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The Chinese Billionaires Having Dozens of U.S.-Born Babies Via Surrogate

Videogame executive Xu Bo, said to have more than 100 children, and other elites build mega-families, testing citizenship laws and drawing on nannies, IVF and legal firms set up to help them

By Katherine Long [Follow](#), Ben Foldy [Follow](#) and Lingling Wei [Follow](#)

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Inside a closed Los Angeles courtroom, something wasn't right.

Clerks working for family court Judge Amy Pellman were reviewing routine surrogacy petitions when they spotted an unusual pattern: the same name, again and again.

A Chinese billionaire was seeking parental rights to at least four unborn children, and the court's additional research showed that he had already fathered or was in the process of fathering at least eight more—all through surrogates.

When Pellman called Xu Bo in for a confidential hearing in the summer of 2023, he never entered the courtroom, according to people who attended the hearing. The maker of fantasy videogames lived in China and appeared via video, speaking through an interpreter. He said he hoped to have 20 or so U.S.-born children through surrogacy—boys, because they're superior to girls—to one day take over his business.

Several of his kids were being raised by nannies in nearby Irvine as they awaited paperwork to travel to China. He hadn't yet met them, he told the judge, because work had been busy.

Pellman was alarmed, according to the people who attended the hearing. Surrogacy was a tool to help people build families, but what Xu was describing didn't seem like parenting, the people said.

The judge denied his request for parentage—normally quickly approved for the intended parents of a baby born through surrogacy, experts say. The decision left the children he'd paid for to be born in legal limbo.

The court declined to comment on Xu's case.

Xu, an online megaposter but real-life recluse, has rarely spoken with reporters and hasn't been photographed in public for nearly a decade.

A representative of Xu's company, Duoyi Network, didn't respond to specific questions about the hearing or Xu's use of surrogacy. "The boss does not accept interview requests from anyone for any purpose," the representative said in an email to The Wall Street Journal, adding that "much of what you described is untrue." The representative, who didn't provide a name, didn't respond to repeated requests to clarify what was inaccurate.

Pellman's decision in the confidential case, which has never been reported, was a rare rebuke to a little-known trend in the largely unregulated U.S. surrogacy industry: Chinese elites and billionaires who are going outside of China, where domestic surrogacy is illegal, to quietly have large numbers of U.S.-born babies.

Since U.S. court proceedings for surrogacies are usually private, often taking place without even a mention on the court's public docket, oversight is limited.

Some Chinese parents, inspired by Elon Musk's 14 known children, pay millions in surrogacy fees to hire women in the U.S. to help them build families of jaw-dropping size. Xu calls himself "China's first father" and is known in China as a vocal critic of feminism. On social media, his company said he has more than 100 children born through surrogacy in the U.S.

Another wealthy Chinese executive, Wang Huiwu, hired U.S. models and others as egg donors to have 10 girls, with the aim of one day marrying them off to powerful men, according to people close to the executive's education company.



Xu Bo, left, in an undated photo. Wang Huiwu seen in 2018.

TAN DAMING/VCG/GETTY IMAGES

Other Chinese clients, usually seeking more typical numbers of babies, are high-powered executives lacking the time and inclination to bear their own children, older parents or same-sex couples, according to people who arrange surrogacy deals and work in surrogacy law. All have the wealth to go outside China while maintaining the privacy needed to manage potential logistical, publicity and legal issues back home. Some have the political clout to avoid censure.

The market has grown so sophisticated, experts say, that at times Chinese parents have had U.S.-born children without stepping foot in the country. A thriving mini-industry of American surrogacy agencies, law firms, clinics, delivery agencies and nanny services—even to pick up the newborns from hospitals—has risen to accommodate the demand, permitting parents to ship their genetic material abroad and get a baby delivered back, at a cost of up to \$200,000 per child.

The growing Asian market for international fertility services has drawn the attention of American investors, including Peter Thiel, whose family office has backed a chain of IVF clinics across Southeast Asia and a recently opened branch in Los Angeles.

Most U.S. states don't bar international parents from working with American surrogates. Chinese law doesn't strictly prohibit its citizens from going overseas for surrogacy, but officials have criticized it. Stories of Chinese celebrities or government officials working with overseas surrogates

have sometimes caused scandal among the public at home, which tends to view surrogacy as ethically dubious and exploitative.

The babies born in the U.S. are U.S. citizens by virtue of the 14th Amendment. The idea of foreign nationals using the Constitution's guarantee of citizenship has long been a political flashpoint.

In 2020, the State Department moved to curb so-called birth tourism, tightening visa rules for women suspected of visiting the U.S. to give birth. In January, Donald Trump issued an executive order denying citizenship to children born in the U.S. unless one of their parents was a citizen or permanent legal resident, which is being reviewed by the Supreme Court. It's unclear if either regulation would apply to foreigners working with surrogates who are Americans.

Last month, Sen. Rick Scott, the Florida Republican, introduced a bill in the Senate to ban the use of surrogacy in the U.S. by people from some foreign countries, including China. He cited an ongoing federal human trafficking investigation into a Chinese-American couple in Los Angeles who have more than two dozen children, nearly all born through surrogacy within the past four years, as reported by the Journal.



A federal human trafficking investigation is looking into a Chinese-American couple who have more than two dozen children, nearly all born through surrogacy. Above, their Arcadia, Calif., mansion. PHILIP CHEUNG FOR WSJ

Law enforcement is more broadly looking at some Chinese parents working with American surrogates. Investigators with the FBI and Department of Homeland Security have interviewed some surrogates who have worked with Chinese parents, according to the surrogates, though the

purpose of those investigations is unclear. The FBI declined to comment, and DHS didn't respond to a request for comment.

'We're not Costco'

Nathan Zhang, the founder and CEO of IVF USA, a network of fertility clinics in the U.S. and Mexico that cater to wealthy Chinese and partner with surrogacy agencies, said his clientele in the past were largely parents trying to bypass China's one-child policy. Babies brought back to China, as U.S. citizens instead of Chinese citizens, fell outside the country's penalty system. The one-child policy was abolished in 2015.

More recently, a new clientele has emerged. "Elon Musk is becoming a role model now," said Zhang. An increasing number of "crazy rich" clients are commissioning dozens, or even hundreds, of U.S.-born babies with the goal of "forging an unstoppable family dynasty," he said.

One wealthy businessman in China, who like Wang is also in the education business, wanted more than 200 children at once using surrogates, envisioning a family enterprise, Zhang said. "I asked him directly, 'How do you plan to raise all these children?' He was speechless," said Zhang, who said he refused him as a client.

Other surrogacy professionals described similarly head-spinning numbers. The owner of one agency in California said he had helped fill an order for a Chinese parent seeking 100 children in the past few years, a request spread over several agencies.

A Los Angeles surrogacy attorney said he had helped his client, a Chinese billionaire, have 20 children through surrogacy in recent years.



ACRC Global, a California surrogacy agency that markets to Chinese and other international clients, had a booth at the Beijing Medical and Health Exhibition in October, which focused on travel to other countries for medical treatment. GILLES SABRIÉ FOR WSJ



A slide showing embryos at the Beijing health exhibition. GILLES SABRIÉ FOR WSJ

Amanda Troxler, a Los Angeles-based surrogacy lawyer, said her firm consulted with a hopeful Chinese parent who said she wanted eight or 10 surrogacies and asked for a discount. “I was like, ‘No, we’re not Costco,’” said Troxler, who didn’t take the client because she rejects those looking for more than two surrogacies at once.

Oversight of the industry is so scant that it’s almost impossible to figure out whether parents are working with multiple surrogates, across different agencies and law firms, people in the industry said.

California surrogacy agency owner Joy Millan said she was approached by a single father in China seeking to hire four surrogates. She agreed to connect the father with one, only to learn later that he had gone to another agency to find more.

“When we contacted him saying this is your due date, the baby is on the way, he panicked and was like, ‘We’re already taking care of two babies!’” Millan said. “It’s not like you can’t have four kids, there are families that have four or five, but if you regret, there’s no way back.”

Industry groups recommend that agencies and IVF clinics not work with parents seeking more than two simultaneous surrogacies, because of the logistical and emotional challenges, and the risk that it will increase the perception that surrogacy commodifies pregnancy. But Millan said the suggestion lacks teeth. The harshest penalty for failing to follow the groups’ recommendations is to be removed as a member.

Lisa Stark Hughes, a surrogacy agency owner and board member of the Society for Ethics for Egg Donation and Surrogacy, acknowledged the difficulty of ensuring those recommendations are followed. The group has been discussing ways to more proactively detect when parents are pursuing multiple simultaneous surrogacies across different agencies without violating patient privacy laws, she said.

Some agencies don’t hesitate. Hu Yihan, the CEO of New York IVF clinic Global Fertility & Genetics, who helps connect Chinese parents with surrogacy agencies, said that when one of her clients wants three or four simultaneous surrogacies, the reaction is often enthusiastic. “I’m getting positive feedback from the surrogacy agencies, they’re like, ‘This is a big one! I want to do this!’” she said.

Agencies typically receive \$40,000 to \$50,000 per surrogacy, separately from payments made to the surrogate carriers.



Hu Yihan, the CEO of New York IVF clinic Global Fertility & Genetics, spoke at the Beijing health exhibition. GILLES SABRIÉ FOR WSJ

Girls for future world leaders

The Chinese government usually turns a blind eye to citizens who pursue surrogacy abroad, even allowing foreign agencies to quietly market their services at home. Still, Chinese parents who work with surrogates sometimes face blowback.

Liu Pengyu, the spokesman for the Chinese Embassy in the U.S., said in a statement to the Journal that the government's health authorities believe surrogacy can lead to a number of negative outcomes, including "serious family and social ethical crisis."

Wang, who fathered the 10 girls through U.S. surrogacies, purchased dozens of eggs from models, a finance Ph.D. and a musician—at a cost of between \$6,000 and \$7,500 each, according to the people close to his company. He is the president and CEO of Sichuan-based education group XJ International Holdings, formerly known as Hope Education Group, which owns and operates universities and technical colleges.

Wang preferred girls, the people said, and hoped they would grow up to marry world leaders.

Screenshots purporting to be of messages from a person claiming to share a nanny with Wang, discussing Wang's use of surrogacy in the U.S., went viral on social media in 2021.

Chinese media criticized the executive, saying that commercial surrogacy exploits women and violates Chinese public order and morals. Shares at Wang's company plunged around this time.

XJ International Holdings, which previously dismissed the claims as rumors, didn't respond to requests for comment.

Around the start of 2019, Zheng Shuang, an actress and model who briefly signed with Prada, hired two U.S. surrogates with her boyfriend, Zhang Heng.

Before the children were born, the couple's relationship began to deteriorate, and Zheng had second thoughts, according to documents in a Colorado custody suit over the two children after their births.

Zheng allegedly considered asking one of the surrogates to terminate the pregnancy, but the baby was too far along, according to email correspondence with the surrogacy agency included in the court documents.

Ultimately, Zhang, the father, flew to the U.S. to attend births in Colorado and Nevada, and stayed in the country to care for the two babies. After he posted on the Chinese social-media site Weibo that Zheng had contemplated seeking abortions, the Chinese Communist Party released a statement criticizing them.



Chinese actress Zheng Shuang, left, and her boyfriend, Zhang Heng, arrive at a Beijing airport in 2019.

IMAGINECHINA/ALAMY

“For Chinese citizens to exploit legal loopholes and flee to the United States simply because surrogacy is prohibited in China is by no means abiding by the law,” the statement from the party’s Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission said.

Zheng was dropped by fashion labels. The couple were investigated for tax evasion; she was ordered to pay a nearly \$46 million fine and he was fined \$5 million in the tax case. Zhang, the boyfriend,

eventually received sole parenting responsibility for the children, according to court documents, and went on to co-found a California surrogacy agency focused on Chinese parents.

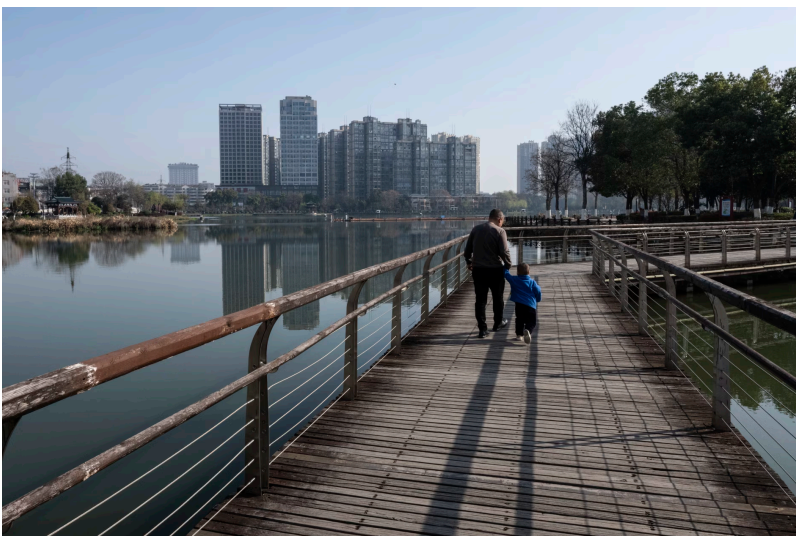
Even some Chinese government officials have turned to the U.S. for surrogacy, industry lawyers and agencies say.

Surrogacy was a key component in the scandal surrounding the 2023 disappearance of Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang. Qin, once a trusted aide to Chinese leader Xi Jinping, fell from grace after a Communist Party investigation found that he had been having an affair with prominent newscaster Fu Xiaotian.

Fu had a child in the U.S. via surrogacy in late 2022. While the Chinese government never disclosed the child's paternity, the incident fueled speculation that Qin was the father and prompted wider scrutiny within the party regarding whether other top officials had used surrogates to have children overseas, according to officials briefed on the matter. Both Qin and Fu vanished from public view when the scandal erupted.

Meanwhile, some older Chinese parents, who were restricted in their younger years by the one-child policy, are looking to surrogacy to expand their families beyond typical child-raising years.

“Any household that’s middle-upper income, any guy who’s 60 years old, they’re having one-child policy revenge,” said Hu, the New York fertility CEO. “They’re trying to make up for something that they wanted when they were young but it was severely restricted, there was no way out, the tech was not there, the market was not there.”



A man and child walked in a park in Tianmen, China, in March. GILLES SABRIÉ FOR WSJ