

The Governance of "Foreign" Left-Behind Children Issue in China: on the Cases in Guangdong

Feng Wen^{1, a}, Yahong Luo^{2, b}

¹School of International Studies, Academy of Overseas Chinese Studies, Jinan University, Guangzhou, 510632, China;

²Corresponding author, Library, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou, 510006, China.

^a36535450@qq.com, ^b271134979@qq.com

Abstract

Since the late 1990s, with the development of transnational migration and the continuous expansion of China's reform and opening up, "foreign" left-behind children began to appear in large numbers in overseas Chinese villages. Based on the theories of transnational migration, this paper holds that the problem of "foreign" left-behind children not only has the general characteristics of the problem of domestic left-behind children, but also is more complicated and diversified in terms of policy system, kinship care, rights and interests protection and other causes. The government, the family and society should work together to strengthen governance in terms of problem awareness, policy adjustment, education improvement, social participation and international cooperation.

Keywords

Hometown of overseas Chinese; Foreign left behind children; Causes; Countermeasures.

1. Introduction

The acceleration of globalization has greatly facilitated the transnational movement of goods, capital and people. Cleon Tsimbos pointed out that in the last quarter of the 20th century, immigrants brought the world to the "age of migration" because of their unprecedented size and complexity[1].

At the same time, with the expansion of reform and opening up and the acceleration of internationalization process, the number of Chinese immigrants to foreign countries has been increasing year by year, and the phenomenon of diversification. Globalisation is no longer the preserve of the elite, and an increasing number of ordinary workers are trying to change their lot through international migration. New groups of immigrants keep emerging. According to statistics from the overseas Chinese affairs department of the state council in 2014, the total number of new immigrants who have moved overseas since the reform and opening up has reached nearly 10 million. However, it is worth noting that due to the unbalanced development of China's urban and rural economy, overseas development opportunities, traditional migration chains of overseas Chinese villages, survival and employment modes of immigrants and other factors, the emergence of new immigrants also leads to a large number of transnational families and "foreign" left-behind children.

Transnational family is a common phenomenon in the hometown of overseas Chinese. The large number of "foreign" left-behind children is a manifestation of transnational families and a unique group emerging in the process of China's social development in the new era. They generally refer to the left-behind children with foreign nationality in the hometown of overseas

Chinese, most of whom are raised by grandparents or other relatives in the family. Western media are also known as "Satellite Children".

At present, there are left-behind children in many provinces of China, especially in some key overseas Chinese villages of Fujian, Guangdong and Zhejiang. For example, Jiangyin town in Fujian has over 7,000 people, Qingtian county in Zhejiang has over 6,000 people and Enping county in Guangdong has over 3,000 people. Most of their parents are low-skilled immigrants with relatively hard jobs abroad and little time to care for the next generation. On the other hand, due to China's rapid development and increasing international influence in recent years, many parents also want their children to go back to China to study and develop, thus forming a generation of transnational "foreign" left-behind phenomenon.

In fact, the problem of "left-behind children" is not just a Chinese characteristic. There is also a large presence in some countries with large migrant exports, such as India, Mexico, Romania, Sri Lanka and the Philippines. Melanie M. Reyes (2008) discussed left-behind children in the Philippines from a cultural perspective. In addition, due to domestic immigration, the number of left-behind children in China is as high as 60 million, which has also attracted the attention of some foreign scholars on China. Swiss scholar Annika Pissin (2013) once analyzed the education and emotional problems of left-behind children in China from the perspective of capitalism through a large number of surveys, calling on the international community to pay close attention to the phenomenon of left-behind children. Sylvie Demurger (2013) has used empirical research to analyze the relationship between left-behind children in China and immigrants' decision to return home.

Chinese domestic related writings mainly focus on the following aspects. One is the discussion on the causes of the problem of left-behind children in foreign countries. For example, Li Minghuan (2005) made an in-depth investigation on Xin'an, Shaxi and Songping, three representative communities in Fujian province from the perspectives of economics, sociology and anthropology, and discussed the formation of new immigrants and left-behind children. Second, the characteristics of "foreign" left-behind children, especially mental health and education. (Liu Yanfei, 2010; Du Rihui, 2008; Sunmoonstar 2008; Li Xuefei, 2012; Chen Yi, 2009; Chen Haina, 2010) et al. discussed the mental health and education problems of left-behind children respectively by taking Zhejiang Qingtian, Fujian Fuzhou and other overseas Chinese villages as examples, which believed that due to the special factors such as family environment, learning needs and development mode, the left-behind children in the hometown of overseas Chinese are relatively more incomplete in family education, prone to personality development obstacles, and prone to deviation in their cognition of learning. In addition, there are interdisciplinary achievements in literature and science. From the perspective of digital convergence, based on the use and satisfaction theory of communication, this paper conducts an empirical study on the media use phenomenon in the formal and informal learning of left-behind children in overseas Chinese villages in the new era. (Wang Youmei, 2013). Third, the solution to the problem of left-behind children in foreign countries. Based on their respective investigations, He Yi (2008), Xu Su (2011), Chen Aihai (2013), Qiao Zhihua (2015), Xia Ling (2017) discussed the current situation of left-behind children in foreign countries and the protection of their rights and interests, and put forward a series of improvement measures and opinions from the perspectives of government, society, family and law.

2. Research Design and Sample Characteristics

2.1. Research Design

Guangzhou and Jiangmen are the key overseas Chinese capitals in China's coastal provinces, and Huadu district and Enping county are the key overseas Chinese townships in these two cities. Since the 1990s, new immigrants from the two places have increased rapidly, and the

problem of "foreign" left-behind children is relatively prominent. Among them, huadu district is a key hometown for overseas Chinese in guangzhou, with about 400,000 overseas Chinese and Hong Kong and Macao compatriots, distributed in 56 countries and regions. According to the statistics of overseas Chinese affairs department in huadu district in 2014, the total number of overseas Chinese and children from Hong Kong and Taiwan studying in various schools exceeded 1000. Enping is a famous hometown of overseas Chinese in China, with more than 500,000 overseas Chinese distributed in more than 50 countries and regions, among which venezuela has more than 180,000. In recent years, due to the poor economy and public security in venezuela, and disapprove its' education mode, many overseas Chinese prefer to send their children back to China to raise and study. According to statistics of Enping bureau of foreign affairs and overseas Chinese affairs in 2014, there are more than 3,000 foreign children studying in Enping, and the number is increasing year by year.

The research is designed to incorporate the relevant theory of sociology, psychology and political science, the field survey mainly includes: family situation, study, life status, psychological status and growth situation of "foreign" left-behind children; Problems in the governance of "foreign" left-behind children in family, school and government; Expected policies and support. In terms of research methods, firstly, the survey made full use of the Internet platform and adopted the methods of conception sampling, quota sampling and introduction sampling in the non-probability sampling[2]. The second methods is semi-structured Interviews. Considering the specific characteristics of the issue of "foreign" left-behind children, extensive interviews were conducted on relevant issues for flexible communication, so as to share more opinions and feelings.

The survey also received strong support from guangdong overseas Chinese affairs office, huadu overseas Chinese affairs office and enping overseas Chinese affairs office. The researchers visited the two places several times in the summer holidays of 2015, 2016 and 2017. A total of 204 questionnaires were sent out and 164 valid questionnaires were returned. More than 40 guardians and teachers were interviewed. The survey sites include enping shahu town community, juntang town xintang primary school, liangxi central primary school, enping dongcheng town hengcha primary school, enping liangxi town cenweixiu primary school, huadu district xinzhuang primary school and other places. The interviewees include "foreign" left-behind children, guardians, principals, teachers and overseas Chinese affairs staff. After that, there were many supplementary surveys and consultations.

2.2. Data Characteristics

The statistics show that the age of "foreign" left-behind children is generally low, with more than 80% under the age of 12, including 57 under 6, 78 between 6 and 12, and 29 over 12. They are not mature either physically or mentally and need special attention from parents or teachers. Most of them over the age of 12 have been sent back to their parents abroad. And in some less-than-ideal families, they may help earn money to support the family.

In terms of guardian status, about 85 percent of "foreign" left-behind children are taken care of by their grandparents at home. Although they are in good health, most of them think that it is still difficult to take care of these lively children, and they are not well educated enough to help them with their study. About 8 percent are in the care of uncles, aunts and uncles, and about 7 percent are others. The age of these old people is basically similar to the previous survey conducted by guangdong women's federation. Most of them are between 55 and 72 years old, accounting for 66.4% of the whole age group. Due to their own reasons, they do not care enough about their children's study[3].

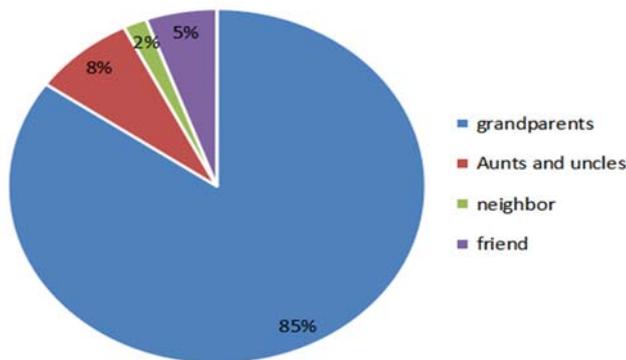


Figure 1. Status of acting guardian of "foreign" left-behind children

In terms of the learning of "foreign" left-behind children, the interview data collected from the teachers show that their performance is basically normal, generally average or above average, and there is no special case of a large number of poor students as reported in some reports. This shows that the status of "foreign" left-behind children does not have much impact on their learning. The survey also found that the performance of "foreign" left-behind children in different towns is different from that of other ordinary children, and some behave worse, lazy, even don't hand in homework.

As for the daily performance of left-behind children, their guardians say that about 10% of them are naughty and not very obedient. On the one hand, it may be related to the long-term absence of parents and lack of affection and love. On the other hand, it may have something to do with the way that most old people spoil their children and do everything to them. However, most of them behaved well at home and were sensible, with 55% obedient and 34% generally obedient. In terms of personality, some "foreign" left-behind children from wealthier families are generally more confident, while some children from poorer families are more introverted and shy, which indicates that "foreign" left-behind children are just like ordinary children, the family's economic situation will have a certain impact on their psychology.

In terms of the contact ways between "foreign" left-behind children and their parents, in the past, the most commonly used tool for left-behind children to contact their parents was the telephone, usually 1-2 times a week. In recent years, with the popularity of WeChat in the Chinese community, video phone network is popular because it is free, and parents can see their children with their own eyes and hear their children's voices, but sometimes it is also limited by their elderly guardians' lack of familiarity with network equipment or poor reception. For the children with superior family environment, their parents can go back to China to visit them once or twice a year. And letters largely became disappeared.

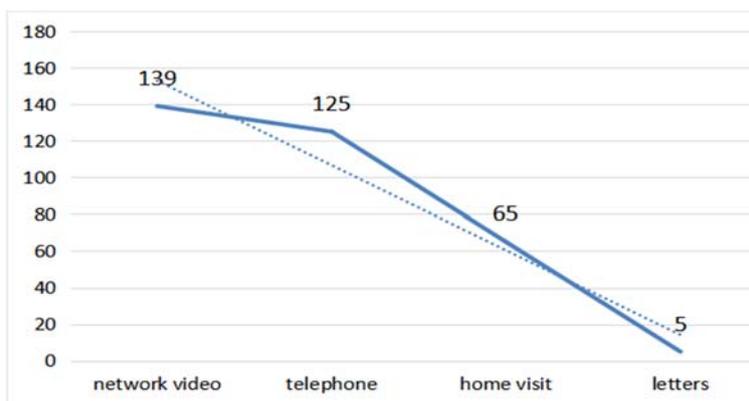


Figure 2. The contacting ways of "foreign" left-behind children and their parents

3. Characteristics of the Problem of "Foreign" Left-Behind Children

3.1. The Long-Term Absence of the Subject of Family Education

Most of the parents of "foreign" left-behind children are far away from home, which is inconvenient and costly. Some of them have not visited them for years, leading to the "long-term" lack of educational subjects and the "vacuum" state of ideological and emotional cultivation. Therefore, for "foreign" left-behind children who are in a critical period of physiological and psychological changes and the formation of ideological and moral concepts, they are more likely to suffer from anxiety, loneliness, helplessness, boredom, depression, fear and other adverse emotions, and induce all kinds of bad behaviors and psychological disorders[4]. Limited by space distance, many "foreign" left-behind children have a vague concept of their parents, and some even think that their parents are only adults who give gifts during the Spring Festival. In addition, because most of the acting guardians are older and of low cultural level, their communication with teachers is also very poor. Only 12 percent of the acting guardians were in regular contact with teachers, 70.5 percent "occasionally" and 17.5 percent "never".

3.2. The Way of Education Is Unscientific

First, family education is incomplete. Due to the absence of parents' education, there are many disadvantages in the education method of grand-grandson's intergenerational education. Many grandparents said they were worried about their grandchildren and sometimes didn't know how to handle them. Some parents feel emotionally and educationally indebted to their children and use money to compensate for emotional and psychological deficits. After a child makes a mistake, if the educational punishment is not in place, the child often cannot fully realize his mistake. Some "foreign" left-behind children are over-indulged by their grandparents, leading to the paranoid disposition and the formation of many bad habits. Second, there is no "special" in school education. Most schools do not have any special care arrangements for "foreign" left-behind children in the classroom, allowing them to develop naturally, resulting in the long-term "marginalization" of some children due to the environment, performance and other reasons. Again, social education is not complementary. In many empirical studies on "foreign" left-behind children in educational psychology, many scholars have noticed their lack of ability in social development. All the families interviewed said that their children were not given special care by the society and few social groups paid attention to them.

3.3. Insufficient Policy Care

First, weak management. The overseas Chinese affairs department admitted that there are a large number of "foreign" left-behind children, with frequent enrollment, transfer and drop-out, and complicated procedures. However, the department itself is short of manpower, unable to effectively carry out the work. Second, insufficient policy support. The policies concerning "foreign" left-behind children in education, medical care, insurance, immigration and other aspects are inadequate. In education, there are problems of paying sponsorship fee and insufficient degree. Medical treatment, they can not apply for new rural medical insurance, the doctor is self-funded, serious illness back to foreign countries. When it comes to immigration policy, local governments are sometimes even more reluctant. Third, the policy effect is not good. The survey found that about 74 percent of families have reservations about the government's solution to the problem of "foreign" left-behind children, saying they do not feel any care from the government. In some places, "foreign" left-behind children have also become "uncaring" children who are "unmanageable by society, unmanageable by schools and unmanageable by parents".

3.4. Confusion About Identity and Cultural Differences

"Foreign" left-behind children are physically the same as domestic left-behind children, but the legal provisions that China does not recognize dual nationality result in their "foreign" identity. Therefore, they are faced with the restriction of household registration in terms of enrollment, employment and marriage in China. In addition, some "foreign" left-behind children return to China only when they are several years old. The cultural education they receive in foreign countries is completely different, and there are some cultural differences. However, after staying in China for a few years, they may return to the country of nationality, so there is a cultural "secondary adaptation" problem. The alternation of this new environment will also affect children's physical and mental development to some extent.

4. Diversity and Complexity: the Structural Cause of "Foreign" Left-Behind Children Problem

Those two overseas Chinese hometown have a long history of emigration, and all kinds of intricate social relations create social capital and realistic foundation for new immigrants to go out. One more, the survey also found that the new immigrants have another important motive, which is to avoid the domestic family planning policy at that time. Especially in huadu, hakka people prefer sons to daughters. Many new immigrants emigrate at all costs to have more children and boys. Meanwhile, the local government believes that immigration can not only generate foreign exchange, support the development of the hometown, but also solve the problem of employment, so basically support foreign immigration. However, the development of transnational migration in the era of globalization is a macro background for the emergence of "foreign" left-behind children, which is not a sufficient condition. The emergence of "foreign" left-behind children and their "problem" also have complicated reasons at family, government, society and other levels.

At the family level, the new immigrants have gone beyond the passive state of the older generation of overseas Chinese in their pursuit of survival, mostly in pursuit of better development space. Many new immigrants have to pay a huge "intermediary fee" in order to go abroad. However, due to the limitations of their own quality conditions, their overseas development process is very difficult, and they basically develop in the form of "family work", so that they have no time to care about the growth of family and offspring. However, the lack of family affection and the aging grandparents can hardly guarantee the physical and mental health of children. As a result, the "foreign" left-behind children who live without parents since childhood can be compared to "double-loss orphans", and are likely to have personality defects, which will affect their future life development.

At the government level, the development of globalization and transnational migration has seriously impacted the interests of sovereign states, but the government policies are often difficult to adapt to the development needs of this trend. The parents of "foreign" left-behind children emigrate to seek better development space, but some domestic policies and laws may prevent them from realizing this dream. "Foreign" left-behind children fail to have preferential policies and support in medical care, insurance, education, exit and entry visas, etc., which will inevitably bring certain economic pressure and may make these families return to poverty. In addition, some government departments do not pay enough attention to the work, lack of consciousness, and rarely stand in the height of national strategy to solve problems with heart. It is unacceptable to the older generation, who see their children and grandchildren as "Chinese".

At the social level, the large number of "foreign" left-behind children is a microcosm of regional economic development, reflecting the lack of good economic opportunities and livelihood environment. Perhaps "foreign" left-behind children have long been a common phenomenon in

the hometown of overseas Chinese, but they have not attracted much attention from the society. Many families were surprised by our survey and said they had never been interviewed. "Foreign" left-behind children cannot get the same social growth environment as normal children in both family and society. But because of the lack of family education and parental supervision, they are more likely to catch the bad habits of society, leading to adverse consequences.

5. Reflections on the Governance of "Foreign" Left-Behind Children

Governance is the sum of the many ways in which individuals and institutions, public or private, manage the same things[5]. It is a process of interaction between the top and the bottom. The government, non-governmental organizations and various private institutions mainly deal with public affairs through cooperation, consultation and partnership, and through common goals. As a complicated problem involving many aspects at home and abroad, the phenomenon of left-behind children also needs the public and private forces of the government and all sectors of society to participate in governance from multiple subjects, perspectives and levels.

First of all, the government should pay attention to the "foreign" problem, strengthen the "foreign" left-behind children special study, and constantly adjust and improve the relevant policies. In view of the urgent practical problems faced by "foreign" left-behind children in education, medical care, insurance, immigration and other aspects, overseas Chinese affairs, immigrants and other relevant departments should integrate academic and government power at the grass-roots level, conduct extensive and in-depth research, and timely combine the actual situation, revise relevant policies and regulations, to protect the legitimate interests of "foreign" left-behind children. It is gratifying to note that some progress has been made, but there is still a gap in actual results. For example, in 2005, Guangzhou stipulated that "overseas Chinese children who come back to study in our city's compulsory education schools are policy-based care students who enjoy the same treatment as the school-age children of the city's household registration", and foreign Chinese children were included in the scope of reference and implementation[6]. In 2010, the Guangzhou municipal government replied in a document that the identification procedures for the children of overseas Chinese in Panama to study in Huanan have been simplified, and only with a valid passport can be regarded as a valid identity, without having to go to Chinese embassies and consulates abroad to notarize their identity[7]. And the Chengde bureau of foreign affairs and overseas Chinese affairs in Jiangmen also set up the "Chengde service center for foreign affairs and overseas Chinese affairs" to assist overseas Chinese children to apply for visa extension.

Secondly, according to the characteristics of "foreign" left-behind children, carry out targeted and characteristic education. "Foreign" left-behind children lack parental care and cannot make up for it in family education. Therefore, school is the most important place to influence their healthy growth. 1. The government should attach importance to the construction of basic education with characteristics of overseas Chinese villages, build a media platform for "foreign" left-behind children, improve media literacy, and bridge the gap between "transnational foster care", cross-generational education, integration into local culture and connection of cultural differences[8]. 2. Schools should pay attention to "foreign" left-behind children without any disagreement, take proper care of them, pay more attention to their study and psychological problems, and offer relevant psychological education and cultural refresher courses to help them adapt to the new environment as soon as possible. 3. Home-school system should be established for regular communication with parents of left-behind children. To establish a "foreign" left-behind children campus support network with teachers as the core and class cadres as the main body, etc., to create a good cultural atmosphere in the campus, so that "foreign" left-behind children in school could get more care and reduce psychological pressure. 4. The government and schools should organize more extracurricular activities and

social investigation activities to encourage "foreign" left-behind children to go out of the classroom, get to know the society and broaden their horizons.⁵ Establish some compulsory counseling institutions to help them understand the culture of their home country and the social culture where their parents work.

Thirdly, the government and the society jointly pay attention to the humanistic care of "foreign" left-behind children^[9].¹ The government and the school establish a contact system to attract social forces to set up a "left-behind children's home", and carry out various forms of pairing and caring actions, and visit some "foreign" left-behind children's families who have difficulties during festivals, which reflects the warmth of the government and society;² Organize classes in the villages and towns where "foreign" left-behind children are concentrated, guide safety education and mental health knowledge, and improve the safety awareness and psychological quality of "foreign" left-behind children and their acting guardians;³ Give play to the role of village committees and community organizations to make up for the lack of family affection. In villages and towns with more "foreign" left-behind children, activity centers or kindergartens for "foreign" left-behind children should be established, and even family-like education should be carried out to promote mutual communication.⁴ Guide social groups to participate, establish public welfare funds, and establish "foreign" left-behind children care base. Relevant departments can contact some social welfare organizations, youth volunteer service teams, college students' sanxia groups, retired teachers and cadres' associations to participate in the action of helping, or even act as the "acting parents" of "foreign" left-behind children to care more about them and understand the outside society. This is also the general advice of the teachers surveyed.

Finally, international cooperation should be promoted to address the root causes of the "foreign" left-behind children problem. Development and cooperation are seen as the root causes of migration^[10]. The country needs to strengthen the communication and cooperation with the governments of "foreign" left-behind children at the highest level, and pay attention to this special group together. At the same time, governments at all levels should give preference to the development policy of overseas Chinese townships, combine the unique overseas Chinese resources, and improve the level of economic development of overseas Chinese townships. In this way, it can not only reduce the migration, but also attract a large number of overseas Chinese to return home, thus alleviating the phenomenon of "foreign" left-behind children.

6. Conclusion

In recent years, as more and more Chinese people study abroad, engage in transnational business, export labor services and emigrate to other countries, the phenomenon of left-behind children in foreign countries tends to spread from the traditional hometown of overseas Chinese in coastal areas to inland provinces. On the surface, the appearance of "foreign" left-behind children is just a kind of kinship raising behavior in Chinese family tradition, but it is actually an international political problem in essence, and it has multiple and complicated subjective and objective reasons. More importantly, as a "derivative" of contemporary transnational immigration, transnational upbringing also has certain political sensitivity, cultural identity and realistic complexity, and has attracted considerable attention from Chinese and foreign countries^[11]. Therefore, it is more necessary for transnational families themselves, the government and all sectors of society to use more wisdom to view and value it correctly and objectively, so as to create a happy childhood and a bright future for these "unfortunate" children.

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