

Addressing Child Welfare Challenges in Rural China: An Assessment of the Child
Welfare Director System and Possible Lessons from Japan

by

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Bachelor of Arts, China Foreign Affairs University, China, 2019

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

China's rapid urbanization and mass migration over the past several decades has resulted in approximately 69 million children being left-behind in the countryside. Many of these children suffer from problems linked to a lack of parental care and emotional support, including physical and psychological abuse, neglect, truancy, and even malnutrition. In 2010, the Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs and UNICEF piloted a "child welfare director (CWD)" model in Chinese 120 hinterland villages aimed at empowering community members to fill the gaps in child welfare provision and to improve the well-being of disadvantaged children in rural areas. Since 2019 the Chinese government has strived to implement the CWD system across the country. Informed by a theoretical framework that encompasses the concepts of child development, family support, and child welfare models in China and Japan, this study investigates the implementation and further development of the CWD system. A comparative analysis of the Japanese commissioned welfare volunteer and chief child welfare volunteer system is also utilized to explore possible lessons for the Chinese circumstances. The research findings highlight the crucial coordination function of the CWD system in incorporating families, schools, government bureaus, and various social sectors into a synergetic network to connect fragmented child welfare resources and services to support disadvantaged children and families. Analysis of the Japanese approach sheds light on the further development of the CWD system in terms of consolidating the partnership between CWDs and schools, promoting the cooperation between CWDs and social welfare institutions, as well as strengthening the professionalism of CWDs. This research also examines the involvement of civil society in child

welfare provision in contemporary China. For program planners and policymakers, this thesis emphasizes the central role of governments at various levels, along with the important though limited contributions of non-government sectors, in providing more financial, human, and training resources to support the implementation of the CWD system to enhance child welfare provision in rural China. A key recommendation arising from this research is to establish a new specially designated government department with responsibility for all relevant child welfare issues. The thesis also speaks to the wider issue of promoting rural revitalization and rural-urban integration to address the specific challenges of left-behind children in the Chinese countryside.

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List of Abbreviations

ACWF	All-China Women's Federation
CFPA	China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation
CPRI	China Philanthropy Research Institute
CCWV	Chief Child Welfare Volunteer
CWD	Child Welfare Director
CWS	Child Welfare Supervisor
CWV	Commissioned Welfare Volunteer
JPA	Juvenile Protection Agency
MCA	Ministry of Civil Affairs of PRC
MHLW	Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SCWP	Service of Child Welfare and Protection
UNCRC	United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Background of this Study

In the early morning at countryside bus stop, a young couple wrestling with their luggage is boarding a long-distance bus. Turning their heads reluctantly, they glimpse a young boy running after the bus crying and yelling “Dad and Mom, please do not leave me”. This emotional opening scene of the film *The Reading Boy* highlights the tough life of a nine-year-old boy named Kai Lu who is left behind in a rural village by his parents to live with his sick grandfather and a stray dog.

In order to create a better living environment for their child, Lu’s parents choose to migrate to the distance city to seek better-paying employment. However, considering the high living expense and limited opportunities to access public education and social welfare in urban areas due to China’s special rural-urban dual household registration system, Lu’s parents make a difficult decision to leave their child in the rural hometown. Only during long holidays such as Chinese New Year is Lu able to have a chance to see his parents. Lu is looked after by his grandfather who has severe pulmonary heart disease. Although Lu is a nine-year-old boy, he helps his grandfather with several household chores such as cooking. Lu likes reading, and he usually reads books to his grandfather. It is interesting that sometimes Lu pronounces some words mistakenly. His grandfather will kindly remind him the correct pronunciation. However, Lu always insists that his pronunciations are correct. Under such situations, Lu’s grandfather is often inclined to spoil his grandson and agree with his pronunciations instead of continuously correcting him.

One day Lu encounters a stray dog, which reminds him of the similar experience of being “abandoned” by parents. Therefore, Lu decides to adopt this stray dog and names him Xiaodanr (Scaredy) because this dog is very timid in the darkness. Since then, Lu regards Xiaodanr as his best friend, to whom he can express all his anxiety and joy. An extremely impressive scenario is that Lu’s Chinese teacher reads his essay in the class. In this essay titled *My Friend*, Lu writes that:

I have a good friend. He follows me on my way to the school, and he leads me home after school. He never asks me to behave well in every call like my dad. Nor does he make me get up early in the morning like my grandfather and tell me to go home and watch my own TV like my neighbor’s sister. He never inquires about my homework, nor forces me to study. He never makes fun of my running nose, nor discloses my secrets. Although I do not know whether he knows where his parents are, I know he always misses them and shears lots of tears in dreams like me. He is my good friend who never criticizes and bullies me. His name is Xiaodanr. He is a dog¹ (Yuan, 2012).

Lu’s essay demonstrates the inner solitude of the vast majority of left-behind children who lack the company of parents. In this film, Lu’s parents seem to merely exist in the phone. For Lu, parents are the ones he misses the most, but they are also the strangers because they seldom appear in Lu’s daily life. That is why Lu would rather choose to stay in the rural hometown with Xiaodanr than migrate to the city with his parents after his grandfather’s death. *The Reading Boy* is the epitome of 69 million left-behind children (those who have one or both parents working away from home for more than three months a year) in Chinese rural areas (UNICEF, 2018).

China has experienced a surprisingly rapid urbanization over the past several decades. This rapid urbanization, along with unprecedented economic growth, has stimulated a great

¹ This essay is translated by the author based on the film *The Reading Boy*.

number of rural workers to migrate to urban areas in search of better-paying jobs to provide more economic resources for their children (Zhao et al., 2015). However, due to the implementation of dual household registration (*hukou*) system characterized as the dichotomy of agricultural (rural) residence and non-agricultural (urban) residence in China, most rural-to-urban migrant workers without local *hukou* are not eligible to share the same social welfare and benefits as local urban citizens (Wu & Treiman, 2004). One of the prominent impacts of the *hukou* system is on education. The lack of urban *hukou* sets an obstacle for many rural-to-urban migrant children to access public schools in cities. As a result, a majority of rural migrant workers leave their children in rural hometowns to guarantee their access to public education and social welfare. The number of left-behind children in rural areas accounted for more than 30% of all rural children in China (UNICEF, 2018).

The long-term absence of parental company and caregiving has negative impacts on the health and development of left-behind children, most of whom are more susceptible to psychological and physical problems such as lower self-esteem, social phobia, and malnutrition (Robinson, 2006; Tang et al., 2018). Particularly, compared to children with one migration parent, children with two migration parents are more likely to have schooling problems and develop a smoking habit (Lee, 2011). In addition to left-behind children, many children in rural areas live in difficulties due to poverty, disabilities, or lack of custody. This group of children are known as children in difficulty. The increasingly severe situation of rural left-behind children and children in difficulty has raised great concerns about child welfare in Chinese society. Although Chinese central and local governments have taken a set of initiatives to

improve the circumstances of these disadvantaged groups, not every child in such situations can access adequate support. In recent years, local governments in China have piloted several community-level programs in response to pressing child welfare challenges in the countryside. This thesis seeks to investigate one of these community-level programs, the child welfare director (CWD) system.

Child Welfare Director System in China

In 2010, the Ministry of Civil Affairs of PRC (MCA) and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) piloted a 'child welfare director' model in 120 Chinese hinterland villages. As the social work system was still relatively immature in contemporary China, it was hard to deliver enough professional social workers to rural areas to satisfy the demands of left-behind children and children in difficulty. In this context, the 'child welfare director' model aimed to empower community members to deliver child welfare services in order to bridge the gaps of available child welfare social workers. The community members who had fundamental knowledge of social work and child protection and capacity to navigate the system were selected and trained to carry out the work. They were known as 'child welfare directors' or 'barefoot social workers', which were originated from the term of 'barefoot doctors' who were sent across the country to vaccinate children and reduce the child mortality rate during China's primary health revolution in the 1960s and 1970s (Wang, 2015). The 'child welfare director' model aimed to create community-level child protection and interventions to promote the well-being of left-behind children and children in difficulty in rural China.

The interventions of CWDs primarily included identifying left-behind children and

children in difficulty by making regular home visits, helping disadvantaged children seek child welfare resources, strengthening the capacity of family in childrearing, managing children's homes and organizing diversified activities to support children's development, raising community awareness on child protection, and facilitating the enactment and adjustment of local child welfare policies. As of 2018, this pilot project has successfully helped around 83,000 children access child welfare services and approximately 5000 children who were illegal extra births (because their parents violated the one-child policy that limited many Chinese families to a single child) to get formal household registration. Since 2019, the Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs has been striving for the widespread implementation of the CWD system across the country (UNICEF, 2019).

As a few existing studies have investigated the CWD system, the purpose of this study is to examine the implementation and further development of this program. In addition to China, there are increasingly complicated child welfare challenges in other Asian countries such as Japan. This study also sets out to utilize the commissioned welfare volunteer (CWV) and chief child welfare volunteer (CCWV) system in Japan to explore how Japanese governments respond to child welfare challenges and what lessons from the Japanese approach can be applied to the Chinese circumstances.

Commissioned Welfare Volunteer and Chief Child Welfare Volunteer System in Japan

Whereas the CWD is a relatively new profession in contemporary China, the similar community-level child welfare model already has a recognized role in child protection and welfare provision in Japan. The CWD system, to a certain extent, bears some resemblances to

the Japanese commissioned welfare volunteer and chief child welfare volunteer system (*minsei iin - shunin jido iin seido*). In Japan, the household registration system has eliminated the urban and rural dichotomy since the Meiji restoration to guarantee free migration and equal access to social welfare within the territory of Japan (Mori, 2014). As a result, the issue of left-behind children in Japan has not historically been as big a problem as it is now in China. However, a series of child welfare challenges, such as parental maltreatment, school bullying, and truancy, have raised great concerns among Japanese society. The CWV & CCWV system was derived from the CWV system that sought to address various social welfare challenges at the community-level. Each appointed commissioned welfare volunteer (*minsei iin*) was in charge of a limited number of households to support vulnerable residents of the community. In 1947, the enactment of the Child Welfare Law in Japan marked the expanding obligation of CWVs to child welfare provision. The CWV was also known as the child welfare commissioner (*jido iin*). Since the CWVs were usually selected from the same community, they knew the basic conditions of each family and could identify and support disadvantaged children and families more effectively. In 1994, in order to enhance the resolution of more complicated children's problems, a new position of chief child welfare volunteers (*shunin jido iin*) was created to assist CWVs in delivering child welfare services. In this way, CWVs and CCWVs focused on different issues and collaborated effectively to promote children's well-being (Matsunaga, 2001).

Despite the fact that China's politics, economy, and socio-culture differ from those in Japan in many ways, there are similarities between the cultural and ideological legacies of both

nations. Notably, current child welfare models in China and Japan share similarities that prioritize the partnership among different social sectors and familism (Esping-Andersen, 1997; Goodman, 1998; Shang et al., 2003). Also, the CWD system and the CWV & CCWV system are both characterized by utilizing community human resources to fill the gaps in child welfare provision. In this sense, given the relatively long history and high maturity of the CWV&CCWV system, it is worthwhile to investigate whether there might be any lessons for current initiatives in China to address challenges of left-behind children and children in difficulty through the new CWD system.

Theoretical Concepts of this Study

In this study, the analysis of the CWD system in China and possible lessons from the Japanese approach will be framed by the key concepts of child development, family support, and child welfare models in China and Japan. These concepts will provide a theoretical framework to help shape and address the research questions of this study. The key theoretical frameworks will be examined in the following chapter.

Purpose of and Research Questions for this Study

The purpose of this study is to provide a theoretically informed analysis of the implementation and further development of the CWD system. Particularly, this study will utilize the Japanese CWV & CCWV system to investigate potential lessons for the Chinese case. A key objective of this study is to raise more attention to the situation of left-behind children and children in difficulty in rural China.

This study aims to examine the implementation of the CWD system and its further development by answering the following central and sub questions:

1. Who are involved in the CWD system and what are their approaches to achieve the goal of addressing child welfare challenges in rural China?
 - a. How are CWDs trained to deliver child welfare services?
 - b. How is the CWD system administered and where does it obtain financial and technical support?
 - c. How do CWDs interact with disadvantaged families and facilitate support for them?
 - d. How do CWDs collaborate with schools to create a supportive educational environment for rural children?
2. Are there any lessons that the CWD system can draw from the CWV & CCWV system?

If so, what specific practices from the Japanese approach can be applied to the Chinese circumstances?
3. What are the practical and policy recommendations for the further development of the CWD system and the improvement of the circumstances of left-behind children and children in difficulty in rural China?

Structure of this Thesis

In alignment with the central research questions of the implementation of the CWD system and its further development, this thesis is structured in five chapters. Chapter 1 describes the context for this study and frames the research questions. Chapter 2 introduces the theoretical framework of this study by analyzing theories in relation to child development, family support,

and child welfare models in China and Japan. Chapter 3 articulates the methodology of this study including primary research approaches, the choice of research site, data collection, and data analysis. This chapter also points out ethical considerations and some limitations of the study. Chapter 4 presents the key findings of the basic elements of the CWD system and lessons from the CWV & CCWV system in Japan. Chapter 5 provides a detailed discussion of the findings and highlights the theoretical contributions as well as policy and practical implications of this study. The thesis concludes by making recommendations for further study.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This study is positioned in relation to three sets of broad themes from the existing academic literature framing the concepts of child development, family support, and child welfare models in China and Japan. This chapter will firstly discuss the theory of child development to shed light on the investigation concerning the developmental process of left-behind children and children in difficulty in rural China. Furthermore, the theoretical framework of family support can offer clear insights into the interactions between child welfare workers and disadvantaged families. Finally, given that both the child welfare director system in China and the commissioned welfare volunteer and chief child welfare volunteer system in Japan are inextricably embedded in their respective national child welfare framework, an overview of child welfare models in China and Japan will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the policy background of these two systems.

The Study of Child Development

Family is one of the most primary contexts of children's socialization and development. A variety of familial elements, such as familial socioeconomic status, parenting styles, family relationships, and familial geographic mobility can have great impacts on family functioning and child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Berger and Font (2015) indicate that there are three principal mechanisms through which family strongly affects children's health and development: financial resources and investments; behavioral investments; and familial environments. Family with higher-level of financial and behavioral investments is more likely

to create stable and high-quality caregiving environments in which children are well-nurtured and supported by their responsible and affectionate parents. In a similar vein, Williams-Washington and colleagues (2008) suggest that children's growth and development are closely associated with a variety of familial environmental factors. For example, families with higher socio-economic status can create more chances for their children to make positive achievements. Furthermore, the positive familial emotional environment can not only facilitate children's developing their self-identity, but also help them smoothly complete one stage of development and transit to the next. Moreover, family's social and cultural environments are crucial for children to fulfill their socialization needs and become more adaptive to different culture.

By contrast, the long-term exposure to substandard parenting environments can have exceedingly negative influences on children's physical, psychological, and behavioral development. Yoshikawa and colleagues (2012) highlight the impact of family poverty on children's health and development. They assert that family in the face of poverty or financial pressure is comparatively limited to ensure the nutritious food supplies, basic material needs, and resources to support children's cognitive development. As a result, such familial dysfunction can adversely affect children's health and development. In addition, abusive home environments can critically jeopardize children's health and development. Those children who frequently undergo parental maltreatment or witness the marital violence are much more susceptible to physical trauma and mental distress. In the meantime, they tend to have behavioral and social problems such as poor self-esteem, social phobia, and delinquency (Holt,

et al., 2008; Saltzman et al., 2005; Wolfe et al., 1986). These studies offer an in-depth insight on major familial factors that can affect child development. As far as these studies are concerned, child development is greatly connected to family functioning. Positive family functioning can have positive influences on child development.

In recent years, a number of studies have paid greater attention to the effect of family on children's intellectual development and academic achievements. Interestingly, Barton and Coley (2007) regard family as the smallest school which can offer children educational resources. From their perspectives, on the one hand, family is a significant locus that can provide children with literacy materials and technical devices. On the other hand, family can guarantee a relatively ideal place allowing children to concentrate on study without distraction. In the same light, Campbell and Gordon (2017) point out that "the home is where orchestration and the organization of a child's time take place" (p.43). They argue that most of families, which lack cultural capital and face economic hardship, have difficulty in providing the orchestration necessary to supplement and enrich their children's education.

It is also worth noting that children's intellectual development and educational achievement are also greatly associated with parental school involvement. Hill and Taylor (2004) suggest that higher degree of parental school involvement can promote children's academic engagement and outcomes. They illustrate that social capital and social control are two pivotal mechanisms that make parental school involvement have influences on children's intellectual development and schooling performances. The frequent interaction with schools and other parents can help parents grasp more important skills and information (i.e., social

capital) to support children's academic development. Also, the consensus about appropriate behavior built by parents and schools can function as a form of social control that can facilitate the decrease in problematic behaviors. Notably, according to the study of Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994), "the results suggest that the ways in which parents get involved in their children's school experiences may vary according to their background, and indicate that involving parent is not a strategy restricted to highly educated families" (p.249).

In addition to family, school is another essential setting in which children learn how to establish relationships with their peers and schoolteachers as well as develop their social and cognitive capacity. The impacts of school climate² on child development have been intensively examined by scholars. According to Roeser and colleagues (2000), children are more likely to drop out of school when they perceive an emphasis on competition and differential treatment by their schoolteachers on the basis of gender or race. Put simply, the long-term exposure to a problematic school environment can have negative effects on children's educational development. In contrast, a supportive school climate created by accountable and caring schoolteachers can help children develop their academic and social abilities as well as promote their socio-emotional well-being. From a different perspective, Roeser and colleagues highlight that when children move from primary schools to middle schools, the school environment will become less supportive, and may affect children's academic outcomes. A broadly similar point has also been made by Way and colleagues (2007), who utilize cross-domain latent growth curve models to investigate how changes of children's perception regarding four critical

² In general, school climate refers to the social and educational environment in school and whether it creates a positive setting for students' development and achievement.

components of school climate (i.e., teacher support, peer support, student autonomy in the classroom, and clarity and consistency in school rules) from primary schools to middle schools affect children's psychological and behavioral adjustment. Their findings show that most of children perceive four crucial dimensions of school climate more negatively during the transition from primary schools to middle schools, and the decline of these four dimensions are strongly associated with the decline in children's psychological and behavioral adjustment. This study provides a particular insight on the relationship between trajectories of changes in children's perception of school climate and their psychological and behavioral adjustment, which is valuable to this study when examining how CWDs collaborate with schools to create a supportive schooling environment for rural children.

As children become more independent in socializing, peer relationships play an increasingly significant role in child development. According to Oberle et al. (2009), "Peer relationships can be important sources of affection, intimacy, reliable alliance, feelings of inclusion, and enhancement of self-worth, and have been linked to both the current and future well-being of children" (p.1331). Deater-Deckard (2001) also suggests that peer relationships, as a protective factor, can critically affect children's psychological and social development. It is interesting to find that children who have a best friend and regularly receive emotional support by their peers are less likely to feel lonely and suffer from school bullying. In the course of cognitive development, children begin evaluating their peers and determining whether accept them or not. In this way, some children who are rejected by their peers are prone to avoid any interactions with their peers, which may lead to various depressive symptoms and

hinder them from establishing new relationships with other peers. Consequently, poor peer relationships can have devastating impacts on children's psychological and social development. This view is greatly supported by Allen and colleagues (2007). They assert that positive peer relationships can not only contribute to the increase of children's attachment security, but also protect them from an array of externalizing behavior problems. On the contrary, those children who are less popular among peers are much more likely to suffer from psychological disorders and peer victimization as well as miss out opportunities to attain valuable social skills.

Some scholars have paid particular attention to the relationship between peer relationships and children's intellectual development. Roseth and colleagues (2008) suggest that in school, cooperative goal structure is closely tied to higher degrees of positive peer relationships, as opposed to competitive or individualistic goal structures. Furthermore, the positive peer relationships can strongly stimulate children's willingness to pursue higher level of academic goals and thus make more outstanding academic attainments. In the process of cooperation, children can learn how to get along with their peers and use their peers as model to monitor and evaluate their self-capacity, which may considerably promote their intellectual development. Along the same line, Wentzel (2009) subsequently argues that within a peer group, children can share their academic goals and expectations for performance with their peers, which may motivate children to set their own specific academic goals and pursue them. In addition, peer groups provide a source of behavioral standards and efficacy standards, whereby children can find where the improvements should be made in order to achieve higher level of academic outcomes. Also, peer acceptance and emotional support ensure a relatively safe

school environment in which children can make every effort to pursue their academic goals rather than worrying about peer rejection or peer harassment.

The theories regarding impacts of school climate and peer relationships on child development mentioned above are mostly studied in the Western context. However, given the particular situations of many Chinese rural schools in which the proportion of left-behind children is extremely high, the notion of influences of school climate and peer relationships on child development within the context of rural China is still largely obscure.

The Theory of Family Support

Over the past several decades, numerous approaches have been taken to examine the family support. The term ‘family support,’ often interchanged with ‘family-centered intervention’ or ‘family-oriented prevention,’ is used to describe a series of services aimed at reducing the likelihood of negative outcomes of dysfunctional families to improve their well-being. According to McGregor and colleagues (2020):

Extant definitions of Family Support emphasise: informal social networks, social support, and the strength and capacity of children and parents who use services; the need for services to be socially and culturally inclusive, accessible and responsive; and for services to work in partnership between children, families, services across all phases of intervention from needs of identification to evaluation. (p. 2)

Recently, a great deal of research on family support has focused particularly on the strengths-based approach. The strengths perspective is previously adopted by social workers to assist clients in exploiting their inherent strengths and setting their desired goals to grapple with the difficulty (Saleebey, 1996). Blundo (2001) argues that “the strengths perspective is an attitude and frame from which to engage those with whom we are working. It shifts our

perspective from a worker-directed effort to a client-directed effort in collaboration with the client” (p.303). Over the past two or three decades, the strengths perspective has been increasingly applied to the family support practice. Early and GlenMaye (2000) highlight that the strengths approach not only helps families identify potential coping resources, but more importantly, it encourages them to use their intrinsic capacity to sustain hope by setting their achievable goals in compliance with their abilities and anticipations. This idea is further supported by scholars such as Walsh (2002) and Lietz (2006; 2007). From their viewpoints, in addition to reducing the risk or correcting the weakness, strengths building is another important method with which interventionists can help disadvantaged family maintain positive family functioning. The strengths and resilience framework holds the belief that there are existing abilities and resilience within each family that allow it to recover and grow stronger from adversity. Therefore, it is necessary for interventionists to give disadvantaged families opportunities to maximize their competencies and build mutual support and collaborative efforts among family members to avert the breakdown and thus assure their children’s development and well-being (Dunst & Trivette, 1987; Walsh, 2002).

The significance of strengths approaches lies in bolstering family to meet the uncertainty more independently when external social support cannot reach immediately. While the application of strengths-based family intervention is still in the early stage, it appears to be an effective approach to help family maintain positive family functioning. In the Chinese context, it is possible to adopt the method of strengths-based family intervention to enhance the capacity of disadvantaged families in the countryside. However, as the strengths approach underlies the

integrated efforts by family members in the face of adversity, the relatively incomplete family structure caused by rural-to-urban migration may bring a big challenge to its practice. Moreover, the study by Lietz (2011) indicates that some strengths-based family support practices do not successfully illustrate the strengths-based principles. Hence, Lietz suggests that further research is needed to enrich the knowledgebase of social workers in terms of theoretical adherence to strengths-based practice principles.

Comparatively, some scholars have investigated family support through the lens of parent-child interaction. According to Mahoney and Wheeden (1997), the concept of parent-child interaction is primarily based on the assumption that “parents are competent, and their children’s progress can be enhanced by building upon the strengths of their relationship with their children” (p.182). They suggest that interventionists should find the most comfortable way that fits each family in order to establish the rapport between parents and children as well as increase parents’ effectiveness and confidence in childrearing. In another study by Mahoney and colleagues (1998), they compare the child-focused model to a relationship-focused model. Their findings indicate that the relationship-focused model, which emphasizes parents’ highly responsive interactions with children, can have considerable influences on intervention effectiveness. By contrast, little evidence supports that the intensity and frequency of directive child intervention services are determinants of intervention effectiveness.

In a more recent study, Duncan and colleagues (2009) suggest that the mindful parenting model is an effective family intervention approach that can improve parent-child relationships and promote family’s well-being. The prominent characteristic of mindful parenting model is

“promoting parents’ ability to bring a present-moment awareness to their parenting, which includes listening with full attention, bring emotional awareness and nonjudgmental acceptance to their parenting interactions, and practicing self-regulation and compassion in their parenting relationships” (p. 266). By using the means of mindful parenting, parents can develop to become more responsive and flexible to parent-child interactions as well as more adaptive to a broad range of external challenges. Consequently, the mindful parenting approach can be conducive to reducing many negative outcomes such as parent-child conflict and ensuring a supportive environment in which children can harmoniously interact with their parents. These studies provide a broader perspective of the function of parent-child interaction approaches in improving parenting quality and maintaining positive family functioning. Returning to the issue of left-behind children in rural China, the long-term parental absence is more likely to result in the poor relationship between left-behind children and their parents. Theories of parent-child interaction approaches can be useful in this study when investigating the role of CWDs in helping migrant parents repair a dysfunctional relationship with children.

In recent years, an increasing number of studies regarding family support have begun to focus on the community-level social network. Cole (1995) highlights the significance of family-support centers, located in the local communities, in helping community families satisfy children’s demands. In stark contrast to child welfare agencies labeled as stigmatizing by client families, the family support centers that form the hub of comprehensive and non-coercive services are widely accepted by community families. Rather than largely relying on the governmental support, family-support centers grow out of the cooperation among community

members as well as a variety of private organizations and sponsors. In the same vein, Berger and Font (2015) emphasize the reproduction of large-scale community-level primary prevention efforts to help dysfunctional families. According to the concept of community-level primary prevention, the enhancement of existing community services, along with the strengthening of collaboration among neighborhood residents and social agencies can increase the efficiency in identifying dysfunctional families and avoiding negative consequences. In the meantime, Maguire-Jack and Showalter (2016) argue that the increasing of community social cohesion can provide more immediate favors for the families in crisis to guarantee a supportive environment for healthy and positive parenting and have a protective role in some neglectful behaviors.

While the community-level social network, which prioritizes the community mobilization and cohesion, have great potential to provide effective family support, it is also necessary to consider the difference of the socio-economic status between advantaged and disadvantaged communities. Based on the study of Jack (2004), the disadvantaged areas without sufficient social resources can provide very limited opportunities for social interactions at the community level. Therefore, disadvantaged families that fail to seek alternative social support are likely to suffer from parenting stress, which may lead to more negative outcomes. Although community-level social networks are effective in supplying family support in most urban communities, such networks are comparatively limited in some rural areas. In the context of rural China, since most villages are relatively disadvantaged, the deficiency in community resources poses an obstacle to providing family support by critically depending on community-level social

networks. Particularly, in many Chinese rural areas, high degree of migration intensity can have great constraints on community resources and thus weaken the community solidarity and diminish the capacity of community-level social networks in promoting children's development, such as cognitive development through family support (Xie et al, 2019). Moreover, the study analyzed above are mainly in the Western context, in which communities enjoy considerable autonomy. Chinese communities, on the other hand, are under greater regulation and control by local governments. In this sense, while social networks might be important in facilitating migration and the search for work, the possible benefits of such networks in providing family support in relation to left-behind children in rural China are less clear.

Child Welfare Models in China and Japan

Child Welfare Models in China

Generally, child welfare has been categorized into two types: one is narrowly defined welfare that mainly targets orphaned and disabled children, and the other one is broadly defined welfare that provides child services for all children. In China, child welfare policies have primarily focused on special groups for a long time. In recent decades, with the market-oriented reform, child welfare policies have begun to transfer from special child welfare to universal child welfare. According to Shang et al. (2003), the state's changing role in welfare provision can be roughly divided into three phases. In the pre-communist period, non-government charities played a crucial role in welfare provision. During the early period in the communist regime, the welfare provision was highly monopolized by the communist party and the function

of private charities was marginal. As Chinese economy transited from planned economy to market economy, the state institutional care was supplemented by family care and the role of public and private charities increased. Currently, the child welfare model in China is shifting towards an integration model in which the state plays a dominant role and all sectors of society take the collective responsibility on child welfare provision.

China's ratification of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1991 marked a crucial juncture in the discourse of children's rights in China. The ratification of UNCRC demonstrates that China adopts the norms of UNCRC, which not only "grants children the right to survival; to development to the fullest; and to protection from harmful influences, abuse, and exploitation," but also "recognizes children's autonomy, the importance of children's views and the concept of children's empowerment" (Naftali, 2014, p.38). However, Zhao and colleagues (2017) argue that while China has ratified most of primary international conventions for children's rights, China has not yet formulated a modern child protection system. Zhao and colleagues point out several deficiencies of the child protection system in contemporary China including:

- (1) targeting and establishing concrete regulations oriented toward child protection;
- (2) streamlining procedures for handling cases concerning child protection issues;
- (3) maintaining a mandated reporting system;
- (4) establishing specially designated departments in charge of child welfare protection;
- (5) establishing a society-based surrogate role to provide custody for abuse children and
- (6) a lack of adequate infrastructure to ensure consistency in conducting child protection activities. (p.334).

Over the past several decades, there has been a trend that NGOs play an increasingly crucial role in child welfare provision in contemporary China (Howell et al., 2018; Zhao et al., 2017). Shang and colleagues (2005) suggest that "the new private non-profit sector responds

to the social demand of providing services to vulnerable children by mobilizing non-government resources whilst actively looking for new ways of co-operating with the state and fighting for legal status” (p. 123). Nevertheless, Howell and colleagues (2018) indicate that under the one-party authoritarian political system in China, the strict regulatory environment poses a challenge for many child welfare NGOs to gain funding, technical support, human resources, and legal status.

Child Welfare Models in Japan

In Japan, the child welfare model is essentially affected by the notion of ‘Japanese-style welfare state’³. Goodman (1998) claims that the Japanese-style welfare state was previously constructed by the Western model in the early Meiji and post-war Occupation periods. However, Japan experienced a series of transitions and redesigns in a highly pragmatic fashion in response to short-term political and economic exigencies in the following several decades. Ultimately, the transitions and redesigns formulated the current Japanese-style welfare state which is considerably different from the Western model. Based on the norms of ‘Japanese-style welfare state’, the state, families, communities, social organizations, and companies share the collective responsibility for child welfare provision.

Unlike Goodman, Esping-Andersen (1997) suggests that the Japanese-style welfare state is still experiencing its evolution and has not yet developed a specific welfare system. He describes the Japanese-style welfare model as a hybrid, which primarily shares “with the

³ The ‘Japanese-style welfare state’ embraces the values of groupism and homogeneity as opposed to the core values in Western society which appreciate individualism and independence. It highlights the collective responsibility of society in providing social welfare.

conservative model, a legacy of status-segmented insurance and familialism; and, with the liberal regime, residualism and heavy reliance on private welfare” (p.183). However, with the tendency of deindustrialization since the 1990s, the capacity and willingness of private companies and families in welfare provision has started to wane, which calls for a more diversified child welfare provision by different social sectors in Japanese society.

The amendment of the Child Welfare Law in 1997 is a significant turning point in the Japanese child welfare system. Reconsideration of the Japanese child welfare framework is largely ascribed to the low birthrate in Japanese society, the need to respond to international commitments such as Treaty for Children’s Rights, as well as the decentralization of central government functions. As a result, the amendment of the Child Welfare Law in 1997 regards children as possessing human rights and aims to strengthen the role of family in children’s growth via family support (Yamamoto, 2000).

In a study which sets out to examine the characteristics of child welfare provision in Japan and the USA, Segal (2004) concludes that “child welfare services in both Japan and the USA aim at prevention, development and remediation. Greater focus is placed in Japan on prevention and development, while USA services emphasize development and intervention” (p.389). Furthermore, the study also indicates that the need of residential treatment facilities in Japan is rather less than in the USA, which reflects the Japanese value that “the sanctity of the family may prevent inspection and intervention by outsiders” (p.388). In this regard, it is obvious that the Japanese child welfare framework has shifted from child welfare to child-and-family welfare, which aims at supplying more family support to raise the role of family in promoting

children's development.

These studies are conducive to this research as they provide a comprehensive overview of the development of child welfare models in China and Japan over the past several decades. Particularly, the analysis on the characteristics of child welfare models in contemporary China and Japan can facilitate our understanding of the national background in which the CWD system and the CWV & CCWV system are embedded.

Summary of the Theoretical Framework

This literature review analyzed a great deal of existing literature to lay out the theoretical dimensions of this study. With respect to child development, this chapter reviewed the impacts of families, schools, and peer relationships on child health and development. It is clear that these three domains have great influences on children's physical, psychological, intellectual, socioemotional, and academic development. The above-mentioned concepts regarding child development helped generate the interview questions in fieldwork to explore the impacts of families, schools, and peer relationships on child development in rural China as well as the role of CWDs in providing family support and schooling support to promote the development of disadvantaged children. Additionally, this chapter also reviewed the literature on family support. Some scholars such as Early et al. (2000) and Lietz (2006; 2007) regard the strengths-based approach as an effective way to guarantee positive family functioning in the face of adversity, while some scholars like Mahoney et al. (1997; 1998) examine the family support through the lens of parent-child interaction. They argue that the parent-child interaction approach not only increase the effectiveness of intervention services, but also ensure the rapport

between parents and children. Furthermore, scholars like Berger and Font (2015) as well as Maguire-Jack and Showalter (2016) focus particularly on community-level social networks. They suggest that the mobilization of potential resources and the enhancement of community cohesion can support disadvantaged families to overcome the difficulties and promote families' well-being. However, given the relatively incomplete family structure brought with by rural-to-urban migration and disadvantaged circumstances in most of Chinese rural areas, further studies are needed to explore a more feasible way to support disadvantaged families in rural China. Finally, this chapter provided an overview of child welfare models in China and Japan. According to Goodman (1998) and Esping-Anderson (1997), the Japanese child welfare framework seems to be a hybrid but unique one that calls for the collective responsibility of various social sectors and prioritizes the private market and familism. Similarly, scholars like Shang et al. (2003) assert that China has shifted towards a mixed-welfare state that emphasizes the partnerships among different social sectors. However, Zhao and colleagues (2017) indicate several deficiencies of the child welfare protection system in contemporary China in terms of regulation, administration, reporting and handling procedures, and fundamental infrastructure. It is also worth noting that NGOs have played an expanding role in child welfare provision in contemporary China, though some of NGOs suffer a set of difficulties under the one-party regulatory environment (Howell et al., 2018; Shang et al., 2005). These studies provide significant insights on the contexts of child welfare in China and Japan as well as shed light on how such contexts shape the characteristics of the CWD system and the CWV & CCWV system.

Chapter 3 Methodology

The literature on child development, family support, and child welfare models in China and Japan analyzed in Chapter 2 provided a theoretical framework for this study. This chapter will introduce the chief methods employed in the study and the process of data collection and data analysis. In addition, this chapter highlights the ethical considerations regarding fieldwork research and points out some limitations of the study. The key findings of collected data from textual materials and fieldwork will be further analyzed in the next chapter.

Approach

The child welfare director system, as a community-level child welfare system, has played an increasingly important role in promoting the well-being of left-behind children and children in difficulty in rural China. This study seeks to provide a theoretically informed analysis for this practice and explore its potential development. The research utilized a range of methodologies to collect and analyze data to answer the research questions. The major method employed in this study is a qualitative research approach. A qualitative research means “any kind of research that produces findings that not arrived at by means of quantification and instead, the kind of research that produces findings arrived from real-world settings where the phenomenon of interest unfolds naturally” (Golafshani, 2003, p. 600). According to Brink (1993), qualitative research is helpful for viewing and analyzing phenomena holistically in social contexts. Differing from quantitative research that focuses on prediction and generalization of findings, qualitative research provides researchers with a comprehensive

understanding of social phenomena from their perspectives and extrapolation to similar situations (Golafshani, 2003).

As for this research, since the implementation of the CWD system is greatly associated with several government bureaus and various social sectors, the qualitative research method facilitates analyzing interactions and interrelationships between different government bureaus and social sectors at different levels. Also, the complicated situations of rural left-behind children and children in difficulty require a qualitative approach to explore prominent child welfare challenges in rural areas. Though the quantitative approach would also be useful for this study, the relatively short research time and limited resources make it hard to employ the quantitative approach to collect meaningful quantitative data for the study. As a result, the qualitative approach is the best suited method to investigate the complexity of child welfare challenges in rural China as well as to provide a holistic understanding of basic elements of the CWD system.

According to Swanborn (2010), a case study approach allows researchers to gain first-hand insights into individuals, groups, situations, and processes to formulate an in-depth understanding of the complex structure of the phenomenon. Informed by this notion, this study utilized the case study method to examine child welfare challenges and the implementation of the CWD system in a Chinese rural town. The observations and interview participants in fieldwork (including semi-structured interviews) provided important first-hand data to facilitate exploring prominent child welfare challenges in the countryside and the function of the CWD system in child protection and interventions. Furthermore, the case study method is

conducive to this study when investigating interrelationships between CWDs, families, schools, and civil sectors.

Moreover, this study employed the comparative analysis method to explore useful lessons from the CWV & CCWV system in Japan. The adoption of comparative analysis methods can help understand the similarities and differences between the CWD system and the CWV & CCWV system to examine any potential lessons the Japanese case may provide for the Chinese circumstances.

The Choice of Research Site

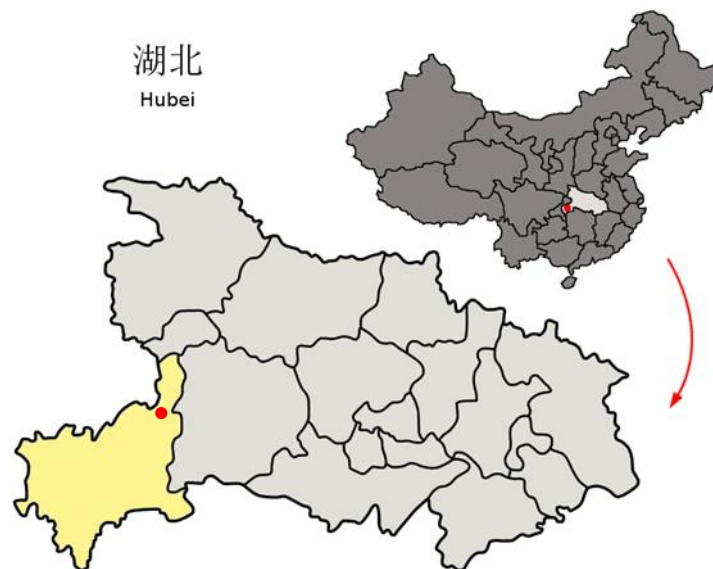
This study carried out fieldwork in a rural town called Yesanguan in Enshi autonomous prefecture, Hubei province, China. Yesanguan town is located in the southeastern area of Badong county within Enshi autonomous prefecture. The primary economic activity in Yesanguan town is agriculture. According to a 2012 survey, the number of rural migrant people in Badong county reached 98,000, which accounted for around 32% of all rural people in this region (Song & Tan, 2013). There were two reasons that Yesanguan town was chosen as an ideal site to conduct fieldwork. Firstly, in China most of remote and disadvantaged villages are concentrated in central and southwestern regions. Enshi autonomous prefecture, situated in the mountainous southwestern corner of Hubei province (See Figure 1, Location of Enshi Autonomous Prefecture in Hubei Province, China), is a region with approximately 42,000 left-behind children⁴ (“Interpretations of *The 14th Five-Year Plan for the Development of Civil*

⁴ Based on the 2018 survey by UNICEF, there were around 69 million rural left-behind children in contemporary China, which occupied more than 30% of all rural children.

Affairs of Enshi Autonomous Prefecture,” 2022). According to the study of Song and Tan (2013), in Yesanguan town, around 43.6% of rural children were left behind in villages and looked after by grandparents. In addition, Song and Tan in their studies selected three primary schools in Yesanguan town to examine the proportion of left-behind children in schools. The result showed that the proportion of left-behind children in these three primary schools reached 46%, 49%, and 70% respectively. Considering the large number of left-behind children in Enshi autonomous prefecture and the relatively high proportion of left-behind children in Yesanguan town, it was ideal to conduct fieldwork in Yesanguan town to investigate the circumstances of left-behind children in the Chinese countryside.

Figure 1

Location of Enshi Autonomous Prefecture in Hubei Province, China



Notes: Google. (n.d.). [Location of Enshi prefecture within Hubei province]. Retrieved from https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/24/Location_of_Enshi_Prefecture_within_Hubei_%28China%29.png. (The red point marks the location of Yesanguan town within Enshi prefecture.)

Another reason for choosing Yesanguan town as a research site was that the local government of Hubei province has taken a couple of initiatives to help rural left-behind children and children in difficulty such as the CWD system, *Caihong Xingdong* program, and *Xiwang Banfei* program (“Responses to Proposal No. 20180371 of the 12th Session of the Provincial Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference,” 2019). Particularly, since 2019, the local government of Hubei province has endeavored to the widespread replication of the CWD system in the province. By the end of 2020, there were more than 29,000 CWDs in Hubei province. Furthermore, from 2017 to 2019, the local government of Hubei province invested 25 million yuan in total to support several child welfare programs including the CWD system in the province (Department of Civil Affairs of Hubei Province, 2021). Given the strong governmental policy support for the CWD system in Hubei province, Yesanguan town was well-suited for an examination of the implementation of the CWD system.

Data Collection

This study primarily utilized interviews and observations to collect first-hand data. Fieldwork was carried out at the chosen research site over a one-month period in July and August 2021. In addition, governmental policy documents and reports from official websites and child welfare-related organizations as well as existing studies conducted by scholars were important sources of secondary data. Moreover, websites of child welfare research institutes such as China Philanthropy Research Institute (CPRI) also provided other sources of important information.

Interview Participant Selection and Recruitment

Interview participants for this study include CWDs, schoolteachers, and people who have experience engaging with child welfare-related programs. This research had planned to interview three to five CWDs to know the prominent child welfare challenges in rural areas and the role of CWDs in child welfare provision. In addition, four to six schoolteachers were expected to be interviewed to understand how they provide schooling support for left-behind children. Also, this research had intended to interview three to five people who have experience participating in child welfare-related activities. One of researcher's undergraduate classmates comes from Enshi autonomous prefecture and his father is a local schoolteacher who has experiences in supporting left-behind children. They served as field contacts in this study. All interview participants were recruited with the assistance of the researcher's personal contacts. They helped disseminate recruitment messages to potential participants who were interested in this project via telephone, email, as well as Chinese social software such as QQ or WeChat. Interview participants were informed about the outline of this study (See Appendix B) and the voluntary nature of interviews. Thereafter, a consent form (See Appendix C) was attached to the recruitment email highlighting the nature of the participation. This study aims to include interview participants who are familiar with the role of CWDs or have experience in contacting and assisting left-behind children and children in difficulty. In the course of recruitment, there were not specific restrictions on participants' age, gender, education background, and religious belief. A total of ten interview participants were recruited for this research: 1) three CWDs; 2) five schoolteachers who have left-behind children and children in difficulty in their classes;

and 3) two people who have experience participating in child welfare-related programs. It is important to note that the third group of participants not only refers to those who have volunteer experiences in child welfare activities, but also to those who sponsor child welfare programs through their businesses. Due to COVID-19 restrictions and the sensitivity of the topics, the researcher was not able to recruit a larger number of informants. Data from all of the informants interviewed was used for the analysis.

Interview Procedures and Questions

Interviews of this study were conducted by using semi-structured techniques. Under the circumstance of COVID-19 pandemic, remote methods such as telephone interviews were adopted to protect the researcher and participants from the risk of COVID-19. Generally, the interviews took approximately 45-75 minutes in duration on the phone or via video call at the convenience of participants. A list of interview questions was designed as a guideline to invite participants to express their perspectives and share their experiences (See Appendix D). In order to increase the efficiency of interviews and assure the quality of information, the designed interview questions varied depending on different targeted groups. The designed interview questions attempted to elicit the information regarding the function of the CWD system, interrelationships between CWDs, families, schools, and various social sectors, as well as individual opinions on the further development of the CWD system. The interview was unfolded as a relaxing communication rather than a rigid question-response, which allowed participants to have the freedom to express their viewpoints and share their experiences. Based on the reflection of interview participants, the researcher asked more specific questions to help

them elaborate on certain issues. Also, some open-ended questions were asked to stimulate wider thinking of interview participants.

Challenges and Solutions

In the process of interviews, the major challenge was linguistic barriers. Since Enshi autonomous prefecture is a minority region that over half of its population belong to Tujia and Miao nationalities, most local people use dialect in their daily communication. Although all interview participants took the interviews in Mandarin, the strong accent of some participants posed a linguistic challenge to the researcher. Under such circumstances, the researcher's field contacts who were local residents played an important role in supplying interpretation assistance to minimize the impact brought by linguistic barriers. The field contacts accompanied the researcher to conduct all the interviews. Only when the researcher faced linguistic problems would they provide interpretation assistance, which guaranteed the dynamic and smoothness of interviews. Furthermore, after the interviews, the field contacts helped review handwritten notes taken by the researcher during the interviews to assure the consistency of collected data.

Data Analysis

In this study, a variety of textual materials including official policy documents and annual reports, scholar literature, public social media article and posts, as well as field notes taken in fieldwork were analyzed to investigate the issues of the CWD system. The official policy documents and annual reports were derived from official websites of government bureaus,

NGOs, and professional research institutes such as MCA, UNICEF, China Philanthropy Research Institute, and Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare in Japan (MHLW). Public social media article and posts mainly came from websites of child welfare-related organizations and forums. This study chiefly adopted the content analysis method to analyze textual materials. Useful data refined from textual materials was utilized as the crucial evidence to support arguments in the study and to reformulate more particular interview questions to collect significant information in fieldwork.

Additionally, this study employed thematic approaches to interpret interview participants' responses from the interviews. Interview transcripts were carefully reviewed and marked with preliminary codes, which could be conducive to further segmenting and categorizing the collected data. Afterwards, a thematic analysis was conducted to identify major themes emerging from interview information. Table 1 below provides an overview of several major themes which emerged from the interviews in relation to the research questions of this study. Interview participants shared their opinions on the issues of left-behind children and children in difficulty, which supplied a significant insight into the circumstances of these disadvantaged groups in rural areas. In addition, participants' responses regarding the implementation of the CWD system provided important sources of information to the assessment of the CWD system. Moreover, participants' individual suggestions shed light on the practical and policy recommendations for the further development of the CWD system and the improvement of situations of disadvantaged children in rural China.

Table 1*Analytical Framework and Research Themes*

Research Questions	Focus of Analysis	Major Themes
Q1: What is the current situation of left-behind children and children in difficulty in rural areas?	Challenges facing rural left-behind children and children in difficulty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parental absence - Poverty - Lack of guardianship - Child abuse and neglect
Q2: What role does the CWD system play in supporting left-behind children and child in difficulty in rural areas?	The function of the CWD system	Coordination function in linking fragmented child welfare resources
Q3: How do CWDs interact with disadvantaged families and supply family support?	Family support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improvement of familial dysfunction - Enhancement of family functioning
Q4: How do CWDs collaborate with local schools to provide schooling support for rural children?	The interactions and interrelationships between CWDs and schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information and experience sharing - Making joint efforts to assist problematic students
Q5: What steps can be implemented to promote the well-being of left-behind children and children in difficulty in rural areas?	Policy recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rural revitalization - Talented cultivation of professional child welfare workers - The greater role of local governments in supporting the exploration of more community-level child welfare programs

Notes: Compiled by the author based on interview data

Ethical Considerations

This study received approval by the Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) at the University of Victoria on July 8th, 2021 (protocol number: 21-0147, See Appendix A). This was to guarantee that confidentiality of interview participants and their data were completely protected. Before the interview, the researcher had a brief introduction of the research topic. Afterwards, consent forms were delivered to participants highlighting the voluntary nature of the participation. The researcher ensured enough time for participants to go through details of consent forms and sign them. Interviews only started after participants signed and submitted the consent forms. Also, before and after the interviews, participants were informed that they might be invited to take further interviews if needed. The researcher made clear the participants' right to withdraw from the research at any time or refuse to answer certain questions without any explanation and, if they decided to withdraw from the research, their responses would be eliminated from the record and excluded from the analysis (none of the interview participants exercised this right to opt out). Moreover, in order to assure that the participants' identities were protected, participants were informed prior to the interview that their names would not appear in the study but replaced by anonymities or pseudonyms. All collected data were stored in the researcher's personal password-protected laptop to ensure the confidentiality of participants and data.

Limitations of this Study

The findings and conclusions of this study were subject to the following limitations:

First, the analysis in this study regarding the implementation of the CWD system was supported by interpretations based on interview participants' responses and data gathered in fieldwork. However, owing to the relatively short research time and limited resources, the number of people interviewed across a small range of key stakeholders was insufficient to reflect the entire situations of CWDs across all of China. Hence, this study should be seen as a snapshot of the circumstances of the CWD system in one part of rural China.

Second, since UNICEF, CPRI, and local governments have played a significant role in supporting the CWD system, this study utilized official policy documents and annual reports to analyze the role of UNICEF, CPRI, and local governments in maintaining its implementation. Though information provided by organization personnel in UNICEF and CPRI or governmental officials may be conducive to the assessment of the CWD system in this thesis, this study did not gain the opportunity to invite them to participate in the interview due to the short research time and inadequate channels. The follow-up interview with personnel in UNICEF and CPRI or governmental officials can be conducted for future studies in this field.

Third, owing to the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, this study employed remote methods to conduct the interview to ensure the safety of the researcher and participants. Thus, most of interviews were over the phone (seven interviews were over the phone and three interviews were conducted by video). In comparison with face-to-face interviews, phone interviews posed a challenge for the researcher to gain deeper insights into respondents' thoughts on the issue by reading their expressions and body language. Also, participants would

avoid sensitive topics when taking phone interviews, which affected the disclosure of some important issues.

Chapter 4 Findings

This chapter will present the key findings from data analysis to investigate basic elements of the child welfare director system including its professional training, administrative system, as well as financial and technical support. In addition, this chapter analyzes the CWD system in several contexts to examine its relationships with families, schools, and child welfare institutions. Moreover, to explore the further development of the CWD system, this chapter will present a comparative analysis of the commission welfare volunteer and chief child welfare volunteer system in Japan to investigate possible lessons for the CWD system. These findings will respond to the main research questions as to how the CWD system is implemented to address child welfare challenges in rural areas and where the improvements can be made for its further development.

Basic Elements of the Child Welfare Director System

Professional Training of Child Welfare Directors

Unlike professional social workers characterized by graduating from universities with social work degrees and having plentiful professional skills and practical experiences in social work, the vast majority of CWDs selected from among community members only have middle or high school degrees and are novices in the field of social work and child protection (Xu et al., 2021). Even though most CWDs are passionate about child welfare work out of their sympathy for left-behind children and children in difficulty, it is difficult for them to carry out the work effectively without sufficient knowledge and skills. Therefore, all CWDs are in

principle required to accept professional training to assure that they are competent to deliver child welfare services. Generally, newly recruited CWDs need to take preliminary training to become qualified child welfare workers. Subsequently, CWDs can continuously receive advanced training to strengthen their professionalism.

UNICEF, CPRI, and MCA, as the primary initiators of the CWD project, play a significant role in providing professional training for CWDs (CPRI & UNICEF, 2018; UNICEF, 2019). In addition, other child welfare organizations such as Save the Children and Beijing CiYou Child Welfare Research Center are important partners for training lesson development. The CWD system began to construct a training mechanism to help CWDs raise their competency. The Service of Child Welfare and Protection (SCWP) is a vital professional training system predominantly developed by CPRI, which aims at providing different levels of professional training and instructions for child welfare workers to satisfy various demands. By systematically combining in-person courses, distance education, and online consultancy, SCWP has made contributions to support frontline child welfare workers, in particular CWDs, to deliver child welfare services more effectively (“SCWP, Service of Child Welfare and Protection,” 2018). Since the primary responsibility of CWDs is to navigate the community-level child welfare and protection scheme to deliver “last-mile” child welfare services in rural areas, professional training developed by CPRI, UNICEF, MCA, and partners chiefly revolves around how to equip CWDs with fundamental knowledge and skills in terms of social work and child protection as well as help them become qualified frontline child welfare workers (UNICEF, 2019; Zheng et al., 2020).

Overall, the primary duties of CWDs encompass following six realms: child information collection and management; accidental injury prevention; child welfare services and resources connection; child welfare policy and knowledge dissemination; social mental support; and case report and assistance (MCA, 2019). Table 2 below shows several aspects of knowledge and theories that have been covered in preliminary training for newly recruited CWDs.

Table 2

Main Contents of Preliminary Training

Aspects	Key Themes
Who is child?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Definition of child - Main phases of child development - Children’s rights
Major problems of rural left-behind children and children in difficulty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of guardianship - Impoverishment - Dropping out of schools and truancy - Child abuse and neglect - Gender discrimination
Child welfare and protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Current child welfare policies - Theories of child protection
Who are CWDs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Responsibilities of CWDs - Assignments of CWDs

Notes: Compiled by the author based on online courses of CWDs. The online courses are available at: <http://www.gywx.org/course/753>

First, the professional training aims to provide CWDs with a comprehensive understanding of characteristics of child development in different phases and children's rights as well as a yardstick of child welfare provision by strictly following the principles of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) initiated by UNICEF in 1989 (Beijing CiYou Child Welfare Research Center et al., 2019). UNCRC has highlighted four general principles: non-discrimination; best interests of the child; the right to survival and development; and views of the child (UNICEF, 1989). All CWDs are required to adhere these four general principles to their daily work, which accordingly facilitates them considering the best interests of children and prioritizing child welfare provision. Second, since CWDs are primarily appointed to improve the well-being of left-behind children and children in difficulty in rural areas, it is necessary for CWDs to further understand the current situation of these disadvantaged children and sets of challenges facing them. Some typical problems of left-behind children and children in difficulty such as lack of guardianship, poverty, dropping out of schools, and child abuse are carefully analyzed through professional training, which can help CWDs strengthen their capabilities of identifying disadvantaged children and assessing their demands. Third, professional training also attempts to provide CWDs with an insight on up-to-date Chinese child welfare policies as well as the fundamental theory of child protection, whereby they can utilize appropriate approaches to protect disadvantaged children and seek child welfare services from more sources. Fourth, the most essential part of professional training is to give CWDs a clear understanding of the duties and assignments of this position. The professional training not only aims to instruct CWDs on how to fulfill their responsibilities

and carry out the work, but also intends to reinforce professional ethics of CWDs. Additionally, professional training attempts to cultivate CWDs solid values and ethics of child welfare social work, which can help them make accurate judgements and decisions when facing value conflicts or ethics plights in child welfare provision (Beijing CiYou Child Welfare Research Center et al., 2019).

In general, the daily routine of CWD includes collecting child information, identifying disadvantaged children and families, seeking child welfare services, reporting child abuse and neglect, raising community awareness on child protection, and supplying family support (UNICEF, 2019; Xu et al., 2020). CWDs make home visits regularly to collect information and thus hold an overall picture of the basic conditions of children living in the village. Thereafter, CWDs establish and categorize information files according to different types of disadvantaged children such as left-behind children, children in poverty, disabled children, or orphanages. As for those disadvantaged children and families, CWDs should get further understandings of their problems and run preliminary assessments of their needs. By completing the assessment and formulating the specific assistance plan, CWDs can support disadvantaged children to grapple with problems. If CWDs find that the case cannot be easily resolved on their own, they seek further assistance from governments or social organizations to handle the issue. CWDs are required to report to child welfare supervisors (CWSs) regularly and accept their supervision (CPRI & UNICEF, 2018; 2019).

In addition to identifying disadvantaged children and helping them seek available child welfare services, CWDs need to observe potential hazards in the village. For instance, there

are often some dry wells in villages, which are covered with grass and hard to be noticed. Some children, especially left-behind children, who go to school without any companions are extremely susceptible to fall into dry wells accidentally. Therefore, observing risky factors such as dry wells, decrepit buildings, and ponds without guardrails and reporting to village committees is one of the most pivotal tasks of CWDs. Furthermore, since community awareness on child welfare and protection in rural areas is relatively low, it is indispensable for CWDs to disseminate related policies and knowledge to raise the awareness of child welfare and protection. At present, many villages are equipped with children's homes, in which children can not only play and learn from their peers but also can communicate with CWDs about their anxiety and problems. CWDs bear the accountability to carefully manage children's homes and organize diversified activities to enrich the entertainment and study of rural children. Moreover, since child development is inseparable from family, CWDs are responsible for identifying and assisting dysfunctional families (CPRI & UNICEF, 2018; 2019).

Professional training has played a significant role in transforming newly enrolled CWDs from a novice to a qualified child welfare worker. Relying on professional knowledge and skills learning from professional training, many CWDs are able to adapt to and carry out the work smoothly and effectively. However, the data obtained from fieldwork and documentary analysis suggests that sometimes the training effect fails to meet the expected outcome. CWD Huang elaborated:

Though professional training indeed guided me how to work as a qualified child welfare worker, I still spent a lot of time in wrestling with establishing the connection with children and delivering child welfare services (Interview notes).⁵

⁵ For the confidentiality of informant's identity, pseudonyms are used in this research.

Similarly, another CWD Shang stated:

In practice, problems of left-behind children and children in difficulty were much more complicated than I have anticipated. Particularly, some disadvantaged children have suffered from not a single but several difficulties. Therefore, sometimes it was really challenging for me to successfully assess all demands of disadvantaged children (Interview notes).

Since the main purpose of professional training is to instruct CWDs on how to navigate the community-level child welfare and protection scheme instead of developing them as professional social workers, the lack of professionalism has become one of the major problems of CWDs (Xu et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2020).

Recently, a study was conducted by Wu and Ji (2020) to examine the professional status and competency among CWDs in four Chinese provinces. According to the study, approximately 73.7% of CWDs expressed their satisfactions with professional training while the remaining 26.3% of CWDs felt professional training did not meet their demands. In addition, 89.7% of CWDs conveyed strong desires to have a more in-depth study in the field of psychology, social work, law, and sociology. In fact, professional training merely provides some relatively basic instructions for CWDs. Nevertheless, as the circumstance of left-behind children and children in difficulty in the countryside is exceedingly complicated, CWDs are very likely to encounter a couple of challenges seldom being mentioned or analyzed in professional training such as juvenile suicide. Hence, in order to ensure the effectiveness of child welfare provision, an increasing number of CWDs expect to raise their competency through grasping more professional knowledge and skills. Particularly, the study pointed out that 70.2% of CWDs would like to further study the legal interpretation in terms of rights and interests of the child as well as 62% of CWDs were eager to learn more about child psychology

(Wu & Ji, 2020). It becomes salient that CWDs' increasing demands of accessing professional training call for more advanced studies.

Furthermore, the study showed that, in regard to the teaching approach of professional training, 42.2% of CWDs preferred the practical operation, and 48.3% of CWDs considered that field teaching was much more impressive (Wu & Ji, 2020). Due to constraints on financial, human, and training resources, current professional training mostly stays focus on theoretical training. However, as CWD Huang pointed out, it may take a rather long time for CWDs to put the theoretical knowledge into practice.

In another study carried out by Wang (2020), some CWDs reflected that they were concerned about not being able to organize the activity smoothly because professional training lacked practical guidance. Also, the relatively lower education level of CWDs in a certain degree limits their mastery and application of social work theories and methods (Huang, 2020; Zheng et al., 2020). Moreover, due to the shortage of human resources and inadequacy of financial budgets, professional training is mostly held at the provincial level. In general, provincial civil affairs bureaus collaborate with some social organizations or research institutes such as UNICEF and CPRI to organize professional training. However, there is little professional training conducted at the county or township level (CPRI et al., 2017; CPRI & UNICEF, 2018; 2019). Since the provincial level professional training commonly assembles a large number of CWDs from several villages, it is hard to have a detailed investigation on specific child welfare issues. Comparatively, the county or township level professional training is more capable providing detailed suggestions and solutions to specific problems, which can

raise the quality of professional training.

Since a great proportion of CWDs serve as part-time instead of full-time child welfare workers, most CWDs cannot be preoccupied with child welfare provision (Huang, 2020; Zheng et al., 2020). On the one hand, CWDs serve as frontline child welfare workers to deliver child welfare services. On the other hand, some CWDs at the same time have their own business or other careers. CWD Shang claimed:

As a CWD, I made efforts to improve the well-being of disadvantaged children in the village. Meanwhile, I also ran my own construction materials store and I needed to meet up with clients very frequently. Sometimes I was even unaware of my role as a CWD when my business was busy (Interview notes).

It is fairly common to see that in many rural areas, the position of CWD is concurrently undertaken by village officers or directors of women's federation. These village cadres not only need to address child welfare issues, but also take the responsibility to deal with a bulk of village work and guarantee the living condition and security of the community. As a result, in many villages child welfare services are delivered hastily in order to satisfy the official inspection instead of fully considering the actual demands of disadvantaged children. The multiple roles to some extents can lead to role ambiguity and thus influence the passion and sense of fulfillment of CWDs in child welfare provision (Wang, 2020; Zhao & Zhao; 2020). Additionally, professional training sometimes fails to take full account of utilizing the individual capacity of CWDs. CWDs are required to deliver child welfare services by strictly conforming to the training instruction and guidance. By doing so, it ignores the possibility for CWDs to take advantage of their initiatives to improve children's well-being by greatly combining their own strengths and living experiences (Wang, 2020). CWD Zhao elaborated:

Undoubtedly, the method introduced by professionals in terms of how to establish the relationship with children were empirical and scientific. However, sometimes I preferred to use my special approaches to interact with children because it seemed more effective (Interview notes).

According to a recent survey by Zhao and Zhao (2020), 67.51% of 197 CWDs who participated in the survey deemed that the position of CWDs was promising and were willing to continue to engage in child welfare work. At the same time, 15.74% of CWDs expressed the uncertainty with respect to the prospect of CWDs and 16.75% of CWDs claimed that they never thought about this issue. As far as the study is concerned, most CWDs are relatively confident in the prospect of this position. In most cases, professional training overemphasizes the responsibility of CWDs, but overlooks the role construction. However, the role construction of CWDs is not only closely associated with the efficiency and quality of child welfare provision but also inextricably linked to the further development of CWDs. Therefore, professional training needs to take more account of how to eliminate the adverse influence brought by multiple careers and consolidate the self-identify of CWDs.

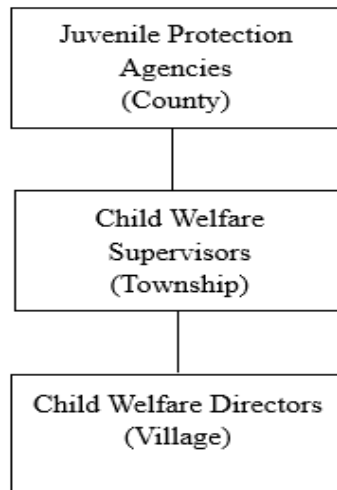
County-Township-Village Triple Hierarchy System

The CWD system has started to establish a county-township-village triple hierarchy system in some regions. As shown in Figure 2, at the county level, the juvenile protection agency (JPA) is established and administered by the county civil affairs bureau to coordinate child welfare provision. On the one hand, the JPA collaborates with government bureaus, UNICEF, CPRI, and other child welfare-related organizations to provide professional training and guidance for CWDs as well as assist with the large-scale investigation for disadvantaged children. On the other hand, the JPA coordinates with county government bureaus and mass

organizations such as the security bureau, education bureau, and women's federation to mobilize available resources and make joint efforts to address child welfare challenges in rural areas.

Figure 2

County-Township-Village Triple Hierarchy System



Notes: Compiled by the author based on the documentary analysis.

At the township level, the position of child welfare supervisors is set and affiliated with the county JPA. CWSs are commonly selected from the officers of township government to promote the child welfare provision and supervise CWDs. CWDs are responsible for regularly reporting to CWSs in terms of the demands of disadvantaged children and the progress in child welfare provision. Afterwards, CWSs further examine the data collected by CWDs and report to JPAs. Depending on the situation, the JPA formulates the specific planning and coordinates

with other government bureaus and social organizations to address the problems of disadvantaged children. The county-township-village triple hierarchy system not only constructs an upward reporting mechanism, but also provides a downward supervision and child welfare delivery mechanism, which significantly guarantees the efficiency and quality of child welfare provision (CPRI & UNICEF, 2018; 2019).

However, the county-township-village triple hierarchy system has not been completely constructed across all rural areas at present. Particularly, the vast majority of CWSs are selected from officers of the township government to take over this position as a side job rather than professional child welfare workers, which leads to relatively inappropriate functioning of CWSs (Huang, 2020). CWD Huang indicated:

Though there was a CWS in our township, I seldom had the opportunity to meet up with her because her schedule seemed extremely busy. As a result, sometimes I could not report the up-to-date demands of disadvantaged children in time, which critically affected the effectiveness of supplying timely assistance (Interview notes).

In the same vein, CWD Zhao elaborated:

As the CWS in our township merely took this position as a side job, she was unable to be dedicated to coordinating the child welfare provision. Moreover, as far as I was concerned, she was not a specialist in the field of child welfare social work. In this sense, the position of CWSs appeared to be redundant because it could not provide us with any constructive suggestions (Interview notes).

As a key component of the triple hierarchy system, the function of CWSs is not only tightly associated with the supervision mechanism of the CWD system, but also highly related to the effectiveness and stability of child welfare provision. Considering the significant function of CWSs in the county-township-village triple hierarchy system, more improvements should be made to reinforce the capabilities of CWSs in supervising and administering the work of CWDs. Furthermore, a recent study implied that the reporting intention of CWDs

tended to be affected by perceived behavioral control over reporting (Xu et al., 2020). In other words, CWDs are unwilling to report the problem of disadvantaged children such as child abuse and neglect, if they feel that there are no improvements even if they report it. As indicated above, the dysfunction such as the role ambiguity of CWSs can have negative impacts on the reporting procedures of the county-township-village triple hierarchy system. Therefore, further steps should be taken to streamline the reporting procedures and improve the supervision and administration mechanism within the triple hierarchy system. Possible responses to these challenges will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter to find where the improvements can be made for the administrative system of the CWD system.

Financial Sources and Technical Support of the Child Welfare Director System

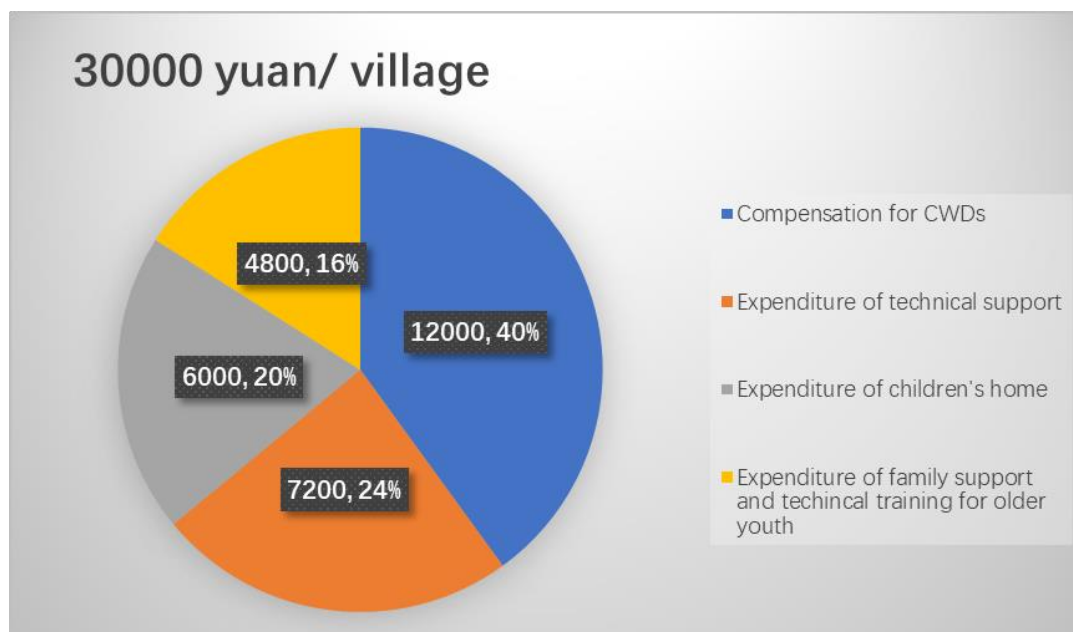
In the first five-year period of the CWD system that was piloted in 2010, the most significant financial sources were China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation (CFPA) and UNICEF (CPRI et al., 2017; UNICEF, 2019). By 2019, Chinese central and local governments began to implement the CWD system across the country (UNICEF, 2019). Currently, the financial support of CWDs on the one hand derives from joint efforts of central and local governments, and on the other hand comes from the contribution of a variety of social sectors.

Based on the first five years of exploration of the CWD system, professional groups have calculated an estimated cost for the implementation of the CWD system in one village per year. As demonstrated in Figure 3, in order to guarantee the maintenance of the CWD system, the estimated cost is approximately 30000 yuan in one village per year. In addition to the compensation for CWDs which accounts for 40% of budget, the expenditure of technical

support and management of the children's home account for 24% and 20% of budget respectively. Also, there is 16% of budget used for family support and providing technical training for older youth (CPRI et al., 2017). Although the estimated cost provides a rough budget for the implementation of the CWD system, in practical terms, the actual financial investment to the CWD system varies from region to region. In some regions, local governments have greatly appreciated the function of the CWD system and provided CWDs with a large amount of funding. For example, the County Department of Civil Affairs of Shaodong in Hunan Province has already listed the annual expenditure of the CWD system in the governmental financial budget to support its implementation. In 2019, approximately 0.45 million yuan was invested by the County Department of Civil Affairs of Shaodong to increase the capability of CWDs and guarantee the basic operation of the CWD system ("Notice on the issuance of funds for the training of CWDs and CWSs," 2019). However, in some regions, merely a small amount of funding or even no funding is issued to support the implementation of the CWD system (Huang, 2020). As a consequence, many CWDs are unable to receive the adequate funding to maintain the operation of children's homes and child welfare provision. In addition, since there has not yet been a unified salary system for CWDs, some full-time CWDs only get nearly 900-yuan monthly compensation, which is insufficient to guarantee the basic living expense (Zheng et al., 2020).

Figure 3

Annual Budget for the CWD System in One Village



Notes: Adapted from “The estimated cost for basic services is 30000yuan in one village per year” [in Chinese], by CPRI et al., 2017, *Barefoot social worker annual report 2017* (trans. 全国基层儿童福利与保护服务体系建设工作 2017 年年度报告), p. 20.

It is notable that recently some local governments tend to emphasize the role of lottery public welfare funds⁶ in providing financial support to the CWD system (“Lottery public welfare funds support the professionalism enhancement of CWDs: Establishing the protection network for left-behind children,” 2020). According to *The Management of Lottery Public Welfare Funds* issued by the Ministry of Finance in 2012, a proportion of lottery public welfare funds are mandated to be included in the financial budget of central and local governments to improve the public social welfare (Ministry of Finance, 2012). For example, the Yunnan province was known as the first province in China to utilize lottery public welfare funds to

⁶ China lottery public welfare funds are raised from lottery tickets to be distributed to sponsor social public welfare services such as social welfare programs and sports programs.

provide financial support for CWDs in 2012. The Provincial Department of Civil Affairs of Yunnan allocated 16 million, 13.2 million, and 15 million yuan in 2018, 2019, and 2020 respectively to support the construction of children's homes in several villages in Yunnan Province ("Lottery public welfare funds support the professionalism enhancement of CWDs: Establishing the protection network for left-behind children," 2020; "Yunnan Province's lottery public welfare funds support the construction of children's home," 2021). Even though some regions have begun to use lottery public welfare funds to support CWDs, a nationwide scale utilization of lottery public welfare funds for the CWD system has not been established. Considering the inadequacy of financial support for CWDs in many regions, the appropriate allocation and effective utilization of lottery public welfare funds is a potential way to ensure the financial source of the CWD system.

Additionally, a set of Chinese domestic NGOs are also important financial sources for the CWD system such as CFPA, Ai You Foundation, The Asia Foundation, Beijing Angel Mom Charity Foundation, and China Children and Teenagers' Fund. These domestic NGOs provide financial support in several ways, directly or indirectly (CPRI et al., 2017; CPRI & UNICEF, 2018; 2019).

For example, the Ai You Foundation⁷ has currently been a significant financial source for the CWD system in providing personalized assistance for disadvantaged children in rural areas. By categorizing the primary demands of disadvantaged children, the Ai You Foundation supplies several types of grants to improve the well-being of disadvantaged children including

⁷ The Ai You Foundation is a public-raising foundation that has been registered in the Ministry of Civil Affairs of PRC. The Ai You Foundation has established several systematic assistance mechanisms in the field of child medical care, child welfare, and child protection.

the living grant, nutrition grant, study grant, and medical care grant. After identifying the demands of disadvantaged children via regular home visits and making a preliminary assessment of the demands, CWDs submit the grant applications to the China Philanthropy Research Institute for further screening. Based on the conditions of disadvantaged children and preliminary assessments provided by CWDs, specialists of CPRI make a more comprehensive reassessment of the grant application and optimize the grant allocation by fully balancing the actual demands of children and available funding. The final applications are submitted to the Ai You Foundation by CPRI when the reassessment and screening are completed. Thereafter, the grants are allocated to disadvantaged children by the Ai You Foundation. According to the annual report published by the Ai You Foundation in 2018, more than 3500 disadvantaged children successfully received the personalized assistance from the Ai You Foundation. In addition to personalized assistance, those disadvantaged children who suffer from severe diseases can access the child medical care program to obtain further financial support. Differing from the medical care grant in personalized assistance, the child medical care program usually provides a larger amount of funding to support children with severe diseases with access to prompt treatments. At present, the child medical care program of the Ai You Foundation is one of the most crucial channels through which CWDs help disadvantaged children seek financial support for medical aids. Furthermore, the Ai You Foundation also makes great efforts to support the construction of children's homes in many villages. In 2018, the Ai You Foundation provided financial support to build 178 children's homes and organize more than 7000 times of activities for rural children (Ai You Foundation, 2018; Interview notes).

Unlike those NGOs providing specific funding to left-behind children and children in difficulty, some NGOs provide financial support for the CWD system in different ways. Since professional training for CWDs requires a considerable number of teaching materials, a large amount of funding is needed to develop and print teaching materials. Some NGOs take a role in providing funding to support technical groups to design teaching materials. For instance, The Asia Foundation has made a significant contribution to supporting the development of teaching materials concerning child development and child injury prevention. In addition, several NGOs, such as China Children and Teenagers' Fund, have supplied funding to organize special training for older disadvantaged children who are poorly educated and to equip them with some technical skills that can facilitate making a livelihood in the future. As different NGOs have their particular ways of providing financial support, CWDs effectively utilize them with various permutations of grants from different NGOs to support rural left-behind children and children in difficulty (CPRI et al., 2017; CPRI & UNICEF, 2018; 2019).

While governments and various social sectors have made joint efforts to provide financial support to the CWD system over the past decade, more funding and investment are needed to establish a more professional community-level child welfare provision team to improve the well-being of disadvantaged children in rural areas. At the end of 2016, the number of both part-time and full-time CWDs in China has reached approximately 680,000. Central and local governments are moving towards the full-coverage of the CWD system across the country (MCA, 2016; Zheng et al., 2020). However, the lack of unified salary system and low compensation standards has led to the frequent mobility of CWDs, which influences the

stability of child welfare provision. Moreover, even if many villages are equipped with children's homes, some CWDs have no choice but to reduce the opening hours and activities of children's homes due to inadequate financial support. Under such circumstances, issues like how to increase the investment in compensations and professional training for CWDs, how to guarantee the financial support for children's homes, and how to purchase more diversified child welfare services from various social sectors have become key points of the further development of the CWD system ("Promoting CWDs to 'child welfare social workers'," 2021).

With respect to technical support, CWDs have been supported by professional groups formed by specialists from various research institutes, social organizations, and universities. One of the most significant technical sources is the China Philanthropy Research Institute. As a philanthropy research institute established by the Beijing Normal University and the One Foundation, CPRI can access academic sources in the university and receive sufficient funding to conduct the observation and research. CPRI has developed several professional social welfare teams in different fields so far. As mentioned earlier, CPRI has established the specific professional training system to strengthen the professionalism of CWDs in various ways. Particularly, the development of online training creates a platform where many CWDs who are restricted by remote location can receive training. In addition, CPRI develops a series of materials such as *Handbook of Children's Games* and *Handbook of Case Analysis* to assist CWDs in handling children's issues and organizing activities. Furthermore, CPRI professionals conduct periodic fieldwork in different rural areas to assess the implementation of the CWD system and explore potential ways of its further development.

Moreover, CPRI and other professional groups provide distance consultancy and specific case studies for CWDs. By consulting with professionals through online meetings, CWDs receive suggestions to resolve problems in child welfare provision. When CWDs encounter the intractable case, they refer the case to professional groups which can help them further analyze the case and provide them with some feasible plans to address the problem. CWD Huang described:

The distance consultancy was really useful. I usually reached out to professional groups when I encountered a difficulty or suffered from work pressure. They would carefully help me solve the problem and alleviate my pressure (Interview notes).

Since CWDs bear the responsibility to cope with children's issues, the heavy workload places great stress on CWDs. Also, CWDs have to consider the issues of managing children's homes as well as organizing diversified activities to promote children's development and raise community awareness on parenting and child protection, which easily cause mental stress (Interview notes). Considering the high pressure of CWDs, professional groups provide psychological consultancy and emotion management training for CWDs to help them maintain psychological health (CPRI et al., 2017; CPRI & UNICEF, 2019).

Contextualizing the Child Welfare Director System

Child Welfare Directors and Families

In recent years, the CWD system has paid growing attention to the well-being of disadvantaged children through supporting dysfunctional families (CPRI & UNICEF, 2018; 2019). Children's growth and development are strongly associated with a variety of familial factors such as family's socio-economic status, social and cultural environments, and parental

companionship. Positive family functioning can promote the physical and psychological development of children. Conversely, familial dysfunction like poverty, parental absence, and domestic violence can significantly jeopardize child health and development (Holt, et al., 2008; Saltzman et al., 2005; Williams-Washington et al., 2008). Since the Chinese government tends to emphasize the role of family in childcare and child protection, it is crucial for CWDs to provide family support to disadvantaged families to enhance family functioning in parenting and child protection (Shang & Wu, 2003).

In rural China, the phenomenon of child neglect is prevalent. The left-behind status is one of the vital factors that lead to the lack of childcare (Han et al., 2015). For most rural-to-urban migrant parents, their main purpose of seeking employment in the metropolis is to earn more money to elevate the living standard of family and create a brighter future for children. However, the long-term absence can make them difficult to fulfill their responsibilities in every stage of children's development. As a result, a lack of parental companion and participation adversely impacts the development and achievement of left-behind children. Many left-behind children are more vulnerable to a series of physical and mental problems such as malnutrition, lower self-esteem, and social phobia. In addition, as most migrant parents are away from their hometowns more than ten months a year, it is hard for them to get involved in and oversee the learning of their children. As a result, due to the paucity of parental supervision and bad self-discipline, many left-behind children are addicted to video games and have poor academic performance (Lu et al., 2016; Naftali, 2016; Robinson, 2016). The following is Case 1 elaborated by Teacher Tan:

Liu was a twelve-year-old left-behind boy who lived with his grandparents. His mother passed away when he was in kindergarten and his father was a migrant worker. Liu was introverted and rarely communicated with his peers and teachers. He was addicted to video games and usually failed the exam when he was in third and fourth grades. Last year (2020), due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the school adopted the online learning. Liu cheated his grandparents that there were no class during the COVID-19 pandemic and did not attend the class. Although the school had contacted with his father several times to let him pay greater attention to the learning of Liu, there were no substantial changes in his academic performance (Interview notes).

As shown in the Case 1, the parental care deficiency may have adverse effects on the development and achievement of left-behind children. Since most grandparents of left-behind children are illiterate, they are unable to provide adequate support to encourage the educational development of children. In this sense, the emergence of CWDs in a certain degree can help migrant parents look after and supervise the learning of left-behind children. As mentioned earlier, CWDs establish and categorize information files of disadvantaged children based on the data collected by home visits. Given that left-behind children lack the parental companion for a long time, CWDs pay a great deal of attention to those left-behind children in the villages. For left-behind children, CWDs increase the frequency of home visits to better understand their physical and mental demands in time. Furthermore, CWDs utilize children's homes to enrich the learning and entertainment of left-behind children. In children's homes, it is convenient for CWDs to supervise the learning of left-behind children after school. CWDs also make substantial efforts to alleviate the loneliness and anxiety of left-behind children via playing various intellectual games and organizing diversified activities. Many left-behind children regard children's homes as their second homes where they can feel the warmth and attain the assistance from their peers and CWDs (CPRI et al., 2018; 2019). However, CWD Huang stated, "Most left-behind children looked happy when they played and communicated with their peers

in children's homes. However, they would feel depressed when they saw the parents of other children came to pick them up" (Interview notes). Regardless of the role of CWDs in providing protection, supervision, and mental support for left-behind children, it is also important to support migrant parents to increase their roles in parenting and child protection.

Additionally, domestic child abuse and maltreatment is also a challenging issue in rural China. A great number of children in rural areas have suffered from severe physical and mental abuse by parents, which has serious negative influences on child health and development (Wan et al., 2020). The Case 2 elaborated by CWD Zhao is a typical case of domestic child abuse in rural areas:

Zheng was an eleven-year-old boy whose father died of an illness while mother got married with stepfather. He frequently suffered from the physical abused by his alcoholic stepfather. His father often smashed things as well as beat him when he got drunk. In order to revenge to his stepfather in the future, he often went to a nearby grove and practice some basic combat skills on his own. Zheng claimed that though he could not retaliate against his stepfather at present because he was still a kid, he would make him pay for his violence when he grew up (Interview notes).

There are a series of similar cases of domestic child abuse in rural areas. As the Case 2 indicates, domestic child maltreatment may have detrimental impacts on children even until adolescent and adulthood (Wan et al., 2020).

In practice, a set of methods are employed by CWDs to support disadvantaged families. Firstly, CWDs increase the frequency of home visits to understand the situations of dysfunctional families. When identifying disadvantaged children suffering from child neglect or domestic child abuse, CWDs coordinate with child welfare supervisors and professional groups to provide the emergency assistance. Afterwards, CWDs continue a three-month follow-up monitoring to ensure the situation of child abuse and neglect has been improved. Also,

CWDs provide the psychological consultation for children and parents to settle their minds and reconcile the relationship between children and parents. However, if the case of child abuse and neglect is severe, CWDs take further steps to reach out to public security bureaus to separate maltreated children from their abusive parents and refer the case to professional consultation agencies to address the problems (CPRI & UNICEF, 2015; CPRI et al., 2017). Furthermore, CWDs organize various parent-child activities to consolidate the parent-child cohesion. Through parent-child activities, parents can have a more in-depth communication with their children and better understand their demands. This is in line with the findings of Mahoney and Wheeden (1997) who demonstrate that such interaction is an effective approach of family support, which establishes the rapport between parents and children as well as increases the efficiency and confidence of parents in childrearing.

As Barton and Coley (2007) suggest, family can be considered as the smallest school. On the one hand, family is an important educational source that children are able to receive the literary materials, technical devices, and a cozy place to support their intellectual and academic development. On the other hand, parents are not merely serving as caregivers but also function as first teachers who have a far-reaching influence on children's moral, physical, and intellectual education.

Family education is regarded as a supplement to school education. In rural areas, many parents overlook the significance of family education in affecting the value and development of children. The CWD system has endeavored to promote the family education investment in rural areas. Given the relatively low education level of rural parents, CWDs collaborate with

professionals and social organizations to provide an array of public lectures at children's homes to raise the quality of rural parents and support them to create a family educational environment that can facilitate children's development. Moreover, CWDs hold regular parental experience sharing meetings to establish a platform through which parents can share and learn more experiences of childrearing from other community members (CPRI & UNICEF, 2015, 2019). Such activities promote the construction of community-level social network, which is an effective approach to ensuring support for families (Berger & Font, 2015; Cole, 1995). By mobilizing the available community resources and enhancing the cohesion and cooperation among community members, CWDs have made a progress in providing family educational support (CPRI & UNICEF, 2018; 2019).

However, there are still some challenges facing CWDs in the process of supporting disadvantaged families. During the fieldwork, three CWDs indicated that some parents refused to interact with them because they regarded familial issues as private and were unwilling to accept any interventions by outsiders. In addition, some migrant parents overly rely on CWDs and intend to shift some parts of parental duties to them. CWD Zhao stated, "What I proposed to do was to raise the caregivers' awareness of childrearing and child protection rather than taking over their duties to look after children" (Interview notes). Furthermore, with respect to the family of left-behind children, the long-term parental absence is more likely to lead to the incomplete family structure. Under such circumstances, how to cope with the incomplete family structure of the left-behind children's family to maintain positive family functioning is also a big challenge for CWDs.

Child Welfare Directors and Schools

In addition to family, school is another important locus in which children accomplish their academic achievements and learn how to build relationships with peers and schoolteachers (Roeser et al., 2000). In contemporary China, with economic developments and educational reforms, an increasing number of rural children have access to more educational resources. Even though schoolteachers bear the responsibility to supervise students' performance, it is hard for them to understand or identify the needs of students in terms of living conditions, interpersonal relationships, and personal emotion. Particularly, in many rural schools, a lack of teaching staff also sets a barrier for schools to fully consider students' demands. Moreover, the dropout rate is incredibly high in some rural areas, which has been clearly shown to be linked to poverty and poor academic performance (Yi et al., 2012).

Based on Liu (2014), a fairly large proportion of rural youths choose to drop out of school for work instead of aspiring to be admitted to universities. Their dropout decisions are strongly associated with their familial economic status and parents' educational concepts. Although the implementation of nine-year compulsory education system⁸ in China has canceled the tuition fee and additional education tax, a huge amount of expense is still needed to support children's educational development. From the perspectives of these rural youths, in comparison with receiving education, going out to work is a faster way to earn money. In another study, Li and Wang (2019) point out that the educational anticipation of rural parents is much lower than urban parents and rural parents who successfully transfer to urban residence. Additionally,

⁸ The Law on Nine-Year Compulsory Education that took effect in 1986 in China guaranteed school-aged children the right to receive at least nine years of education, including six-year primary education and three-year secondary education.

though efforts to improve the circumstances of women and girls in China and educational reforms in the twentieth century have enhanced women's educational attainment, gender inequality in education still exists in rural China (Huang & Placier, 2015). The study of Brown and Park (2002) suggests that girls from poor families are more likely to drop out of school than boys. They add that, "the clear gender bias in educational investment may be due to lower returns to education for girls, the lower selfish returns to parents from investing in girls that will marry into other families, or from parental preferences that favor son" (p. 538).

Under such circumstances, an increasing number of CWDs aim to build the partnership with local schools to create a more supportive schooling environment for rural children. The teaching staff can provide students' schooling performances to CWDs, which is conducive to helping CWDs identify students in need of extra support. In turn, CWDs can supply supplementary services such as identifying the specific demands of children outside school. Case 3 provided by Teacher Yang clearly demonstrates the significance of collaboration between CWDs and schoolteachers:

Chen was a sixth grade left-behind boy looked after by his grandparents. At the beginning of fall term, Teacher Yang found that his grade declined so rapidly. By sharing the basic information of this left-behind boy with local CWDs, Teacher Yang cooperated with CWDs to take prompt actions. At first, they made home visit together and found that this left-behind boy was addicted to playing mobile games when he went back home. Thereafter, Teacher Yang contacted his parents to further discuss how to resolve this issue. In the meantime, CWDs tried to communicate with this left-behind boy to make him understand the harmfulness of indulging in mobile games. In the following days, Teacher Yang helped him review some previous key points after school while CWDs made home visit frequently to check out his learning status. In consequence, the joint efforts of Teacher Yang and CWDs successfully prevented this left-behind boy from indulging in mobile games and guided him to a right way (Interview notes).

In regard to dropout children, CWDs take immediate actions to figure out the reasons that

children drop out from schools. For children who choose to drop out due to financial reasons, CWDs make efforts to seek available financial resources to help them return to schools. For those children who decide to drop out due to the poor academic performance, CWDs collaborate with schoolteachers to provide psychological consultation to increase their confidence in learning. Additionally, CWDs make full use of children's homes to conduct the educational dissemination to raise parents' and children's awareness of receiving education (CPRI & UNICEF, 2018; 2019).

Since schoolteachers primarily stay focus on student's academic performance in school and do not have enough energy to pay attention to students' peer relationships, CWDs play a supplementary role in helping children establish positive peer relationships. Based on Deater-Deckard (2001) and Wentzel (2009), the positive relationship can not only bring children emotional support and sense of security, but also motivate children to pursue higher academic goal and make better academic achievement. Many left-behind children have suffered from mental and psychological problems, most of whom are self-abased, depressed, and solitary. As a result, they are more likely to encounter various problems when getting along with their peers (Tang et al., 2018). Moreover, some left-behind children are exceedingly spoiled by their grandparents who want to compensate for the absence of migrant parents. These grandparents are inclined to protect their grandchildren even when they misbehave instead of teaching them how to correct their misbehaviors. Consequently, some left-behind children are egoistic and have a lot of behavioral problems (Silverstein & Cong, 2013). As a solution, in children's homes, CWDs organize various activities to increase children's interactions and thus instruct

them on how to share with and provide mental support for their peers. In addition, CWDs guide children to form study groups to learn from each other and develop their collective consciousness. CWDs play a significant role in helping left-behind children learn how to establish and utilize the peer relationship in school to promote their development and achievement.

Fieldwork shows that CWDs also function as a coordinator to link the private sectors such as individual business or enterprise to schools. For instance, an enterprise that sells spectacles in Yesanguan town proposes to provide philanthropic lectures regarding eyesight protection and free optical examinations for children in a rural primary school. By reaching out to CWDs, the manager of the spectacles enterprise successfully establishes the partnership with the school. Currently, this spectacles enterprise has kept cooperation with the primary school for three years. The enterprise manager indicated:

At the beginning, I had no idea how to establish the relationship with the primary school. My friend told me that probably I could reach out to local CWDs to get assistance. Fortunately, a CWD was acquainted with the teaching staff and helped me connect with the school. From my perspective, CWDs could play a great role in linking the resources between private sectors and schools or child welfare institutions to support disadvantaged children (Interview notes).

Functioning as a coordinator, CWDs can not only help private sectors link the resources to schools, but also assist schools in seeking more potential resources from wider civil sectors. However, the fieldwork finds that only a few CWDs have smoothly established the partnership with local schools. Since the promotion and publicity of CWDs is relatively insufficient, many schoolteachers are still unaware of their existence. For example, out of five schoolteachers who participated in the interview, only one of them has the experience of collaborating with CWDs

to address children's issues. One schoolteacher has heard about CWDs, but merely knows a little about this position. The rest of three schoolteachers have never heard about CWDs before (Interview notes). Also, due to the heavy workload and busy schedule of CWDs and schoolteachers, it is inconvenient for them to keep regular communications with each other. Furthermore, the relatively frequent turnover of the teaching staff in rural schools also affects the stability of partnership between schoolteachers and CWDs (Chang et al., 2021). CWD Huang stated, "Previously, I kept contact with two schoolteachers in a local primary school. However, they were transferred to other schools last year so that I lost an important way to understand students' schooling performances. Such turnover was very commonplace in rural schools" (Interview notes).

Child Welfare Directors and Child Welfare Institutions

The cooperation between CWDs and child welfare institutions has played an increasingly significant role in child welfare provision. Substantially, the CWD system functions as a community-level child welfare network rather than a specific child welfare institution. Therefore, the implementation and available resources of the CWD system bear some differences with child welfare institutions. On the one hand, the cooperation creates an opportunity for CWDs to share experiences with other child welfare workers. On the other hand, the collaboration can in turn fill the shortage of child welfare provision. In the interview, CWD Shang reflected that he established the partnership with a local child welfare institution to provide medical care for left-behind children and children in difficulty. CWD Shang elaborated:

Some left-behind children in the village suffered from psychological and physical problems. In addition to reporting the case to the county juvenile protection agency to seek assistance, I tried to contact with a local child welfare institution because they had available medical resources to support these disadvantaged children (Interview notes).

Thus, by establishing the partnership with child welfare institutions, CWDs help disadvantaged children access more resources and gain further assistance through referring the case to local child welfare institutions. For example, Ding was a girl who lived in a village in Hunan province, China. She dropped out of school because her family was unable to offer adequate finance to support her schooling. Under such circumstances, the CWD helped her apply to the local civil affairs bureau for financial assistance. In the meantime, the CWD reached out to a local child welfare institution to link the financial resources from a foundation in Hong Kong to help Ding continue her schooling (CPRI & UNICEF, 2015). However, there is a significant imbalance between the development of child welfare institutions. Since the availability and quality of child welfare resources are different among child welfare institutions, the way of collaboration with CWDs varies from place to place (Sun, 2021). In some rural areas, there are merely few or even no child welfare institutions, which critically blocks the potentiality of establishing the partnership between CWDs and child welfare institutions. Furthermore, some local child welfare institutions are on a small-scale and can supply very limited resources to support left-behind children and children in difficulty.

Mapping the Child Welfare Director System

In contemporary China, though some government departments have promoted the legislation of child welfare, there is no specific bureau with primary responsibility for

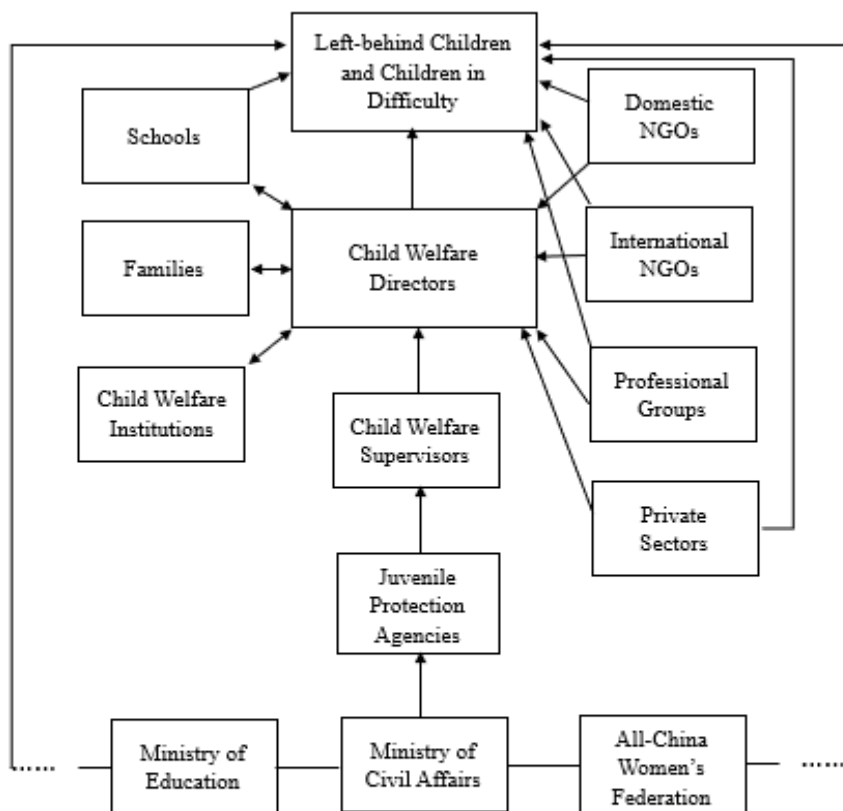
children's issues. Child welfare issues are primarily managed by a set of government bureaus and mass organizations such as Ministry of Civil Affairs of PRC, Ministry of Education, Public Security Bureau, All-China Women's Federation, and China Disabled Person's Federation. Due to the distinctiveness of these bureaus and agencies, the enactment of child welfare policies bears a significant difference among bureaus and agencies. As a result, a lack of specific child welfare bureau and integrity of policy enactment leads to the fragmentation of child welfare provision, which has critical influences on the optimization of child welfare resources and services (Qiu & Hao, 2009). In this sense, the CWD system facilitates a joint approach among several government bureaus and agencies to deliver child welfare services.

Figure 4 below visualizes several important interrelationships as well as the network of the CWD system. Families and schools are two significant loci strongly associated with child development. Thus, by establishing the partnerships with families and schools, CWDs can help left-behind children and children in difficulty create more sustainable familial and schooling environments to promote their development. Moreover, the partnership between CWDs and child welfare institutions can achieve the supplement of available child welfare sources and mutual assistance. Functioning as a vital point of coordination, the CWD system features the linkage of potential child welfare resources and services from a variety of social sectors. Currently, MCA is the most primary government bureau in charge of children's issues. MCA provides several types of child welfare services to address various problems such as serious illness and disability, decrepit buildings, poverty, dropping out, and childcare deficiency. Based on particular demands of disadvantaged children, CWDs seek available child welfare resources

from MCA to address their problems. Also, CWDs seek child welfare resources from an array of government bureaus and mass organizations such as the Ministry of Education, Public Security Department, and ACWF to handle children’s issues. In this sense, CWDs serve as a bridge to successfully connect these fragmented child welfare resources and services to disadvantaged children and families in the countryside.

Figure 4

Network of the CWD System



The “.....” in the figure means that there are a series of government bureaus and mass organizations.

Notes: Compiled by the author based on the documentary analysis and fieldwork.

In addition to government bureaus, CWDs also reach out to civil sectors to seek potential child welfare resources. Given the limited child welfare resources provided by government bureaus, a widespread participation of multi-level civil sectors can supply a supplementary role in child welfare provision. As shown in Figure 4, Chinese domestic NGOs, international NGOs, social organizations, professional groups formulated by universities and research institutes, and private sectors are all significant sources of child welfare provision. Rather than receiving child welfare services passively, CWDs take the initiative to seek and connect the available child welfare resources to disadvantaged children. In other words, the CWD system has endeavored to interweave a synergetic network to fully mobilize the child welfare resources to establish a more supportive and protective child welfare environment for left-behind children and children in difficulty in rural areas.

However, there are also some challenges facing the CWD system in the process of connecting child welfare resources and services. Since the enactment of child welfare policies reveals some differences between local governments, the accessibility of governmental child welfare resources and services varies from region to region, which can have great impacts on the effectiveness of linking child welfare resources and services (Qiu & Hao, 2009). Furthermore, while the involvement of private sectors, such as private enterprises, can enhance child welfare provision in the countryside, it is challenging for CWDs to stimulate the enthusiasm of and establish the long-lasting relationship with private sectors in supporting disadvantaged children. Moreover, it must be stressed that there are no substantial domestic NGOs in contemporary China. All domestic NGOs should register to MCA and undertake their

activities under its regulation and supervision. Compared to those influential NGOs, most grassroots NGOs are more likely to disband by a series of external factors such as economic depression and political pressure, which significantly influences the sustainability of child welfare provision (Han, 2018).

In a nutshell, this section mapped the CWD system to provide a more holistic comprehension of its coordination function. Similarly, the commissioned welfare volunteer and chief child welfare volunteer system also plays a role in connecting various government bureaus and institutions to support disadvantaged children and families in Japanese society. The following section will analyze the Japanese CWV & CCWV system.

Japanese Commissioned Welfare Volunteer and Chief Child Welfare Volunteer System

The previous sections in this chapter presented several key findings of the CWD system from textual materials and fieldwork. In addition, this study utilized the CWV & CCWV system in Japan to investigate potential lessons for the Chinese circumstances. This section will focus on the analysis of the implementation and characteristics of the CWV & CCWV system.

In Japan, the commissioned welfare volunteer system was originally developed by the local government to improve the social welfare. The appointed CWVs were in charge of a specific district to identify the needs of disadvantaged residents and help them address the problems. In 1947, with the enactment of the Child Welfare Law, the obligations of CWVs were expanded to include child welfare provision. All CWVs were authorized and governed by the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare of Japan to deliver welfare services. However, since most CWVs are not professionals in the field of child welfare social work, it became

challenging for them to meet urgent and expanding child welfare demands in the Japanese society. Also, CWVs were responsible for providing other public welfare services for the disabled and elderly, which significantly affected the effectiveness of child welfare provision (Matsunaga, 2001).

Between the 1950s and 1990s, successive Japanese governments initiated a series of child welfare programs to improve the well-being of children such as children's allowances, child support allowances, child guidance centers, and child welfare advisory councils (Ozawa, 1991). In 1994, in order to enhance the resolution of more complicated children's problems, a new position of CCWVs was created to collaborate with and lead CWVs. The newly appointed CCWVs were more experienced child welfare workers specializing in childcare and child protection. Generally, the ratio of CCWVs and CWVs in the community was approximately one to twenty. As a community-level child welfare model, CWVs and CCWVs served as enthusiastic community members who could have a more in-depth understanding of the special needs of disadvantaged children and families and provide timely assistance to them. Over the past several decades, the CWV & CCWV system has played an increasing role in improving child welfare in Japanese society (Matsunaga, 2001).

One of the most significant characteristics of the CWV & CCWV system is that it has established a community network that links local administrative authorities, schools, social welfare institutions to disadvantaged children and families (Matsunaga, 2001; MHLW, 2009). In the past several decades, increasingly severe child problems in Japanese society such as domestic child maltreatment, school bullying, and dropping out have brought challenges for

the CWV & CCWV system. It is worthwhile to examine how the CWV & CCWV system utilizes the community network to address child welfare challenges under such circumstances.

One aspect of the community network intertwined by the CWV & CCWV system can best be understood in light of its cooperation with schools to address child welfare challenges. Many CWVs and CCWVs keep in close contact with schools to guarantee the experience and information sharing between them. CWVs and CCWVs make regular school visits to investigate students' school performances. The teaching staff communicate with CWVs and CCWVs concerning the problems of school bullying, dropping out, and truancy, who accordingly provide possible strategies for teaching staff to grapple with problems. In turn, CWVs and CCWVs provide information about problematic students and dysfunctional families that they identified during the home visits and remind teaching staff to pay greater attention to them (MHLW, 2009; Noguchi, 2007). Additionally, in some regions, CWVs, CCWVs, and schools have established the specific communication mechanism to share information and discuss prominent child welfare challenges and possible solutions. For example, in Osaka prefecture, some schools organize liaison meetings (*renraku kai*) approximately three times a year to encourage the experience and information sharing among CWVs, CCWVs, and teaching staffs. In general, the first half of a liaison meeting concerns the general situations of child welfare challenges in school and family. In the second half of the meeting, CWVs and CCWVs are divided into several groups to facilitate discussions around specific cases according to districts (MHLW, 2009). The periodic liaison meetings not only enhance the connection between schools, CWVs, and CCWVs, but more importantly, they create a platform

in which teaching staffs and child welfare workers can share experiences and information mutually and explore potential strategies to address child welfare challenges.

Moreover, in some areas, CWVs and CCWVs make cooperation with schools to provide various welfare services to students and community residents. For example, a middle school in Toyama prefecture has invited local CWVs and CCWVs to provide psychological counseling for students after school. The school prepares a classroom for CWVs and CCWVs to carry out the counseling, which is also known as the relaxing counseling classroom. In the relaxing counseling classroom, CWVs and CCWVs patiently communicate with students about their problems and provide them with feasible suggestions (MHLW, 2009). For many students, the relaxing counseling classroom plays a role in helping them settle down and relieve stress. Particularly, some adolescent students are unwilling to tell their problems to their parents or schoolteachers. Nevertheless, through relaxing counseling classrooms, CWVs and CCWVs become amiable and patient listeners to whom students are more inclined to talk. Accordingly, CWVs and CCWVs can further understand students' specific needs and assist them in addressing the problems. The close contact is also conducive to helping students deepen the impression of CWVs and CCWVs. By doing so, many students can become more familiar with the role of CWVs and CCWVs and more likely to reach out to them to seek assistance when encountering problems.

Furthermore, CWVs and CCWVs make full use of the vacant classroom to organize child welfare-related communication salons to raise community awareness of childrearing. For example, in Shizuoka prefecture, a primary school has cooperated with CWVs and CCWVs to

organize periodic childrearing salons for preschool-aged children and their parents. Apart from the interactions between preschool-aged children and parents, CWVs and CCWVs also invite some higher-grade primary students to communicate with these preschool-aged children. The periodic childrearing salons not only provide a valuable opportunity for students to volunteer but also promote the interactions and interrelationships between children of different ages (MHLW, 2009).

Another angle of the community network of the CWV & CCWV system can be discussed in light of its collaboration with social welfare institutions to supply family support. CWVs and CCWVs have engaged with various social welfare institutions such as childrearing aiding centers, child consultancy centers, and health care centers to deliver child welfare services to support disadvantaged families (Noguchi, 2007). CWVs and CCWVs utilize these social welfare institutions as important platforms to disseminate childrearing knowledge to the community. For instance, in Sanda city, Hyogo prefecture, CWVs and CCWVs cooperate with local welfare health care centers (*fukushi hoken jyo*) twice a month to provide free childrearing counseling to new parents (MHLW, 2009). Since most new parents do not have sufficient childrearing knowledge and experiences and thus are more susceptible to anxiety, free childrearing counseling is an effective approach to help them enrich their knowledge and experiences as well as relieve their stress. In general, new parents need to bring their infants to take periodic health examinations in local welfare health care centers. After the infant health examination, new parents consult with CWVs and CCWVs about their parenting problems. CWVs and CCWVs provide appropriate suggestions based on their individual knowledge and

experiences (MHLW, 2009). Through the counseling, CWVs and CCWVs can help new parents alleviate the pressure and raise their confidence in childrearing. The collaboration with social welfare institutions creates a valuable opportunity for new parents to interact with CWVs and CCWVs and thus have a deeper comprehension of their roles.

Additionally, CWVs and CCWVs also collaborate with social welfare institutions to protect at-risk children from domestic maltreatment. When finding maltreated children, CWVs and CCWVs take active steps to bring them out of problematic families. Depending on the conditions of maltreated children, CWVs and CCWVs refer them to nursery centers, hospitals, or mental disorder recovery institutions. Subsequently, CWVs and CCWVs make joint efforts with parental consultancy centers, health care centers, female consultancy centers, and welfare offices to help parents realize the harmfulness of child abuse and instruct them in the appropriate approach to foster children. After addressing the issue of child abuse, CWVs and CCWVs reach out to related welfare institutions to follow up the case to ensure the eradication of child abuse in the dysfunctional family (Noguchi, 2007).

Taken together, CWVs and CCWVs play a crucial role in linking child consultancy centers, schools, health care centers, care insurance service centers, and local governmental child welfare department to address child welfare issues. The CWV & CCWV system has established an effective channel for disadvantaged children and families to access available child welfare resources. Previously, due to the lack of information, many disadvantaged families tended to be confused about how to seek potential assistance when encountering problems. In the meantime, it was hard for those child welfare agencies or departments to identify the demands

of disadvantaged children and families in the community. Since CWVs and CCWVs are more familiar with various child welfare services, they play a role in connecting disadvantaged children and families to available child welfare resources. Consequently, this sort of coordination function can considerably increase the effectiveness of child welfare provision. Moreover, by making regular home visits, CWVs and CCWVs identify disadvantaged children in the neighborhood and provide them with timely assistance instead of waiting until they reach out to seek assistance.

However, although the CWV & CCWV system has existed for a relatively long period, there is still room for its further development to address more complicated child welfare challenges in Japanese society. It is worth here making a deeper probe into the potential development of the CWV & CCWV system suggested by Japanese scholars, which may provide lessons for the CWD system in China.

Recently, Japanese scholars have raised more concerns about the competency enhancement of CCWVs. Since CCWVs are particularly authorized to take charge of child welfare issues, it is important for CCWVs to continuously raise their capability to better address increasingly complicated child welfare challenges. Noguchi (2007) suggests that there should be more advanced studies to promote the competency enhancement of CCWVs. Therefore, it is necessary to formulate a more specific training mechanism such as “the university of child welfare volunteers” that can supply periodic and high-quality advanced studies to help CCWVs strengthen their competency in child welfare provision (Noguchi, 2007). Advanced studies allow CCWVs to access various topics of child welfare social work and have a more systematic

and comprehensive understanding in terms of delivering child welfare services. For example, in an advanced study regarding the psychological care of maltreated children, psychological professionals aim to help CCWVs raise their competency in assisting maltreated children from several aspects such as the language of maltreated children, the introduction of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), the care of PTSD, and the method to aiding maltreated children (Noguchi, 2007). Advanced studies will allow CCWVs make an in-depth investigation of the related issues and explore more possible approaches to support disadvantaged children.

Moreover, according to Okano (2005), many CCWVs expressed that one of most significant skills was knowing how to comprehend emotions and values of young parents. Given that CCWVs are frontline child welfare workers who directly contact disadvantaged children and families, the way that they understand their emotions and values can subsequently influence the effectiveness and quality of child welfare provision. In particular, the general value of young parents is comparatively different from CCWVs whose ages are mostly around 40 years old. Therefore, the advanced studies also need to pay more attention to create opportunities for CCWVs to learn how to consider and address the issues from the perspective of young parents as much as possible (Okano, 2005).

It is interesting to find that the CWV & CCWV system in Japan shares several similarities with the CWD system in China. First, the purposes of these two systems are to empower community members to fill the shortage in child welfare provision. Second, personnel of these two systems are semi-official child welfare workers. On the one hand, they serve as child welfare volunteers with small reimbursement. On the other hand, they are appointed and

governed by the governments to carry out the work. Third, both the CWD system and the CWV & CCWV system establish effective networks that connect various government bureaus and social sectors to support disadvantaged children and families.

However, there are also some differences between Chinese and Japanese systems. First, in Japan, the CWV & CCWV system has been developed to address child welfare challenges at the community-level in urban and rural areas. Comparatively, the assistance target of the CWD system is more specific. At the present stage, the CWD system is primarily implemented to support left-behind children and children in difficulty in the Chinese countryside. Second, the funding of the CWV & CCWV system mainly comes from national and local governments. With respect to the CWD system, in addition to governmental financial support, civil sectors play an increasingly significant role in supplying funding. Despite the differences between these two systems, the CWV & CCWV system in a certain degree can provide some potential lessons for the further development of the CWD system. The possible lessons from the Japanese approach will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Summary of Findings

In line with the objectives of this research to assess the implementation of the CWD system in China and explore its potential development, this chapter highlighted a set of key findings analyzed from textual materials and fieldwork, including interviews. Section one examined several basic elements of the CWD system including professional training, administration, and financial and technical support. The CWD system has endeavored to continuously develop professional training to equip CWDs to deliver child welfare services. In

terms of administration, some regions have started to build the township-county-village triple hierarchy system to increase the effectiveness of bottom-up reporting procedures and top-down supervision and child welfare delivery. With respect to financial and technical support, in addition to central and local governments, the CWD system obtains support from a wide range of social sectors such as international and domestic NGOs, social organizations, professional research institutes, and private enterprises. Section two concentrated on the relationship of the CWD system with families, schools, and child welfare institutions. By contextualizing the CWD system in different contexts, this research examined how the CWD system provided family support and schooling support for left-behind children and children in difficulty in rural areas. Informants' first-hand materials were utilized to enrich the analysis. Section three mapped the CWD system to highlight its pivotal coordination function that links fragmented child welfare resources and services to support disadvantaged children. Section four paid particular attention to the comparative analysis of the CWV & CCWV system in Japan, which shed light on exploring the potential development of the CWD system. To respond to the central research questions of the implementation of the CWD system and its further development, these findings will be analyzed and discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 Discussion and Conclusion

Chapter 4 demonstrated the basic elements of the child welfare director system and its role in different social contexts. In addition, Chapter 4 analyzed the characteristics of the commissioned welfare volunteer and chief child welfare volunteer system in Japan. This chapter will further discuss the implementation of the CWD system and possible lessons from the Japanese approach based on the key findings. The thesis will conclude by highlighting implications for the theoretical framework as well as indicating practical and policy recommendations for the further development of the CWD system and the issue of left-behind children and children in difficulty in rural China. Lastly, this chapter will point out potential directions for further study.

The Implementation of the Child Welfare Director System

In contemporary China, due to the implementation of the dual-structure *hukou* system, there is a dichotomy of urban residence and rural residence. Such rural-urban dichotomy has resulted in the severe problem of left-behind children in rural areas. The CWD system that initiated in 2010 aims to establish a community-level protective environment to address complicated child welfare challenges and improve the well-being of left-behind children and children in difficulty in rural areas. This study examines the implementation of the CWD system and its further development by answering the following central questions: Who are involved in the CWD system and what are their approaches to achieve the goal of addressing child welfare challenges in rural China? Are there any lessons that the CWD system can draw

from the CWV & CCWV system in Japan? If so, what specific practices from the Japanese approach can apply to the Chinese circumstance? What are the practical and policy recommendations for the further development of the CWD system and the improvement of the situation of left-behind children and children in difficulty in rural China?

Professional Training

Since most CWDs selected from the community are not the specialists in the field of child welfare social work, they are required to take professional training to become qualified frontline child welfare workers. Over the past decade, the CWD system has endeavored to combine both in-person and online professional training to ensure the competency of CWDs. Through professional training, CWDs can grasp fundamental knowledge in relation to child development, child protection, family-centered intervention, social work, and up-to-date child welfare policies in China. Additionally, professional training provides a guidance for CWDs to carry out the daily work that includes collecting information, identifying disadvantaged children and families, supplying family support, seeking for and allocating child welfare resources, managing children's homes, reporting significant children's issues, and raising community awareness on child protection.

Although professional training plays a role in shaping CWDs as qualified child welfare workers, evidence from findings suggests that there is a demand for professional training to enhance the professionalism of CWDs. As most CWDs only have the middle or high school education background, the lower education level poses an obstacle for them to fully comprehend theories and grasp skills included in professional training. In addition, for child

welfare workers, the development of awareness of children's rights requires long-term professional training and practice. Therefore, it is difficult for professional training to successfully develop CWD's awareness of children's rights merely depending on a few training sessions (Huang, 2020; Zheng et al., 2020). Owing to constraints on financial and human resources, professional training currently focuses more on theoretical instructions and overlooks the continuous professional development of CWDs (CPRI & UNICEF, 2018; 2019; Wang, 2020). Wu and Ji's survey (2020) found that some CWDs felt unsatisfactory with the effect of professional training and a fairly large proportion of CWDs expressed strong anticipation to take periodic advanced studies to raise their competency, particularly, in the field of law, psychology, sociology, and social work. Moreover, the survey indicated that a majority of CWDs expected professional training to incorporate field teaching and practical operation rather than merely concentrating on theoretical training (Wu & Ji, 2020). In the meantime, findings from interviews show the significance of professional training in providing more practical guidance for CWDs to increase the effectiveness of child welfare provision. In short, it is important for professional training to attend to the continuous professional development of CWDs as well as effective combination of theoretical instruction and practical guidance.

While professional training has made some contributions to cultivate professional ethics of CWDs, there is still room for the further development of the role of CWDs. Given that most of CWDs are part-time volunteers rather than full-time professional child welfare workers, their multiple roles are more likely to lead to role conflicts and role ambiguity. Indeed,

professional training to some extents helps CWDs make a relatively comprehensive understanding of the role of CWDs such as its main duties and function. However, professional training pays little attention to instruct CWDs on how to balance the significance of matters and what matters should be prioritized when facing work conflicts caused by multiple careers (Huang, 2020). Based on the study of Zhao and Zhao (2020), although a considerable proportion of CWDs conveyed a positive attitude towards their positions, some CWDs still reflected the uncertainty of the future of this position. When interview participants claimed that sometimes they would forget their roles as CWDs due to the heavy workload brought by multiple careers. This implies the necessity to further specify work ethics and responsibilities of CWDs to raise the quality and effectiveness of child welfare provision.

It is worth noting that in 2020, CPRI and Beijing CiYou Child Welfare Research Center initiated a special program called *Juguang Jihua* aimed at providing professional training for local social welfare organizations and institutions to shape them as important disseminators of professional knowledge and skills to create more opportunities for CWDs to access professional training. However, since this program is still at a preliminary stage, professional training at present is held on a small scale and only few child welfare workers have the chances to attend training (“‘*Juguang Jihua*’ Social Organization Development Camp is Coming,” 2020).

Administration, Financial Sources, and Technical Support

In some regions, the CWD system has built a county-township-village triple hierarchy administration system that includes the bottom-up reporting mechanism and top-down

supervision and child welfare delivery mechanism. Under the county-township-village triple hierarchy system, local governments better understand the progress of child welfare provision of CWDs, which enables them to coordinate related government bureaus, make appropriate adjustments, and provide timely assistance to raise the quality of child welfare provision. However, findings demonstrate that inappropriate functioning of child welfare supervisors influences the effectiveness of administration of the CWD system negatively. Currently, the position of CWSs is mostly taken charge as a side job by officials in the township government rather than undertaking by child welfare-related specialists. As a result, many CWSs are unable to stay focus on handling child welfare issues and offer professional guidance for CWDs.

The financial resources of the CWD system primarily come from central and local governments as well as from wider civil society such as NGOs, social organizations, and private enterprises. Local governments in many areas have begun to include the expenditure of the CWD system in financial budgets. There is also a trend that some local governments attempt to emphasize the role of lottery public welfare funds in supporting the implementation of the CWD system. Nevertheless, it remains unclear what specific percentage of central and local governmental funding is utilized to support the CWD system. Especially, local governments take different positions on the funding arrangement for the CWD system. Some local governments regard the CWD system as a financial burden and have not yet listed the expenditure of the CWD system in financial budgets (Huang, 2020).

In addition to formal and informal governmental funding, a variety of social sectors, in particular, international and Chinese domestic NGOs play an expanding role in providing

funding for the CWD system. One of the most prominent international NGOs is UNICEF. As the chief initiator of the CWD system, UNICEF has supplied significant financial assistance for a long period. Furthermore, there is some evidence to suggest the increased role of Chinese domestic NGOs in supporting the CWD system. The example of the Ai You Foundation presented in Chapter 4 helps to illustrate how domestic NGOs gradually become the crucial financial sources of the CWD system. However, while the positive contribution of domestic NGOs has obtained growing recognitions from the government and the public, the new laws issued in 2016 revealed the governmental intention to adopt a more explicit divide-and-rule approach to domestic NGOs (Han, 2018). Under such circumstances, many domestic NGOs disappeared due to financial difficulties or political pressure and thus could not guarantee the sustainability of financial support to the CWD system.

With respect to technical support, the CWD system has received technical support from several professional groups such as professional research institutes, universities, and social organizations. CPRI is currently the most important professional group that has made a significant contribution to technical support of the CWD system including offering professional training and online consultancy, developing teaching materials, establishing child welfare-related database, conducting fieldwork to observe the implementation of the CWD system, and making regular assessment of the CWD system. Through scientific and systematic analyses, CPRI and other professional groups supply appropriate suggestions to further improve the CWD system.

Family Support

It has been widely accepted that family plays an important role in child development. In rural China, the phenomenon of child neglect and domestic child abuse is prevailing (Wan et al., 2020; Zhao, 2018). Such family dysfunction has negative impacts on children's development and life course. Arising from the dual-structure *hukou* system in China, many rural-to-urban migrant workers tend to leave their children in rural hometowns to guarantee their rights to access education and social welfare. As a result, there has been an overwhelming number of left-behind children in rural areas. Many left-behind children are more vulnerable to a couple of physical and psychological problems due to prolonged separation.

The CWD system has made great efforts to identify dysfunctional families and supply family support to assure positive family functioning. Rather than merely focusing on helping disadvantaged family seek available welfare resources to resolve the difficulties, more importantly, the CWD system has paid great attention to improve the well-being of dysfunctional families by strengthening the capability of family in childrearing and child protection. Since CWDs are a part of community members, they keep follow-up visits to support and encourage positive family functioning. Considering the negative impacts of long-term parental absence on left-behind children, the CWD system employs the parent-child interaction approach to rehabilitate the poor relationship between left-behind children and migrant parents and increase the parental involvement in activities and resources to promote children's development. Furthermore, findings suggest that the CWD system has begun to put more emphasis on family education. In rural areas, most parents tend to overlook the

significance of family education. In addition to schools, family is another important educational source for children. Hence, the CWD system aims to raise rural parents' awareness of family education and provide parents with appropriate guidance on how to set a positive example in family to cultivate children great moral character and behavioral habits. By doing so, rural parents create a more supportive family educational environment that facilitates children's development and achievement. However, interview participants' responses demonstrate that a proportion of parents refuse to accept family support considering the privacy of family issues. In addition, some parents overly rely on the function of CWDs and attempt to shift parts of parental duties to CWDs. Such factors may have negative impacts on the outcomes of family support.

Schooling Support

Since school is also a crucial locus for child development, the CWD system has endeavored to establish the partnership with local schools to support rural children's educational development. CWDs, in a certain degree, play a complementary role in helping schools identify problematic students and make joint efforts with schools to supply appropriate assistance. Case 3 in Chapter 4 provided by the interview participant explains the significance of the partnership between CWDs and schools in supporting rural children's educational development. Interestingly, findings from fieldwork also suggest that the participation of different social sectors such as private enterprises and child welfare institutions is significant in providing schooling support for rural children. The critical coordination function of the CWD system is particularly pivotal in this respect. In fact, the CWD system should not be

merely regarded as a volunteer team, but a community-level child welfare network that connects various social sectors to mobilize potential welfare resources and services to support disadvantaged children. Through the network, the CWD system helps schools secure available resources to create a supportive schooling environment and ensure rural children's educational achievement.

However, evidence from findings indicates that only a small proportion of CWDs have successfully built robust partnerships with schools. There are several factors that limit the collaboration between CWDs and schools. First, as the promotion and publicity of the CWD system is insufficient, many schoolteachers have little awareness of the availability of CWDs and express uncertainty as to their roles. It is difficult for CWDs to establish solid partnerships with schoolteachers if there is a lack of trust from schoolteachers. Second, in rural schools, there is a relatively high turnover of teaching staffs, which may undermine the stability of partnerships between CWDs and schoolteachers. Third, while some CWDs have built the partnership with local schools, a lack of effective communication and cooperation mechanism affects the outcome of schooling support. Furthermore, it should be noted that although some child welfare institutions have engaged with CWDs to provide schooling support for rural children, the different development level of child welfare institutions in different regions may critically influence the possibility of collaboration between CWDs and child welfare institutions.

Taken together, the CWD system is characterized as a flexible and synergetic network that connects fragmented child welfare services and resources to support left-behind children and

children in difficulty in rural China. At the vertical level, there is a county-township-village triple hierarchy system that supplies the upward reporting mechanism and downward supervision and child welfare delivery mechanism to facilitate the administration and child welfare provision of CWDs. At the horizontal level, various government bureaus and social sectors are linked to support and promote child welfare provision. Since family and school are two significant loci of child development, the CWD system plays an important role in strengthening family functioning and supplying schooling support to create a more protective and supportive environment to encourage child development in rural areas.

Potential Lessons from the Commissioned Welfare Volunteer and Chief Child Welfare Volunteer System

In Japan, the CWV & CCWV system has been developed to address increasingly complicated child welfare challenges at the community level. While China's politics, socio-economic development, and child welfare challenges are distinct from those in Japan, it is still worth investigating the CWV & CCWV system to seek potential lessons for the CWD system because these two systems share the similarity in utilizing community human resources to fill the paucity of child welfare workers. Findings from analysis illustrate that there are several valuable lessons that the CWD system can draw from the Japanese approach.

First, in Japan, many schools regard CWVs and CCWVs as an indispensable partner in improving the well-being of disadvantaged children. In addition to frequent communication with schools, CWVs and CCWVs also actively engage in a variety of school activities and interact with students. Also, some special communication mechanisms such as periodic liaison

meetings facilitate further analyzing the prominent child welfare challenge and exploring improvements to child welfare provision. Moreover, CWVs and CCWVs also make full use of available resources in school such as vacant classrooms or even students to offer psychological counseling and childbearing salons and enhance child welfare provision and attain more recognitions from the community (MHLW, 2009). As to the CWD system in China, even though some CWDs have begun to collaborate with schools to address child welfare challenges, findings revealed from the case study indicate that there is likely to be similar challenges in establishing solid partnerships between CWDs and schools at the national scale. For many CWDs, it is difficult to attain adequate trust and support from schools due to the lack of general recognitions of this position in Chinese society. Furthermore, the interaction between CWDs and schools is relatively simple, which primarily concentrates on information exchange (Interview notes). Therefore, the CWV & CCWV system in a certain degree illuminates the way for the CWD system to further strengthen partnerships between CWDs and schools. To help CWDs build the robust partnership with schools, local juvenile protection agencies should collaborate with local education bureaus to facilitate the interactions and interrelationships between CWDs and schoolteachers. For example, JPAs and county education bureaus hold periodic liaison meetings to promote the communication between CWDs and schoolteachers and help CWDs attain sufficient trust from schools. In addition, following the Japanese approach, Chinese local governments need to encourage schools to invite CWDs to serve as student counselors to further understand the specific demands of students and help them address the problems. Furthermore, CWDs should cooperate with schools to organize

diversified activities such as traditional festival celebrations, parent-child activities, and public lectures to enhance child welfare provision and secure more recognitions in the community.

Second, the CWV & CCWV system sheds light on the strengths of reinforcing the collaboration with social welfare institutions in raising the effectiveness and quality of child welfare provision. On the one hand, local governments should play a greater role in promoting the cooperation between CWDs and social welfare institutions. In Japan, the effective cooperation between CWVs, CCWVs, and various social welfare institutions has achieved an ideal outcome in addressing child maltreatment and helping dysfunctional families maintain positive family functioning. In the Chinese context, local government bureaus and agencies need to provide information of local social welfare institutions to CWDs and support them to establish the partnership with social welfare institutions. On the other hand, CWDs should utilize social welfare institutions as potential platforms to increase the interactions with children and parents to gain more recognitions from the community.

Third, the CWV & CCWV system provides some valuable lessons for the CWD system regarding the competency enhancement of CWDs. Since current professional training systems cannot greatly satisfy CWDs' increasing demands of raising capacity to address more complicated child welfare challenges, more effective training mechanisms are needed to help CWDs reinforce their competency in child welfare provision. In this sense, the concept of "the university of child welfare volunteers" advocated by the Japanese scholar may be worth considering for the CWD system. Based on the existing professional training system, the CWD system should establish a dedicated website or mobile-based platform for CWDs to share

experiences and information as well as access advanced studies. Furthermore, it is also crucial for professional training to pay greater attention to strengthen the ability of CWDs in terms of fully considering the issues from the perspective of disadvantaged children and families.

These lessons from the Japanese approach can be conducive to providing policy and practical recommendations for the further development of the CWD system. Though it is also worthwhile to investigate the overall structure of child welfare provision in Japan such as its finance, administration, and resources to find more possible lessons for the Chinese case, the purpose of this study primarily focuses on the comparative analysis between the CWD system and the CWV & CCWV system. More detailed examination of the wider issues of child welfare provision in Japan can be the subject for further study.

Implications of this Study

The preceding sections in this chapter discussed the implementation of the CWD system and possible lessons from the CWV & CCWV system in Japan based on the findings. This section will highlight theoretical implications of this study as well as provide policy and practical recommendations for the further development of the CWD system and the issue of rural left-behind children and children in difficulty.

Implications for the Theoretical Framework

This study raised significant questions about the implementation and the further development of the CWD system, which offered a theoretically informed analysis for this practice. In addition, the findings of this study were informed by a broader theoretical framework regarding child development, family support, and child welfare models in the

context of rural China.

With respect to child development and family support, many scholars have examined these issues from different perspectives in the context of Western society. This study has extended the key concepts of child development and family support by making a careful assessment of the CWD system to analyze how this community-level child welfare program facilitates child development and family support in the Chinese countryside. Family and school are two significant loci that have great influences on child development. The positive familial environment and school climate can promote children's development and achievement (Barton & Coley, 2007; Roeser et al., 2000; Williams et al., 2008). This study investigated the interactions and interrelationships between CWDs, families, and schools to analyze the role of CWDs in supplying family support and schooling support to promote the development of left-behind children and children in difficulty in rural areas. In regard to family support, scholars have already suggested several promising approaches that can help family maintain positive family functioning such as the strengths-based approach, parent-child interaction approach, and community social networks (Berger & Font, 2015; Early & GlenMaye, 2000; Maguire & Showalter, 2016; Mahoney & Wheeden, 1997; Walsh, 2002). Informed by these theoretical frameworks, this study explored how CWDs utilized parent-child interaction approaches, strength-based approaches, and community social networks to rehabilitate the poor relationship between left-behind children and their parents as well as enhance the capacity of disadvantaged families in parenting and child protection. In addition, this study examined the way that CWDs cooperated with schools to support disadvantaged children and create a more supportive

schooling environment to facilitate their educational development and achievement. Furthermore, the theories of peer relationships have indicated that the positive peer relationship can facilitate the psychological, social, and intellectual development of children (Allen et al., 2007; Deater-Deckard, 2001; Roseth, 2008). This study made further reflections on this issue by analyzing how CWDs assisted left-behind children in establishing positive peer relationships to promote their development. These findings enriched the depth of concepts on child development and family support within the context of rural China.

Additionally, this study provided an opportunity to accommodate understanding of Chinese child welfare models in the context of rural China. Shang and colleagues (2003) suggest that China's child welfare model is shifting towards an integrated model in which the state plays a dominant role along with the widespread participation of various social sectors in child welfare provision. With close investigation and critical analysis of the implementation of the CWD system, this study has highlighted how the coordination function of the CWD system is characterized by incorporating a wide range of social sectors into a dynamic network to deliver child welfare services in rural areas. Also, according to Naftali (2014), China's ratification of United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) denoted that Chinese child welfare models has started to include key principles of the UNCRC in child welfare provision underscoring children's rights. This study examined how key objectives of the UNCRC were reflected in the implementation of the CWD system. However, even though CWDs are required to adhere the norms of UNCRC in child welfare provision, the lack of professionalism and continuous professional development poses an obstacle for CWDs to

fulfill awareness of children's rights in practice. This research strongly emphasized how program planners and policymakers must further reflect on the issue of providing more financial, human, and training resources to help child welfare workers strengthen professionalism in child welfare provision.

Moreover, Zhao and colleagues (2017) pointed out several deficiencies of the child protection system in contemporary China such as the lack of a specific department in charge of child welfare issues, the paucity of concrete regulations oriented towards child protection, and the ineffectiveness of reporting and handling procedures for children's issues. Although many regions in China have begun to build a county-township-village triple hierarchy system to deliver child welfare services, this thesis has highlighted a need for central and local governments to further improve the institutional administration of child welfare provision. This should most likely involve establishing specially designated child welfare departments at national, provincial, and municipal levels to focus on child welfare issues. Also, this thesis examined the involvement of NGOs, social organizations, and private enterprises in supporting the implementation of the CWD system, which helped convey a more nuanced understanding of the role of civil sectors in child welfare provision in Chinese society.

Policy and Practical Implications for the Child Welfare Director System

The implementation of the CWD system has made significant progress in protecting and supporting left-behind children and children in difficulty in rural China over the last decade. However, in order to better address increasingly complicated child welfare challenges in rural areas, more efforts need to be put in further developing the CWD system to create a more

supportive and protective environment to improve the well-being of disadvantaged children. The findings of this study have a number of important implications for the further development of the CWD system.

First, it is crucial to promote the transformation of the role of CWDs from child welfare volunteers to more professional child welfare workers. At present, there are more than 680,000 CWDs in China, the vast majority of whom are poorly educated women and serve as part-time volunteers (Zheng et al., 2020). Given the significance of the role of CWDs in identifying demands of disadvantaged children and delivering child welfare services, the lack of professionalism and specification of the responsibility of CWDs can limit the effectiveness and quality of child welfare provision. Therefore, a reasonable strategy for this problem is to promote the restructuring of the team of CWDs to shape it as a more professional child welfare workers team. Local governments should play a greater role in providing financial and human resources to encourage the talent cultivation of social workers in local social work institutions to select more capable people to serve as full-time child welfare workers to deliver child welfare services.

In addition, continued efforts are needed to strengthen the professionalism of CWDs. Professional training should focus more on field training and practical operation so that CWDs are able to put theoretical knowledge into practice. Since the current situation of left-behind children and children in difficulty is complicated, professional training should pay a great deal more attention to instructing CWDs on how to utilize different sorts of skills to better understand the specific demands of disadvantaged children and help them resolve the

difficulties. Moreover, informed by the concept of “the university of child welfare volunteers” advocated by the Japanese scholar, there is potential to establish a more sustainable online learning platform to escalate the scale of professional training to assure the continuous professional development of CWDs. Particularly, the *Juguang Jihua* program mentioned earlier is a promising approach to emphasize the leading role of experienced child welfare workers and construct a more sustainable professional training network in response to CWDs’ increasing demands of professional knowledge and skills.

Second, this study highlights the need for central and local governments to play a greater role in providing financial support to the CWD system. Since there is still no unified salary system and working expenditure standard for CWDs, governments should further specify working expenditures and salaries of CWDs and include them in governmental financial budgets to assure the implementation of the program. Considering wide regional socio-economic disparities in development in contemporary China, central and local governments need to coordinate financial budgets depending on specific local conditions. For underdeveloped areas in central and western China, for example, the central government should increase the proportion of financial budgets to alleviate the financial burden of local governments to guarantee the working expenditure and salary of CWDs. At the local level, governments need to establish a diversified financial support system that can raise funding from wider civil society sources to support CWDs. Furthermore, more efforts should be made to stimulate the utilization of lottery public welfare funds in supporting left-behind children and children in difficulty. Particularly, there is a need for central and local governments to do

more to improve the management and allocation mechanism of lottery public welfare funds to ensure the equitable distribution of funding.

Third, further steps should be taken to develop the administration system of the CWD system. Currently, the CWD system is affiliated to the Ministry of Civil Affairs of PRC. However, limited capacity and resources make it hard for MCA to take full responsibility for administering and supervising the CWD system. Hence, the central government should set specific child welfare bureaus at national, provincial, municipal, and local levels to take charge of child welfare issues and administer the implementation of the CWD system. Also, more improvements should be made to increase the effectiveness of administrative mechanisms of the county-township-village triple hierarchy system. At the county level, a child welfare administration agency should be established to supervise and guide child welfare provision. Additionally, the child welfare administration agency needs to collaborate with other government bureaus and child welfare research institutes, such as China Philanthropy Research Institute, to provide periodic professional training for CWDs to strengthen their professionalism. At the township level, given that child welfare supervisors play an important role in overseeing the work of CWDs and making the preliminary assessment of children's issues, it is necessary to select child welfare-related specialists to fill these positions. Moreover, there should be a more effective mandated reporting mechanism within the triple hierarchy system. A potential approach to tackle this issue is to establish a rapid online reporting system, such as mobile-based reporting applications, through which CWDs can report significant children's issues to juvenile protection agencies or government bureaus as soon as possible.

Fourth, in practice, county juvenile protection agencies and government bureaus need to assist CWDs in strengthening partnerships with schools and social welfare institutions to enhance child welfare provision. Inspired by the Japanese approach, it would be useful to establish specific communication mechanisms, such as periodic liaison meetings, to promote the interactions and interrelationships between CWDs and schools. CWDs can collaborate with schools to provide counseling for disadvantaged children and organize public lectures and caregivers-child activities to raise community awareness on childcare and child protection. Additionally, county juvenile protection agencies should provide CWDs with sufficient information about and opportunities to cooperate with local social welfare institutions. To incorporate more social welfare institutions into the network of the CWD system, local governments can designate such organizations as semi-official institutions to deliver child welfare services by exempting them from property and corporate tax or giving special tax relief.

Policy Implications for the Issue of Rural Left-behind Children and Children in Difficulty

Despite the significant role of the CWD system in supporting left-behind children and children in difficulty, Chinese central and local governments need to take more measures to address the increasingly dire situation of disadvantaged children in rural China.

First, central and local governments need to explore more community-level child protection mechanisms to support rural left-behind children and children in difficulty. In addition to the CWD system, many child welfare research institutes and organizations are still working on various pilot models such as the child-friendly spaces program aimed at providing more diversified child welfare services to disadvantaged children (UNICEF, 2019).

Governments should put more emphasis on these projects and collaborate with related social organizations and research institutes to establish sustainable technical support mechanisms to assure replication across the country.

Second, there is a need for governments and enterprises to establish stable assistance mechanisms to support rural-to-urban migrant workers and their accompanying children. It is possible for central and local governments to utilize a certain proportion of lottery public welfare funds to purchase welfare services from domestic NGOs to support migrant workers and their accompanying children. In addition, governments can levy a small tax from enterprises that employ migrant workers to deliver child welfare services to those migrant children. Furthermore, enterprises should highlight the function of labor unions in supporting migrant workers. For migrant workers, enterprises can reduce or cancel membership fees to invite them to participate in labor unions. Labor unions can not only supply migrant workers with financial support and information regarding up-to-dated subsidy policies, but also play a role in helping migrant workers protect their rights and benefits in urban areas. In this way, more migrants will choose to bring their children to the cities instead of leaving them in rural hometowns if they can access more public welfare and benefits in urban areas.

Third, it is extremely important that governments should make efforts to address the problems of the rural-urban dichotomy. The potential strategy for improving this situation is to promote rural revitalization and accelerate rural-urban integration to eliminate barriers and bridge the gaps between rural and urban areas. Owing to the dual household registration system, rural-to-urban migrant workers and their children are not entitled to access most public welfare

and services in urban areas, including schooling. One of the major reasons that many rural people have migrated to megacities is that they desire to seek better-paying employment to provide higher living standards for their families because there are fewer satisfactory job opportunities in rural areas. Therefore, governments need to take active steps to revitalize the industry, economy, and education in rural areas to narrow the gaps between rural and urban areas. The local government should strengthen the cooperation between leading local enterprises and rural agriculture to facilitate industrial management of agriculture so that it can create more job opportunities for rural people. With respect to rural education, the shortage of teaching staff and poorer quality of rural schoolteachers are prominent issues. To address these problems, governments should provide preferential treatment for rural schoolteachers, such as giving them priority in the professional evaluation, to attract more teaching staff to rural areas. In the meantime, the training and support program for rural schoolteachers piloted by UNICEF is conducive to supplying sustainable technical support to rural schoolteachers (UNICEF, 2019). Therefore, governments need to further develop training and support programs to strengthen the capacity of rural schoolteachers. More broadly, a meaningful strategy for rural revitalization and rural-urban integration is key to addressing the issue of left-behind children in contemporary China as rural people are more likely to choose to stay with children in their rural hometowns rather than migrating to urban areas.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study provides the following suggestions for further study. First, this study utilizes the CWV & CCWV system in Japan as a valuable lesson to investigate the potential

development of the CWD system. In addition to studies about the CWV & CCWV system, it is worth examining other potential child welfare strategies in Japanese society to address child welfare challenges in rural China. For example, there are specific child guidance centers located in all prefectures and especially designated cities that are authorized by the Japanese government to provide professional diagnosis and treatment plans for disadvantaged children and families (Ozawa, 1991). In the Chinese context, the development of juvenile protection agencies is still at a preliminary stage, further study can be conducted to probe the program of child guidance centers in Japan and explore possible strategies to promote the further development of juvenile protection agencies in China.

Second, the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly brought a lot of challenges to children's well-being. During the COVID-19 pandemic, children who are isolated from their parents are more susceptible to a series of psychological problems such as anxiety, psychological distress, and post-traumatic disorders. In addition, as the COVID-19 pandemic has led to economic downturn, many families are threatened with pandemic-related job losses and financial problems. These challenges increase parents' stress and diminish the quality of caregiving, which in turn strongly affects children's well-being (Benner et al., 2020). More broadly, the COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the educational gaps between children. Those disadvantaged children who live in the remotest areas face more obstacles to sustain their academic stability because they cannot access to suitable technology devices and high-speed internet connections (Anderson, 2020). Under such circumstances, there is a need for further study to examine how the CWD system can enhance its resilience and sustainability in child

welfare provision in the face of external challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Appendix A

Approval for Human Participant Research



Office of Research Services | Human Research Ethics Board
Michael Williams Building Rm B202 PO Box 1700 STN CSC Victoria BC V8W 2Y2 Canada
T 250-472-4545 | F 250-721-8960 | uvic.ca/research | ethics@uvic.ca

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR	Andrew Marton (Supervisor)	ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER	21-0147
PRINCIPAL APPLICANT	Rongxin Zhang Master's student	Expedited review - delegated	
UVIC DEPARTMENT	Pacific and Asian Studies PAOR	ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE	08-Jul-2021
		APPROVED ON	08-Jul-2021
		APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE	07-Jul-2022
PROJECT TITLE Addressing Child Welfare Challenges in Rural China: An Assessment of The Child Welfare Director System and Possible Lessons from Japan			
RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS None			
DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING None			
DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL Sample Interview Questions.docx - 26-May-2021 tcps2_core_certificate.pdf - 30-Jun-2021 Recruitment Script.docx - 30-Jun-2021 Participant Consent Form.docx - 30-Jun-2021			
CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL			
This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.			
Modifications To make any changes to the approved research procedures in your study, please submit a "Request for Modification" form. You must receive ethics approval before proceeding with your modified protocol.			
Renewals Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.			
Project Closures When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.			
Certification			
This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Participants.			
			
_____ Dr. Rachael Scarth Associate VP Research Operations			

Certificate Issued On: 08-Jul-2021

Appendix B

Email Recruitment Script (This script is delivered in Chinese)

Dear [Name],

This is Rongxin Zhang, a graduate student in the Department of Pacific and Asian Studies at the University of Victoria. I am contacting you regarding my graduate research entitled “Addressing Child Welfare Challenges in Rural China: An Assessment of the Child Welfare Director System and Possible Lessons from Japan”. This research will help to further assess the child welfare director system and examine what steps can be made to promote the well-being of left-behind children and children in difficulty in rural China. I believe your knowledge and experience of assisting these disadvantaged children will be conducive to this research.

The objective of this study is to further investigate the child welfare director system in China and to explore its potential development by examining whether the commissioned welfare volunteer and chief child welfare volunteer system in Japan can provide any lessons for the Chinese case. This research will use the first-hand knowledge from child welfare directors, schoolteachers, and people who have experiences in engaging with child welfare-related programs to examine the current situation of rural left-behind children and children in difficulty as well as the implementation and further development of the child welfare director system.

I will interview three to five child welfare directors to know primary child welfare challenges in rural areas and the role of the child welfare director system in child protection and interventions. Additionally, four to six schoolteachers will be interviewed to share their experiences in helping left-behind children, especially in terms of academic achievement. Moreover, I will interview three to five people who once participated in different welfare-related activities to better understand the collaboration among child welfare directors and different social welfare facilities. I would appreciate if I can have an opportunity to communicate with you about your knowledge and experiences in relation to child welfare in rural China.

The interview will take 45-60 minutes when you are convenient. Considering the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, our interviews will be conducted by telephone or video. Furthermore, you have rights to withdraw from the research at any time without any explanation. Once you decide to withdraw from the research, all data will be eliminated. Also, all collected data will be stored in my password-protected laptop. A pseudonym will be used to replace your name in the thesis.

I would appreciate if you would like to participate in the interview and please contact me by email at rongxinzhang@uvic.ca.

Sincerely,
Rongxin Zhang

Appendix C

Participant Consent Form

(This script is delivered in Chinese)

You are invited to participate in a study entitled “Addressing Child Welfare Challenges in Rural China: An Assessment of the Child Welfare Director System and Possible Lessons from Japan” that is conducted by Rongxin Zhang.

Rongxin Zhang is a current graduate student in the Department of Pacific and Asian Studies at the University of Victoria. You can contact the researcher by email at rongxinzhang@uvic.ca if you have any questions.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research to achieve the degree in Master of Arts. The research is conducted under the supervision of Dr. Andrew Marton. You can contact my supervisor by email at amarton@uvic.ca if you have any questions.

Objective of This Research

This research aims to assess the child welfare director system in China and explore its potential development. This research will combine secondary data from documentary materials and first-hand knowledge from local child welfare directors, local schoolteachers, and people who had experiences in participating in child welfare-related programs to examine the institutional context and basic elements of the child welfare director system as well as provide practical and policy recommendations for this practice.

Significance of This Research

Although China has made significant progress in promoting the well-being of children, the severe situation of left-behind children and children in difficulty needs more concerns about child welfare in rural China. The child welfare director system, as a community-level child protection and welfare provision model, has played an increasingly important role in promoting the well-being of these disadvantaged children. Considering rather few previous studies have been conducted to examine the child welfare director system, this research can provide a theoretically informed analysis for this practice and call for more attention to the situation of disadvantaged children in rural areas.

What is Involved

This study will combine primary data and secondary data to investigate the child welfare director system in China. Individual interviews will be conducted to collect primary data. And secondary data mainly comes from publicly documentary materials. If you consent to participate in this research, you will take a 45-60 minutes interview. The collected data will be kept for further analysis and the final thesis.

Risks

There are no known or potential risks for you to participate in this research.

Voluntariness

All interview participants participate in this research voluntarily. You can withdraw from this research at any time without any explanation. Once you decide to withdraw from research, all information and data will be eliminated.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

Your name will not be presented but substituted by pseudonyms in the final thesis. In addition, your confidentiality and the confidentiality of data will be protected by storing in a password-protected laptop. All physical materials including consent form will be carried with by the researcher in the process of fieldwork and will be stored in a lock cabinet when back home.

Dissemination of Results

It is anticipated that the results of this research can be disseminated in the following way: Thesis in partial fulfillment for a Master of Arts in Pacific and Asian Studies at University of Victoria.

Disposal of Data

All data from fieldwork observation and interviews will be eliminated two years after the completion of the final thesis.

Research Ethics Contact Information

You may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria, Canada (1-250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Confirmation and Signature

Your signature below indicates that you have already read the notice above and confirmed to participate in this research.

Name of Participant _____
Signature _____
Date

A copy of this consent form will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix D

Participant Interview Questions

For child welfare directors:

1. Could you please briefly introduce the child welfare director system in China?
2. Could you please provide an overview of the situation of left-behind children and children in difficulty in rural areas?
3. What role does the child welfare director system play in solving the difficulties of left-behind children and children in difficulty in rural areas?
4. What roles do central and local governments play in supporting the child welfare director system?
5. Are there any facilities to collaborate with child welfare directors to deliver child welfare services? If yes, what are they and how do they work?
6. How do child welfare directors interact with and support disadvantaged families in rural areas? If possible, could you please describe one or two examples?
7. Could you please describe the kinds of efforts you are able to make to help left-behind children improve their relationships with their parents?
8. What kind of collaboration have you had with local schoolteachers?
9. What are your opinions on the future development of the child welfare director system?

For local schoolteachers:

1. What is your position at school?
2. Do you know the basic condition of the students in your class? If yes, do you know how many of them have parents who live away from home?
3. What kind of support does school provide to promote the academic achievement of rural children?
4. What kind of collaboration have you had with local child welfare directors?
5. Do you stay in touch with any of your former students who were left-behind children? If yes, what is your understanding of their current circumstances?
6. Do you have any recommendations about what improvements can be made to provide a better schooling environment for rural children?

For people who have experiences in participating in child welfare-related programs:

1. How often do you participate in child welfare volunteer activities?
2. What kind of child welfare programs have you participated in? Could you briefly introduce the programs?
3. From your perspective, what are primary challenges of left-behind children and children in difficulty in rural areas?
4. Are you aware of the child welfare director system? If yes, how were child welfare directors involved in the programs in which you participated?

5. Do you have any suggestions on what steps can be implemented to promote the well-being of left-behind children and children in difficulty in rural areas?