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**A Review of the Phenomenon of Left-behind Children in China from the  
Perspective of Historicism with Discussion and Analysis of the Relevant  
Research Literature**

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## **A Review of the Phenomenon of Left-behind Children in China from the Perspective of Historicism with Discussion and Analysis of the Relevant Research Literature**

### **Abstract**

The rapid industrialization and uneven regional development of China over the past few decades have forced a large number of young and middle-aged people in rural areas and small towns to leave their hometown and undertake burdensome manual jobs in urban areas. Many of them have become parents. The long separation with their children contributes to the widespread Chinese left-behind children phenomenon. This review article explains further the Chinese left-behind child phenomenon, identifies and discusses the relevant research literature, and analyzes research approaches and findings with attention to the concept of 'historicism' (attributing meaningful significance to elements of space and time). Arguably, it would provide a clear picture and guidelines such as research status, gaps, and depicts for underlying researchers.

**Keywords:** Chinese left-behind children phenomenon, historicism, research literature, research approaches, research findings.

### Introduction

For Polkinghorne (1983), "this interpretive process is as concentrating on historical meanings of experience and their development and cumulative effects on individual and social levels." (as cited in Laverty, 2003, p.24). From the perspective of historicism, all understanding should link to one's historicity. It grants meaningful significance to space and time, such as a historical period, geographic place, and local culture. It considers more about contextualized interpretation of information (Kahan, 1997). Therefore, drawing upon the perspective of historicism, in understanding the current contexts, issues, and challenges as affecting the Chinese left-behind children, this paper gives a detailed examination and analysis of the historical background and the existing literature about the children's group (e.g., researcher approaches and findings). This allows the researcher to interpret the lived experience of Chinese left-behind children based on a historical perspective. The researcher does not try to make a linear history, but rather a tree diagram, i.e., the historical origin of left-behind children in China as a root, researches concerning the challenges faced by Chinese left-behind children and existing serious impacts (safety and psychology) as trunks, research and government-sponsored programs regarding countermeasures, and policies and actions of the Chinese central government and provincial governments as branches. Specifically, historical roots and changes of the Chinese left-behind children phenomenon are broadly reviewed based on relevant research archives to obtain a clear picture of the disadvantaged children's group. Moreover, a specific review of the existing literature (challenges and countermeasures) regarding Chinese left-behind children is made. Meanwhile, a clear picture is given to learning current national and provincial policies and actions for the Chinese left-behind children in particular. Overall, the literature review aims (1) to understand the history of the Chinese left-behind children to provide a holistic view for the present study of the Chinese left-behind children, (2) to highlight the importance and necessity of studying

the Chinese left-behind children, (3) to identify gaps and deficits in the existing literature in the field.

### **History of the Chinese Left-Behind Children**

The phenomenon of left-behind children is only mentioned in China due to the two reasons, i.e., the Chinese household registration system (*hukou*), and rapid urbanization and economic reform. The household registration system is a population management system implemented by the Government of the People's Republic of China on the citizens of the People's Republic of China. Household registration shows the legitimacy of a natural person living in a certain place. Since the 1950s, the formulation and implementation of the People's Republic of China's population management policy have been based on this system. The current Chinese household registration system divides the household registration attribute into "agricultural *hukou*" and "non-agricultural *hukou*". The agricultural *hukou* can obtain land use rights in rural areas, but cannot enjoy any social welfare in a city (Liang & Chen, 2007; Yan, 2005). This means those temporary residents in a city are not eligible to obtain equal treatment for social benefits as received by permanent residents.

However, since 1980, the development of urbanization and economy reform in China has led to the transfer of a large number of rural labors to cities for better economic conditions (Liang & Chen, 2007; Lu & Zhang, 2004). Many of them have become parents. Parents need to go out to work in a city to earn a living, but they cannot take the children into a city or stay with them because they cannot afford the high cost of living in a city. That is, they migrate to an urban center for work, but they will be restricted from welfare, and other government benefits (Wei & Hou, 2010; Leitch, Ding, & Song, 2016).

These parents (one or both) have to go out to work to increase the family's income and obtain more economic resources to provide children with nutrition, medical, and educational opportunities (Duan & Zhou, 2005). As a result, these children endure long

periods of separation from their parents. The long-term separation from parents underwrites the widespread left-behind children phenomenon. This phenomenon has led to discrimination and marginalization against these disadvantaged youth in schools and communities (Lu, 2012; Wang, Zhang, & Zimmerman, 2015). Most left-behind children are in a growing period. Due to their separation from their parents, they lack the necessary ideological guidance and concept formation, and parents' attention and care. As a result, the left-behind children tend to be withdrawn, emotionally passive, self-conscious and timid. What's more, in some places, there is even the phenomenon of left-behind child labor (Baidu, 2019). In 2004, after the first report referring to this children's group and defining them in the People's Daily, Guangming Daily, and China Youth Daily (Baidu, 2019), it is attracting widespread attention little by little, and various investigations are emerging in China.

In 2008, the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) in the national family education minors sample survey of the situation and the national rural left-behind children survey conference disclosed that, among the rural children, 28.29% of them are the left-behind children. That is, on average, one out of every four rural children is left behind. In recent years, with the rural migrant Labor force's growth, the number of left-behind children has also been gradually increasing. ACWF released in May 2013 that the total number of left-behind children in rural areas in China was 61.0255 million. They mainly distribute in the labor export provinces such as *Sichuan, Henan*, and so on. In *Chongqing, Sichuan, Anhui, Jiangsu, Jiangxi*, and *Hunan*, left-behind children accounted for more than 50% of rural children. That is, more than half of the rural children are left-behind children. The left-behind children without elder care and with brothers and sisters or living alone together have reached 2.057 million, accounting for 3.37% of the total proportion of left-behind children. Compared with the statistical data five years ago, the percentage of preschoolers has been showing an increase and the size of left-behind

children compulsory education stage has been presenting shrinkage as shown in Table 1(the All-China Women's Federation, 2013)

Age	Gender and Age Composition Percentage of Rural Left-Behind Children (%)			
	Males	Females	In total	Sex ratio
0	2.96	2.50	5.47	118.40
1	3.72	3.05	6.77	127.79
2	2.38	2.14	6.96	121.66
3	3.58	2.97	6.55	120.54
4	3.60	3.00	6.60	120.00
5	3.29	2.73	6.02	120.51
0-5	20.97	17.39	38.37	120.59
6	3.25	2.71	5.95	119.93
7	2.90	2.44	5.34	118.85
8	2.82	2.36	5.18	119.49
9	2.87	2.48	5.30	118.11
10	2.85	2.41	5.26	118.26
11	2.68	2.30	4.98	116.52
6-11	17.37	14.56	32.01	118.57
12	2.97	2.57	5.53	115.56
13	2.86	2.49	5.35	114.86
14	2.88	2.55	5.42	112.94
12-14	8.71	7.61	16.30	114.45
15	2.82	2.48	5.29	113.71
16	2.23	2.00	4.23	111.50
17	1.99	1.82	3.80	109.34
15-17	7.04	6.30	13.32	111.75
0-17 in total	54.08	45.92	100	117.77

Fortunately, in 2018, according to the data released by the Ministry of Civil Affairs, there were more than 6.97 million rural left-behind children. Compared with the data (more than 9.02 million) released in 2016, the number of left-behind children shows a fall (22.7 %) (Li & Luo, 2018).

Table 2: The provinces where the percentage of rural left-behind children showed a substantial fall from 2016 to 2018(the Ministry of Civil Affairs, 2018)

The declined percentage compared with 2016	Provinces
Off 40% or more	<i>Shanxi, Liaoning, Jilin, Fujian, Hunan, Shaanxi, and Gansu</i>
Off 39% to 35% and more	<i>Jiangxi, Shandong, Chongqing, and Guizhou</i>
Off 34% to 20% and more	<i>Zhejiang, Guangxi, and Qinghai</i>

### Existing Serious Impacts (Safety and Psychology)

Negative effects on safety and mental health issues of left-behind children are the most serious and frequently reported. For example, 49.2% of left-behind children have suffered accidental injuries, 7.9 % higher than non-left-behind children (Xin, 2008). The rate of hospitalization for left-behind children is high as well, 61% (4,280) of left-behind children among new pediatric patients (Gong, 2007). *Bijie*, an extremely impoverished town located in *Guizhou* province, is one of the hardest-hit areas of left-behind children suffering accidental or intentional injuries. For instance, in 2012, five left-behind children died of carbon monoxide poisoning due to fire in the garbage bin (Xin, 2008). In June 2013, three left-behind children in *Shengmi* town, *Nanchang* city, *Jiangxi* province, unfortunately, drowned while playing in a pond. Their parents were working in a city at that time (Wikipedia, 2019).

The main psychological and behavioral issues of left-behind children are as follows (Li, 2015): (1) In terms of self-awareness, they have a serious sense of inferiority, and they have a low evaluation of their intelligence and appearance but they are self-centered. (2) Emotional instability is resulting in physical and mental illnesses (i.e., chest upset, palpitations, headache, migraine, asthma, itchy skin, stomach ulcers, mental fatigue, headache, inattention, muscle or joint pain, symptoms such as memory loss, depression or anxiety, etc.) and hostile behavior. The proportion of left-behind children suffering

from anxiety or depression is higher than other children. In addition, girls are inclined to have a bad temper for no reason. Their confusion index is higher than that of non-left-behind children. (3) They are prone to attribute frustration to people or things other than themselves, responding in an unreasonable way, such as fantasy, rationalization, and retreat. (4) They are likely to be resentful to parents, blindly resisting. (5) In terms of interpersonal relationships, they are more introverted and often bullied/attacked more. (6) In terms of academics, their academic performance is prone to decline, and the proportion of boys who are tired of learning, truancy or dropout is also high. (8) The left-behind children who are boarding have poor living habits and their satisfaction with life is relatively low. (9) The left-behind children who have gone out of their mothers have shown more/severe problems.

However, the performance of different left-behind children is quite different. Depending on their ability for resilience, the performance of left-behind children is also polarized. Factors such as the time of separation between mother and child, the age at separation, gender, grade, communicative methods and frequency with parents also make individual differences. The emotional state of rural children in the northwest and southwestern regions is significantly more negative than that of children in the eastern and central regions.

### **Researches Concerning the Challenges Faced by Chinese Left-behind Children**

Numerous efforts and concerns have been made in recording, analyzing, and solving the Chinese left-behind children's educational issues on a global scale. These studies are pertaining to guardianship, life, psychological stress, academic development, conducting and emotional problems, socialization, nutrition, and health. These researchers mainly consider those left-behind children who are in the period of nine-year compulsory education (Grade1-9) (Guo, 2007) except little research focusing on those in middle and high schools (e.g., Sui & Song, 2017).



### **Academic Performances and Skills**

In the existing studies of this issue, academic performances and skills of the Chinese left-behind children are examined on the top priority. The left-behind experience has remarkably negative repercussions on the children's schoolwork. To be more exact, the lack of family education and generation-skipping education render poor academic conditions for the group (e.g., Li, 2015; Wang & Wang 2005; Wang & Wu 2003; Pan & Ye, 2017). Liang, Hou, and Chen (2008) describe a more in-depth investigation of the schoolwork of left-behind children. This can be based on data from a large-scale sampling survey with multivariate regression models from students' grades, gender, family factors, and school characteristics. Hu and Szente (2009) present that those younger left-behind children, fortunately, living with their parents in urban areas still have limited access to education due to costly tuition for admission to public kindergartens and complicated enrollment regulation. Therefore, they have to choose private schools, including private kindergartens for affordable education, but these schools are usually poorly organized, which disadvantages these children to improve their academic skills. Chen (2007) also finds out migrant children have limited access to public schools due to *hukou*, and also suffer from an unsafe commute to and from school, after-school care, etc. Dong (2016) highlights how those martial arts students, who are the left-behind children, engage with the structural, symbolic, and normalized violence in martial arts schools, such as limited curriculum, discrimination from teachers and peers, and parents' negative discourses. Wang, Dong, and Mao (2017) uncover boarding schools organized loosely with unqualified caregivers and insufficient food services are leading to a negative effect on the left-behind children's academic achievement. They think boarding schools in rural western China should recruit more professional caregivers and improve their catering service to support children's social-economic competence development. In particular, minority left-behind children have been facing a serious lack of educational and cultural ecology in rural boarding schools (China Youth & Children Research Center, 2014). In

additions, Sui and Song (2017) track data of 7,411 first-year high school students from 106 secondary vocational schools in *Zhejiang* and *Shaanxi* provinces from 2011 and 2012. They illuminate the impact of the experience of being left behind on the exam behavior, drop-out behavior, and willingness for promotion of secondary vocational school students. Qin and Zhai (2015) present that non-left-behind children are generally better than left-behind children in terms of learning purposes, learning habits, and academic performances. Among the three types of guardianship of left-behind children, the children with the mother's guardianship are better than that of those with the father's guardianship in academic performances. Wu and Du (2014) also mention that the father's going out to work has not a significant influence on the academic performance of left-behind children, but the mother's going out to work has a significant negative effect on the academic performance of left-behind children. In addition, some researchers think the academic performance of left-behind children is not related to parental outings. For example, Shi (2017) investigates 973 primary and middle school students in *Gansu* province through the questionnaire. Children's self-confidence in their study is relatively low. Middle school children's overall average is less than that of primary school children. The academic performance of girls is higher than that of boys. The longer preschool education is, the higher the children's academic performance is. Those children living in their home and renting a house near schools get relatively better in academic performances, but those living with relatives are with relatively low grades. The higher the parents' educational level is, the higher the children's academic performance is. The left-behind children who are studying in cities obtain higher academic performances than that of the left-behind children in towns. Through multiple regression analysis, from the different learning phases, parental outings are not a significant effect on the academic performances of the left-behind children in elementary schools and middle schools. Guardianship types of left-behind children have not an obvious effect on left-behind children. The main factor impacting left-behind children's academic performance is personal, such as personal

learning evaluation, physical health, and mental health. The family factor is relatively secondary to influencing children's academic performance.

### **Guardianship and the Psychological Wellbeing**

The impact of guardianship and the psychological wellbeing of the group also are analyzed and stressed. As a result of left-behind children's cross-generation fostering, the left-behind children lack the opportunity to communicate with their parents, which leads to adverse effects on children's psychological health (Zhou, Zhong, & Wang, 2017; Zhang, 2012). Rural children in the western region of China have been facing a situation of severe neglect. The neglected rate of left-behind children is higher than that of non-left-behind children (Zhong et al., 2012; Pan, 2007; Tang et al., 2018). In the survey of four types of guardianship (single parent, grandparents, relatives, and self or peers), the left-behind children have different levels of life and psychological burdens. The detection rate of behavioral problems, anxiety, and depression is higher than that of non-left-behind children (Zhao & Liu, 2010; Dang, 2010). Many factors are affecting the mental health of left-behind children, such as the lack of family affection, unclear responsibility of guardians, insufficient educational ability, lack of school education, and their reasons. That is, the factors affecting the mental health of left-behind children include social factors, school factors, guardianship factors, self-factors, and parental factors (Ye, Zhang, and He, 2006).

### **Emotions and Behaviors**

Emotions and behaviors of left-behind children are also considered as an imperative aspect of previous studies in the field. Juvenile delinquency refers to the criminal acts committed by those who are in a specific age range (14 to 25 years old) (Shi, 2014). The proportion of juvenile delinquency is quite high among the left-behind children. The negative trend not only follows common reasons for juvenile delinquency (e.g., addictions) but also is related to the "left-behind syndrome" (Wang, 2006). In the absence of parents' loving care and effective supervision of society, left-behind children

are more likely to be exposed to an unhealthy social environment and socialization process (Liu, 2007). Based on an investigation of the left-behind children in *Guizhou* province, 27.9% of left-behind children's problem behaviors are identified as a normal level, i.e., emotional problems and hyper-action. 24.6% of the group are posited on a marginal level, i.e., the problems of peer interaction and pro-social behaviors. However, surpassing 47.5% of them are considered as having ill-natured behavior problems, such as bullying, stealing, cheating, fighting and so on (Ban, Song, & Wu, 2013; He, Tang, & Jiang, 2011). Lin, Yin, and Zhu (2013) investigate 2218 rural left-behind children's emotional and behavioral problems. They discover that the indicators of left-behind children in emotional and behavioral problems are significantly higher than that of non-left-behind children, and the prosocial behavior is significantly less than that of the non-left-behind children. Emotional problems of left-behind girls are more serious than that of left-behind boys, and the conduct problems of the left-behind boys are much more serious than that of left-behind girls. Moreover, the authors found obvious group characteristics in the left-behind children's emotional and behavioral problems and divided them into five groups, including emotional difficulty, peer exchanges difficulty, attention disorders, and good adaptation. Jiang (2013) presents that the children as left-behind with a longer time have more emotional problems and those with less time contacting their parents have more conduct problems. Living with relatives other than parents or friends ( $OR=1.270$ ) is a risk factor for psychopathology, while the good family economic condition (odds ratio=0.479) is a protective factor. Overall, those living with at least one parent or grandparent, being left behind for a short time, keeping frequent contact parents, and with good family economic conditions have less emotional and behavioral problems.

### **Socialization**

Some studies have focused exclusively on the socialization of the Chinese left-behind children. Socialization refers to the individual's interaction with society. By

socializing, the individual gradually develops a unique personality and transforms from a biological person into a social person, adapting to social life through the internalization of culture and the study of role knowledge. The process of socialization is related to whether a person can grow up healthily and successfully enter mainstream social life. In particular, the socialization of childhood will affect the development of a person's physical and mental development and personality formation and values. In the process of socialization, the socialized subjects that individuals rely on include families, schools, peer groups, and the mass media. These subjects have different functions in the process of socialization. For a long time, due to the lack of socialized main functions, rural left-behind children have been deprived of certain necessary conditions and environment in the process of socialization. Their socialization process will inevitably have major defects and cannot reach normal levels, and ultimately cannot become an expected qualified member of society (Baidu, 2019).

The weakening of family functions, the alienation of the parent-child relationship caused by the lack of parental roles in the family, the lack of parents' care, and the shortcomings of generation-skipping education make the left-behind children psychological barriers in the process of socialization. There are many problems in safety and health, which seriously affect the socialization of children (Zhang, 2015). Wang, Dong, and Mao (2017) collect data from 74 rural boarding schools in 11 provinces in western China through a quantitative research approach. They figure out boarding schools have a negative effect on the improvement of left-behind children's social-economic competence (SEC). Zhang (2015) investigates how Chinese left-behind children view the missing roles of parents. He also considers how parent-child relations in such families are impacted over time by in-depth case studies of two left-behind children with different family backgrounds in a village of Henan province. Harmonious parent-child relationships have been linked to better academic performance and fewer behavioral problems (Fuligni, 1998; Tseng, 2004). Xia and Cai (2014) employ meta-analysis to

examine those factors affecting the social adaptation of left-behind children. Chen and Lin (2008) figure out the left-behind children show strong independence. They have to undertake most of the household chores. Only one of the 15 sampling left-behind children does not need to do or do tiny housework. In addition, to manage their own lives, the left-behind children have to bear the burden of boiling water, cooking rice, sweeping the ground, feeding chickens, taking care of their younger siblings, etc. The positive impact is that it can exercise the self-care ability of left-behind children developing a good habit of loving labor. The negative impact is that heavy housework will put a lot of pressure on left-behind children, effecting their normal study and rest. Another manifestation of the independence of left-behind children is that they often participate in some important decisions at home. Because of both parents going out to work, guardians often consult their children when making important family decisions.

### **Nutrition and Hygiene**

Additionally, some studies examine the nutrition and hygiene of Chinese left-behind children. In 2007, the Ministry of Health selected 7 of the 13 provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities) with more left-behind children to conduct surveys focusing on the psychological, nutritional, and growth development of 7,200 left-behind children under 7 years old. Prevention of common diseases and the utilization of health services were included as well. The results of the survey showed that the left-behind children generally had problems, including unreasonable dietary structure, insufficient nutrient intake, and low breastfeeding rate. This is because most of the left-behind children are raised by the elderly, and the elderly do not correct the child's picky behavior. On the other hand, about one-fourth of the parents did not send their children's living expenses on time, which caused that caregivers did not have enough financial support to take care of the children. In addition, caregivers do not have enough time and energy to take care of their children's diet, which is also an important cause of malnutrition in these left-behind children (Chinanews, 2009).



The left-behind children, whose mothers are absent, often suffer more serious nutritional problems; energy, protein, iron, and nutrient intake are insufficient (Duan, 2009). Another research investigates hospitalized patients among left-behind children and understands this social group in order to give more care to the left-behind children as healthy, physical, and mental. The researcher evaluates 4 280 cases of left-behind children admitted to his hospital from January 2005 to December 2006 in terms of their physical development, mental behavior and health conditions. Among hospitalized children, the rate of physical development and mental behavior abnormality of left-behind children is significantly higher than that of non-left-behind children ( $P < 0.05$ ) (Gong, 2007). Li and Zhang (2010) study the nutritional status of left-behind children in rural areas in China and measure the impact of parental outings on children's nutritional status average treatment effect. The results show that malnutrition of left-behind children is particularly acute.

#### **Research and Government-Sponsored Programs Regarding Countermeasures**

At present, research and government-sponsored programs focusing on coping strategies to challenges left-behind child facing have been improved and implemented. For example, left-behind child's care has been included in the Family Education Plan (FEP) and Children Development Plan (CDP) in Shaanxi province, which offers a clear guideline to left-behind child's care service system. Precisely speaking, since 2011, the province spent 8 million RMB creating "A home of left-behind children growing up", and 45 "happy homes" in order to carry out the training of guardians and psychological aids of left-behind children (Guo, Wang, Zhang, & Zhang, 2014). These programs can help left-behind children develop an extensive range of positive personal, social, and intellectual traits to some extent. Nevertheless, these projects do not work well in that they usually are one-size-fits-all without consideration in the demographic and regional discrepancies. Moreover, the Volunteer Center plays an imperative role in helping China's vulnerable children's group as a part of the comprehensive strategy for revising the *Hukou* system

and promoting the economic development of rural and western China (Leitch et al, 2016; Kwong, 2011). However, this kind of non-profit organization is operated in a narrow range (e.g. some metropolis) so the model still needs thoughtful consideration of policy-makers, funders, and practitioners for dissemination and trials in other parts of China (Leitch et al, 2016; Kwong, 2011). In 2008, Shanghai formulated a new policy accepting migrant children into urban public schools (Lan, 2014), which offers an opportunity for them to access high-quality education. Additionally, in 2003, UNICEF and the Chinese government jointly introduced the *Tianjin Development Model*, which encourages cooperation among government, community, and society in the care of left-behind children (Zhou, 2014). However, some studies refute that the Chinese household registration system has been converted into more hidden forms of institutional exclusion that reproduces cultural prejudice and intensifies group boundaries (Lan, 2014). To be more exact, registration of *Hukou* is relaxed in some metropolises, which means migrant workers can be allowed to register city *Houkou* with the same social welfares as local residents. Their children can enroll in city public schools. Nonetheless, migrant workers are suffering from marginalized challenges that the dominant group employs implicitly in cultural and discursive formation to normalize status hierarchy. Educational institutions are invisibly excluding the left-behind children based on spatial and discursive segregations. For example, older students transferred from peasant-worker schools are inclined to be arranged in separate classes, situated on different floors or in different buildings from the local students (Lan, 2014).

## **Policies and Actions of the Chinese Central Government and Provincial Governments**

### **Policies of the Chinese Central Government**

In response, the Chinese government issues relevant policies to address the needs of left-behind children. China State Council enacted *the Proposal for Strengthening the Care*



*and Protection of Rural Left-behind Children* (China State Council [CSC], 2016). This was introduced at all levels of government to improve the current situation of left-behind children.

Specifically speaking, (1) strengthening the responsibility of family supervision. Parents must perform their guardianship obligations for minor children under the law. As instructed, migrant workers keep underage children together so these children can live in the same place. Children under 16 years cannot live alone and must be looked after by guardians. Migrant workers should frequently contact their left-behind children and learn about their life, study, and psychological stress in time. If parents or guardians do not perform guardianship, the village (residential) committee or public security department will promptly advise and stop them; if the situation is serious or causes serious consequences, parents will be investigated for legal responsibility. (2) Implementing the duties of county and village (residential) committees. Local governments must strengthen coordination and supervision, and formulate practical and feasible policies for the protection of left-behind children in accordance with local conditions to ensure that all cares and protections cover all rural left-behind children. For example, it is necessary to provide convenience for the rural left-behind children to contact their parents by telephone and video. (3) Ensuring left-behind children complete nine-year compulsory education. The county-level government shall improve the coordination mechanism to urge guardians to send school-age children to complete compulsory education. The education administrative department shall implement free compulsory education and educational subsidy policy to ensure that left-behind children in rural areas do not drop out due to poverty. (4) Taking advantage of social care services. The Communist Youth League(CYL), the Women's Federation(WF), the Disabled Persons' Federation (DPF) will give full play to their advantages and actively provide holiday care, psychological counseling, and other care services for rural left-behind children. (5) Promoting the active participation of social forces. Social work professional

service organizations, charitable social organizations, and voluntary service organizations shall be established to carry out rural childcare guidance and psychological counselling such as social integration and family relationship adjustment.

### **Actions of Provincial Governments**

Provincial governments, particularly those main rural labor export provinces such as *Henan, Chongqing, Anhui, Zhejiang, Guizhou, and Shaanxi* province, etc. formulate relevant local laws and regulations based on the aforementioned proposal by the Chinese central government.

For example, *Henan* province as one of the main rural labor export provinces stipulates if parents or other guardians fail to perform their guardianship duties because of going out to work, they should entrust other adults with guardianship abilities to act as guardians. It is also necessary for parents to maintain regular contact with underage children, learning the physical and mental health of underage children (Standing Committee of Henan Provincial People's Congress [SCHPPC], 2010). It is given full play to the advantages of traditional media such as radio and television, newspapers and magazines, and new online media such as Blog, WeChat, QQ group, etc. Such can actively promote the care and protection of left-behind children in rural areas by means of public service advertisements, micro-movies, and donation of love, creating a strong social atmosphere and attracting more enterprises, non-profit organizations and caring people to participate in the care of rural left-behind children. Urban children and rural left-behind children are encouraged to pair up freely to help each other and grow up together. Public opinion monitoring and early warning and response mechanisms will be established and improved, to rationally guide public opinion and respond to social concerns on time. Strengthen network management will play a role to avoid adverse effects on left-behind children in rural areas.

*Chongqing* municipality pays special attention to campus safety issues, including detailed responsibilities of schools, nurseries, and public security institutions, weaving a

gentle safety net for minors. Moreover, those underage students with financial difficulties are given boarding fee reduction or funding (Chinanews, 2010). Moreover, from the promotion of health plans such as “Custard Plan” and “Nutrition Lunch” to the exploration and innovation of “Custody Home” and “Homestay”, Chongqing has insisted on the education of rural left-behind children as the overall development and promotion of urban and rural education in recent years. More than 600,000 rural left-behind children have benefited from important measures of education equity. In the next few years, the city will implement nine action plan for caring for rural left-behind children as follows: the Rural Left-behind Children Education Linkage Plan, the Rural Left-behind Children's Universal Aid Program, the Urban and Rural Primary and Secondary School Standardization Construction Plan, the Rural Left-behind Children Nutrition Love Plan, the Left-behind Children Training Model Innovation Plan, the Rural Left-behind Children's Family Connection Plan, the Rural Left-behind Children Mental Health Plan, the Rural Left-behind Children's Pairing Assistance Program, and the Rural Left-behind Children Community Care Program, etc. These actions will work to create a good study for the physical and mental health of more than 1.3 million rural left-behind children in the city.

*Anhui* province stipulates that the boarding work of left-behind children should be included in the overall plan of boarding school construction, guiding and supervising the education administration departments and schools to improve boarding conditions, and providing boarding fee reduction or subsidy for students with financial difficulties. The education administrative departments and schools should carry out actions such as life care and counseling for left-behind minors and provide good learning and living conditions for left-behind minors. Enterprises, institutions, social organizations, and individuals are encouraged to donate funds to build boarding schools, hosting centers or service centers for left-behind children (Xinhuanet, 2009). In order to protect the basic living of left-behind children, there are 11,000 rural left-behind children in the province

to be included in the social assistance and social welfare policy system. In order to strengthen the guidance of family education, *Anhui* province has trained nearly 10,000 parents and entrusted guardians of rural left-behind children (XinHuaNet, 2009).

*Zhejiang* province stipulates schools, kindergartens, and daycares should treat children equally. Those who have shortcomings in character and have difficulty in learning must be patiently educated and helped instead of neglect or discrimination (Standing Committee of Zhejiang Provincial People's Congress [SCZPP], 2010). In 2016, *Zhejiang* province established a "one person, one file" for rural left-behind children. In response to problems such as being unsupervised, unimplemented household registration, and drop out, *Zhejiang* province organized a joint monitoring program in 2017. Through the joint efforts of local governments and relevant departments, up to now, 15,796 rural left-behind children who have one parent without custodial ability and other one going out or are unsupervised have been effectively guarded. 346 left-behind children were registered households, and 78 students have returned to school.

General Office of the Guizhou Provincial Government issues an urgent notice requesting women's federations, youth league committees, and other relevant departments should perform a centralized, comprehensive, in-depth, and meticulous investigation of all rural left-behind children and school dropouts in accordance with the principle of territorial management, and thoroughly investigate the number, composition, characteristics and family status of left-behind children (China Network Television [CNTV], 2015). Moreover, the "Love Project" was initiated in 2015. This project mainly is to awaken love, gather love, pass on love, and thank for love. It aims to win the resources of the party and government departments, link social organizations, integrate social resources.

In order to meet the requirements of the internet era, the provincial party committee adopted the crowdfunding method to specially produce the H5 Tencent public welfare donation platform. Since the platform was put into trial operation, 2,500

people have participated in donations and realized crowd funding of 133,000 RMB. Various types of funds (including social donations) are 4.33 million RMB in total.

Relatively speaking, the number of migrant workers in *Shaanxi* province is less than those mentioned above, but some effective actions have been issued to aid these individuals. The Shaanxi Provincial Government (2016) recently issued the "Implementation Opinions on Strengthening the Care and Protection of Left-behind Children in Rural Areas", proposing to ensure that left-behind children in rural areas are not out of school due to poverty. The opinion requires that the left-behind children under the age of 16 may not live alone.

The opinions propose to comprehensively establish a system of care for the left-behind children in rural areas, which is responsible for the due diligence of the family, the government, and the school. In the aspect of putting "protective clothing" for rural left-behind children, the opinions have strengthened the responsibility of the family guardian, requiring migrant workers to live with their minor children as much as possible, or parents to stay home for care. The relatives or other adults shall be supervised on their behalf, and children under the age of 16 shall not be allowed to leave the guardianship to live alone.

In order to prevent rural left-behind children from being out of school due to poverty, education departments at all levels in *Shaanxi* Province must strictly implement free compulsory education and educational subsidy policies to ensure that left-behind children in rural areas are not out of school due to poverty. The management of rural left-behind children is included in the school year-end target assessment and the principal. The teacher's performance appraisal is linked with it.

In the case of *Yuyang* District located in the northern part of Shaanxi province, China, a full-coverage system for the financial support of the left-behind children has been established including yearly 1000 RMB subsidies, *Eggs and Milks Project*, and *Notorious Breakfast Project*. At schools, *Psychological Counselling Rooms* and *Whisper boxes*

are operated to alleviate the pressure on these children and enhance their resilience. Calling for performing *No Class Day* activities can develop the left-behind children's specialities and interests to a large extent (Yuyang District Government [YDG], 2017).

Strong top-down efforts (from central, provincial, and local governments to social organizations) can ensure that quality left-behind children education is actualized throughout China. However, in some cases, the aforementioned actions, ensuing conversations, and bureaucratic agencies are not completely performed because the contextualized realities of left-behind children communities are paid little attention to by multi-level leaders. Moreover, they do not deploy or function effectively when needed.

### Summary

According to the aforementioned, this literature review provides a broad historical context in which the Chinese left-behind children's group is situated. It also examines the existing literature highly relevant to the Chinese left-behind children group. Meanwhile, the official policies for the group are reviewed, offering a clear picture of the mainstream trend in the salvation of the left-behind children. Some potential gaps in the existing literature are unveiled. To be more exact, most of the aforementioned studies have either been based on quantitative studies or have failed to make embedded comparisons between Chinese left-behind children and other parallel groups of children. In addition, a majority of scholars have paid attention to the repercussions of the left-behind experience. However, they hardly consider an in-depth theoretical framework to guide their studies. Within the enormous Chinese literature in the field, the researchers seem to blur the lines between methodology and method as the literature does not justify the importance of the studies (e.g., Ban et al., 2013; Zhong, et al., 2012). Thus, it is inadequate to prove the justification of these studies. In addition, most literature employs a problem-focused approach. Few existing studies place an emphasis on a resilience paradigm orienting their field-based research, particularly in a Chinese context.

Further research in the field should be located in extending and deepening the existing studies of the field and exploring the lived experiences of left-behind children. This is based on typical methods of qualitative research and the application of resilience theory. The language and accounts of participants will be focused upon to further understand how the disadvantaged children group can positively develop, in spite of adversity.

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