

Left Behind Children

Daily Experiences of Left Behind Children in China

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ABSTRACT

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The term “left-behind children” represents a social group in China. The term describes children who live with older generation or relatives in the countryside, while their parents are away working in other cities or countries. Those children may only see their parents once or twice a year, when the parents return home to visit. In China, every year there are children facing the risk of being left behind. The topic of this thesis is to discover the living situation and daily experiences of the left behind children in Shaanxi province, China. The main aim of this thesis is to expose the life situation of them and discuss how we should treat them well.

The main goal of this thesis is to expose the lives and daily experiences of left-behind children in China. The thesis examines how these children feel about their lives, and examines ways to ensure these children are treated well.

The result can be used to improve the lives of left-behind children. Solutions may involve school teachers and society in general, paying more attention to these children and raising awareness of the problems these children face. And if the parents of these children better understand the plight of their left-behind children, they can better understand their children.

The research applies a qualitative method. Questionnaires were used to collect research data. The narrative analysis method was used to analyze the research data.

Key words: children, left behind. Emotional life. Living experiences.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis looks deeper into the daily lives of China's left-behind children in an attempt to discover more about how these children are living. The author got motivated to study this topic when she read the news of left-behind children in China. The All-China Women's Federation's report found that in 2013, there were almost 60 million left-behind children living in China's rural areas. In the report, one parent said "Bread or taking care of children, you can only cover one side." This sentiment is shared by many parents who have difficulty to choose whether to take care of their children themselves or give financial support to their family. This encouraged the author to look deeper into left-behind children's daily lives and, to hear more from them. The author used questionnaires to interview several left-behind children. The narrative analysis method was also used to analyze the collected data.

This thesis focuses on the daily lives of left-behind children. Having seen and read many articles and reports concerning left-behind children's physical and mental health, what mostly interests the author was these children's daily lives, including their educational status and their social lives. For example, does every child have opportunities for education? What do they learn at school? Do they have friends? How often do they talk to their parents? What about their nutrition? The author chose this topic because she thinks these questions are the basic questions that cover the foundation of one's life

In 2012, the author returned to China, and contacted some organizations there to gather research for the preparation of her thesis. However, because of time limitations, she was unable to complete the interview process herself, her friend helped finish the interviews. The author developed 10 questions and interviewees answered the questions with stories. The author thinks it is easier for the children to express their feelings in the form of a

story

2 BACKGROUND OF “LEFT-BEHIND” CHILDREN IN CHINA

Most left-behind children live in China’s rural areas, mostly in the regions of Sichuan, Henan and Anhui. According to an All-China Women’s Federation’ report, in 2010 there were already 58 million children who were growing up without parents around. Nearly 80% of them were being taken care of by grandparents. Those children range in age from 0 to 17 years old. In recent year, the number of left-behind children has been increasing, and the age of children being left-behind is getting younger and younger. (All-China Women’s Federation, 2010)

2.1 Definition of Left-Behind Children

“My parents left home when I was very young. Their faces are fading away.”

___ by a left-behind children in China (Wake & Love Fund)

The sentence above was written by a middle school student who is also a left-behind child. Nowadays increasing number of young adults are migrating to big cities to earn a living, leaving their children in the care of elderly relatives in their hometown. This is much like a group of migratory birds, flying between foreign cities and their hometowns. The situation is worsening and it affects more and more children, branding them as so called “left-behind children” (Bian Chencun 2013, access date 08 AUG 2013)

The official definition of the term “left-behind children” is children who are left to live in the countryside with their grandparents, or other relatives or family friends, while their parents work as migrant workers in urban areas. Most left-behind children do not

live with either parent. Only a few live with one of their parents. (Sui Zhou 2006, access date 10 Aug 2013)

Left-behind children are usually categorized into two groups: The first group is comprised of children, whose parents are migrant workers in China's city areas. Their parents visit home once or twice during the year. The other group is children whose parents are working in foreign countries. Most of those parents are illegal there, so they send their children back to China when they are still very young. Both groups of parents depend on phone calls to keep up with their children. The only memories their children have of their parents are their parents' voices or a toy they were sent. (Sui Zhou 2006, access date 10 AUG 2013)

2.2 Why children become left- behind?

In China, the development between urban area and countryside areas are at different levels, therefore, many young adults go to big cities looking for work to earn more income. Although there are more job opportunities in the cities, the cost of living is high. Most of those migrant workers are married couples, and due to work and financial considerations (e.g. high cost of living, high-cost of education) they cannot bring their children to live with them and are forced to leave their children in the rural areas with grandparents. The result is that children and parents are separated and children are left behind.

According to the research on China's left-behind children's website, 57.2% of left-behind children live with one of their parents, and 42.8% of left-behind children's parents are both away. In addition, 79.7% of left-behind children live with their grandparents, and 13% live with other relatives. 7.3% are unsupervised. China has always had the world's biggest population. According to the National Bureau of

Statistics of China, the officially registered population in rural China is about 900 million, but the actual population living in rural areas is about 740 million, and around 200 million people live in other cities. In recent years, large amounts of farmers have moved to the eastern cities to work as agricultural workers. In Beijing, there are nearly three million migrant workers. In Shanghai, there are about five million migrant workers. The reason why there are such large migrant populations in big cities is because of the income gap between the cities and rural areas. According to the statistics, the income gap between the rural areas and the city area is considerable. In 2004, the average annual income in the rural areas was 2185 yuan per year, and in the city areas, the average annual income was nearly 7183 yuan per year. In 2005, the average annual income in the rural areas was 3255 yuan per year and the average income in the city areas was 10,493 yuan per year. This income disparity is worsening and affecting the family structure in rural China, contributing to the emergence of left-behind children (Liuguang&Yanpin 2003 access date 25 Nov 2011, Wei Lu June 2010 157-167)

There is a system called “ Bao Chan Dao Hu Ze Ren Zhi” (包产到户责任制). It means that in the village all the land will be divided for each family. On one hand, this has been improving the rural area’s labor force. But, in a family, all members have to take responsibility for working, and that includes underaged children. Apparently, a family’s land is the only means by which to support their daily living and this means every child has to work hard. Depending upon the season of the year, children may have to help with the farm work. This kind of system does not work for long. Due to urban and economic reforms, many adults realize that compared with hard, low-income farm work, urban area salaries are much better. This seasoning has served to break apart families and it is one of the reason why parents started leaving their children with grandparents.(Xie Ni, Shen Jianqiang, Chen Huacong, 2010,4)

It is not only the economic situation that forces the migrant parents to leave their children. As parents they want the best for their children. And parents know the

importance of education. Parents hope their children study hard and graduate from a good school so they will not be like them, The findings of a research study on the parents of left-behind children from a book entitled “*The Education Situation of Left-Behind Children In Rural Area*” – revealed that most of the parents of left-behind children went to work in bigger cities to make sure they could earn enough money to their children to go to college. (Xie Ni, Shen Jianqiang, Chen Huacong, 2010 211)

2.3 Differences Between School Systems in Urban Area and Rural Areas of China

In China, the school system includes kindergarten, primary school, secondary school, high school, and college. Children older than three year’s old attend kindergarten for three years; then they attend primary school, which takes six years to finish. After that, they go to secondary school for three years, then on to high school for another three years. College usually takes three to four years to complete. (Laura Mack. Access date 10 Oct 2013)

Primary school and secondary school in China are required and free, but parents must pay for books. The law of the People’s Republic of China mandate “children of six years old, despite gender, nationality and race, must go to school to receive free education. And areas where conditions are yet to be ready could postpone the school age to seven years old, which the state, society and families must guarantee.” This means that in China, primary school and secondary school is compulsory. However, after secondary school, parents must pay for high school, which is not inexpensive. This is why some children in rural areas stop going to school at 15 years of age, after they complete secondary school. (Han Li, 2005,5.)

In China, pre-schools are an important part of the educational system, especially

kindergarten, which can be full- time or part-time. In rural China, kindergarten is focused on nursery classes, but in some rural areas children do not go to kindergarten; instead, they stay home and are raised by family members until they reach primary school age. According to Chinese law, children have to attend primary school. However, the day care in rural areas and urban areas of China are markedly different in terms of the availability of facility materials and teaching materials. (China Education Centre, 2001, access date 10 OCT 2013)

A. *Facility materials*

In a school, the environment and its facilities have a strong impact on a student’s academic life, and the school’s facilities play an important role in a child’s education .Basic school facilities usually include things such as clean water, individual toilets, electricity, etc. (Hakunun Shimomura, 2013, access date 11 Oct 2013)

In urban areas of China, schools are equipped with individual toilets, electricity, heating and cooling systems, and all kinds of sport activity areas.

Figure 1: “Equipment in Classrooms Urban and Rural China”, 2008

	Urban High School	Urban Primary	Rural High School	Rural Primary
Multi-Media	65%	30%	5%	3%
Audio	77%	23%	6%	3%
Additional Materials	89%	87%	38%	29%

(Teng Biao, 2011,access date 10 Feb 2014).

In the rural areas of China, schools lack adequate equipment and facilities. The data in Figure 1 is from a blog created by three authors who prepared a research article entitled “The State of Rural Schools in China and the Broken

Educational System.” They conducted research in the Guangxi area to compare urban and rural area school facilities.

The data reveals that 30% of urban primary schools have multi-media equipment, while only 3% of rural primary schools have multi-media equipment. And 23% of urban primary schools have audio equipment, but only 3% of rural schools have audio equipment. And the research found that 87% of urban schools have what is termed “additional materials,” while only 29% of urban schools have additional materials. This disparity clearly demonstrates that rural area students do not have access to the materials that help them learn. Furthermore, according to the research conducted in Ningxia province, 17% of primary schools and 15% of middle schools do not have libraries in their schools.(Teng Biao, 2011,Access date 10 Feb 2014).

B. Teaching material

The teaching material basically means the teacher. The quality and amount of teachers differ between urban area and rural area schools. In rural China, lack of teachers is common. The reason for this is low salaries. Salaries for teachers in rural China cannot support their daily living. As a result, most teachers choose to work in other cities or town. According to one report, in Yunnan province, there are almost 60 village schools, but there are only one or two teachers at each school teaching all the coursework. However, in urban areas, there are usually more than 40 teachers per school, and every subject has a dedicated teacher to teach it. And this helps the whole class learn.(Teng Margaret Fu, 2005, access date 10 Feb 2014).

The quality of the teacher is one of the key factors that determine a child’s quality of education. Usually in urban areas, the schools are staffed with well-trained teachers with advanced education, unlike the schools in rural areas where it is difficult to find a professionally qualified teacher. (Zhang Li, 2009,

15).

The continued development of a teacher's knowledge and other professional qualities are related to the education of the children. Teachers in urban areas often get the opportunity to communicate with other school teachers, or even get chance to study abroad. But in rural areas, the main development plans are from within the school. This model, which is called-- "jiao yan zu," means teachers who teach in the same grade combine as a group to support each other. (Zhang Li, 2009, 16)

2.4 The Emotional World of Left-Behind Children

Childhood experiences are very important to a child's health and development. A child's parents, educators and family, as well as their environment are the factors that can affect a child's life up to adulthood. For a left-behind child, however, the opportunities for a healthy and happy childhood are diminished.

“I can now hand in the tuition fee on time,
I have more toys and pocket money,
Mum and Dad call back regularly,
But why am I always unhappy?”

Poem written by a left behind child (Chunyun, 2011, 13).

Every child deserves a healthy and happy childhood. The economic situation in China has existed for a long time. The movements of so many rural area residents to cities to work as migrant workers and the daily increase in the number of left-behind children is drawing the attention of the media. In recent years, this group of children has become a topic of concern of the media, with more and more news outlets reporting on the living situations of the left-behind children. The media is focusing on the children's care, educational disadvantages and physical development. Research shows that most left-behind children are more aggressive than children living with their parents. And

left-behind children often lack self-control and get depressed more easily. (Wang Chunyu, 2012,1.).

Figure 2: Data showing depress scores of children at varying ages, which were left by parents.

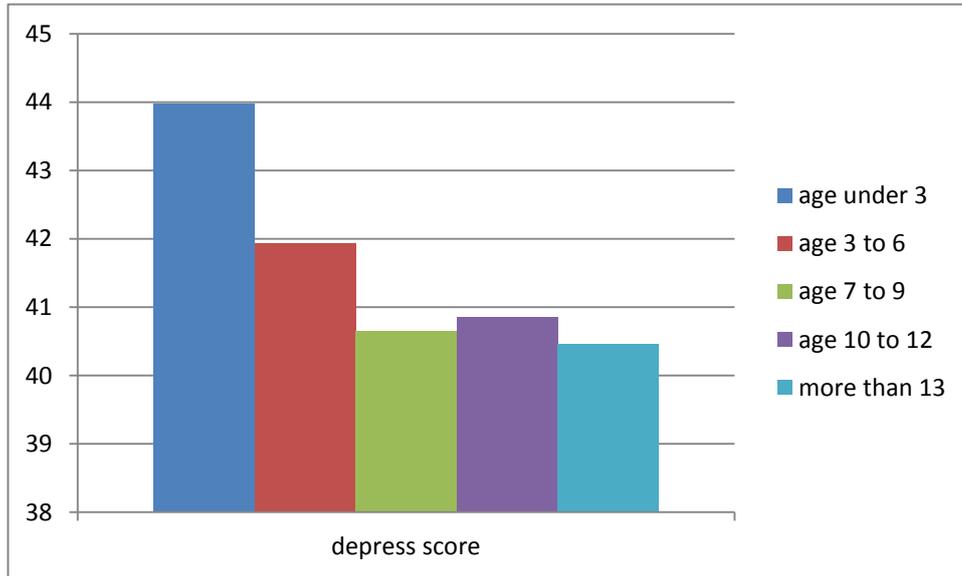
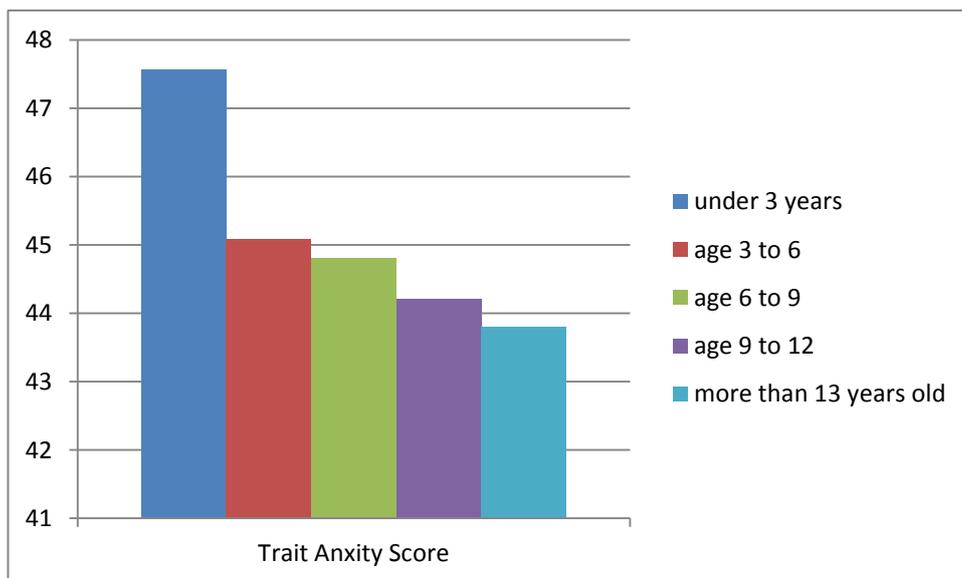


Figure3: Data showing anxiety scores of children at varying ages, which were left by parents.



(Zhengkui Liu, PhD, Xinying Li, MD, and Xiaojia Ge, PhD 2009).

The data comes from research conducted by Zhengkui Liu, PhD, Xinying Li, MD and

Xiaoja Ge, PhD research. They performed the examination in three areas of rural China -Chongqing, Anhui and Guizhou. The goal of the research was to determine the emotion effects of depression and anxiety on children who were separated from their parents at various ages. The test group was divided into five groups (under three years old, three to six years old, six to nine years old, nine to 13 years old, and older than 13 years old). We can see from figure 2 that the highest depression score is in children whose parents left them when they were under three years old. The second highest scores are in the three-year-old to six-year-old age group. Children who were left behind after they reached school age (seven to nine years old) have less symptoms of depression than the younger children. For children from age 10 to 12 years old, the depression score is higher than in the seven-to nine –year-old group. And the last group, adolescents aged 13 and up, had depress scores similar to the school age group. (Zhengkui Liu, PHD, Xinying Li, MD and Xiaoja Ge, PHD, 2009, 4).

Children who were left behind by their parents also display the symptoms of trait anxiety. The website definition of anxiety is feeling scared, worried or uncomfortable. We can see from Figure 3 that the children, who were left behind by their parents at three years old, have the highest anxiety score (47.56). The three-to six-year-old age group had the second highest score (45.08). We can see from the data that there is a pattern in this Figure 3, which shows a decrease in anxiety scores correlated with the ages of the children. The older the children are when they are left behind, the less anxiety they experience (Zhengkui Liu, PhD, Xinying Li, MD, and Xiaoja Ge, PhD, 2009, 4).

“Dear Mom

. . . I always cried since dad and you left. I wept a lot in the quilt. In aunt’s home, I felt I

was the extra one, When they talked with my cousin and comforted him because he failed an exam, I felt I was pricked by a needle . . . My desk mate bought a red pen yesterday morning and I liked it very much. So I also bought one at noon. But her pen

disappeared, and she called me a thief and insisted my ball pen was hers. I felt so angry that I turned all red and cried. But I didn't tell aunt. She couldn't help me.

Nobody can help me . . . I am not in a good mood. I had a big quarrel with Xiaoli and Xiaohong because they said you don't love me anymore. If you loved me, why haven't you come back for so many years? I showed them all the clothes you bought me and They didn't say another word.

Mom, you left when my younger sister was less than one-year-old. For all these years I can remember, I have only seen you twice, and Dad, three times. You called back home once every two months. Mom, could you please come back more often? I know it is expensive to travel, but could you call back more often? I want to hear your voice. And I have so many things to tell you."

--- A letter from left-behind children

(Wang Chunyu, "Children's Letter: The Emotional Worlds of Left-Behind Children")

The letter is from an article called "Children's Letter: The Emotional Worlds of Left-Behind Children". The article features letters written by left-behind children. The letter shows that this child has emotional depression and it seems to be full of tear, loneliness and depression. Like many left-behind children's parents, this girl's parents are also migrant workers, seeking a better income and better life for their children. Much research has shown that children usually accept the reason for their parents' absence, but as the time goes by, most of those children start to have doubts about those reasons. Growing up without parents around is very easy to cause emotional problems. (Wang Chunyun 2011, 15).

2.5 The Physical Development of Left-Behind Children

Childhood is one of the most important stages of development. During this time children need to have adequate nutrition. Most of rural China has the problem of under

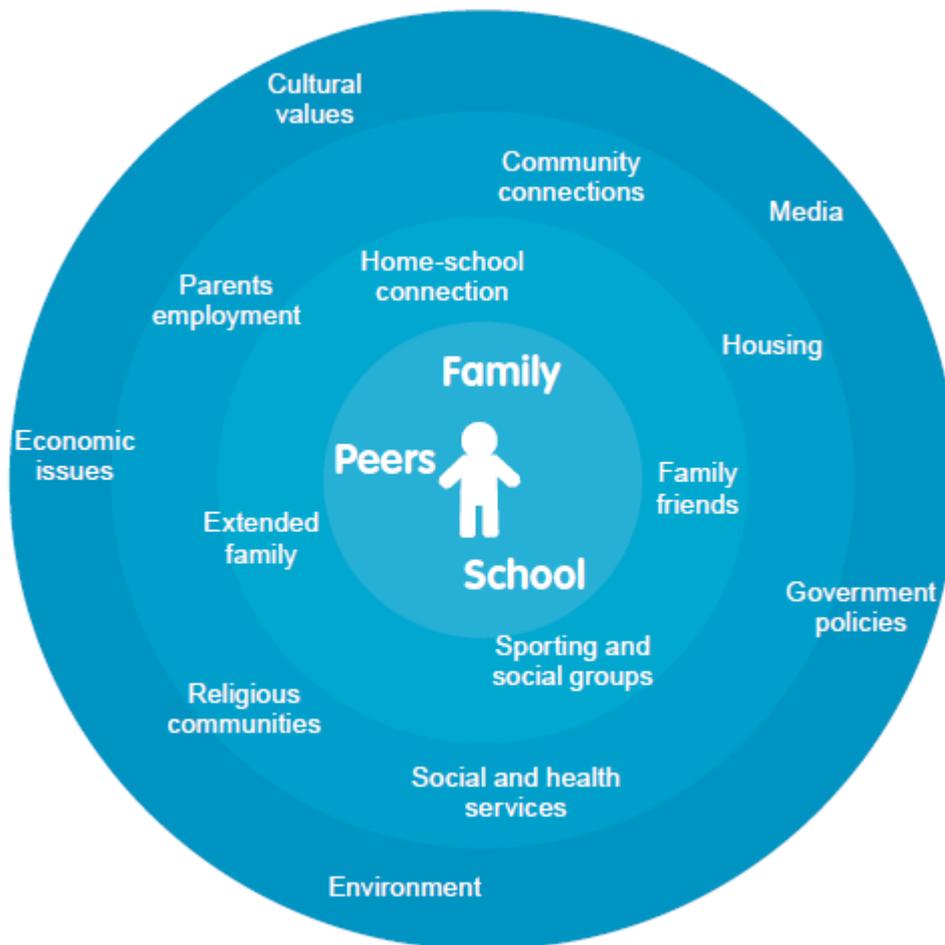
nutrition and stunting. In a large amount of China's rural areas, children are malnourished and many also suffer from iron deficiency. (Migration and young children nutrition: Evidence From rural china. Ren Mu; Alan de Brauw 2013). According to the << food and nutrition development plan in china (2010)>>, most left-behind children receive inadequate nutrition for their age. Compared to their urban peers, left-behind children have a lower health status, and most of them are anemic.(Ren Mu& Alan de Brauw, 2013, 10).

Children usually have growth spurts with significant development during age 10 to 13 years old. Normally, boys will gain 20 centimeters in height and 20 kilograms in weight, and girls will gain 16 centimeters in height and 16 kilograms in weight. (Augustin L, Franceschi S, Jenkins D, Glycemic index in chronic disease: a review, European Journal of Clinical Nutrition, 2002) . But left-behind children suffer from long-term lack of nutrition. In the book << *The Survey of Left-Behind Children in China*>>, the author writes about research he conducted on left-behind children in a village called Andu, located in Guangxi province. He wrote that the children usually eat rice and yellow beans for lunch and most of the children do not eat breakfast. For most families in Andu, vegetables and fruits are very expensive. This lack of nutrition means children cannot grow up healthily. (Zhao Junchao, 2012, 51).

2.6 Social Development of Left-Behind Children

Social development involves learning how to behave and communicate with others. It includes learning the values and living skills that enable children to relate to others.

Figure 4: Influences on children's social development



There are many things that influence children's social development. Clearly, parents and care takers are the most important influences on their development. As we can see from Figure 4 above, family, school and peers are most closely aligned with the child in the center of the diagram. Usually, children make contact with parents, school and peers every day, and children learn values and rules from these influences. In other words, family, school and peers have the most effect upon children. In addition to the influences of family, school and peers, children are also influenced by their extended family, community and friends. Even culture has an influence on children's social development. All of these factors; give children the opportunity to develop their social skills with different people in different settings. As Figure 4 shows in the outer portion of the circle, children's social development is also influenced by social and health services, parents' income, family time, and the media. (Australian government, beyondblue, APS, 2012, access date 13 Feb 2014).

Children build relationships with their family and friends. They learn from others, and they discover their own personality and values, as well as their social world.

The Figure 4 shows us that family and school are the most important components of children's social development. They learn from their parents. They get protection from their parents. And they develop social connections with peers, and obtain education at school. But left-behind children, who normally live with their grandparents or other relatives, are usually unprotected and forced to take on adult responsibilities. For example, some left- behind children lack nurturing. Children left in the care of grandparents or other relatives, often times have poor communication with the family member, and that may affect the future relationship between the children and their peers. Also left-behind children often have difficulties with their social relations with the people around them, and some children isolate themselves from peers. Furthermore, because their parents are absent, left-behind children seldom experience improved relationship with their parents. This can cause negativity and create an adverse relationship between the children and their parents. (Rodolfo, 2010, 17-20).

They may separate themselves from their peers. Because they are already separated from their parents, the parent-child bonding process, may be adversely affected, causing problems in building adult relationships in the future. For this reason, parents need to pay more attention to their children's emotional and social development. (Rodolfo, 2010, 17-20).

3. LEFT-BEHIND CHILDREN IN SHAANXI PROVINCE

Shaanxi is one of the oldest provinces in People's Republic of China. It is located northwest of China, in the middle part of the Yellow River. The area of this province is 200,000 square kilometers, and the permit population is about 37,62million (2008). The capital city is Xi'an. Shaanxi province is comprised of many cities, including Xianyang City and Xi'an City. (Song Li, 2006, access date 20 Sept 2013).

According to research conducted by the Shaanxi daily newspaper, in Tongchuan, a city in Shaanxi province, there are 633 left-behind children in the city's primary school, and almost 52% of them live with their grandparents, while 38% of them live with one parent, and 10% of them live with other relatives. These children may lack of love or education. According to their research, 70% of the children's parents come home less than three times a year, and 30% of left-behind children talk with their parents once a month. Lack of love or understanding and lack of communication with parents are some of the issues these children experience. (Jianjun, 2013, access dtae 20 Sep 2013).

The government of Shaanxi province has implemented many programs for left-behind children. In 2011, the local Women's Federation built 15 children's homes in various cities within Shaanxi province. The children's homes have professional teachers and child psychologists. According to the children's development plan in Shaanxi province, every child has the right to education, and to facilitate this, there are plans to build, more boarding schools for left-behind children (Yang Dabao, Zhang Afang, Wang Chun, 2012, access date 10 Oct 2013)

3.1 Introduction of Xianyang City

Xianyang City, which is in the middle of Shaanxi province, is 10,246 square kilometers. It has 10 prefectures a population of and about 500 million. Almost 99% of people belong to the Han nationality. In terms of transportation, until 2003, the total distance of the high was 4297.399 kilometers. There is also a 20 train station around the whole city. In 2012, the Xianyang airport had 89 inland airlines and 11 foreign airlines. Economically, the city's main industry is agriculture. In 2011, the city's gross domestic product GDP reached 1359.1 billion yuan, and it increased 14.2% from the previous year. The city's biggest problem is the imbalance in the amount of development between its rural area and city area, characterized by the huge income gap between the city area and the rural area.(Bo Sheng, 2006, access date 12 Oct 2013).

In Xianyang City, there are 489 million permanent residents, and 74.64 million are children aged 0 to 14 years old. The city has 13.2 million left- behind children and 56.7% (7.48 million) of them live with single parents. The other 43.3% (5.72 million) of left-behind children live with grandparents or other relatives. The percentage of left-behind children is correlated with economic development. As the economy grows, the percentage of left-behind children will decrease. Conversely, as the economy recedes, the percentages of left-behind children will increase. (Shen Yueyue, 2011, access date 02 Oct 2013) .

3.2 The Daily Routine of Left-Behind Children

For most people 5800 million left-behind children merely represents a number. Few people know about these children's daily lives. For example, a beautiful teenage girl lives with her little brother in a house that does not have a door. a child's father died while at work. A girl gets sexually harassed because no one is there to protect her. Every story is full of misery and tears. (Zhao Junchao, 2012, 14).

Based on the author’s interviews with left-behind children, most of the children live with grandparents. Besides going to school, they must also take care of the home or otherwise help their grandparents with household responsibilities. *Sichuan News* published an article in which a reporter chronicles a day in the life of a left-behind child. The reporter created a timetable analyzing his observations .

Figure 5: Daily Timetable of Left-Behind Children (*Sichuan News*)

5:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m.	Wake up and make breakfast for sister or brother
6:00 a.m. to 7:30 a.m.	Walk to school
8:00 a.m. to 11: 30 a.m.	Morning school time
11:30 a.m. to 12: 30 p.m.	Lunch time at school
15:00 p.m. to 16:00 p.m.	Afternoon school time
16:00 p.m. to 17:00p.m.	School finished and walk back to home
17:00 p.m. to 18:00 p.m.	Homework
18:00 p.m. to 20:00 p.m.	Help cook and eat dinner together
21:00 p.m	Sleep time

We can see from Figure 5 that daily living is very difficult for children. The reporter’s analysis of the left-behind children shows that some children have to make their own breakfast, and then walk at least 20 minutes to school, even in the winter time. Children said they loved school, because they can learn, they have friends there, and they do not feel alone. Children usually bring their own lunch from home and eat it during their lunch break, but because some schools do not have heating appliances, they have to eat their food without warming it. After school, some of the children do homework and others have to help their grandparents cook dinner. In response to the reporter’s questionnaire, these children wrote that they dreamed about their parents all the time and wished they would come back early. (Enxiao, 2010, access date 10 Oct 2013).

3.3 The School Life of Left-Behind Children

A most commonly used definition for “daily life” is engaging in non-productive activities. Chinese scholar(Yi Junqing 衣俊卿) describe “daily life activities” as how a person or family spends their time and these activities depend on our tradition and customary, experiences. He adds that daily life activities include work, housework, sleep, study, etc. So, in this chapter the author will introduce left-behind children’s school live. (Xi Nan, 2011, 19) .

As we all know, Monday to Friday are official school days. In China, every year from February to July and from September to January, students have almost eight months study in school, which is a very important part of their life. In a traditional family, when children live with both parents, a child’s daily life involves being cared for and protected by parents. (Xi Nan, 2011, 20). But left-behind children usually live with grandparents or other relatives, and because of the housework or farm work, they need to wake up early and finish all the work before they go to school. After school, they may need to prepare dinner or take care of a sibling. How can children be expected to study in this kind of situation? How is their school life? From the author’s own research, emerged the story of a boy (case 4) who wrote about this school day and home life.

Going to school

“Xu is a 12-year-old boy. Like, other left-behind children, Xu’s parents went to the city to work, so he lives with grandmother. The house they live in is a very old house. Because of Xu’s grandmother’s leg problem, so Xu has to take care of most of the housework.

Xu attends middle school and walks there every day with friends. School starts at 9:00 a.m. Xu wakes up at 7:00 a.m. and eat some rice soup, which grandmother has already

prepared. His grandmother also packs his lunch and puts it in his backpack. He wrote that depending on the season, he has to do farm work before he goes to school. Also when his grandmother is sick, he has to do most of the housework. And every day he has to go out and cut grass to feed the cow. After housework or farming chores, he walks to school with friends. Xu said "I like go to school with friends, because we talk, we laugh, and I do not feel alone." Xu said that children like their school, even if is not beautiful like city schools, Xu reported that he and his friends are close and they do not feel alone when they are together (Xu, 05 April 2013, interview).

During school

"Xu and his friend reach school around 8:30 a.m. He usually has a half hour before class starts. So he hoes into the classroom, takes a look at the timetable and then he takes out his book and pen to study. In the meantime, other classmates' arrive, girls start to talk to each other and boys go to the playground to play football for a while."

"At 10:00 a.m. the bell rings, and everyone returns to class and sits quietly waiting for the teacher. Xu wrote in his story that during class he can focus at beginning of class, but after 25 minutes his mind wanders elsewhere. One class usually takes 45 minutes in the morning, and then they have three more classes and two 15-minutes breaks. During class, sometimes the teacher assigns homework, and they do it in class. During breaks, he likes to stay with friends and play and talk with them. Lunch time is at 11:45 a.m. Xu does not go home during lunch time. He takes lunch every day to school and eats it in the classroom. Actually, most of the students stay at school during their lunch breaks. After lunch, there is still some time left so Xu takes a nap in his desk. At around 14:00 p.m. afternoon school starts. The students, usually have two classes in the afternoon, and then the school day ends at 15:45p.m., after which time Xu walks home with his friends, usually other neighborhood children. He writes in his article that school has math class, English class, art class, physical education class and others. He likes all of them, but sometimes he does not understand the homework, and there is no one at home who can help him." (Xu, 05 April 2013, interview).

After school

“When Xu returns home from school it is already around 4:00 p.m. At his age, most children go school without parents or grandparents. But Xu wrote that “Every time when I see someone’s parents come to school and pick them up, I feel so jealous, and also want my parents to come to pick me up from school.” After he arrive home, he has time to play with his friends in front of the house for a while, because usually in the afternoon his uncle will come and help him and his grandmother with the farming work. At around 5:00 p.m., he has to help his grandmother make dinner and set up the table. He said that sometimes his uncle will stay to eat with them, but at other times it is just him and his grandmother. After dinner, Xu will take care of the dishes, because he thinks he needs to help his grandmother as much as he can. Around 7:00 p.m. he has study time. Sometimes he will do his homework, but because his grandmother does not have enough knowledge to help him with his homework, he sometimes just leaves the homework and watches TV until bed time. As for clothing, he usually changes clothes once a week during winter time, and twice a week in summer time.” (Xu, 05 April 2013 interview).

We can see that Xu’s life is more difficult than his peers who live with one or both parents. Everything has good and bad influences, and the good thing is that left-behind children are understood more than other children, but the negative part is that they grow up without parents and that create personal problems for them as they pursue their education, according to the book, (*<<Miao Left-Behind Children’s Daily Live>>*, Xi Nan, 2011). The book analyzes common issues that exist in left-behind children’s lives. Some of these issues are highlighted below.

A. Education environment

according to a book called *<<The Issues of Left-Behind Children’s School Education >>* by Luo Xiaosong(罗小松), compared with the city areas, schools in rural areas are

backward, with fewer school facilities, lack of teachers, and also lack of teaching material.(Xi Nan, 2011, 25).

B. *Children's hygiene*

Most children need adults to teach them about personal hygiene. But most left-behind children live with grandparents or other relatives who sometimes fail to take care of the children like their parents would. For example, in Xu's case, he changes clothes once a week during winter and in summer time, only twice a week.(Xi Nan, 2011, 25).

C. Studying

We can see from Xu's case that sometimes he does not understand the class but there is no one who can help him, so instead of doing homework he will watch TV until bed time. Because grandparents typically lack sufficient education and knowledge to teach children and because the children's parents' are absent, it makes it very difficult for children who have to study alone. (Xi Nan, 2011, 25)

3.4 What Kind of Dangers Left- behind Children Face? (Case 1)

A child may have to deal with many dangers. This is very difficult for a child. When children grow up with absent parents, they may lose their way, get hurt or even become involved with drugs. The below story is one that one of the left- behind children narrated, relating his experiences with drugs.

"I am a 12-year-old boy. My parents left me to grandparents when I was a baby. I love them, but they only come back home once a year. For me, the difficult thing is to stay away from bullies and their drugs. I remember the first time when I met them.

They made me feel scared, and they even tried to force me to buy their drugs. I was terrified and wished my parents were here with me. I have been forced to buy a few times. I was too scared to tell my parents. I do not want them to think of me as a drug abuser. But the bullies come to me more frequently; I felt I could not this anymore, so I told my dad and mom. During the phone call, they cried and told me that they are sorry for not protecting me, for not being around as I'm growing up. After that, my dad decided to take me with them, so now I have a new school, new friends and most importantly I am with my parents. (One of the left-behind children who was interviewed)”

Left-behind children have more opportunities to engage with drugs. This may be due to lack of education or other childhood experiences. Some left-behind children are traitorous when their parents are not around. They may leave school and meet up with street person and end up addicted to drugs. Or some of them may have been forced to buy or take drugs from other people.

In 2011, China had 112.7 thousand registered drug addicts. It was difficult to track all drug addicts, so China mainly focused on those addicts, between 18 and 45 years old (representing 92.3% of the registered addicts), although some addicts were as young as 13 years old and as old as 60 years old. Among those 92.3% of drug addicts, 51.35% were 15 to 24 years old, 25.22% were 25 to 30 years old, 21.61% were 30 years old, and 1.8% were over 40 years old. The data reveals that drug use is more prevalent among young people, between 15 and 24 years old. (Huzhou drug control committee, 2012, access date 25, Nov 2013).

As mentioned before, because left-behind children lack supervision and education, they are very susceptible to drugs. In this kind of situation, improving education about the dangers of drugs use is very important. Usually schools will invite the related department to give a speech to the children about the perils of drug use or send them to drug camps, to teach them about the dangers of drugs and how to avoid these dangers.

Or the teacher will ask the children to write a letter to their parents to tell them what they learned about drugs. And this does more than just inform the parents about what the children learned, it facilitates communication with their parents.

3.5 What Do Left-Behind Children Want, Toys or Love? (case 2)

Many left-behind children's parents give their children a lot of material goods, such as. Toys, school supplies, clothes, etc. Because most of the parents feel guilty about leaving their children in the care of others, they think that if they can offer more material goods maybe that can make up for the truth that they are absent while their children are growing up. Below is a story that represents this issue.

“I am just a normal child who, likes to sing and paint. I live with my grandmother, because my parents went to work in a bigger city. And I am part of the group called “left-behind children.”

Our income is from my parents, They send me toys and clothes all the time, and last year I got a second- hand computer, because my mother said that if I have trouble with my school work, I can use it to study. They told me there are many books I can read. When my friends come to my home, they are always jealous of me because I have many new clothes and toys and even a computer. But I was not happy about it. I think it does not mean anything to me. All I wanted was to stay with my parents and let them guide my studies. Computers, toys, and clothes, those things are very useful and beautiful, but they are not my parents. I just want to spend more time with dad and mom” (Yu Fengtong, 27, Aug, 2013. Email message).

Among the issues left-behind children face, the most common one is lack of communication with parents, and it easily causes self-abasement and other negative

personality characteristics. In the Pinding mountain city, there are 12,000 left-behind children. Researcher approached these children and asked them one question: “What do you think you need?” For 80% of the left-behind children, the answer was parents’ love. We can see from this response that what left-behind children really need is the love from their parents, because no matter how many clothes and toys they have, those material items are not their parents.(Wang Haixia 2009, access date 20 Nov 2013).

3.6“Is This My Home?”

Below is the story of a left-behind child, who was involved in author’s research. The story written was in Chinese, so the author translated it into English.

“My name is Meishu, I am a 12- year-old girl. My father and mother said they gave me this name because it means beautiful and happy. I am living with my aunt the small town of Xianyang City, My parents left me when I was around four years old. Now they are both working in Shanghai. I don’t have grandparents. My mother said that they died, so now I have to live with my aunt. She is my mother’s relative.

My parents come home once a year, but they call me by phone sometimes. I really miss them, and I wish there was a place in town where they could work, so they would not be so far away from me. My aunt has her own children, so I feel sometimes she does not care about me. I also do housework at home, because it is not my home. Every time when my parents send me pens or toys, my aunt’s daughters always fight with me for them, and my parents said I need to give it to them, because I am living with them and older than them. That makes me feel sad and alone. I feel there is no one for me when I am in trouble. But during the Chinese New Year, my parents come back, and this is my happiest moment during the year.

In school, I don't have many friends. Xiaohong and Meiting are my closest friends at school. Their parents have also gone to the big-city to work, so I feel we are the same, and they understand me. My aunt sometimes helps me study, so I am doing well with my studies. But my biggest wish is that I can go to a good university in the future and have a good job in the city, so I can live with my parents. I always dreamed that we would have one big house that belongs to us, where me and my parents are living together."

As previously mentioned, some left-behind children live with relatives. There are positives and negatives associated with these living arrangements. When left-behind children are cared for by someone in their parents' age range, this caregiver will usually help the children with their studies, but pay less attention to their emotional needs. As we can see from Meishu's answer, she felt sad and alone. She desperately needed attention from her parents.

According to a report by Chashan Primary School, there are 40 left-behind children in the school. Of these 40 students 12.5% of them live with relatives, (Yang Guangchuying, 2007, access date 18 Nov 2013).

3.7 The Social Lives of Left-Behind Children

Social life is defined as an individual's personal relationships. Typically, it describes the time we spend with other people. Most people socialize during the weekends, but socializing occurs routinely during the week as a part of daily life. Social life involves engaging with friends and interacting with parents. But for left-behind children, there is one more part, living with relatives.

Research conducted by China Population Center on children from primary school, shows that 75% of children do not think they can communicate with their parents. And 55.6% of children have issues with meeting new friends. A few children believe they do not know how to talk with other people. This research shows that many left-behind children have strong feelings about friendship and wish to have friendships. Because of these family background, some children emotionally alone and inferior, unsatisfied with themselves, and are very easily affected by outside factors. This thesis examines three aspects of left-behind children's social life, social interaction with friends, living with relatives and communication with parents. (Jinhong, 2011, access date 15 Oct 2013) .

A. *Social interaction with those in the same range*

Friendships represent a very significant part of a child's life. Friendships enable children to learn to care and share with friends. According to Diane Levin, Ph.D, author of *“Remote Control Childhood”* “friendships help children gradually learn to be independent, contributing members of a community and it's just as important as their academic growth”. Usually, children choose friends from their own range, because they are similar in age, thought and habit. Children are easily affected by friends, in some ways more that they are affected by their parents, because they face the same issues and they have more common language. (Xi Nan, 2011, 49)

Interaction with peers in their age range is very important for children while growing up. This is especially true, for left-behind children, because growing up without parents around makes friends more important to them. Interacting with friends makes left-behind children feel happy and they experience positive emotions. And that helps children grow up with happy, positive personalities. Besides, when interacting with friends, left-behind children can experience cooperation, as well as the benefits of sharing and helping people. These positive social behaviors help them learn to get along with people. (Xi Nan, 2011, 49).

Just like having a good friend can help a child, having the wrong friends can cause a child to go the wrong way. In the book <<*Left-Behind Children`s Problem and Solution In Rural Area*>> (Wang Qiuxiang 王秋香), the author says that because parents are absent, when left-behind children choose friends, it is very easy for them to join an unhealthy group or interact with a bad social group. Research from (<< *Miao Left Behind Children`s Daily Lives* >>Xi Nan, 2011) compared the interactions of children from traditional families with left-behinds children. (Xi Nan, 2011, 48).

- Children from traditional families, under their parents` supervision, choose having interactions with friends.

In a traditional family, children live with their parents and under their parents` supervision. In this situation, parents will know their children`s friends and who they are playing with, and they will help the children understand what kind of friends are good for them and what kind are not good for them. Even when children get involved with bad behaving children, their parents will notice it and try to fix it.(Xi Nan, 2011, 49).

- Children from left-behind families lack supervision and, have social interactions with all kinds of people.

What follow is a story from the Dajiang website, written by Zhang Yu 张愉, and Yang Kaiyue 杨凯越. A left-behind child gets into a street fight and sustains 12 injuries. Xin was born in the village. He has four brothers and sisters. His parents divorced when he was nine and he lives with his grandfather. When he was 13 years old he dropped out of school and went to work in his uncle`s restaurant. While at the work, he met a man much older than him. The man seemed rich and had a car. This made Xin admire the man a lot. Later on, Xin started to call the man “brother”. Since that time, Xin would out with this “brother” and the “brother” would give him drugs and ask him to try them. Because of curiosity, he tried once. Then he was unable to stop. He started to use all his money to buy drugs and tried to hide this

from his parents and uncle. He also helped other people buy drugs in order to get extra money to buy drugs. In 2006, Xin was invited to join a fight in a village. During the fight, he sustained 12 injuries, including the loss of three fingers. After police got involved, Xin was eventually sentenced to four years in prison. (Zhuang yu& Kaiyue, 2012, access date 15 Oct 2013).

Most of left-behind children live with grandparents. As time goes by, some of these children start to believe parents and family are unimportant, and they interact more with people of their own generation who are similar in age. But because they lack adequate supervision and education, they are immature and have narrower view of life. These children have more freedom to choose friends, who may cause them to join unhealthy groups, interact with unhealthy people, and ignore their studies and spend inordinate amounts of time playing. (Zhuang Yu& Kaiyue, 2012, access date 15 Oct 2013).

B. Living with relatives

Family structures of left-behind children have changed, and are different from what they once were. According to the research, they have been divided into three groups: (Wei Lu ,2011, 20).

- Living with and cared for by grandparent's generation. This situation is very common in rural areas. A large population of left-behind children is cared for grandparents.
- Living with other relatives or friends of their parents. These children are cared for by their other relatives(besides their grandparents) or by other families
- Children who take care of themselves. Some children do not have a guardian, so usually they take care of themselves.

According to Wei`s research, in 2002, in Meishan provinces, there were 3,118 left-behind children. Wei`s study showed that 81% of left-behind children were taken care of by their grandparents, 18.3% of were taken care of by their relatives or parent`s friends and 0.7% of them lived along. (Wei Lu, 2011, 21).

It is uncommon for Left-behind children to live with relatives who are not their grandparents. As mentioned above, 18.3% of left-behind children lived with relatives or their parents` friends. These guardians have to pay more attention to the children`s material condition and safety situation, and they typically will not, dare to criticize the children too often, because they do not have close relationships with the children. Most of the left-behind children believe that guardians who have their own children, might not care about them as much as they do their biological children, and that makes left-behind children feel they are simply living in someone`s home, These children then try to please their guardians by doing more housework or eating less food. They also feel a lack emotional support from their guardian or the guardian`s family. (Wei Lu, 2011, 25-28).

Living with care takers who are their parents` friends may have positives outcomes for left-behind children. According to Wei`s (2011) research, most of the guardians (relatives or parent`s friend) were younger than 50 years old, have a higher education level than the children`s grandparents`, and can support the children academically.(Wei Lu,2011, 28).

C. Communication with parents

Children from traditional families, who are born to working parents, spend most of their time at home with family. Family is the environment for children to communicate with parents. Their parents play the most important role in their lives. Communicating with their parents helps these children with their growth and development, and provides them with emotional support, love and care. By contrast left-behind children, who live

separated from their parents are unable to, communicate with their parents regularly. As a result, some left-behind children lack emotional support and have bad relationships with their parents. (Linzheng Wei, 2009, 2).

Figure 6:Rate of communication between left-behind children and their parents (Wei Lizheng 2010)

Frequency of communication with parents	The parents who the left-behind children talks to when one or both of the child's parents have left			
	Both parents left (father)	Both parents left (mother)	Only father left (father)	Only mother left (mother)
Almost every day	7.6	8.2	9.2	3.0
Once a week	61.3	62.5	49.1	48.5
Once every two weeks	16.6	15.7	22.0	15.2
Once a month	9.1	6.9	13.9	12.1
Once every two months	2.4	3.3	5.2	9.1
Once every six months	3.0	3.3	0.6	12.1

Figure 6 is from an article entitled (<< “*Communication with Parents Affects the Left-Behind Children’s Psychological Health*” >> Wei Lizheng 2009). The author conducted research on left-behind children at a school, assessing six classes with a total of 898 children, and 495 of which were left-behind children. We can see from Figure 6 that there are fewer children who talk with parents almost every day, and most of the children talk with parents once a week. And, only 3.0% of children talk with their father once every six months.(Wei Linzheng, 2009, 3).

According to news reports , when left-behind children call their parents, 80% of them say to their parents “ Dad, mom I miss you so much. When are you coming home?”

Other children do not talk; instead they cry on the phone. (Hua Long website , Liu YI). And, when parents talk with children, they usually ask about school, their child's living situation diet, health, and safety. Most of the parents do not know their children well. And even though, children miss their parents, they nevertheless still feel strange when they actually see their parents. Below is a picture story from *Teng Xun News*. The story was from a non-benefit activity , it called "Xiao Hou Niao Tuan Ju Ji Hua"(小候鸟团聚计划). The activities are planned to support left-behind children who come to town to spend time with parents. The story is about a boy who came to the city area to visit his parents during the holiday. (Liu Yi, 2012, access date 20 Oct; 2013, Anonymity, 2012, access date 20 Oct 2013).



Four-year-old Hao Tian`s parents left him when he was 10 months old, All he can remember about his parents are their voices. His parents are now working in Dong Wan City. Every Chinese New Year, his grandmother takes him to visit his parents.



Every year, Hao can stay 10 days with his parents. In the morning, the train arrived in Dong Wan City. He finally see his parents. But when his mother takes his hand and asks "Hao Tian, do you remember me?" he does not answer his mother. He seems a little

scared and does not show any excitement. Parents are little strange to him.



When they return to Hao's parents' home, his grandmother helps him wash his face, which is dry and hurts when she washes it. But he does not say a word. Hao is being raised by his grandmother and is very close to her. At one point, his grandmother coughed very hard, and Hao said, "Grandmother, do not die, Do not leave me alone." The words hurt Hao Tian's parents.



Hao's father applies cream to his face after they get a little more familiar with one another.



Family eating together is very precious for them.



Hao Tian never saw a handcart before, so his father puts him inside of the handcart. He was so happy. This moment will be important for him when he misses his father.



During the 10 days, Hao and his parents got familiar with each other. In the train station, he keeps playing with his father



In the train station, Hao falls down and cannot stop crying. It is not known if he cries because he is hurt or because he is leaving.



Before they board the train, Hao's mother asks him, "Would you like to stay here?" He answer "No". Then he jumps out from mother and takes his grandmother's hand and

they board the train together.

We can see from the story that the little boy feels strange to talking to his parents. He lacks communication with them. Both parents and the boy were feeling sad when they had to separate. But the boy does not want to stay with his parents, because he is close with his grandmother-closer to her than anyone else in the world, even his parents. There are so many children living like Hao Tian and so many parents like Hao Tian's parents. They know they owe their children a "sorry," but the reality is cruel. Luckily, nowadays, there are many organizations trying to help left-behind children and their parents. (Feng Haiyong, 2012, access date 20 Jan 2014).

3.8 The Existing Project Concerning Left-Behind Children in Shaanxi Province

The Shaanxi All Women's Federation was established in 1950 and is a part of the All China Women's Federation. Every five years the All China Women's Federation has a national meeting in every province and at the meeting they decide the goal of the federation and discuss major problems facing China's women and children. The aim of the federation is to represent and protect women's and children's right. They have one special group that provides services for children and underage teenagers. They advertise the importance of children's education and family education and organize numerous activities for children.(Jing Jinping, 1950, access date 10 Jan 2014).

Every year, they plan many activities for left-behind children. These activities include helping the children get more connections to their parents, and collecting donations to support their education or improve their daily lives. For example, during Children's Day on June 1, 2013, the organization, along with volunteers, went into towns and give gift to children; they took their pictures, talked with them and participated in photography-related activities with them. When the social worker asked them if they

wanted to keep their photos, most of them said that they wanted to send the photos to their parents, and, in the hopes they would visit home. (Jianping, 2012, access date 23 Oct 2013).

Another organization is the Shaanxi Children's Village. This is a non-governmental organization established in 1996 and is specially gear to children who do not have guardians. In the village, children live, eat and study together. The organization's goal is to help the children as much as they can and to take care of the children's daily living issues.(Shaanxi government, 1996, access date 23 Oct 2013).

Left-behind children are a big problem in China, and it is one that is very difficult to solve. Every province of China has an organization or group dedicated to helping the left-behind children, by providing them with an opportunity to see their parents and by giving them a chance at a good education and a good life.

4 LEFT-BEHIND CHILDREN AS A SOCIAL PROBLEM

In rural China, it is common to make comparisons between the rural children growing up with absent parents and, city children. Most of the time, rural area children are more independent and mature. On the other hand, growing up without parents around also has a huge effect on the children. Most of the left-behind children's parents are doing physical work in the city areas. They do not communicate with their children; therefore, their children do not get enough attention and guidance from them. This has a negative effect on the children. As a result, many of these children have bad attitudes, personality problem, studying or problem with their guardians. In the end, society pays the price. (Helen Gao 2013 access date 11 Nov 2013: Xi Fengyu, 2007, access date 11 Nov 2013).

The growing number of left-behind children has brought about social problems in Chinese society. The problems are basically divided into three parts.

A. Left- behind children's mental development. Childhood is the most important period one's life. In China, we say, "childhood is the time to make the children who they will be in future" Nurturing Family and social environments are the basic conditions for children's development. But for left-behind children, it is very easy for them to lose themselves or experience mental issues. For example, they may be anti-social or lack self-confidence, or they may be prone to violence. Children represent the next generation to develop our society, but with the growing number of left-behind children and their potential mental issues, China is faced with one of its most severe societal problems. (All-China Women's Federation, 2009, access date 12 Nov 2013).

B. Left-behind children are challenging the society. Most left-behind children are unfamiliar with law; therefore, stealing, fighting, and vandalism to public property is more prevalent with these children. The media reports that 40% left-behind

children have stolen before and 50% have been in fights. Because they do not have a good understanding of laws and lack supervision, this has lead them to commit crimes that they did not think were crimes.

- C. The rights of left-behind children. Presently, the Chinese government and other organization do not enough attention to left-behind children. Also, no one has been accountable for improperly supervising these children; therefore, left -behind children's basic lift supplies and safety have not been guaranteed. (All-China Women's Federation, 2009, access date 12 Nov 2013).

Left-behind children have clearly become a social problem in China. The problem is not confined to the children themselves, but challengers all of Chinese society. The problem will not be easy to solve in the short-term, but the Chinese government has come up with some good solutions to help the situation.

(All-China Women's Federation, 2009, access date 12 Nov 2013).

The social problem of Left-behind children in China has existed for a very long time. To be able to help the children and reduce the problems caused by left-behind children, the Chinese government needs to combine their societal resources with the families' own power.

- A. *Create an environment to care for the left-behind children.*

All organizations should work together to help the left- behind children. To be able to do this, there should be more volunteers to help individual families. At the very least, they should offer to help these children place phone calls to their parents. And they should also help the migrant workers get their right and improve their medicinal,living environment, so they can have their children live with them in the city area.

(All-China Women's Federation, 2009, access date 12 Nov 2013).

B. Establish files for left-behind children.

In rural China, the local office should set up individual files for left-behind children. They should conduct family visits to get to know the family situations of the children. For those families facing difficulties, local offices or the community should provide more help and care.

(All-China Women's Federation, 2009, access date 12 Nov 2013).

C. Schools

School managers at rural area schools should have information about the left-behind children who attend their schools. The managers should set up files for them and pay more attention to them. Teachers and parents should communicate more about children's academic performance, so that parents know what is happening with their children school. Every village should have at least one psychological teacher to provide emotional counseling to the children to prevent the children from falling into depression and harboring negative feelings.

(All-China Women's Federation, 2009, access date 12 Nov 2013).

5 RESEARCH PROCESS

The research process is simply the step by step process for developing research. In this process, the researcher tries to answer the research question by revealing the findings of the research. During the research process, the researcher can use many research methods to collect information.

Research methodology is defined as a measure to collect information. In this paper the author used the qualitative research method. The author used questionnaires to collect the data. The author developed 10 questions and responses were collected from left-behind children. (Mararia, 2011, 15).

5.1 Research Question

Left-behind children usually face many issues while growing up. This thesis attempts to show the reader the kind of lives they have and the kinds of problems they face. The author conducted her research in the small city of Xianyang. The left-behind children who are the subject of the author's thesis are boys and girls who range in age from seven years old to 13 years old. They became left-behind children when they were very young. The aim of this research is to explore the daily lives of left-behind children. And to do that, the author used the research question below.

1. What happens in the daily lives of left-behind children?
2. How did they become left-behind children?
3. What challenges do they have?

One of the objectives of the study was to help people know about the lives of left-behind children (e.g., their inability to get help with their studies and their daily routes to and from school). Hopefully, the research will help more organizations to understand the children, so that they can support them. Another objective of the research was to help the parents of left-behind children realize that sometimes the most important thing for their children is to have their parents present. In addition, the research aims to help parents find ways to balance their work and family life, and pay more attention to their children's emotional world.

5.2 Goals of the Study

The goals of this thesis are mainly to explore the daily lives of left-behind children. However, the detailed goal of the thesis is below.

1. To explore the living situation of the left-behind children and learn basic information about their lives and family.
2. To help more charity organizations understand the children and to support the children mentally, physically and even financially. The research hope to encourage individuals to help the children as much as they can.
3. To promote good relationships between the parents and children and help parents to understand the children's real needs.

In order to get the result, the author conducted quality research and studies the lives of left-behind children to obtain the basic information about their daily lives and educational situation. The author also obtained information about the left-behind children from the All-Women's Federation.

5.3 Type of Research

Qualitative research was used in the thesis research process. Qualitative research is usually conducted to explore human behavior, experience and opinion and to find out why and how. Most researchers and practitioners use qualitative research to learn about the ways in which people organize and interact with the world. (Monicah Mararia, 2011, 17). Questionnaires are used to gather the information from a group of people. And for this thesis, the questionnaires are used as a method to collect data from left-behind children. This thesis research is focused on the daily life experiences of left-behind children in Shaanxi provinces. The questionnaires were given to six left-behind children who range in age from seven to 13 years old. (Tom Lemanski& Tina Overtion, 2011,4).

6. METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

The research started with choosing the issue, and the data collection started after the issues were defined. Before conducting research, the researcher needs to know that there are primary and the secondary data collection methods. The primary data collection method involves gathering new. The secondary data collection method involves gathering data that has already been collected by other researchers. For this thesis, both data collection methods were used.(Mararia, 2011, 18).

In this thesis, the data was collected by sending questionnaires to the left- behind children. The researcher developed 10 questions that related to the children's basic information and daily life experiences.

A questionnaire is usually sent at the participant who completes it and returns it. The questions are specifically chosen for the study. This method is mostly used when we cannot have direct contact with the participants. There are two kinds of questionnaire methodologies used in research studies, and each serves a different purpose. One is called descriptive studies, which means to estimate the facts in some field. The other is called analytical studies, which means to compare the characteristics of two or more populations. This thesis used questionnaire based on descriptive studies. (Whitney, D.R., access date 6 Nov 2013).

6.1 My Thesis Process

This thesis topic idea came from news when the author read on the internet. The news was reporting on the plight of China's left-behind children. News accounts presented facts, figures, picture, and stories; that informed readers about left-behind children. And

the author found the topic fascinating. The author is a native of China and she knows these groups of children have existed for a long time, and the author was aware of the social problem it has become in China. For these reasons, the author wanted to explore the daily lives of China's left behind children for the purpose of informing reader about these children, so that they can help them.

During the research, the author found six children to help complete the research. They range in age from seven to 13 years old. For the research, the author travelled back to China to find some children to help her with the interviews, but because of the culture, it was very difficult to get interviews with them. (In China, people do not trust outsiders who show up at their home asking for interview). Luckily, the author has a friend in China who knows these kinds of families. So, the author asked him to help with the questionnaires. The author developed 10 questions and sent them to him. He was able to give the questionnaires to the children and the children wrote their stories based on the questions. This is how the author obtained data from the children.

The children involved in this thesis lived in the countryside in Xianyang City. And their parents all went to work in other cities. Their parents visit home once or twice a year. Five of the children were living with grandparents and one of them was living with other relatives. The questions were primarily focused on information about their family, their studying situation and their daily lives.

6.2 Area of Study

The research was carried on in a small city called Xianyang City, which belongs to the middle of China's Shaanxi province. The author conducted the research in this area because the author grew up in this city, and it was easy to get the information from organizations and also because the numbers of left-behind children in this city are

increasing.

This research focused upon left-behind children, whose parents left them when they were very young. There were six children who completed questionnaire. The children were boys and girls who range in age from seven to 13 years old.

As the author mentioned above, there were only six children who participated in her research. The main reason for having so few participants was that because all the children who participated in the research was under 18 years old, so the author had to obtain parental permission before they could be included in her research. The other reason for so few participants was lack of time. The friend of the author, who was busy travelling often between two cities, was unable to find more for research.

It took almost three months to receive the completed questionnaires. During the research, author's friend went to the children's home and explained the questions to the children and let them write their responses themselves, alone. It usually took a few days for children to complete the questionnaires. Because the children wrote their responses to the questionnaires in Chinese, so the author translates the responses into English.

7 FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

In this thesis, the narrative analysis method was used to analyze the data from the left-behind children. Narrative analysis is a type of case-centered research that focuses on stories told by the participants. It seeks to highlight human experiences. (Fritz, 2008, 6).

In 1928, the Russian formalist, Vladimir Propp, wrote a book entitled “*Morphology of the Folklate*”. His book gives us a clear explanation of the narrative analysis. (Monicah Mararia 2011, 23).

Inside the book he wrote:

“The narrative analysis of the text helps to bring out not only the properly linguistic characteristics of the story a task perhaps better left in the hands of those who know how to do this best: linguists, but also a great deal of sociology hidden behind a handful of lines.”(Franzosi 1998, 519). “It is the story, the chrono-logical succession of events that provides the basic building blocks of narrative. Without story there is no narrative. The presence or absence of a story is what distinguishes narrative from non-narrative texts.”(Rimmon-Kenan 1983:15 in Franzosi1998).

Narrative is all about the stories, and the exploration of human life experiences or experiences of certain events. And in this thesis, the author chose to use the narrative analysis because it is to use stories to analyze the data and it shows the result more clearly. Also the author thinks it is easier for children to write down their experiences as stories. In stories, they do not have to worry about shyness and they can express their feelings and tell their stories freely. (Monicah Mararia, 2011, 23).

7.1 What are the basic necessities of life?

In China, people describe the basic necessities of life, which includes four different

parts: “clothes,” “food,” “accommodation and,” “transportation”. The saying simply describes the basic things a human need in their daily living situation. In the past, people in China, did not need much. All they need was clothing to keep them warm, adequate food, a house, and transportation. But now, with the emergence of economic development in China, people have started to want more. They want more than food to eat; they want food that tastes good. They want clothes only for warmth, but for beauty. But for left-behind children, do they even have the basic necessities of life? (Anonymity. 2006, access date 31 May 2014).

- *“I don’t live in school, so I bring my food with me every day. Normally I took “Man Tou”(similar to bread) and some fried vegetables for lunch. After school we will have some rice soup or sometimes rice to eat at home” (Case 4)*

“Dad and mom send money to us every month, so grandparents will go buy some rice, vegetables or sometimes fruits. I eat at home most of the time, but sometimes I get to take instant noodles with me to school. I like it. It tastes good.(Case 2)

The author believes food and clothing are the things most needed for humans to stay alive. Nowadays, people want more in food. They care about the taste and the nutrition as well as the safety of the food. But for some of the left-behind children, food does not come that easy. We can see from the sentences above written by left-behind children who participated in this research, that the food these children eat is not that nutrition. They eat what they can afford or what they grow at home. In a book entitled “*The Survey of Chinese Left-Behind Children*” the writer did research in a village called “Zi Cheng Village.” Inside the village, there is only one grocery store, and the only things for sale are basic living supplies. It is even difficult to buy a banana in the store. The store owner has to order and buy them from somewhere else. Most families live by farming, so they eat what they have, and that means corn. But if they experiences a bad

growing season, they do not have much food to eat. When children go to school, they can have better food. The school provides free meal for students-things like. soya bean milk and bread for breakfast. The benefit of a free meal for students does not exist in every village. This benefit is available in only a few villages, even though China is a big country, with many rural villages throughout the country. But still, the national government and local government try to help left-behind children's situations. Many provinces in China are working with local schools, trying to help the left-behind children get healthy food. (Zhao Junchao, 2012, 38-39).

- *“Every year my mom and dad buy me some toys or beautiful clothes. They even gave me a second-hand computer. Friends are so jealous of me. They want to try play with my toys and try on my clothes, because most of my friends get their clothes from are relative's children or from their older sister. But all I want is to spend some time with my parents. ” (Yu Fengtong, 27 Aug 2013,Email message). (Case 2)*

When talking about clothes, people think of beauty because now clothes are not only for keeping warm, but also for making people look good. But left-behind children need clothes to keep them warm or simply to cover their bodies. But many left-behind children have not enough clothing due to the financial situation of their parents. Most of the parents are working physical work and earn low salaries. With those salaries they have to pay for their own living experiences and also support their children's. However, some parents are doing well in the city, and they have enough money to provide their children with more material items. For example, the child above got new clothes from her parents. But every left-behind child is not this fortunate. Most left-behind children receive old, damaged clothes from relatives or they wear their elder sibling's clothes, which might not keep them warm enough. But the author knows that many individuals donate their children's clothes to rural areas, and also the author learned that there are many organizations and schools that are also trying to help the rural area children with

their clothing situation. (Zhao Junchao. 2012,1).

- *“I live with my grandparents in our old house, and walk to school every day.”*
(Case 4)

“I live in school, because my home is really far from school. So really I went home during the weekends, but not every weekend, because the bus also costs money. In my dorm, we have six students living together. We have our own bed and some tables. There is a shared toilet and bathroom for the whole floor, so it is crowded” (Case 5)

In the city areas of China, most of the children live at home with their parents. But in the rural areas, there are always left-behind children who live at school. There are both positive and negative aspects of children living at the school. On the positive side, some local schools provide a healthy breakfast for the left-behind children. So at least they get one healthy meal a day. However, on the negative side, the living conditions of the schools are not that good. We can see from the story above, six students live together in one dorm room, and they do not have privacy. According to the thesis of Zhu Xiatao, <<*School Living Condition of The Left-Behind Children in Rural Areas of China*>>, in An hui province's , Da Bie village, there are three schools which provide students with dormitory housing inside the school. And those three schools, together 183 middle school-ages left-behind children and 208 high school-age left-behind children. In her thesis, she mentioned that usually 20 students' live in a dorm which is only 20 square meters, and the students need to buy their own living things. On the other hand, as the author mentioned above, there are advantages for left behind children to living at school. (e.g., the safety of the children). In China, school buildings are inside the wall, and there is a main door and a side door, and both have doormen to keep it closed at night. And there is a teachers' dorm near to the students' dorm. So, the teacher can help them when they need them. Therefore, some parents choose to let their

children stay in school, because parents think it is safer for them to live in the school, and that it may be helpful for their studies. (Zhu Xiatao,2006,10-14).

8. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Before the author started her research about left-behind children, she had already heard these children's stories from TV and other online news outlets. She knew of their existence and that they really needed help from the society. But somehow she felt all those things were far from her. The author thought maybe there were no families like this around her. But during research the author learned a lot, and she received direct information from them. That gave the author the courage to do more volunteer work in the future. The author knows that she can help them, and she knows how to help them. They are just children who need care and love from individuals and also the society as a whole.

During this research the author learned to accept the traditional culture in the countryside. As the author stated the beginning of this thesis, she travelled to China to conduct the research. The author was unable to secure her interviews, so her friend helped her to connect with some of the left-behind families he knows. The research was carried out in a village. The village is home to many traditional cultures. The inhabitants do not want to tell a stranger their story, because of rules in their village. The author lives in a city area where many traditional cultures are already dead. But after this research, the author knows how to adapt to different people and respect their cultures. Individuals have their own values and cultural traditions. People should respect and adapt to them.

During the research, the author noticed that many organizations have programs to support the left-behind children, but they can do very little. For a left-behind child, one phone call or one video chat from time to time is not enough for them to sufficiently communicate with their parents. What they need is a solution to close the gap between them and their parents. In order to do those, the author thinks they should work with the children mentally, try to help them understand their parents and the society in which they live. Then, they should connect with the local government to do something for the

children and give every child a chance to talk with their parents every other day.

The most important thing the author learned from this research is that family has a really big influence on children's future development. As a child of divorced parents, the author did not realize that her family situation had that much influence on her. But after doing all the research about left-behind children, the author is beginning to feel that family and parents are the most important part of child's development. And where the author start to think of the stories of those children, their lack of care and love from their parents, she realizes that is part of the reason why some children do not trust other people and why some children are too shy.

9. CONCLUSION

The number of Left-behind children is increasing, and more and more organizations are being established to help these children. But the situation of left-behind children in our society has not gotten better. Many children are becoming homeless or becoming drug abusers. These issues are not only due to parents' minimal attention, but also due to the whole family and society not taking responsibility and paying enough attention to the plights of these children. It will not be not easy to change the situation.; however , the author still hope the organizations and families of left-behind children can think more about those children and make their situations better.

Growing up without parents is very hard for a child. During this time children can change a lot. Their personalities will also change a lot. Some of children will become strong and mature; they know why their parents left them, so they study hard just to escape this kind of life. But, some of the other children have poor willpower, and without parent's' protection, they are at risk for getting involved with drugs or committing crimes.

Children should be living with their parents and they should be protected by their parents. Family is an important part of a child's life and children learn from their family members how to love and care for others. Because of China's One Child Policy, it is very important to think of children's futures and take responsibility for children by protecting them and teaching them right and wrong.

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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.

1. Can you share some basic information about you and your family?
2. Please describe a regular day in your life.
3. Who do you live with?
4. From whom can you get financial support?
5. How often do you see your parents?
6. What is the most difficult and the happiest thing for you?
7. How do you feel when your parents are not around?
8. How do you feel about your school life? Do you have any friends?
9. What do you think is the reason for being left behind?
10. If you are in trouble, who supports you?

APPENDIX 2: LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1: Equipment in classrooms- urban and rural Chin, 2008.

Figure 2: Data showing depress scores of children at varying ages who were left by parents.

Figure 3: Data showing trait anxiety scores of children at varying ages who were left by parents.

Figure 4: Influences on children's social development.

Figure 5: Daily timetable of left-behind children (*Sichuan News*).

Figure 6: Rate of communication between left behind children and their parents.