteer from time to time. Beside the inconvenience of asking research question with volunteer identity mentioned before. Also, it was quite a challenging task for me to write down my field notes. Every day after volunteer work, I would go to write down my field notes in a quite café a bit far from the place where we stay to avoid being asked too many questions by other volunteers.

An Incident of Moral Dilemma

Beyond my identity as a volunteer and a researcher, I also faced with a dilemma of protecting my interest or the interest of the children. There was one incident happened during the program that brought me into this constant struggle. There was an old man who came to the center B very often. He would bring staff needed by the center every time he came. He was familiar with all the stuff and children at the center. But his behaviours seemed odd to me when he tried to take a close-up picture of some little girls by chasing them around. There was one girl who got upset, sat down and cover her face, showing her underpants unintentionally. He then took a picture of the girl's underpants with zooming-in. I saw the whole thing right behind him and realised that was a case of child sexual abuse. I was scared of telling other staff members at the center B because of the language barrier and my little knowledge about the relationship between the old man and the center. I believe that another staff also saw what I saw. But she did not do anything to stop him. I immediately asked for advice from people who have expertise in children protection. I then contacted the local child protection organization anonymously in the fear of personal attract from the old man (I gave my identification information to the center). It took me quite some time before I would tell the organization the name of the center. Throughout this time, I was struggling with should I stop reporting to make sure my absolute safety or should I bring this issue up to protect the interest of the children. Sometimes, after thinking about it too many times, the incident became so blurry to me that I doubted if it really happened. But my field notes I took right after the incident confirmed what I saw. With the encourage and help from the few people I asked help from, I gave the sufficient information to the local organization. Right now the organization has gotten in contact with the local police for further investigation.

Limitations

Adapting the identity of volunteer during the fieldwork enabled me to explore the data inside the volunteer program. It also restricted me from getting data outside the boundaries of the volunteer program. For example, I was only able to collect data for two weeks; most of my data about the host communities came only from center B; also I could not ask questions that did not fit with my volunteer identity. Another main limitation of this research is that it only covers data from one volunteer program of one Chinese SO. Because of the limited data, the external validity of this research is also limited. Generalisation of the findings in this research to other types of Chinese international voluntourism may not be valid. To exam the validity of the arguments made this research, in the future more empirical research is needed to understand whether other types of Chinese voluntourism also share the same features described in the research.

Using the combination of ethnography, case study and cover study, I was able to collect a good amount of data to answer my research questions. The expected difficulties brought by my double identities during the research and the unexpected moral dilemma shaped my research direction and my positionality. By acknowledging them in this Chapter helps me to form my theoretical framework in Chapter 3, to navigate through the empirical data in Chapter 4, and main arguments of this research in Chapter 5.

Chapter 3
Theoretical Framework

In this Chapter, I will present my theoretical framework: neoliberalisation of development and other key concepts related to it.

Humanitarian Imaginary Vulnerability

Only focusing on the responsibility and ability of people to contribute to social change is not as strong an appeal as ones that derived from emotion. Vulnerability of the far away others is often used as a powerful tool to initiate actions. The strong emotional connection with distant others is theorized as "humanitarian imaginary" by Choulilaraki, explained as "it is this repertoire of staged images and stories about distant suffering that comes to legitimize the imperative to act on vulnerable others as the moral order of modernity" (2013: 28). With the legitimisation from the emotional connections with the distant others, helping activities becomes meaningful, and the actions taken becomes representation of who we are. Motivated by the suffering of the others, volunteers in the VT may feel the urge to act without even knowing what the real problems are at the host communities and what volunteers can do to make a real difference. However, these issues can be overshadowed by the imagined strong emotional bond.

Humanitarian imaginary vulnerability of others creates the emotional basis that legitimize VT and the broader trend of neoliberalisation of development that focuses on individual contribution.

Global Citizenship & Localism

The acknowledge of others' suffering not only acts as motivation tool but also a way to evoke people's identity as a global citizen. A sense of contribution to global issues related to us all makes us feel connected with one another through the global citizenship. Global citizenship is often advocated as one of the most important quality that should be obtained from higher education. Its emphasis on young people's responsibilities in the society and ability to make a difference which fits VT's claim on make a change by knowing and helping out in different culture settings, making volunteer programs appealing to young people who want to gain global citizenship (Butcher& Smith, 2015; Chouliaraki, 2013). Despite the big scale of the global problems, they are somehow always believed to be solvable at the local level. This corresponds to the idea that development can happen with efforts of many individuals and at local level rather than global level, which can be captured by a term called "localism" (Butcher & Smith, 2015: 123).

It is exactly the essence of global citizenship – a sense of each individual can make their contributions to the solution of global problems (localism) – that builds up the individual actability of VT and individualized development under neoliberalisation of development.

Diminished Subjectivity

It is prevailing in VT that there is a sense of "diminished subjectivity" (Butcher & Smith, 2015), referring to "a diminished sense that societies and individuals (either the volunteer or

the communities subject to volunteer tourism) can transcend their present culture and level of development, or that they would benefit from doing so" (Heartfield, 2002; as cited in Butcher &Smith, 2015: 105). Connecting to a disillusion of grand political agenda, individual volunteer's contribution is not required to or believed to have measurable impact. Similarly, for host communities, their ability to make a difference is considered as small. The assumed vulnerability of the host communities is also perceived by volunteers as the reason for action and help. With the disbelieve in possibility of meaningful material change to be achieved soon, volunteers are expected with no special skills that can help build the capacity of the host communities. The short period of volunteering is also accepted, because the emotional connection, the care, and love given by the volunteers to the vulnerable members (usually children) is considered as enough. (Butcher & Smith, 2015) The sense of diminished subjectivity is an important tool of justification for volunteers or people engaging in helping behaviours when they feel disappointed that their contributions are smaller than they expected. Diminished subjectivity helps people to the accept the idea of the global citizenship that each person can only contribute a little but together we can make a difference.

Produced by the same disillusion of the grand political agenda like the neoliberalisation of development, diminished subjectivity focuses on individual actions rather than the gross change. It acts as justification tool for VT and the neoliberalisation of development when their positive impact on development are questioned and challenged.

Neoliberalisation of Development

With the raise of the disbelieve in the grand political ideologies and disillusion of the real change that the government and big association can bring to the world, a preference of apolitical and individual contribution to the development emerges. Under this condition, neoliberalism raises as a dominant "theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (Harvey, 2005: 2). And "the process of its enactment" (England &Ward, 2007: 13) is referred to as neoliberalisation, aiming "to bring all human action into the domain of the market" (Harvey, 2005: 3). Borrowing from the definition of "neoliberalisation of nature" (2008: 327) by Duffy, neoliberalisation of development can be therefore defined as "a process whereby" development is "increasingly subject to market-based systems of management and development" (Castree, 2003, 2007; as cited in ibid.). Through "privatisation and personalisation" (Ren, 2005; as cited in England& Ward, 2007: 13), "development has been depoliticised and rendered as a 'challenge'" (Sin et al., 2015: 122) for "recipients of welfare and social insurance" (Ren, 2005; as cited in England& Ward, 2007: 13) who are "motivated to become responsible for themselves" (ibid.). An increasing emphasis on the individual's responsibility in bringing the development in neoliberalisation of development corresponds to the individual emotional connection drawn by the humanitarian imaginary vulnerability and the individual actability promoted by the global citizenship.

VT is one of the many manifestations of neoliberalism of development in that it provides a way for individuals to reach the vulnerable in their humanitarian imagination and act as a responsible global citizen. While the VT "reflects the individualisation of mainstream development practice" (Sin et al., 2015: 122) and relies on the neoliberalisation of development to transform development practices "into privately owned and globally 'marketable goods'." (Duffy, 2008: 327); it also "intensifies and extends neoliberalism through the privatization and commodification of development and global justice agendas." (Mostafanezhad, 2013: 321)

One of the vital implications of the neoliberalisation of development is that: VT as a "sentimental response", it can help to neutralise "the political response that the amelioration of chronic poverty and structural violence against the poor necessitates" (Mostafanezhad, 2013: 323). As VT put emphasis on the individual responsibility to 'make a difference', the states' role in systematically addressing the problems is weakened (Western &Wright, 1994; as cited in Duffy, 2008: 337). Rather VT is likely to answer to the demand of the market, leaving it difficult for the host communities to make the volunteering programs correspond to their need (Duffy, 2008: 333).

It is important to note that voluntourism is not solely demanded by the volunteers and SOs, the host communities may also participate in the process of neoliberalisation of development. Rather than bring the "hapless victims or passive objects of global neoliberalism" (Colas, 2005: 78; as cited by England &Ward, 2007: 18), they can also engage in "neoliberalisation with their own 'local' agendas and contexts in mind." (England &Ward, 2007: 18)
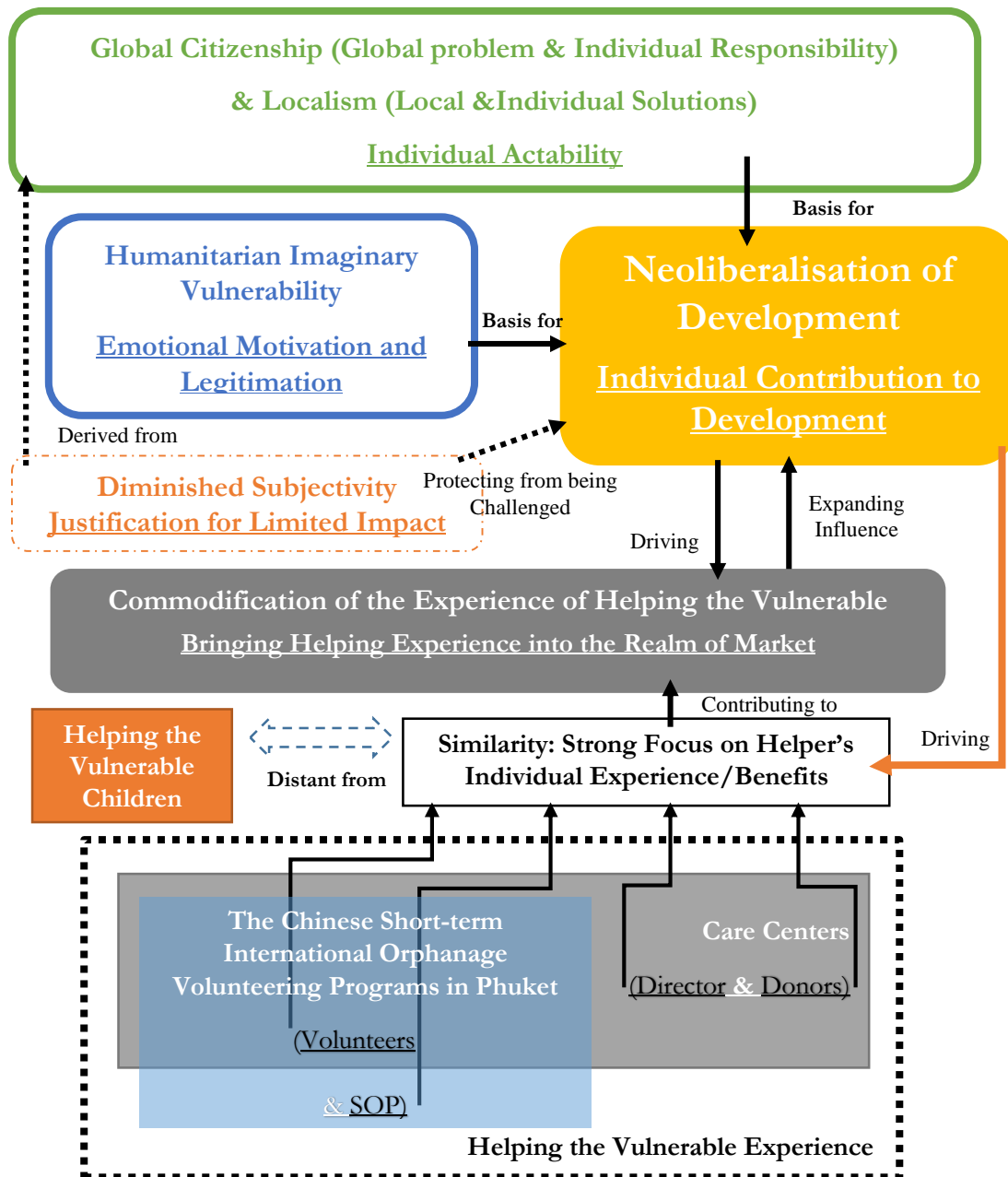
Commodification of the Experience of Helping the Vulnerable

Commodification is one of main ways to bring new things or activities "into the domain of the market" (Harvey, 2005: 3). It "denotes the creation of an economic good through mechanisms to standardise and appropriate goods and/or services" (Harvey, 2005, Liverman, 2004, O'Neill, 2007, Peck & Tickell, 2002; as cited in Duffy, 2007: 329). As described by Vrasti, in VT, "overseas charity work was packaged as an all-inclusive commodity and sold off to conscious consumers" (2013: 1).

The experience of helping the vulnerable, in this research: the vulnerable children, is commodified with three standard and common features: 1) vulnerability of the children, 2) authenticity through intimacy, and 3) the individual benefits for people who help. Firstly, as the focus of orphanage volunteering is on orphans – the vulnerable children. Their vulnerability and "adorable innocents" (Reas, 2013: 122) perceptions are commodified into "a marketable resource" (ibid.) that can trigger the emotional connection through humanitarian imagination. Secondly, as mentioned before in the introduction, the intimacy with the vulnerable children during the helping experience adds to its authenticity of VT and separates it from traditional tourism experience where the vulnerability is only observed by tourists from a distance (Conran, 2011). Thirdly, for the individual benefits, "reward and gain is the significant discourse in tourist literature aimed at potential volunteers for orphanage" (Reas, 2013: 125). Personal growth, "qualities and identity enhancements" (Reas, 2013: 128) are commonly mentioned as the main benefits people can gain from the volunteering. With the vulnerable children to be helped, an authentic method of helping through intimacy and the final beneficial results for the individual, the helping experience is standardized into an appropriate commodity.

There are two ways this commodification of helping experience reproduces itself and appeal to potential participants: the images and narratives produced from the experience. The photos of the children and the intimacy of the helpers and the children "confirm the efforts and compassions of the benefactor and the joy and gratitude of the beneficiary" (Reas, 2013: 131). These images serve as the evidence of the authentic experience and are used instrumentally for the promotion of the experience to future consumers (Urry, 1995; as cited in Reas, 2013: 131). As for the narratives created by helpers who participated in the experience (usually in the form of SOs' promotions on their websites, volunteers' blogs, and other social media posts), they are also widely used to present the experience to others and call for potential participants (Conran, 2011: 1461).

The theoretical framework will be applied in this research is demonstrated in Graph 1.

Global Citizenship (Global problem & Individual Responsibility)

& Localism (Local &Individual Solutions)

Individual Actability

Basis for

Neoliberalisation of Development

Individual Contribution to Development

Humanitarian Imaginary Vulnerability

Emotional Motivation and Legitimation

Basis for

Derived from

Diminished Subjectivity Justification for Limited Impact

Protecting from being Challenged

Driving

Expanding Influence

Commodification of the Experience of Helping the Vulnerable

Bringing Helping Experience into the Realm of Market

Contributing to

Helping the Vulnerable Children

Distant from

Similarity: Strong Focus on Helper's Individual Experience/Benefits

Driving

The Chinese Short-term International Orphanage Volunteering Programs in Phuket

(Volunteers

& SOP)

Care Centers

(Director & Donors)

Helping the Vulnerable Experience

Graph 1. Theoretical Framework

While the humanitarian imaginary vulnerability evokes the emotional need of helping the vulnerable others; the discourse of global citizenship presents the actability of individual contribution to development. Based on these two concepts, and a disillusion of grand political agenda, neoliberalisation of development came into being. It underpins the individual responsibility towards development embedded in VT and other individual helping experience of the vulnerable. While VT opens up new market through the commodification of the experience of helping the vulnerable. A strong emphasis is put on helpers' individual experience, while the root causes of the problems faced by the vulnerable are ignored. When the contribution of the individual is unsatisfied, a sense of diminished subjectivity helps to refocus the attention to individual efforts already made, and protects the VT industry and the underlying neoliberalisation of development from being challenged. In the next Chapter, data

will be presented with the key concepts in this theoretical framework to answer sub-research questions, divided according to actors, to show the main similarity of volunteers, SOP, director and donors.

Chapter 4
Individual Experience or Children's Needs

In this section, data obtained from the fieldwork will be presented here. It will then be analysed with theoretical framework from Chapter 3 in the next Chapter. The data is grouped according to the three main actors: Chinese volunteer SO, Chinese volunteers and host communities& others, answering the sub-research questions in sequence. The purpose of this Chapter is to show an important similarity among volunteers, SOP, care center director and donors. That is a strong focus on helper's individual experience and benefits over the needs of the children they are supposed to help.

Chinese Volunteer Sending Organizations

In this section I will answer the first sub-research question on how did SOP portray and benefit from these portrayals. The program I signed up for was organized by one of the eleven SOs mentioned in Chapter 1 (I cannot disclose the name of the organization because of the ethical concern related to covert study discussed in Chapter 2), referred to as SOP. On its website and official WeChat account, there were in total three aspects of the portrayals about the short-term international orphanage volunteering program: 1) portrayals of international volunteering in general; 2) portrayals about SOP as an organization; and 3) portrayals of volunteering experience through introduction on the website, volunteers' blogs, videos and images from the previous programs.

Firstly, on the SOP's portrayal about international volunteering, personal growth was considered as the main individual benefits for volunteers, reflecting neoliberalism's focus on individualisation. Ten reasons for participating in international volunteering were listed on the SOP website[3]. They could be divided into two categories: the practical benefits and the soft-skill enhancement.

For practical benefits, a) international volunteering experience was described as helpful for increasing the possibility of getting into a good higher education institution (most likely abroad). It said on the website that many famous universities prefer students who had the international experience which could be gained from the international volunteering. The short-term international volunteering programs were presented as a way for busy Chines students to be closer to the type of students wanted by prestigious universities by joining volunteering in their short vacations. Then, b) international volunteering experience was presented as a desirable item to be added to the CV for students who were seeking to be competitive in the job market. The website said teamwork, language skills, tolerance of different cultures, and a responsible attitude towards simple and boring work were skills that could be gained from the volunteering experience and were highly valued by the big companies. Also, the SOP mentioned that c) the skills and working experiences obtained from the working with the local people could be of practical use in the future.

As for the soft-skill enhancement, d) speaking to the Chinese students' repetitive and dull study model in high school, SOP believed that the experience of international volunteering would help Chinese students to find their passion in acquiring new knowledge through "truly

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[3] SOP website (because of the ethical concern related to covert study, I am not able to disclose the SOP's website; 26 October, 2016)

experiencing the life of people in developing countries"[4], meeting new friends and reflecting on yourself. Then, e) the experience of "volunteering in the developing countries"[5] would help to boost volunteers' self-esteem and increase a sense of satisfaction about life. The reason given was that: when the volunteers saw for themselves how people in the poor condition can live happily, they would learn to appreciate what they have right now. Going abroad was one of the selling points of international volunteering. SOP claimed that f) doing international volunteering could help volunteers to know about the world and gain cultural experience. Another reason, SOP presented was that g) during the volunteering experience volunteers could meet many new friends with various background, and learn from each. At last, h) rather than simply helping others, volunteers were said to gain more from the helping experience through discovering the true self.

By portraying international volunteering experience as advantageous for volunteers as individuals, the programs organized by SOP which all fall into this category were made attractive to potential volunteers.

Secondly, SOP introduced itself as an experienced and trustworthy organization that could provide volunteers with high-quality programs, experience commodified by SOP for volunteers to purchase and to enjoy. Ten reasons listed given by SOP on why volunteers should choose SOP's programs over others could be put into three groups: 1) safety and full-scale support; 2) good-money value; 3) experienced organizers, well-designed programs, and providence of good volunteering experience.

For the first point, SOP claimed that the locations and the organization of all the programs were very safe; and that the SOP would provide full-scale support to ensure the safety of the volunteers, including quick response to questions, listening to the complains, and making adjustment when needed. As I found out during the fieldwork: these claims were not strictly followed by SOP. During the pre-departure meeting hold on the WeChat group, when some of the volunteers asked questions, the organizers either ignored the questions or disappeared for more than ten minutes before very short and ambiguous answers were given. After arriving at the location, there was only one A4 sheet of instruction on the wall of the hostel about the surroundings and rules volunteers should follow, pointed to us by the hostel staff. Throughout the program, there was no appearance of any organizer from SOP. On their website, it said that for volunteers under eighteen years old, they would ask for volunteers' parents' permission to register for the program. One of the volunteers under age eighteen told me that, when she registered for the program by herself, she was not able to get the signature from her parents. So she signed her parents signatures herself. She said without checking if the signatures were real (for example, through asking the identifications of both the volunteer and his or her parents) SOP enrolled her into the program. Also SOP promised her parents that they would provide extra contacting services for her parents to update them with her safety conditions. She said her parents had never heard from SOP.

As for the money value of the programs, SOP claimed to organize programs with a very reasonable price and high quality programs. Compared with other programs from other ten SOs I searched, the prices of SOP's programs are at the similar level of other organizations while the quality of the programs are difficult to judge with the limited empirical data of other programs.

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[4] SOP website (26 October, 2016)
[5] SOP website (26 October, 2016)

SOP also focused on building up the image of an experienced organization through mentioning it as a partner with one of the best universities in China for volunteering program arrangement and winner of an award related to SOs. On the website, it was emphasized that SOP's organizers had international volunteering experience before and a good understanding on how to bring about well-designed programs that could offer satisfying volunteering experience to volunteers.

By presenting SOP as an experienced and trustworthy SO that could ensure the quality of its programs, SOP tried to set itself apart from other SOs that were operating in China.

Thirdly, there were three most noticeable elements mentioned in the presentation of the actual volunteering experience in various formats: travelling, children and hard-work. With these elements, SOP presented their standardized programs to satisfy their consumers' (volunteers') needs.

For travelling, almost half of the images on the website or WeChat account were pictures of sceneries of different volunteering locations, local food, or volunteers without any elements from the volunteering part of voluntourism. In the introduction for different locations of the programs, the majority of the information was about the travelling information of the locations while the volunteering programs were only briefly mentioned at the end. On the webpage of this program, there was relatively adequate information about the schedule of the volunteering activities, but most of the information was still about the tips on how to travel to the location.

The element of children was very visible in different portrayals. Close-up pictures of happy and smiling children, or children hugging the happy volunteers could be founded on almost each web page of the website and were common components of all the volunteer blogs on volunteer program involving children. In the case of the Phuket program I participated, in the very short description about the orphanage, children were depicted as loved by the professional care givers at the orphanages, and had the opportunities to achieve their dreams because of the help, presenting care centers as the perfect solution for these children.

Even though hard work element was the least apparent one among all the portrayals, it was mentioned at several different places. In the pre-departure instruction, it was repeatedly mentioned that volunteers should be prepared to do lots of hard work and accept the fact that Thailand, as a developing country, has a harder living condition than China. In the writings and images of volunteers' blog, volunteers work was described by many volunteers as tiring and demanding, even though many of the activities described were kitchen or house chores that were not physically intensive.

Through images, blogs and other materials and description of the previous programs, the volunteer experience was made real and tangible to potential volunteers. The fun of travelling, the need of care from volunteers for the children and the ascetic nature of volunteering in hard-work all helped to build up the ideal international volunteering programs that could truly give volunteers a memorable experience. In turns, SOP benefits by attracting more and more future volunteers. An additional point to be added here: SOP paid each volunteer, whose blog was published on SOP's WeChat account after the selection and adjustment by SOP, 500 RMB (around 70 euros, a relatively large amount of money in China). It is thus possible that the blogs published described the program in a positive way.

It is similarly important to also mention what SOP did not mention in these portrayals. For example, what problems are the host communities facing? Why can volunteers contribute? It was only when volunteers arrived at the care center that they knew the name and some information of the care center A and the fact that there was also another care center B. In comparison, tourist information about how to travel after the volunteering was much more abundant. Another point to be made here is about the misrepresenting of the nature of the program. Even though on both of the care centers' websites, they introduce themselves as care centers for underprivileged children[6] rather than orphanages, the term 'orphanage' is repeatedly used to represent care centers in all sorts of promotion materials of SOP. Many volunteers were very surprised to find out in the introduction given by the care center A staff that none of the children at the care center A lost their parents and that most of them came here because their parents were too poor to raise the children. The term "orphanage" can trigger more emotions of the volunteers than the term "care center", as orphanage reminds people of the term "orphan" which "locates and emphasizes vulnerability, helplessness and neglect and has become synonymous with sympathy, compassion and sentimentality and significantly a need for adult intervention" (Edstrom et al., 2008, Richter & Norman, 2010; as cited in Reas, 2013: 124). Even though SOP only described the children as happy and loved, the use of the word orphanage brought up the strong connection between vulnerability and the children.

It was mentioned clearly in the pre-departure instructions that all the programs organized by SOP were profitable for SOP. The more volunteers found their programs worth a try, the more profit they could gain. All the positive portrayals of international volunteering as beneficial to volunteers, of SOP as a reliable organization, and of the meaningfulness of the actual volunteering experience established a program that responded to the need of the volunteers. For things that could challenge the purpose of the programs or render a less catchy program, they were either not part of the portrayals or misrepresented in the portrayals.

Chinese Volunteers

In the part, I will start to present data concerning the second sub-research question. I will first introduce one important event which happened during the fieldwork and move on to discuss the three ways volunteers portrayed their volunteering experience: 1) photos and videos; 2) social media posts; 3) blogs after the program.

The important event I referred to was that half of the volunteers went on strike for two days. When we first arrived at center A, we were separated into two groups. Four girls were chosen to go to center B to take care of the young children while the rest stayed at the center A (with many tasks not related to the children, as most of the children would go to school in the day time). During the first week, volunteers at center A were asked to pave the small playground to make the ground even. Despite the fact that the work did not directly involve children, the end result could benefit children: when they running around the playground they would not easily trip over the stones on the ground. In the third day's evening, some volunteers from center A asked for a quick meeting in the common room of the hostel where all the volunteers stayed. I was presented in the meeting. During the meeting, the volunteers who volunteered at the center A talked about their frustration of over-work and that they were not allowed to rest during the work. They said they were not expecting to do so much physical work when they signed up for the program. Another comment repeated many times by different volunteers was that: "they promised to let us stay with the children, but where

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[6] Care center A and B's website (because of the ethical concern related to covert study, I am not able to disclose the centers' websites).

are the children?"[7], stressing children as the indispensable part of the program. Volunteers at the center A were even more upset when they heard that center B would be closed for the last two days of the week, meaning that they would not have the chance to take care of the children, It also means that all the volunteers at center B, including me, needed to volunteer at center A. At the end of the meeting, volunteers at center A told us (volunteers at center B) they would stop the volunteer work all together for the last two days. Before making this decision, some of the volunteers from center A were worried that "What if they don't give us the certificate in the end?"[8], reflecting one of the motivations of joining the program as individual recognition. As I was a bit late and missed the beginning of the meeting, I later was told by another volunteer at center B that volunteers were also mad at us because, in their opinion, it was not fair for us to have a much better volunteering experience. This indicates again that without the element of children, the volunteer program was not up to the standards promoted by the SOP. Then in the last two days, only three volunteers at the center A volunteered for a short-period of time while other four volunteers did not join the work at all. They spent the last two days playing with their smart phone or sleeping at the center A while volunteers assigned to center B did volunteer work at center A.

For photos and recording, I will look at both the way they were produced and the end results in the form of photos and videos.

One type of most common photos is about the children at the care centers. As I mentioned before in Chapter 2 ethical concerns section, many volunteers took large number of close-up picture with children despite the warning by the local staff not to do so. When the children came to stay with the volunteers, most of the volunteers would take out their smart phones and began to take close-up pictures of the children or selfie together with the children. Some volunteers would ask other volunteers to help taking photos of them playing with children or taking care of the children. The photo-taking activities of volunteers would usually only stop when the children got really interested in the phone itself and tried to take the phone away from the volunteers. I have noticed that, instead of taking photos with children at the end of the volunteering experience when the volunteers were more familiar with the children, most of the photos are taken at the very beginning when volunteers just met the children for the first time. In fact, the number of times volunteers took photos with children reduced after being more familiar with the children. These photos of or with children may not be used only as the evidence of a good volunteering memory with children but also the proof of the element of children in the program. Here is another example. At the end of the first week after we were all given a volunteer certificate, some volunteers asked for a group photo of all the volunteers. There were two children playing around us. When we were about to take the photo, one volunteers asked those children to be in the pictures. The children were not willing to join the picture. The volunteer insisted by dragging one of the children's arm. After seeing this, the staff who helped us take the photo asked those two kids to join us. In the end, in the center of the group photo, there were two unhappy children surrounded by volunteers holding their volunteer certificates.

Like the portrayals from SOP, rather than the vulnerable helped by the volunteers, children were often used in volunteers' portrayals as a standardized element of the program.

For the example of video, it was the last day of the first week volunteering, all the children stayed at center A to celebrate Thailand's mother's day. The staff planned out the whole celebration events and did not ask for much help from the volunteers. We, volunteers, sit next

[7] Conversations during the volunteer meeting (10 August, 2016)
[8] Conversations during the volunteer meeting (10 August, 2016)

to the venue of the event without being part of it. One of the volunteers sitting next to me took out her smart phone and made a short video about the event. She said while recording that "Today, I'm participating in the Thailand's mother's day celebration at the orphanage."[9]. Before making the video, she was looking down on her smart phone without paying too much attention to the event, and she went back to looking at her smart phone after the recording. The comparison is ironic: the portrayal from the recording presented a volunteering experience where volunteers actively engaged in the volunteering experience while the reality was an uneventful day that the volunteer spent with almost nothing to do.

The portrayals in social media posts and blogs after the programs share many similarities. So they will be presented together. All the social media posts (25 in total) came from volunteers who went to the same volunteer programs with me and the blogs (eleven in total) were the ones published by SOP on SOP's WeChat account from volunteers who joined the same volunteering program but might go to Phuket before me, after me, or the same time with me. One of the major differences is that compared to blogs written after the program, social media posts can reflect the current mood or feelings of the volunteers. During the first week when volunteers from center A were upset about the unexpected hard-work, two of them post on their WeChat account's news feeds that "We haven't even seen a sign of the children. Are we here to move the sand?"[10], and "Why I have to come all the way to swipe the floor?"[11]. However, both of the negative posts were soon deleted by these two volunteers and were replaced with new posts about the meaningful and regretless volunteering experience they had. The reason behind the change of posts might be that despite the bad experience, promoting a satisfying program confirms the benefits volunteers gained from it.

Beside the tendency of positive portrayals in both social media and blogs, there are five common narratives about the positive influence volunteer programs bring to the volunteers and volunteers brought to the children they helped.

Firstly, the descriptions about children from all the social media posts and blogs almost all follow the same pattern. The difficulty faced by the children was vaguely presented as poverty, abandonment, parents' divorce or prison sentence. But the situation of the children was never described as an absence of care and love (from care taker, volunteers, donors from around the world). Right after the vulnerability of the children was established in the blogs or social media, the writing turned to focus on how happy, lovable and grateful these children were despite all the hardship they endured. This contrast was often formulated by volunteers as a lesson to be learnt from these children about gratitude and being content with what volunteers already had.

Secondly, love and care from volunteers and other donors were presented as the solution to the difficulty faced by these children. Even though many volunteers mentioned in their blogs that there were many donors who came to contribute to the care centers materially, the main focus was always about the love and care these donors shown to the children. The way love and care were given to the children was usually described as the intimacy between the children and people who came to help. Only one volunteer mentioned in both of his blog and social media post and other two wrote in their blogs that the hard work, even though not directly involved children, were ways to show their care for the children. The love between volunteers and the children was mostly presented in the form of chose-up pictures of the children, volunteers and children hugging or kissing each other, volunteers helping the

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[9] Field observation (12 August, 2016)
[10] Social media posts by one of the volunteers (10 August, 2016)
[11] Social media posts by another volunteer (10 August, 2016)

children to eat or teach them something, or selfie of volunteers and the children. Beside the images used in the blogs and posts, all the blogs also mentioned that they felt they were loved by the children. The most common depiction was that when they first stepped into center B (where the main tasks were taking care of the children), children ran to them to hug or jump on them. Two volunteers even referred to some of the children as their sons or daughters[12]. And many volunteers described the satisfaction they felt as the lovely and pure similes of the children they saw. These similes were understood as a way for the children to show gratitude to the volunteers. Some of the volunteers also wrote about the strong emotional connections they felt with the children: "Will they (the children) think about us when we are not there to read books for them?"[13]; another volunteer felt pity that "we didn't get the chance to say goodbye to the children."[14]

Thirdly, a sense of contributing to the well-beings of the children were mentioned by many volunteers. As mentioned before, a few volunteers felt accomplished that they helped to pave the playground. But majority of the volunteers described the help they provided more vaguely as "the hard-work is worthy, but it is far from enough"[15], "contribute a bit efforts from ourselves"[16], "care and love"[17], "our help is insignificant, but I wish our efforts can be of a little bit use for them"[18], "each person's power is small, but a whole group, a whole volunteer team, can make a big influence"[19], "the happiness of contribute to others"[20], "not worthy mention"[21], "what we can give is very limited"[22]. None of the volunteers depicted the contribution they made as enough. However, none of them perceived this limited contribution as disappointing. Rather, many mentioned that they believed that with many volunteers' efforts, the change would be big or that this motivated them to participate in more volunteer work in the future.

Fourthly, for almost all the blogs and posts, at least half of each blog or post, including the writing and pictures, was about the travelling. Pictures of local food volunteers tried, night markets they visited, and famous beaches they went to made up a large proportion of all the pictures. Writings about encounters on the way from China to Phuket, tips about applying for visa, and other things future volunteers need to know usually took up a quarter of the whole blog. While the tourism activities, especially after volunteer work every day and after the whole program could take up to half of the whole blog. Compared to the volunteer part of the 'voluntourism', the tourism part had the same, if not more, amount of representation in the volunteers' blogs and posts.

Lastly, personal growth through the tiring volunteer work, experiencing the less developed country's living condition, the friendship with other volunteers, the different cultures and traveling by themselves to a new country were presented as the main gains from the orphanage volunteering program. Even though the program lasted only for one week (five to six days) for the majority of the volunteers, many mentioned in their post and blogs that they felt that

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[12] Volunteer 5's blog, translated by author from Chinese (1 September, 2016); Volunteer 9's blog, translated by author from Chinese (18 August, 2016) (because of the ethical concern related to the covert study, the real name of the volunteer will not be revealed)
[13] Volunteer 10's blog, translated by author from Chinese (16 August, 2016)
[14] Volunteer 8's blog, translated by author from Chinese (27 August, 2016)
[15] Volunteer 3's blog, translated by author from Chinese (4 September, 2016)
[16] Volunteer 4's blog, translated by author from Chinese (3 September, 2016)
[17] Volunteer 1's blog, translated by author from Chinese (12 September, 2016)
[18] Volunteer 4's blog, translated by author from Chinese (3 September, 2016)
[19] Volunteer 6's blog, translated by author from Chinese (31 August, 2016)
[20] Volunteer 8's blog, translated by author from Chinese (27 August, 2016)
[21] Volunteer 10's blog, translated by author from Chinese (16 August, 2016)
[22] Volunteer 11's blog, translated by author from Chinese (11 August, 2016)

they become "a new and better person"[23] and that "instead of helping the others, it is a gift for ourselves: life experience"[24], and that they felt the program was an "enjoyment"[25]. A sense of fulfillment and satisfaction from the volunteering and travelling experience were expressed in almost all the post (especially the ones post at the end of or after the program) and blogs.

In general, all the portrayals even though involved children, a strong focus was put on the volunteers' individual "life experience"[26], benefits and lessons they got.

Host Communities & Others

To answer sub-research question three, I will present data about center B director's portrayals of the volunteer program, center B, and herself as the director. Also her attitudes towards different donors, the helping experience of the donors, and my observation of children in the center B and the its operation will be described in this section.

Before joining the volunteer program, it was not clear how much influence the program would have on the different actors in the host communities. During the fieldwork, I found out that the volunteer program I participated in was only a small part of the daily operation of both center A and B. There were many other donors from around the world who came to visit. As I spent most of my time (eight out of ten days) in center B and did not get enough data about host communities from center A, data presented in this section will only be focus on center B. Also, even though, as a volunteer, I could observe the visit of different donors and other interaction with the children and staff, the short-time interaction with them and the language barriers stopped me from getting to know how would they portray the volunteer program or the helping experience they had. I can only speculate from my observation of their activities. However, I was able to become Facebook friends with the director of the center B and gather data about how she portrayed the volunteer program and her experience of helping the children as the director.

Director of the Care Center

There are two aspects of the director I want to discuss: 1) her portrayals of volunteers, donors, children at the center, center B and herself; and 2) her attitudes towards different people who came to center B to provide help.

First, the data about her portrayals mainly came from her Facebook posts. Every day, she took around 200 photos in the center B and posted most of them on her Facebook news feed. From these posts she tried to show that there were lots of meaningful events happening in the center B everyday even though my observation might sometimes tell something different. Her portrayal of volunteer can be used as an example. One day she asked us to teach Chinese to the children. We taught them Chinese some numbers for around five minutes before most of the children became distracted. She then asked the Italian volunteer who was also volunteering at center B at that time to teach English. The Italian volunteer's English was worse than the director herself. Despite the fact that the director had to correct the volunteer's many English pronunciations and that the teaching only lasted for less than ten minutes, on

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[23] Volunteer 1's blog, translated by author from Chinese (12 September, 2016)
[24] Volunteer 11's blog, translated by author from Chinese (11 August, 2016)
[25] Volunteer 2's blog, translated by author from Chinese (9 September, 2016)
[26] Director of center A's introduction (8 August, 2016; 15 August, 2016), Volunteer 11's blog (11 August, 2016), & Volunteer 12's WeChat post (16 August, 2016)

her Facebook post that day, the director put on the pictures of us (both Chinese and Italian volunteers) teaching with caption that "Children learnt Chinese from Chinese volunteers and English from Italian volunteers."[27] As if the teaching was something significant. She would also take pictures of us taking care of the children or teaching children and posted on Facebook with captions like "Chinese volunteers are taking good care of the children."[28] Despite the satisfaction with our work expressed on the posts, she would always get angry at us or even shout at us if she thought we did not fully understand her instructions.

For donors, each visit from donors during my stay was recorded by a Facebook post of the director (beside one group of high school student donors who visited center B, possibly not considered as important by the director). Usually, each Facebook post had pictures of the donated stuff from donors placed on a table in the middle, happy children surrounding the table, the donor standing behind the table with director in the middle. Even though we (volunteers) usually did not have much interaction with the donors, we were often asked to join the pictures by the director. To the director, volunteers might be an important element in the picture to show that the center B had various support from the outside.

As for portrayals about children at the center B and her role as a director, the majority of the pictures on her Facebook were pictures of children. She also posted lots of pictures of herself with the children. Once, some of the girls at the center B were dressed with colourful dresses and put on makeup for a performance for a visit from important government officials. Before the officials came, I was asked by the director to take photos for her with two girls. She was not happy with how she looked in the photos I took, so I was asked to take the photo again and again. In the end, I took around ten photos. The two girls were too tired from smiling that they could not smile anymore but the director still insisted to take more photos until she liked the photo. Also, different from the lovely photos she often took with children, she usually would not take care of the children. Taking care of children was usually done by other center staff and volunteers. She would only take over the control when the children need to sing national anthem in the morning or when she thought the children were too naughty. She would often discipline the children by beating them with a ruler and shouted at them at the top of her voice. But she would never do that when there were visitors or donors in the center.

While the directors' posts described a care center that was good for children and worthy the donation, my observation showed director's heavy emphasis on the good public image of the center and herself over the actual operation of the center.

Second, on her attitude towards different donors and volunteers, at the beginning of the second week, when other three volunteers were busy taking photos with children and hugging them, the director suddenly shouted at us that we could not take pictures of the children or hug them. However, a bit later when the donors came to the center B, they were allowed to take pictures with and of the children, and to hug them. It might be that, as the center B's operation expense entirely came from different donors, making donors have a happy stay at center B was crucial for the donation to the center B. The intimacy with children was controlled by the director in exchange for donation or benefits. Compared to important donors, volunteers do not bring the same donation and benefits to the center, therefore, do not deserve the same amount of intimacy with children.

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[27] Center B director's Facebook post, translated by Facebook from Thai (17 August, 2016)
[28] Center B director's Facebook post, translated by Facebook from Thai (16 August, 2016)

Donors

Seven days out of eight days I was at the center B, there were at least one donor visit. Beside getting a group picture with the children, most donors could stay a while to play with the children and take individual photos with the children. Some donors could also come to celebrate their birthdays with the children. Six out of the seven days when the center B had visitors, there was one donor who brought lunch for the children and spent his or her birthday with the children. During the lunch, the donor would help a bit in distributing the food and feeding the children. When all the children got their food but before they started to eat, all of them would sing the happy birthday song to the donor. Then the director would ask the children to say some blessings to the donor. Some of the children would raise their hand and stand up to say the blessing, with their hands closed in front of their chest. All the children during my stay said the same blessing as if they had practiced giving blessing to donors before. In return for the donation, all donors got the standardized intimacy with children as if the donation was paid in exchange for a certain type of commodity.

Children at Center B

Different from all the positive portrayals from SOP, previous volunteers and the director, center B was not operated entirely safe for the children there. There are two points about the children there I want to discuss: 1) most of them were very used to getting close to strangers who came to the center; and 2) they were very disciplined in certain ways. Also I will discuss a bit about the operation of the center B.

When I first went to the center B, lots of children ran to me, opened their arms and wanted to be hugged. The same was experienced by all the other volunteers who went to center B with me. Similarly, most of the blogs mentioned that children were very excited to see the volunteers. The ones that did not mention this were all written by volunteers who stayed in center A. Every day before the lunch, all the children would take shower. After they come out of the shower, volunteers were asked to use towels to dry them, put baby powder on them, and help them to put on their clothes. Even though all the children were around three to five years old and need some assistance from adults, asking strangers whose identities and backgrounds were unknown to the center staff to take on the work made it easy for child abusers to cause harm to the children. Only one or two children insisted to do these by themselves, others would comfortably let or ask volunteers to do these for them. During the lunch, most children would also let or ask volunteers to feed them. When we sat down to relax, there would always be some children who would come to sit on our knees or sit next to us. Beside a few children who would only prefer to stay by themselves, most children would come to be close with volunteers and other visitors of center B.

Despite being very difficult to control in most of the time, the children were also disciplined under certain conditions, usually: when asked by the director to take a photo with the visitors, perform for visitors, and give birthday wishes to donors. At one time, one kid was very into playing with a toy with me. She was very excited and laughed frequently. But once she heard the director asked her to take a photo with one of the donors, she stopped playing immediately and went for the photo. After that, I also noticed many children did them the same. No matter how much fun they were having, they would stop what they were doing right away to take the photo. In comparison, it was very hard to let them follow other rules including asking them to watch cartoon, sit down to eat or take a shower. For performance, when some of the children were performing for the visitors, other children would sit still until the performance was over. And when they all sang together, only one of two children out of 30 some children would get distracted. For the birthday day blessings as I mentioned before, it seemed that they went through some training about it. Each time there would be around five to six children raise their hands themselves to say the same blessing to the donor.

The openness to strangers, quick response to photos, trained behaviours to please the donors of children at the center B make it easy for all the visitors to get the intimate experience with children.

For the operation of the center B, firstly, children in the center were frequently exposed to strangers from different places and used to be intimate with the strangers. It possible that in this relatively open environment, people who could bring harm to the children could gain easy access to children. Also identification of the visitors or volunteers were not strictly documented. During the volunteering work, even though the staff at the center asked volunteers to bring copies of their identifications, they usually forgot to follow it up. Beside me, all the other six volunteers did not give their identification copies or full information. Once we were asked to fill in a form to record our identification information including passport number. All the other volunteers did not fill in the passport number because they did not remember it at the time and were never asked again for finishing the form. The case of child sexual abuse I witnessed was another example of this lose control of visitors. Secondly, the daily routine of taking shower could also open chance for sexual abuse. When we first arrived at the center B, we were immediately assigned to dry up naked children with towels without checking any background information of the volunteers. One of the volunteer even used professional camera to take a close-up pictures of naked children coming out of shower and put the picture in her blog. Even though I did not think the volunteer has any bad intension behind, it showed the ease for visitors with intension to harm the children to really do so. Besides, the beating and shouting by the director and the similar behaviours from another staff reflect an environment that might be too harsh for children under six.

In this Chapter, the data answering the three sub-research questions was presented. With the theoretical framework explained in Chapter 3, in the next Chapter I will discuss the main arguments I want to make in this research.

Chapter 5
A Commodified Neoliberalism Development Experience

Here I will make my main arguments in this research by demonstrating how the theoretical framework in Chapter 3 can help to make sense of the data in Chapter 4.

Commodification of the Experience of Helping the Vulnerable

As discussed in the theoretical framework, there are three main elements that make the experience of helping the vulnerable a standard good, a commodity that can be consumed: 1) vulnerability of the children, 2) authenticity through intimacy, and 3) the individual benefits and experience for people who help.

Firstly, the vulnerability of the children is produced and reproduced in the helping experience. The word "orphanage" repeatedly used by SOP and many other SOs evokes the image of children who were abandoned by their parents despite its inaccuracy in describing the root problem faced by the majority of the children in the care centers. The emphasis on the hard work and difficult living condition of less developed countries by SOP and previous volunteers' blogs and social media posts depicts a harsh environment where the vulnerable children located. With the image of the suffering others in the mind of volunteers, a strong emotional connection was built through their humanitarian imagination of the vulnerability of children they are going to help. Then after the volunteering experience, volunteers again produced the images of happy but vulnerable children. These images are then put into volunteers' social media posts and blogs, together with the storied they heard about the hardship endured by these children. These social media posts and blogs serve as the evidence of the children's vulnerability, reproducing the humanitarian imaginary vulnerability in potential volunteers.

Secondly, intimacy is established as the way for change and authenticity. When volunteers finally go to the center, the children who are used to the strangers' visit welcome the visitors with hugs and kisses, leaving an impression of children who need love and care over anything. The emotional connection imagined before becomes real through the intimacy with the children and further strengthen volunteers' belief that without much skills they are able to improve the situation through the efforts they made in caring and loving the children. Seeing the happy smiles from the children, volunteers feel that they are able to make the children's life better through the volunteer work. Even though lots of volunteers perceived their contribution as limited, they believe with efforts from a large number of volunteers all the little change add up to a real difference. Namely, the actability of the individual contribution to solution of bigger problem was confirmed. Then through photographs, especially those showing intimate relationship between volunteers with the children, the love and care between them are preserved for others to inspect or for volunteers to prove the truthfulness of the authentic helping experience. The children are also trained to be easy to take photos with (referring the quick reaction of children when asked by the director to take photos with visitors and being comfortable with any strangers), making it convenient for the volunteers to record the moments of intimacy.

Thirdly, the different kinds of benefits from the helping experience make the participants satisfied with the experience. Beside staying with children, volunteers benefit in both practical use and soft-skill enhancement as promoted by the SOP. After the volunteering experience,

many of them also concluded that they learnt from the hardship of the children, from difficulties they encountered during the programs, from friendship fostered with other volunteers, and from cultural experience of travelling outside. Instead of focusing on the contribution made during the volunteering, both SOP and volunteers put a heavy emphasis on the personal growth and life experience of volunteer as individuals.

With a purpose (to help the vulnerable) that is emotional connected and individually actable (vulnerable children that need love and care of the volunteers to become better), and the way of contribution (through love and care in intimacy), volunteers are able to benefit personally. Through the Chinese short-term international orphanage volunteering programs, the experience of helping the vulnerable children is made into a commodity that can be sold by SOs and purchase and enjoyed by the volunteers.

Voluntourism as one Manifestation of Neoliberalisation of Development

However, through the observations during the fieldwork, volunteers and SOP were only a part of the all the actors that actively engaged in the commodifying the helping experience. For donors, the humanitarian imagination about the vulnerable children seem to motivate them to act; the individually actable efforts – donations together with love and care through intimacy with the children might give them a sense of fulfilment; other enjoyable experience including the birthday wishes from the children, prepared performance by the children, photos with the children were all enjoyable for them in the helping experience. Rather than simply being the subjects to be influenced by the neoliberalisation of development, actors from host communities can also actively engage in the process of neoliberalisation. For the director, the promotion of the care center through the vulnerable children at the center was crucial for getting the operation expense of the center. Creating an image of the center as a home for children to have fun, to learn and to be loved could do more in getting donation than maintaining an environment that is truly safe and beneficial to the children. To attract the income from different donors, children at the center were deliberately taught in a way that could help to create a commodified helping experience for whom came to help to enjoy.

Driven by the individual needs and motivations to contribute to development, volunteers and donors are seeking to engaging in the helping experience where the individual responsibility to development can be demonstrated. Only through the commodification of the experience of helping the vulnerable children, can different individuals including donors and volunteers easily access the development experience they want. Also driven by the individual benefits, the organizers of the SOP (for profitability of the SOP), the director of the care center B (for the donations and image as a loving care center director), and previous volunteers (for the promotion of their unique life experience) all come together to produce and reproduce the vulnerability of the children, the enjoyment of intimacy in helping and individual benefits into a commodity of the helping experience. The individual responsibility, individual benefits and individual experience are at the core of this commodity, reflecting the essence of the neoliberalisation of development. While the commodification of the experience of helping the vulnerable (including VT) also helps to sustain and expand the neoliberalisation of development by reproducing the neoliberalism influence through creating new variations in the market.

Throughout all the portrayals by all actors, the discussion of the root causes of the problems faced by the children was rarely presented. Guided by a strong focus on individual's responsibility in solving the global problems at the personal level, the appeal to look into the structural understanding of the problem is limited. Therefore, rather than aiming at solving

the problem, the neoliberalisation of development can lead our attention away from the systematic solutions required to "make a difference".

As the final point, mentioned by many volunteers in their posts and blogs, they did not feel that they contributed enough during the volunteer work. However, none of them were discouraged or lost faith in VT. Rather they believe that individual's power is doomed to be small and invisible but with the efforts of many volunteers or more of their contribution in the future, there would be positive change. A strong emphasis on helping the vulnerable children through individual care and love over visible and measurable positive impacts in VT reflects the concept of diminished subjectivity where a disbelief in individual's ability to change the situation lowers the expectation and justifies the little impact individual has. Since the big change is not expected neither is believed possible, VT is seldom influenced by its lack of measurable impact.

The main arguments made in this Chapter are: 1) different actors (including the host communities) presenting in my fieldwork were participating in the commodification of the experience of helping the vulnerable children; 2) through the commodification of this experience, these actors were contributing to the process of the neoliberalisation of the development.

Chapter 6
A Future for Chinese Voluntourism

Throughout the Chapter 3, 4and 5, the conclusions of this research are clear that: 1) through actively participating in the commodification of experience of helping the vulnerable children, different actors (volunteers, sending organizations, care center director from the host community, and donors from in and outside of the community) can gain their own benefits; 2) driven by the trend of neoliberalisation of development, Chinese short-term international orphanage volunteering program is one of the many ways neoliberalism expands its influence through expanding new areas for the market. With the conclusion, I will discuss the implications of this research and future studies that can be done based on this research.

Implications

For the theoretical implication, this research re-confirms the linkage between voluntourism and the neoliberalisation of development as many related studies showed (Burrai,2016; Duffy, 2008; England &Ward, 2007; Harvey, 2005; Mostafanezhad, 2013; Sin et al., 2015). That is, while driven by the trend of neoliberalisation of development, VT also expand the influence of neoliberalisation of development. As one sub-division of VT industry, this research shows that Chinese short-term international orphanage volunteering programs also relies on and intensifies the trend of the neoliberalisation of development.

For practical implications, there are two main points I want to make.

Firstly, it is vital for Chinese VT industry and Chinese young people who participate or want to participate in VT to think about: why volunteering is needed for the various host communities? What problems do these communities face? What contributions can volunteers bring to help solve these problems? What possible negative impacts volunteering can bring to the communities? Having a great experience is indubitable important for volunteers, but focusing overly on volunteers' experience and neglecting the main purpose of serving the host communities can deprive the meaning from the volunteering. In China, the VT industry has a relatively short history compared to the one in the North. The mainstream view about VT is still dominated by its positive effects on society. As VT becomes known to more and more Chinese citizens, it is important to look at it from different angles. With this research, I hope to bring in more critical voices about VT industry in China.

Secondly, as mentioned before, both of the centers need to rely on the unstable donations to provide living expense needed by the children. Therefore, children at both centers become the main attraction or reasons for donors to contribute. Commodification of children become necessary for the survival and education of these children. This system also has the potential to encourage parents to send away their children. To avoid the influence from commodification for the children, it is necessary for the local government to guarantee the sufficient fund for these centers. And to take a step further, a system that ensure the social welfare and education for all the children is needed for the children to grow up with their parents or other close family members. Taking the issue under the control of a reliable local government rather than relying on the fluctuant donations would be a longer-term solution.

Future Studies

I wish more attention from the academic world to be paid to the development of different types of VT in China. Instead of being limited to studying North to South on VT, more researches (especially systematic studies) about South to South VT should be done to understand this alternative development from tourism and whether or how does it change in different contexts.

In addition, more academic discussions from within China about VT should be done to critically examine the Chinese VT industry, generate deeper understanding of this sector, and raise broader and higher awareness of VT among Chinese citizens.

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Undisclosed Materials

Field notes (including all the field observations, instructions and conversations)

SOP's website

Care center A's website

Care center B's website

Social media posts from volunteers (including Volunteer 12's WeChat post, 16 August, 2016)

Care center B director's Facebook posts

Volunteer 1's blog (12 September, 2016)

Volunteer 2's blog (9 September, 2016)

Volunteer 3's blog (4 September, 2016)

Volunteer 4's blog (3 September, 2016)

Volunteer 5's blog (1 September, 2016)

Volunteer 6's blog (31 August, 2016)

Volunteer 7's blog (28 August, 2016)

Volunteer 8's blog (27 August, 2016)

Volunteer 9's blog (18 August, 2016)

Volunteer 10's blog (16 August, 2016)

Volunteer 11's blog (11 August, 2016)

The ABC new report that includes name of care center A