

**YE JINGZHONG
JAMES MURRAY
WANG YIHUAN**

LEFT-BEHIND
CHILDREN
IN RURAL CHINA



CREATOR
BRAȘOV, 2021

CONTENTS

PART I LEFT-BEHIND CHILDREN IN MID-WEST CHINA....7

CHAPTER 1

Impact Study of Rural Labor Migration on Left-behind Children in Mid-west China.....	7
1.1 Research Background and Research Problem	7
1.2 The Present State of Research.....	9
1.3 Research Design	24
1.4 Field Survey Details.....	36
1.5 Research Findings.....	37
1.6 Conclusions.....	113
1.7 Recommendations	122
1.8 Innovation and Limitation of the Research.....	126

PART II LEFT-BEHIND CHILDREN IN THE RESEARCH COMMUNITIES 129

CHAPTER 2

Survey on the Left-behind Children in Dasha Village, Liushu Township, Xixiang County, Shaanxi Province	129
2.1 Overview of Xixiang County	121
2.2 The Profile of Dasha Village	130
2.3 The Basic Information about the Production Team Three in Dasha Village	133
2.4 The Status of Left-behind Children in Dasha Village	136
2.5 Conclusions	154

ANNEX

Annex 1: Cases from left-behind children	157
Annex 2: Cases of guardians of left-behind children.....	163

CHAPTER 3

Survey on the Left-behind Children in Xinglin Village, Chunlin Township, Pucheng County, Shaanxi Province.....	169
3.1 Overview of Pucheng County	169
3.2 The Profile of Xinglin Village.....	170
3.3 The Status of Left-behind Children in Xinglin Village	173
3.4 Conclusions	195

ANNEX

Annex 1: Case studies of left-behind children	198
Annex 2: The case study of guardians of left-behind children.....	203
Annex 3: Interview records with teacher	207

CHAPTER 4

Survey on the Left-behind Children in Cuijiapan Village, Jialu Township, Jiaxian County, Shaanxi Province.....	211
4.1 Overview of Jiaxian County.....	211
4.2 The Profile of Cuijiapan Village.....	212
4.3 The status of left-behind children in Cuijiapan Village.....	219
4.4 Conclusions	240

ANNEX

Annex 1: Cases of left-behind children	243
Annex 2: Cases of guardians of left-behind children.....	247
Annex 3: Group interview with guardians of left-behind children.....	252
Annex 4: Letters from left-behind children to their parents migrating to work outside	255
Annex 5: Interview with teachers in charge.....	257
BIBLIOGRAPHY	259

PART I

LEFT-BEHIND CHILDREN IN MID-WEST CHINA

CHAPTER 1

IMPACT STUDY OF RURAL LABOR MIGRATION ON LEFT-BEHIND CHILDREN IN MID-WEST CHINA

1.1 RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH PROBLEM

Since the beginning of the 1980's, the pace of modernization in China has led to increased migration to urban areas. This movement of rural people for wage labor can be seen on the one hand as a rational choice for poor farmers, but on the other, as a consequence of industrialization and urbanization. The purpose of migration for farmers lies in their pursuit of cash income, getting to know the outside world, and most importantly to earn money for their children's education, with the expectation that they will make a better life for themselves than their parents were able to do.

In many western countries migrants are able to buy housing in the new locality and claim the same rights as the local population. They are protected by the law, receive welfare benefits from local government, have the same opportunities for employment and education and in principle enjoy the same rights as local people. However, things work differently in China.

Due to financial constraints and the existing 'dual system' of rural-urban relationships, farmers face educational and other difficulties when they migrate. These can be in housing, educational fees for transferring their children to new schools, transportation and so on. For these reasons, many farmers leave their children behind when they migrate for work and have to entrust their care to others. Thus, a new and weak group, referred to in this document as 'left-behind children', has emerged in rural areas of China.

According to official statistics, there are about 150 million farmers presently working in urban areas in China. The figure is increasing by five million each year. The fifth Population Census indicates that the number of left-behind children reaches to 20 million and this tendency is still on the increase. Research conducted by Dr. Wu Ni and colleagues (2004) from the China Central Institute for Education in five counties of Gansu, Hebei and Jiangsu Provinces, indicates that 31.5% of the sample children from primary and middle schools had either mother or father away working and 16.2% had both parents away. These figures account for 47.7% of the children sampled (Educational Development Research Department website, 2004), in other words, about half of the children in school were left-behind children. A survey in Caowuzhen Primary School in Jingshan County of Hubei Province showed that of more than 1,000 students, almost 50% had parents who worked on a temporary basis in urban areas (Rural China Website, April 13, 2004). The above figures show the large number of left-behind children in rural China.

Some of these children are cared for by one of the parents (usually mother), and some by grandparents, relatives or neighbors who thus miss the care and education of their parents. Research indicates that they are physically and psychologically affected by their parents' migration and in some cases their rights are abused. In the last year attention has been drawn to the fact that some get involved in criminal activity. With the pace of urbanization the numbers of left behind children are growing. This is therefore not a temporary but a long term controversial issue. The 'three-agrarian' issues - agriculture, rural areas and farm ers-have attracted much attention and have been a bottle neck to development in China. Education of the next generation of rural farmers therefore becomes crucial to tackling the 'three-agrarian' issues.

Migrating to urban areas for wage labor work has increased farmers' incomes and accelerated the economic development of urban areas, but it has also generated a fluctuating living and educational environment for rural children. What the impacts and implications are of migration on left-behind children has thus not only become crucial to the growth of children, but also important for the sustainable development of rural education and holistic society. However, although there exists rich reporting from the media on left-behind children and some academic studies that have touched upon the numbers involved and the types of guardians and impacts on children's education, psychology and behavior, there is a lack of systematic in-depth research on left-behind children. Some of the existing studies used mainly questionnaire survey methods in the rural schools and lacked any rural community-based in-depth analysis.

In September 2004, with the support of Plan China, the College of Humanities and Development of China Agricultural University formed a research team to study the 'Impact of Rural Labor Migration on Left-behind Children in Mid-West China'. The team carried out research in ten villages of Shaanxi, Ningxia, Hebei and Beijing. The research explores the changes that occurred in the children's lives, study and thinking after their parents migrated for work and the impacts this had on their physical and psychological development. The research, we hope, will make an important contribution to understanding left-behind children and will draw the attention of government organizations and academic institutes to resolving the problems they face in obtaining the same care as other children in their communities.

1.2 THE PRESENT STATE OF RESEARCH

There is little systematic empirical research on the impact of migration on the children of migrants, either for China or internationally. We limit our discussion here to existing domestic media, institutional, and research coverage of the issue.

1.2.1 OVERVIEW OF DOMESTIC MEDIA COVERAGE ON LEFT-BEHIND CHILDREN

Although the issue has existed for several years, it was not until a serious incident hit the media headlines in Sichuan Province in early 2004, that it was seen as a new social issue in the context of social transition. The incident involved a left behind child and was attributed to a lack of adult care. It aroused concern in general over such children and experts in various fields, including sociology and pedagogy, started to cast their eyes on the issue.

The following is an overview of the domestic media coverage.

1.2.1.1 Problems met by left-behind children

The issue has frequently been covered by the mass media, including TV (CCTV and local TV stations), newspapers (China Youth Daily, China Education Daily, Legal Daily, Yangzhou Evening News; Ningbo Evening News) and websites (Xinhua Net and Education Net). Such coverage reflects society's growing concern over the problems involved.

1.2.1.1.1 Chutian Metropolis Daily (2001-11): A thirteen-year-old girl was found hanged in the dormitory of Yuyan Middle School in Qingquan Township, Xishui County, Hubei Province. Her mother and elder sister were permanent migrants and she lived with her father. Because of the long-term lack of maternal love, she became asocial, introverted, reticent and unhappy. She panicked over the changes occurring at adolescence and without correct guidance various unhealthy emotions developed that resulted in her suicide.

1.2.1.1.2 Xinhua Net (2005-02-01): In February 2004, a couple from Duchang County, Jiangxi Province working in Dongguan City, Guangdong Province put their child Jiang Menglan in the care of the wife's younger sister. On February 19, the child, studying in Wanhui Middle School, fell from a two meter high bed while playing games in the dormitory. Due to the lack of medical care, the internal brain injury was not detected in time, resulting in the death of the child. The couple grieved over the death and continuously repeated: 'We wish we had been at home and nothing would have happened.'

1.2.1.1.3 China Youth Daily (2004-5-26): In March 2004, a thirteen-year-old young girl in Junior Middle School in a township of Fushun County, Sichuan Province, gave birth to a child without anyone knowing. The under-age girl became a mother unexpectedly.

1.2.1.1.4 China Youth Daily (2004-11): In June 2004, a girl in Grade Four of primary school in Huangmei County, Hubei Province, whose parents were temporarily working in other provinces, was hanged by her hot-tempered grandmother for talking back.

1.2.1.1.5 Xinhua Net (2005-02-01): On December 6, 2004, a rural woman killed her niece and an innocent young pupil by putting toxic poison on lollipops, only because she was reluctant to look after the girl left in her care by her migrant parents. The incident raised strong public repercussion in the local area and reflected the hidden worry over the living conditions of some rural left-behind children.

1.2.1.1.6 Xinhua Net (2004-08-09): A teacher in a village primary school of Sichuan Province expressed his concerns about left-behind children. He thought that because most of them were raised by grandparents and lacked parental love, they became relatively introverted. The children in junior grades were mostly naughty and became eccentric when entering senior grades and liked neither talking nor studying.

1.2.1.1.7 Sichuan Daily (2004-12-07): A local survey on left-behind children in Meishan City, Sichuan Province, found that children who lived away from their parents were inclined to be coddled and unchecked. The grandparent generation or temporary guardians tended to neglect the children's physical and mental health and education of character, leading to an absence of moral or ethical education. Children whose fathers worked outside were shy and not as confident or diligent as other children. Those whose mothers worked outside were not as virtuous or loving and lacked good habits of life and study. Some children in their adolescence slept with the parent staying at home, and others took up unhealthy habits, for example, fighting, stealing, or even taking drugs.

Besides these cases, there are others too numerous to count from many Provinces and Autonomous Regions. All the left-behind children concerned

suffered serious psychological, physiological and security problems or even lost their lives because their parents were working away and their guardians could not take care of them. Although such reported incidents are extreme cases, they attract attention to the welfare of left-behind children. Currently, the government and other relevant institutions have started to adopt measures to reduce or eliminate the potential risks to such children.

1.2.1.2 Counter measures adopted by relevant institutions and departments

Since the promulgation of ‘Several Comments on Further Strengthening and Reforming the Ethical Development of Juveniles by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council’ on February 26, 2004, some cities have made and applied various relevant policies and measures, and competent education departments in some provinces have been proactive in addressing the problems of left-behind children. For example, in Rugao Region of Jiangsu Province, a Caring for Left-behind Children Committee has been established with reference to the transfer of parental guardian rights. Parents and teachers sign a contract that helps to understand children’s needs and to establish a system of social guardianship. In Funan County of Anhui Province, the Army-and-Police Joint Defense System, implemented in its rural areas gives much attention to the safety of left-behind children. (Modern Education Daily, 2004-07-05)

1.2.1.2.1 UN officials have commented that ‘Chinese rural left-behind children are in urgent need of care and love’ and ‘People have begun to pay attention to children living with their migrant parents, but have neglected those left at home with more hidden troubles in the process of growing-up, and who are vulnerable to harm’. ‘[A] Survey shows that most of the children kidnapped and sold are migrant or left-behind children.’ Mr. Yang Jin, Deputy Director General, Department of Elementary Education of the Ministry of Education holds that the development of tens of millions of left-behind children calls for special attention. ... Therefore, a system of files and contact cards for left-behind children has been established in some provinces and cities, and measures such as training for guardians and a long-term mechanism for safeguarding the benefits of left-behind children

has been effectively established and will be further extended to the whole country. (Xinhua Net, 2004-11-05)

1.2.1.2.2 On January 31, 2005, the Deputy Secretary of The Communist Youth League, Sichuan Province, sent New Year gifts to the left-behind children in Longwei Village. On the same day, a 'Hand by Hand, Sending Warmth' campaign was conducted by the Young Pioneers of Chengdu City, Sichuan Province in the Sunlight Primary School of Longwei Village, Longwei Township, Jintang County. The campaign helped every left-behind child in the village to find a 'hand by hand' peer partner with whom they can study and play. (Northeast-News Net, 2005-02-01)

1.2.1.2.3 An Acting Parents System was implemented in Baisha Township, Xinning County, Hunan Province whereby teachers and left behind children became partners. The teacher would act as the parent responsible for all aspects of the child's daily life and study. This compensated for the absence of family functions and created a harmonious space for healthy growth. (Guangming Daily, 2004-06-22)

1.2.1.2.4 On December 7, 2004, the Cultural and Ideological Progress Steering Committee of Huai'an City, Jiangsu Province, issued the 'Notion on Initiating Ten Activities on Caring for Rural and Urban Left-behind Children'. It emphasized the importance of motivating the whole of society to care for left-behind children, helping the juvenile to grow up in a healthy manner in their thinking, study, life and psychology, and accordingly worked out 'Ten Activities'. (Website of Huai'an City Government, 2004-12-07)

1.2.2 OVERVIEW OF DOMESTIC RESEARCH ON LEFT-BEHIND CHILDREN

1.2.2.1 Background on the emergence of left-behind children

For a long time the dual social structure of 'urban' and 'rural' areas has been the biggest barrier to 'Issues concerning Agriculture, Countryside and Farmers'. It has also impacted on the education of the children of migrants and on their parents' decision to leave them behind. Although countless

rural migrant workers have made great contributions to the development of cities, they do not enjoy the same rights and treatment as urban citizens. Dr. Wu Ni (2004), of the China Central Institute for Education, maintains that this dual social structure makes it virtually impossible for farmer workers to take their children with them. They cannot afford the better schools of the city and children who have studied in the disadvantaged rural schools are unable to compete for places in the city high schools. This has formed the background to the emergence of left-behind children. The cause of their staying behind is also due to the necessity for parents to seek work or business outside in order to increase their income because of the heavy economic pressures on the family regarding education, health, rural taxation, etc. (Wang Yanbo, Wu Xinlin, 2003).

1.2.2.2 Impact of labor migration on the daily life of left-behind children

There are usually three categories of guardianship for left-behind children (Li Qingfeng, 2002): the grandparent generation - usually meaning the grandparents themselves. Most families take this approach and it has led to many abuses in children's development. The guardians usually spoil the children and pay attention only to their physical requirements, neglecting the control and guidance of their mental and moral education, resulting in indulgent and willful behavior. The second category is the parent generation. It means that the parent's peers (relatives or friends) take care of the children. Again they concentrate only on the physical aspects of care and seldom pay attention to the cultivation of behavior and to psychological and ethical requirements. The third category is self-guardianship, that is to say, the children are left to take care of themselves. The parents in such circumstances will try their best to meet the children's needs with money, which can easily lead to extravagance and a lack of self discipline.

Generally speaking, there are a large number of left-behind children who in a sense become orphans or single-parent children (China Social Survey Institute, 2004). According to the survey results of the China National Institute for Educational Research, about 56.4% of left-behind children live with either mother or father at home, 32.2% are being raised by

grandparents, 4.1% live with other relatives, and 0.9% live in the homes of others.

When the Chongqing Committee (of the Revolutionary Committee of Kuomintang Sponsors) helped poor students of Fenshui Central Primary School of Fenshui Township, Wangzhou District, it found that of the 1,525 students of the school, 668 (44%) were left-behind students whose parents had migrated to work for a long period. 375 of these were being cared for by the grandparent generation, and 293 were looked after by other relatives. The problems of these left-behind children were the lack of family love, worrisome psychological health, mediocre study performance, poor self control capacity, lack of communication with grandparents, superficial guardian responsibilities. (China Youth Daily, 2005-01-20)

1.2.2.3 Impact of labor migration on the education of left-behind children

The Asia Expo Agriculture Weekly of 2004-11-09 wrote that, due to their unfair social treatment, their status as labor migrants was changing the nature of their children's education. Their children were no longer educated or required to be honest or diligent, but to adapt to a secular society that taught them that honesty was not 'the best policy' but caused losses. The left-behind children were losing the nature of diligence and simplicity. Their objective was no longer to make a living through hard work but to make money through migrant wage labor. Few of them set their mind on staying in the rural area. In the longer term the existence of all this will make rural development more complicated and unsustainable.

Li Qingfeng (2002) argues that when parents migrate for work, the frequency of communication and contact between parents and children is reduced. This greatly weakens the influence of the primary family unit on the children and results in insufficient socialization during the period of compulsory education. In addition the parents are unable to take their children out to broaden their horizons during their free time, which again impacts on their development.

In addition, the diverse values and concepts regarding education held by migrant workers will influence academic achievement. Parents who believe

that education makes no difference have a subtle influence on a student's desire to study and may lead to a belief that 'study is useless,. If a parent has high educational expectations then this may become an important factor in promoting educational progress. The nature of the migrant's occupation may also play a guiding function and have positive and/or negative impacts.

Opinions differ as to whether parental migration impacts on the education of left-behind children. There are mainly two viewpoints: the first suggest that it has no outstanding impact on their study behavior and performance. The other is that it has significant negative impacts on their study performance.

The Education College of Beijing Normal University made a study of 'The Status Quo of the Education of Rural Left-behind Children of Migrant Wage Workers' in 2001. The results indicated that there was not much difference on the study behavior between left behind students and the rest, and the students' study performance had no obvious connection with whether they were left-behind or not. In addition, the left-behind students had higher self-confidence and study efficiency than the non-left-behind. The left-behind students' intention of study varied, some liked to study, some studied hard in order to reduce the parent's burden, some wanted to leave the countryside, some studied for emotional needs. The parent's supervision of their left-behind children fell into three categories: maintaining, enhancing or weakening. In addition, parent's labor migration helped to improve the environment and conditions of the children's study, but reduced the time for study.

Dr. Wu Ni and others (2004) from China Central Institute for Education Studies also conclude that there is no great difference on interest to study between left-behind and non-left-behind children, most of whom showed the same interest in studying, but there was a great difference on how they viewed their performance. The left-behind children's estimation of study performance was much higher. Most had a positive view of their performance with only a small number considered their performance as poor.

A sample survey jointly made by Zhou Qiaochun and Wu Huanqing, correspondents of Xinhua News Agency and the Education Department of Renshou County, Sichuan Province, showed that 48% of left-behind children had a poor study performance (with failed subjects each semester),

40% of them had under average performance (China-rural-study Net, 2004-11-17). The study performance of left-behind children polarized in an uneven manner and the ratio of good study performance was relatively low. Due to the lack of supervision and encouragement, most of these children had inadequate motivation to study and lacked a sense of achievement, since their study performance was mediocre. Only a few, with good self-control, were able to work hard and achieve well (Wang Yanbo, Wu Xinlin, 2003). Among the left-behind primary school students, a large number went from being 'good students' to being 'average' and then to 'bad students' after their parents migrated for work and the number was increasing. Among left-behind middle school students, 90% were boarders, and the ratio of change from 'good' to 'bad' was 10% (By Tan Shaohuai, 2004).

Because of insufficient supervision from temporary guardians, the performance of left-behind students lagged behind. Quite a lot of them had unclear study objectives and bad study habits. Their homework was not finished on time and there was the occasional occurrence of truancy or dropping out (Li Xiuying, 2004).

Wu Ni (et al, 2004) argues that inadequate intervention from guardians would lead to left-behind children having problems of study. On the one hand the low educational level of grandparents meant they were unable to help such children with their studies, and where one parent stayed at home, he or she had to undertake all household and field tasks alone, leaving little time to pay attention to the children's studies.

According to the survey on rural left-behind children made by the Huainan Normal College, most of the left-behind children had poor awareness of the value of study and considered migrating for work after graduating from the middle school as a life goal and were reluctant to pursue further study. The educational status of left-behind children was therefore worrisome. The absence of guardian rights was a direct cause of the poor study performance of left-behind children (By Cong Feng, Xiao Chunfei, 2004).