

Reflections on the Transformation of China's Child Welfare in the Context of Low Fertility Rate

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ABSTRACT

With the increasingly severe fertility situation in China, China has already started the negative population growth from 2022, and the development of child welfare is imperative. The current child welfare system in China is unable to meet the diversified welfare needs of children in the new era, and the inclusive child welfare only stays at the moderate inclusive stage. In the future, it is an inevitable trend to move from moderate inclusion to comprehensive inclusion. By analyzing the current development of child welfare in China, we find the achievements and problems in the development of child welfare in China, so as to put forward a targeted proposal for the transformation of child welfare through the synergy of policies, investment in children, legislation on welfare, and equalization of urban and rural development in order to provide certain references to China's way out of the low In this way, it is proposed that the transformation of child welfare should be carried out through policy coordination, child investment, welfare legislation and equalization of urban and rural development, with a view to improving the level of child welfare and providing reference for China to get out of the low fertility trap.

KEYWORDS

child welfare; child investment; inclusive child welfare

1 Introduction

Children's well-being is a matter of national future and national revitalization, and is an important indicator of a country's level of social welfare protection^[6]. In recent years, with the decreasing birth rate, the situation of childlessness in China has become more and more serious, and the development of children's welfare has reached a point of necessity. According to the latest data released by the National Bureau of Statistics, in 2023, China's birth population of 9.02 million people, the birth rate of 6.39 ‰, the death population of 11.1 million people, the population mortality rate of 7.87 ‰; the natural growth rate of the population is -1.48 ‰. ¹After the first negative population growth in China in 2022, it seems that the birth rate in China has begun to go downhill. The reasons for the low birth rate are manifold, among which the difficulty of adapting the existing child welfare system to the requirements of the current stage of development is one of the major reasons.

Since the 18th National Congress, China has entered a new era in which the main contradiction in children's welfare has been transformed into a contradiction between the unbalanced and

1 Statistical Bulletin on National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China 2023, National Bureau of Statistics, 2024, https://www.stats.gov.cn/sj/zxfb/202402/t20240228_1947915.html

insufficient development of children's welfare and the needs of the majority of children and their families for a better life. General Secretary Xi Jinping has pointed out that "letting children grow up healthily is related to the future of the motherland and the nation, and is also the greatest wish and expectation of every family". Children are the hope of the nation and the future of the motherland. With the continuous development of China's society and economy, the fruits of economic development should benefit all people to the greatest extent possible, and in particular should benefit the two groups of "one old and one young" in China, but the reality is unsatisfactory. China has already provided universal benefits such as allowances and free medical care for the elderly over 60 years of age, which we will not repeat here for the time being. However, welfare policies for children lag far behind the real welfare needs of children and their families, and the problem of imbalance and insufficiency in the development of children's welfare still exists, especially between urban and rural areas and regions, which is not conducive to the sharing of the fruits of social development by this group of children, nor is it conducive to the realization of social equity. Therefore, how to realize the comprehensive development of children through a comprehensive transformation of children's welfare in the new era is an important issue worthy of our consideration.

2 Literature review

China's child welfare has gone through a process of transition from "filling the gaps" to "moderately inclusive" to "comprehensively inclusive". With the introduction of the Program for the Development of Chinese Children (2021-2030), the development of child welfare in China has entered a new stage. According to Chen Tao (2021), the Outline for the Development of Chinese Children (2021-2030) makes the judgment that "a moderately inclusive child welfare system has basically been established", laying down a new institutional framework for the development of universal coverage. Since entering the 21st century, China has basically completed the transition from gap-filling to moderately inclusive, and the moderately inclusive child welfare system has achieved significant development. Yan Xiaoying and Zhou Jing (2021) suggest that with the current economic and social development of China entering a new stage, the construction of moderately inclusive child welfare and child protection has basically been completed, but moderately inclusive is currently only for orphans, children with AIDS and other parts of the children in distress, and the welfare requirements of the whole child have been neglected, and with the social and economic development of the society, we have already possessed the economic conditions for the establishment of a comprehensively inclusive child welfare, in order to better meet the welfare needs of all children at this new stage, we urgently need to establish a comprehensive and inclusive child welfare system. Currently, China's social welfare and security is in a period of rapid development, and the construction of the child welfare system is still relatively lagging behind. Cheng, Navy and Zhu, Yanmin (2012) pointed out that we should build an inclusive child welfare model, use different kinds of allowances in combination with different forms of services, build a community platform to provide families with directly acceptable and convenient welfare services from the grassroots level, strengthen the rule of law and the construction of welfare moral and ethical construction, multichannel expand funding sources, and strengthen social supervision and welfare performance rating; Lu Shizhen (2017) believes that we should adhere to high standards and inclusive pointing in the selection of child welfare standards and models. At present, the development of China's welfare undertakings is still lagging behind the development of social economy to a certain extent, and children, as a specific group, have not been able to share the fruits of China's social and economic development as other social groups, and China's children's welfare system is in urgent need of transformation and development, and Yin Jidong (2022) points out that

the development of China's children's welfare system should be from moderately inclusive to comprehensively inclusive, which is the the necessary way.

How, then, should the transition take place? It is worth noting that some scholars have proposed an "investment in children" relationship. They believe that investing in children benefits the future. Shang Xiaoyuan (2011) suggests that investment in children should be led by the government to establish a welfare system for all children, from guaranteeing children's survival to fully realizing children's rights. Wu Ziming (2021) analyzes the child welfare system in Taiwan, China, and points out that we should shift from child protection to investment in children, and when he talks about how to implement the transformation of the child welfare system to the level of policy practice, he mentions that an important point is to invest in childcare policy, which is to change from the traditional childcare service to the investment childcare policy that encourages childbearing and reduces the burden of childcare, and at the same time, through the cash payment as an inducement to reduce the burden of childcare families in raising children. that reduces the financial burden of childcare families in raising children as well as increasing the willingness of childcare families to have another child. Song Yueping (2023) further points out that improving the child welfare system is an investment in the future, not only in the future of children, but also in the sustainable development of rural revitalization areas, and that child development has a fundamental role to play in interrupting the transmission of intergenerational poverty and promoting the sustainable development of villages.^[9]Wan Guowei (2023) proposes that in the next stage, China's child welfare system should shift from "promoting birth" to "supporting parenting" to create a "child-investing country" by strengthening the parenting capacity of families and the civil administration at the grassroots level. By strengthening the child-rearing capacity of families and the service capacity of grass-roots civil affairs, we can prevent China from falling into the "low fertility trap" for a long time, and improving the accuracy of targeting child welfare recipients and the ability of welfare services on the ground will help to improve the status quo of China's low fertility rate.^[2]

This study will inherit the research lineage of the previous scholars and systematically sort out the current situation of the development of China's child welfare system in the past five years. Through the analysis of the developmental status quo, it will further reveal the problems and deficiencies of China's child welfare system, and on this basis, it will explore the transformation path of child welfare in a targeted manner, aiming to provide some theoretical references and academic support for the transformation of China's child welfare system.

3 Current status of child welfare development in China

Since entering the new era, China has made some initial achievements in child welfare. In terms of the scope of protection, in addition to traditional children in difficult circumstances and de facto unsupported children, infants and toddlers under the age of 3 have also been included in the scope of protection, and the level of welfare has been raised through the granting of allowances and tax breaks to improve the burden of family upbringing. In terms of medical care and services, the Comprehensive Early Childhood Development Program, the Leukemia Treatment and Management Program, and the Blue Sky Program have been implemented to promote the healthy development of children on all fronts. At the same time, the welfare of rural children has also been greatly improved, with initiatives such as the Nutrition Improvement Program and the Special Education Enhancement Program to ensure the comprehensive development of rural children. In terms of content, China's child welfare services have become increasingly rich, covering a wide range of areas such as health, nutrition and education, and are committed to solving the outstanding problems of children's development. In terms of protection personnel, China has improved the welfare plight of

rural children to a large extent through the continuous innovation of the grass-roots child welfare and protection service model, and the establishment of child supervisor and child director positions in rural villages on a village-by-village basis, with full coverage realized by 2020, to care for children in their lives, studies, thoughts and other aspects. According to data released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), by the end of 2022, China had a total of 529 children's welfare institutions; and 396 institutions for the rescue and protection of minors, an increase of 120 from the end of 2021. There were 334,000 children's homes in urban and rural communities, an increase of 5,146. There are a total of 50,000 children's supervisors and 651,000 children's directors nationwide, basically realizing the goal of having children's supervisors at the township level and children's directors at the village level. ²According to statistics, the number of children's welfare institutions and institutions for the relief and protection of minors in China has continued to increase, and the number of children's homes in urban and rural communities has also grown significantly, with a growing team of specialized personnel, creating conditions conducive to upgrading the level of services.

Although China has made certain achievements in the area of child welfare, the reality is that there are still many problems and challenges. At the top of the list is the problem of the uneven development of child welfare; there is a clear gap in welfare between urban and rural areas and between regions, and some urban welfare policies have a clear tendency to place children in rural areas at a disadvantage in terms of enjoyment of welfare. This intergenerational transfer of welfare disparities requires the Government to increase its efforts in favor of rural areas and to promote equity between urban and rural areas. Second, the lack of a necessary monitoring system for children's welfare is also an important issue. The frequent occurrence of children's problems in recent years, including bullying and sexual abuse, has exposed the serious shortcomings in our country's prevention and supervision of children's safety. The current system focuses too much on after-the-fact punishment, and the prevention and correction mechanism is weak and needs to be strengthened. At the same time, the lack of legislation also restricts the development of child welfare. Despite the existence of several laws, including the Law on the Protection of Minors, there is a lack of a unified and complete Child Welfare Law, and the existing regulations are limited in their coverage, strong in principle but insufficient in concrete operationalization. Finally, there is the serious decentralization and fragmentation of China's child welfare policy, and the lack of unified norms for child welfare, resulting in a poorly adapted child welfare policy. Therefore, there is an urgent need for the transformation and development of child welfare in China, so as to meet the diversified needs of child welfare in the new era and to promote social fairness and justice by strengthening the monitoring system and improving legislation. This is not only the responsibility of the Government, but also the common expectation of society as a whole.

4 The Need for Transformation of Child Welfare

In recent years, China has made remarkable progress in social security, with the goal of universal health care basically achieved, universal pensions for the elderly, an increasingly complete social assistance system, and steady progress in housing security, elderly services and welfare for the disabled. In contrast, the development of children's welfare has remained at the stage of moderate universality, with children's audiences mainly comprising children in difficult circumstances, and the welfare needs of all children have not yet been properly safeguarded. In the face of the current

² 2022 Statistical Monitoring Report on China's Children Development Program (2021-2030) https://www.stats.gov.cn/sj/zxfb/202312/t20231229_1946067.html

challenges of childlessness, accelerating the transformation and development of child welfare in China has become an urgent and important task. By optimizing the allocation of resources, increasing investment and improving the service system, we expect to promote the leapfrog development of child welfare and create more favourable conditions for the healthy growth and comprehensive development of children.

4.1 Economic and social development has placed new demands on child welfare

With the continuous socio-economic development of China, in particular the great achievements made over the past 40 years of reform and opening up, China has rapidly moved from a low-income country to the ranks of middle-income countries and is on its way to becoming a high-income country. The current socio-economic conditions in China have undergone profound changes. Zheng Gongcheng (2019) argues that our government and society have the economic conditions to provide better and more comprehensive welfare arrangements for children's development. Moreover, "sharing" is an important part of China's development philosophy, and the fruits of economic development should be shared by all, but the level of development of children's welfare has lagged behind economic development. In 2022, China's gross domestic product (GDP) exceeded 121 trillion yuan, and general public budget revenue reached 20.37 trillion yuan. Therefore, in order for the fruits of development to benefit all people in a greater and more equitable way, the social security and welfare system should be used to enable all people, including children, to share in the fruits of national development, which requires the timely transformation and development of China's child welfare system.

4.2 The development of child welfare is an important initiative to promote population balance.

In recent years, the country has faced the dual challenge of a continuing decline in the total fertility rate and a decrease in the number of births, which is largely attributable to changing attitudes towards marriage and parenthood and the escalating cost of childcare. Following the first negative population growth since 1962 in 2022, the trend has not improved but rather intensified in 2023. According to the latest data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the country's natural population growth rate dropped to -1.48 per thousand in 2023, further highlighting the urgency of promoting balanced population development. According to data from the seventh national census, the total fertility rate of women of childbearing age in China will be only 1.3 in 2020, which is already at a low level. The high cost of childcare is one of the key factors contributing to the generally low fertility intentions, which makes the development of child welfare particularly urgent.

Child welfare plays a crucial role in reducing the cost of childcare, enhancing the well-being of children and promoting balanced population development. It is one of the key strategies for promoting balanced population development. Since the 18th National Congress of the Party, child welfare has gradually received attention and has been safeguarded and implemented through specialized institutional arrangements. Although some progress has been made in the pilot program of moderate and universal child welfare, its incompatibility with the development requirements of the new era has gradually emerged as the needs for child welfare continue to escalate and new challenges emerge. In particular, against the backdrop of a low fertility rate that poses a serious threat to the balanced development of the population, it has become urgent to accelerate the transition of children's welfare from moderately inclusive to fully inclusive.

International experience has shown that, against the backdrop of accelerated population ageing and the dilemma of low fertility, child welfare, as an important policy tool and social investment instrument, can effectively encourage or stimulate childbearing. Therefore, in order to realize the national goal of long-term balanced population development and the national strategy of actively coping with population ageing, China urgently needs to accelerate the pace of transformation of

child welfare and lay a solid foundation for future social development.

4.3 Growing shortcomings of moderately inclusive child welfare

As a result of the realities of sectoral management of children's welfare, moderate and inclusive child welfare is usually limited to children in distress under the authority of the civil affairs departments, and is clearly unable to respond to the rising and escalating demands of children and their families for child welfare. First of all, the concept of child welfare in a narrow sense is that it covers only orphans, street children, de facto unsupported children, and children with serious illnesses and disabilities, a concept that has nothing to do with children as a whole. This restriction of the child welfare policy to vulnerable groups of children is bound to make it difficult to achieve the desired results, and will not have the positive effect of promoting children's development, supporting the family and enhancing social equity. Secondly, in terms of child welfare benefits, the current policy is limited to a small number of special children and the level is not high, and what is achieved is only basic living and medical protection for special children. Finally, in terms of child welfare services, the total number of child welfare services is insufficient, which is also a prominent problem. Take childcare services as an example, according to statistics, the number of infants and children between the ages of 0 and 3 is as high as 42 million nationwide, and one third of these families have an urgent need for childcare services. However, the current actual supply situation is worrying, with only about 5.5% of the demand being met, reflecting a huge gap between supply and demand. At the same time, the quality of development of children's services varies and is generally low. Some services tend to focus only on material needs at the expense of the spiritual dimension, ignoring the diversified needs of children. In short, the limitations of the moderately inclusive type of child welfare are becoming more and more apparent, and if it is not transformed and developed, it will not be conducive to the sustainable development of China's welfare undertakings in the long term.

In the context of the new era, China should proactively promote the transformation of child welfare, with a view to giving full play to the positive role of child welfare in reducing the burden on child-rearing families, promoting the healthy growth of children and realizing social harmony and sharing. This is not only an inevitable requirement of the new era, but also an important mission for us. By deepening the reform of the child welfare system and increasing policy support and investment, we hope to achieve a smooth transformation of child welfare, create a more favourable environment for the comprehensive development of children, and further promote social harmony and progress.

5 Exploring Transformative Paths in Child Welfare

In the past, we tend to adopt the concept of child welfare in a narrow sense, which mainly protects children in difficult circumstances whose families are unable to meet their needs, but the new development concept requires us to start from the welfare needs of all children to plan the development of child welfare, and it is inevitable that China's child welfare protection in the new era will move from children in difficult circumstances to all children^[18].

Since late 2007, the Ministry of Civil Affairs of China has been advocating a strategic transformation of social welfare, moving from the traditional "gap-filling" approach to a new, more "moderately inclusive" stage. Subsequently, in 2011, China's Children's Development Program (2011-2020) was released, clearly setting out the goal of building and improving a moderately inclusive children's welfare system, marking the transformation of China's welfare policy from a single gap-filling approach to one that comprehensively benefits all groups of children. 2013, the Ministry of

Civil Affairs chose Kunshan City in Jiangsu Province, Haining City in Zhejiang Province, Luoning County in Henan Province, and Shenzhen City in Guangdong Province as pilots for the implementation of moderately inclusive social welfare programs. In 2013, the Ministry of Civil Affairs selected Kunshan City, Jiangsu Province, Haining City, Zhejiang Province, Luoning County, Henan Province, and Shenzhen City, Guangdong Province, as pilot sites to take the lead in building a moderately inclusive child welfare system, and in 2014, the Ministry of Civil Affairs announced the list of the second batch of pilot areas, further expanding the pilot work to 46 municipalities (counties and districts) nationwide. To ensure the effective implementation of the Outline for the Development of Chinese Children (2011-2020), since 2016, the National Bureau of Statistics has established a monitoring report system for the areas of children's health, education, welfare, social environment and legal protection, with ongoing midterm and annual monitoring.

Since the 18th National Congress of the CPC, the construction of the child welfare system, the work system, and the safeguard capacity have been comprehensively strengthened, basically completing the overall evolution from a gap-filling to a moderately inclusive system, forming a system matrix for moving towards public welfare and universality, and accumulating a solid foundation and valuable experience for the protection of children's rights. In 2021, the National Development and Reform Commission and the Office of the Women's and Children's Working Committee of the State Council jointly issued the Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Construction of Child-Friendly Cities, which explicitly stated that we should improve the public welfare and inclusive child welfare system, and take the improvement of the public welfare and inclusive child welfare system as a breakthrough to promote the construction of child-friendly cities in China to go deeper and more practical. It can be seen that the transformation of China's child welfare to inclusive child welfare is inevitable, so what exactly should be done in practice? Based on the above analysis, this study will propose corresponding insights and strategies on how to promote the transformation of China's child welfare to inclusive.

5.1 Moving from a single system to synergistic policy development

First, it should be synergized with the population policy; in recent years, China's policy of encouraging births has had little effect, and the reality of China's low fertility rate requires synergy between policies to stimulate population growth. On the one hand, it is difficult to establish children's welfare rights and interests; on the other hand, children's welfare involves multiple administrative departments, and if there is a lack of clear regulation on the boundaries of responsibilities and coordination mechanisms, it may be difficult to form an effective pattern of coordination. In the future, legislation should be passed to clearly give children the corresponding welfare rights and interests, and at the same time clarify the responsibilities of the government, society, family and other subjects. Legislation should be used to lead the development of children's welfare, ensure the unity and fairness of the children's welfare system, and further clarify the boundaries of rights and responsibilities between the various bodies responsible for children's welfare, so as to avoid an imbalance of responsibilities and a waste of resources. Secondly, it should also be combined with family policies that encourage birth support. "The family is not only an important welfare supply subject, but also an important support for the identification and expression of child welfare needs." ^[9]In developing child welfare, it is also necessary to strengthen support for families, especially to increase support for mothers, develop mother's welfare, strengthen father's responsibility in the process of childbearing and child-rearing (such as the establishment of paternity leave, shared parental leave, etc.), and promote the construction of a mother-friendly society. Lastly, harmonize with medical policies. The financial burden of treating major diseases is an important factor contributing to family poverty. ^[19]We should therefore

establish a better and more inclusive medical insurance system for children with major illnesses, so that children and women can enjoy preferential medical policies.

5.2 Moving from child protection to investment in children

Child investment theory appeared in the 1990s, the theory of investing in children can be said to be in full bloom, under the research of a group of influential intellectuals such as Giddens, Esping Anderson, the social investment concept that emphasizes human capital investment and aims at coordinating economic and social policies has gradually developed into a mature theoretical system.³ In this context, the "child-centered" social investment strategy was put forward in due course. Against this background, the "child-centered" social investment strategy was put forward at the right time, and during this period, the theory and practice of social investment promoted each other, and both of them achieved great development. Today, most OECD countries' social expenditures on children are maintained at a high and stable rate, and the state has invested a large amount of resources in child care through the provision of a universal child care support system, and the popularity of child allowances, parental leave allowances, and child care services in these countries is relatively high. This is of great significance in reducing the burden of child-rearing on families, increasing fertility and allowing children to grow up healthily in a relatively fair environment, and it also provides a useful reference for other low-fertility countries in the world to reverse the current situation. Under the pressure of low fertility, East Asian countries are also facing the same serious problem. Japan and the Republic of Korea have begun to promulgate family policies, and both countries hope that by sharing the burden of child-rearing among families, they can help families to reduce the pressure of child-rearing and thus increase their fertility rates, and since then there has been an increase in spending on family policies, and people's willingness to have children has improved. At the present stage, China is facing the reality of a low fertility rate, which indicates that China has entered the ranks of low-fertility countries. In recent years, in order to promote population growth, China has continuously adjusted and optimized its family planning policy, making two adjustments in 2016 and 2021, shifting from controlling population growth to encouraging fertility, with a view to stimulating the people's fertility vitality by relaxing the relevant policy restrictions. However, we must realize that the downturn in the fertility rate is not caused by a single policy factor, but is the result of a combination of social factors. Specifically, the high cost of childcare and the difficulties in employment for women brought about by childbearing have to a large extent weakened the public's willingness to have children. This social phenomenon bears a striking resemblance to the background of the policy of investing in children during the transition of some welfare states.

5.3 Moving from policy to legislative guidance

At present, although a preliminary framework of child welfare policies and regulations has been formed in China, China's current child welfare system lacks a top-level legal design, and there is no unified, high-level child welfare law. For a long time, children's welfare is mainly implemented on the basis of policy documents, the lack of specialized children's welfare law, policy documents are usually limited to the competent departments, there is no unified management body, this situation is not conducive to the orderly promotion of the development of children's welfare undertakings in China. Prof. Zheng Gongcheng of the China Social Security Society said that the "14th Five-Year Plan" period is an important window for the promotion of children's welfare and legislation on

³ Giddens, *The Third Way: The Revival of Social Democracy* [M]. Beijing: Peking University Press, 2000. 128-129.

children's welfare. In the future, legislation on child welfare is an inevitable trend. The family, the state and the society, as the main bodies jointly responsible for children's welfare, need to form a synergy to jointly promote the free and comprehensive development of children. Therefore, in the future, China's Child Welfare Law should clarify the boundaries of the responsibilities of the state, the family and the society, and build a benign interaction mechanism among the responsible subjects, in order to enhance the fairness and efficiency of children's service provision.

5.4 Promotion of integrated development of child welfare in urban and rural areas

In the process of building an inclusive child welfare system, equalization of benefits for children in urban and rural areas is an important part of the process. The core of a universal child welfare system is to ensure that all children can enjoy basic social welfare on an equal footing. However, there is currently a significant urban-rural and regional divide, with the urban-rural gap being an example, as urban children often enjoy quality education, medical care and other social resources, while rural children face greater difficulties in accessing public service resources. Therefore, how to break the shackles of the urban-rural economic dichotomy and integrate urban and rural development, so as to ensure that urban and rural children's welfare is equalized, has become an issue that we need to urgently think about and put into action. The integrated development of children's welfare in urban and rural areas should cover not only various aspects of children's education, health, allowances and preferential treatment, but also the planning and layout of children's welfare facilities and the optimal allocation of service resources. In the context of rural revitalization, the welfare needs of rural children are becoming increasingly individualized and diversified, and in order to adapt to this trend, we should combine this with rural revitalization, not only to ensure that migrant children enjoy the same welfare benefits as urban children, but also to ensure that both urban and rural children have equal opportunities for all-around development, so as to promote the comprehensive transformation and upgrading of the children's welfare system.

6 Summary and outlook

To sum up, in the future, it is necessary to seize the critical window to expeditiously promote the transformation of the child welfare system and realize the comprehensive development of child welfare. Specifically, this study argues that, first, child welfare policies should be combined with population, family and medical policies to realize synergistic development; second, there should be a shift from the focus on child protection in "gap-filling" child welfare to the focus on investing in children in "comprehensive and inclusive" child welfare; and third, because China does not have a complete and independent set of Child Welfare Laws, there should be a shift from the focus on child protection to child investment. Secondly, we should shift from focusing on child protection in the case of "gap-filling" child welfare to focusing on investing in children in the case of "comprehensive and inclusive" child welfare; thirdly, since China does not have a complete and independent set of Child Welfare Laws, it is even more urgent to provide legislative guidance; and lastly, we should speed up the construction of an inclusive child welfare system, make up for the disparities in child welfare between urban and rural areas and regions as soon as possible, and maximize the sharing of the fruits of socio-economic development among all children to promote social equity. However, due to the limited space and level, this study is still relatively one-sided in exploring the path of how to realize the transformation of children's welfare, and does not give specific practical initiatives, which need to be continued and improved in future studies.