

The Way Home: Reflections on the Problems of Left-behind Children

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ABSTRACT

There is a direction, called the direction of home; there is a group of people, called family; there is a road, called the road home. To pave a road home for the parents of left-behind children is the wish of everyone who cares about them, and also the wish of the whole society. In the course of my participation in rural education, the problem of left-behind children is a common occurrence. It is even more important to be seen than to be helped. I hope that through this voluntary teaching trip, we can re-examine the problem of left-behind children in remote areas, and then join in the concern and help for them.

KEYWORDS

Left-behind children in rural areas; Education in underdeveloped areas; Education; Rural vitalization

1 Introduction

With the development of China's economy and society, the process of urbanization and industrialization has accelerated. Working in cities has become a choice for rural people to improve their economic conditions. However, due to the pressure of environment and economy, many parents choose to leave their young children in their hometown to be taken care of by others, resulting in the emergence of a large number of left behind children in rural areas. Although objectively, parents who work in cities provide some economic security for their families, some people have improved the living environment of their families and the material conditions of their children. This seems to make children's lives happier, but in essence, family influence and family company are the first elements in the process of children's growth. Many left behind children have physical and mental health problems due to their parents' perennial absence. To make matters worse, the living conditions of some families have not improved significantly. The children are not accompanied, and their lives are still poor, resulting in many left behind children having no schooling. Many children are about to lose the word "home" before they know how to own it. Fortunately, we have seen that the Party and the government have put this issue on the agenda. The state has issued a series of policies to protect children left behind and put forward a strategy for rural revitalization, which provides an effective way to revitalize the countryside and let "parents" go home. I also created a series of paintings aiming at this social problem, hoping to reflect the rural reality, put forward thoughts, and describe the future of children, parents and rural areas under the national rural revitalization policy.

The way home is hard and ecstatic. The way home is far and muddy, but worthy expectation. The way home is cold and lonely, but warm and safe; The way home is at the foot of millions of parents, is also in the dreams of millions of children.

2 The Way Home is a Choice that Parents Have to Choose

As parents, they all want to make their children worry about their clothes and food, and to accompany their children throughout their growth process. However, the fact is not as good as people's wishes. As the efficiency of agricultural production increases, employment opportunities in rural areas decrease. For many people of working age, the only chance to earn a wage to support their family is in a city far from their birthplace. Although this often means that parents need to stay away from their children, it also means that they will have more disposable income that can impact their children's health and education. This "income effect" tends to have a positive impact on education, but to some extent is offset by the parent's "lack of companion". When parents go out to work, these children are often left with their next generation's elders or begin boarding at school. Many left-behind children are left by their grandparents and grandmothers, who are often illiterate and do not have sufficient conditions and abilities to meet all their needs. However, driven by real-world factors, parents have to leave their homes and go to large cities in the north to make money to support their families. Facing unfamiliar cities and fast-paced life, they may be confused and under great pressure, but they do not dare to relax. At the same time, they have a barrier in their heart. They can not honor the elderly and take care of their children on the next. They can only hide the miss of their children and their families, work hard and work hard to make money to give back to their families. Perhaps they also want to have a way to resolve this frustration and take them home. (Fig.1)



Figure 1 *Choice* Digital Painting 2022

3 The Way Home is the Desire, the Deep Desire of the Children's Expectation for Parents

Children are the future of the nation. They should have a happy childhood, but are they happy? Who will accompany them on their birthday; Who do they tell when they have something on their mind? I was a volunteer teacher in a primary school in Yunnan Province, teaching fine arts in grades 2 to 5. (Figure 2) The middle and primary school girl in the picture is a sophomore of mine. Her name is Siyu, but she doesn't speak. From my first class to leaving school, I never heard her say a word. I heard from other teachers that she was not ill, but introverted. Her parents left home to work when

she was very young. She was a typical child brought up by her grandparents. Her family was poor and her clothes were always the same. Her two pigtails were tied by Grandma, and the color of the leather tendons was always not in the same pace; The face and hands are always dirty, as if they were pencil ashes deliberately smeared; What attracted me most was her big flashing eyes, a pair of black eyes. She just looked at you straight, as if she was afraid, but seemed not afraid of anything. Without speaking, you can also see her timidity and purity, as if everything was written in her eyes. In the distance of the picture, the light flickering faintly in the low earth house seems to guide her home. It seems that grandma is cooking at home, but is it possible that mom and dad are back?

My primary school is a boarding school. Although children don't have to face loneliness and boredom on their own, boarding school students also face a range of problems because they may lack care wherever and whenever they want. In the evening they were left in a cold and crowded dormitory, with inadequate supplies and caring teachers. Without parental supervision, children are more likely to lose interest in learning, become more naughty or introverted, and even drop out of school, which is not what their parents want to see. In fact, more than 13 percent of left-behind children drop out of junior high school. In addition to the absence of parents, another reason for dropping out of school is that some of the left-behind children have to assume family responsibilities, such as helping the elderly of their families to work in the field, which also accounts for most of their study time. For children who continue to receive education, the quality of teaching is also decreasing. As rural teachers in remote areas often lack incentives and resources, education becomes a major obstacle for left-behind children. Educators hired for rural teaching posts also tend to experience simple training in schools without much teaching experience to provide good education. However, due to the Overwork caused by inefficiency, many teachers cannot concentrate on how to improve the quality of teaching. The dual scarcity of living and teaching environment makes the future development of left-behind children in rural areas face great challenges. This is not the dilemma of this primary school. It is a common problem for rural schools in all remote areas.

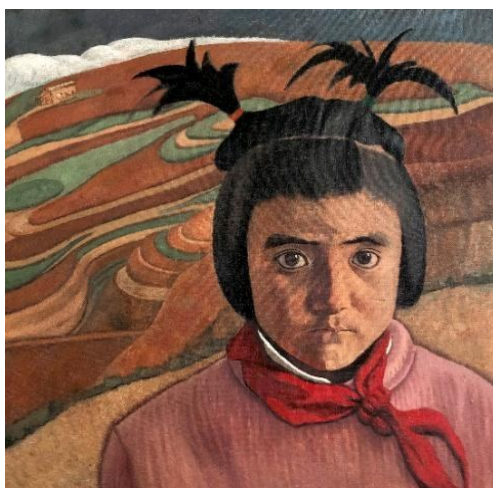


Figure 2. *The Way Home - Desire* Canvas 2022

4 The Way Home -- A Link that not only Connects the Hearts of Parents and Children, but also Connects Millions of People

Left-behind children can touch the hearts of countless people at the mention of these four words. Reunion is the hope and wish of countless people. I have participated in educational

activities in Yunnan. During the period of teaching, I get along with my children day and night, and they have built deep feelings with each other. They are willing to tell their hearts, and I also want to bring them more pleasure and fill a little gap for them because their parents are not around. I am happy to see my children happy when they receive gifts that I have prepared with other teachers in the New Year. I posted my life record on the network and got the attention of many people. Many friends, even those I have never met, expressed their desire to donate money and donations to help these children, some of whom provided help without leaving their names. There are many loving people and public organizations in our society who are also doing a lot of assistance in various ways. The "Starlight Care for Left-behind Children Public Welfare Program" organizes wonderful courses and colorful games for children, taking them to the sea of books, helping them forget their loneliness and grow up healthily in a caring atmosphere⁸. Public welfare projects such as the New Rural Assistant Action, Baidu Tieba for the left-behind children, and caring for primary schools are all providing the left-behind children with the help and warmth they can. The public's concern is the driving force to solve this social problem. (Fig.3)



Figure 3 *Goodness* Digital Painting 2022

5 The Way Home -- A Wish and Inevitable Result of the Rural Revitalization of the Party

At this moment, everything looks so beautiful. At sunset, a warm glow covers the earth, a golden rape field, a brand new ocean house, and a moment when they meet again. This moment has arrived at last. It is a moment of thinking day and night, and also a moment parents have long expected. Instead of going back to the concrete to make a living, they work happily and easily in their picturesque home, accompany their family and enjoy a rich life. After the country promulgated a series of rural policies, through people's efforts, this scene only appears in the dream of "thinkers" countless times and is realized in reality. (Fig. 4)

The 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) put forward the strategy of revitalizing rural areas, and insisted on giving priority to the development of agriculture and rural areas. The goal is to establish and improve the urban and rural integration development system and policy system in accordance with the general requirements of prosperous industry, livable ecology, civilized rural style, effective governance, and affluent life, and accelerate the modernization of agriculture and rural areas.⁹ In accordance with the strategic arrangement proposed by the 19th



Figure 4 *Homeland* Digital Painting 2022

National Congress of the Communist Party of China to build a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way and achieve the second centennial goal in two stages, the 2017 Central Rural Work Conference defined the goals and tasks of implementing the rural revitalization strategy: by 2020, the rural revitalization will have made important progress, and the institutional framework and policy system will be basically formed; In 2035, decisive progress will be made in rural revitalization and agricultural and rural modernization will be basically achieved; By 2050, the countryside will be fully revitalized, and agriculture be strong, rural areas be beautiful, and farmers be rich.^[8] It really paves a way for migrant workers to go home, so that farmers can return to their own land to work and live, and achieve economic prosperity. They do not have to travel thousands of miles away to work for their families, so that children will no longer be far away from their parents, so that the land will no longer be barren, so that the vast countryside will become a field of hope again.

6 Conclusion

The issue of left behind children in rural areas is a phased issue in China's economic and social development, and is a profound reflection of China's unbalanced urban and rural development, uneven public services, imperfect social security and other issues. The left behind children in rural areas, like other children, are the future and hope of the motherland and need the common concern of the whole society. The care and protection of children left behind in rural areas is related to the healthy growth of minors, family happiness and social harmony, and the overall situation of building a well-off society in an all-round way^[9]. Ye Pengfei, associate professor of the School of Social Work of China Institute of Labor Relations, believes that the changes and mobility of left behind children and rural society are consistent. The appearance of left behind children is a structural factor, but it has a great impact on individuals^[10]. The 2019 White Paper on the Mental Status of China's Left behind Children was released by the Beijing Public Welfare Promotion Center on the Road to School in early 2020. It spanned 15 provinces, and after ten months, the total number of questionnaire samples reached 14000, and more than 100 families of left behind children were visited in depth. This year's white paper shows that left behind children are generally estranged from their parents. Researchers found that no matter how normal their situation is, left behind children will suffer serious psychological trauma. The emotional state of most left behind children will be more negative than other children, and communication with parents will become more difficult. Many children deeply resent their parents, and more than 10% say their parents have "died". And most of them are not

because working in cities is more life threatening, but because children's "lack of companionship" for their parents triggered a playful self-protection. Each report is like a drop of tears. The water has accumulated and trickled down. The real psychological problems of left behind children also spread out in front of the public. I also hope that through this reflection and creation, I can reflect more rural realities, promote social concern, describe the future vision, and make my own modest efforts to turn the vision into reality.

About the Author

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