Life without value? Voices of embryo donors for hESC research in China

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Asia is a force to be reckoned with when it comes to research in the life sciences. Asian countries play a major role both in shaping international research practices and in the formulation of biomedical research regulation in the field of biomedical research and research applications, including stem cell research, genetic testing and screening, reproductive technologies and the banking of biological materials. Not only wealthy welfare societies such as Japan and Singapore but also large developing countries such as China and India, are strong global competitors at the forefront of biomedical research and biotech applications. These new fields of research, on the one hand, promise to yield revolutionary technologies and biomedical knowledge that could enhance the health and welfare of large patient populations, including diabetes, muscular dystrophy, Parkinson’s disease and Alzheimer’s disease. On the other hand, biomedical concerns have come about due to the novel and great nature of research in the life sciences and the application of resultant technologies in some regions where even the most basic healthcare is a scarce good.

Life without value?

Technoscientific projects feature high on the Chinese government’s agenda. The decoding of the rice, chicken and most recently panda genomes have caught the attention of the media and the masses. A no less ambitious plan is the drive to establish China as a key force in human embryonic stem cell (hESC) research. While in the West hESC research has been slowed by ethical and legal debates, a high permission regulatory environment has been fostered in China. Achim Rosenberg investigates how this corresponds to the perceptions of potential embryo donors.

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