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The Experience of Children in the Chinese Countryside towards Their Parents' Labor Migration

Master's thesis in Childhood Studies

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Abstract

In China, the rural to urban labor migration that started after the initiation of the Open Door Policy resulted in a total of 277.5 million migrant workers, which composed 36% of the workforce in China. This migration led to great impacts on the nation's economy but also in structures of Chinese families. 'Home-staying' children are used to describe children whose father and/or mother work outside the rural community as migrant laborers, with one parent (usually mother), grandparents, relatives or neighbors as the caretakers in their daily situations. In 2015, there were over 60 million 'home-staying' children in China. There has been great attention in the public towards 'home-staying' children. However, the image of 'home-staying' children in the public has often remained biased. The helpless children was the common narrative when 'home-staying' children have been described in charity appeals and media.

With regards to such discourses, the question arose as to whether these children's everyday life experience was accurately described by the public. Thus, this study aims to explore Chinese rural children's experiences and knowledge towards their parents' migration. More specifically this study seeks to understand the important aspects in their everyday lives; the relationships of these children with their families, school, and friends and how these relations impact on their life experience; and finally how labor migration transformed their childhood.

A total of 19 children from thirteen to fifteen years of age participated in the research. Five were not home-staying children, and fourteen were home-staying children. This study uses the social studies of childhood as the theoretical framework, together with concepts such as discourse, generational order, dependence and interdependence, and Chinese individualism, perspectives which also connect with the methodology and analysis of this research. This study uses qualitative and participatory research methods including participant observation, naming, household visits, drawing/recalling, photovoice, semi-structured interviews, and in-depth interviews in attempts of gaining an understanding of participants' everyday life experience.

In the first analysis, the discussion will focus on the construction of 'home-staying' childhood. By implementing the concept of discourse and social construction theories, the helpless child discourse and how 'home-staying' children perceived this narrative will be elaborated. Furthermore, this chapter will explore how the 'home-staying' childhood was constructed by social, historical, and cultural contexts and how this particular childhood was understood by different actors.

The second analysis will discuss how societal changes potentially (re)shape the family relations of 'home-staying' children. In addition to labor migration, this chapter will also address on education reform and Internet access, which were two aspects that stood out in the fieldwork as essential life experience of participants. Using concept of generational order, this chapter will discuss how the family structures and caregiving structures have changed. Furthermore, this chapter will elaborate on how the childhood of 'home-staying' children is immersed in complexities in terms of spatiality, interdependence, collectivity, and individualism.

This study was conducted in hope of supplementing the growing body of the social studies of childhood. It also hopes to bring more understanding about 'home-staying' children's everyday life with their own experience and knowledge.

Dedication

This is for my dear parents, Yi and Shefei

Acknowledgement

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1 Introduction

> P(articipant): 'Home-staying' children sound like a group of children with pitiful life.
>
> Yue: What do you feel about that?
>
> P: I feel some people might have that kind of life experience, but not me (laugh).
>
> Yue: What do you think of me using this term in the title of this study? Should I avoid using this word?
>
> P: Yes, I think so. Actually, when you use that word, we feel like mice in the lab waiting for being researched. Even though you avoided to use that word in the class, you still used it when you introduced the study to us in the beginning, right?
>
> Yue: Would you say that it is better if I use… for example… children whose parents are labor migrants? What do you feel about that?
>
> P: It feels right… it feels pretty good. Because 'home-staying children' sounds so pitiful, and now it doesn't sound that pitiful. Just use the experience, feeling of children in the Chinese countryside towards their parents' not being at home.

Above was a transcription from an interview with a 'home-staying' child participant. I chose to start my thesis with this interview because this conversation created the title of this study. This study focused on the group of Chinese children who stay at home when their parents work in cities as labor migrants, namely 'home-staying children'. When I conducted the fieldwork, it became clear that the term 'home-staying children' delivered negative stereotypes like pity, powerlessness, dependence, and delinquency in media and the community; thus, participants preferred not to use this term in everyday life and in the research. In this thesis, there are further discussions on connotations of this term and how participants perceived it. Furthermore, because this study was written from a childhood studies perspective, I found it essential to respect participants' perspectives and inputs in this research. Therefore, the title of this thesis is 'the experience of children in the Chinese countryside towards their parents' labor migration'. Along with this title, I hope that this study can create more knowledge about children's experience with labor migration, while avoiding enhancing the stereotype of this group of children.

1.1 Background of the study

In the rising pace of economic globalization, migration has become a widespread phenomenon among countries experiencing industrialization. The migration is often from rural to urban areas because people move to cities for the increasing employment opportunities (Pun, 2005). According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China (2010), there exists a total of 277.5 million migrant workers, which composes 36% of the workforce in China. Work migration happens in China and many other countries, and the distance of movement can extend from hundreds to thousands of kilometers. Across different cultures and regions, one major cause of work migration is to improve the family's financial condition (Yeoh, Graham, & Boyle, 2002). Parents choose to work away from their hometown to provide better living conditions and education quality for their children. While parents work in cities, many Chinese children stay in the hometown with their grandparents and relatives. These children are often described as 'home-staying' children in Chinese

media and scholarly articles. In China, there are 69.7 million home-staying children, and 96% of them are taken care of by grandparents (Chen, Yang and Ren, 2015).

In both media and research articles, there are many discussions on labor migration and its impact on both cities and the countryside. However, the majority tend to emphasize on adults' rather than children's experiences. In the studies of home-staying children, many of them focus on home-staying children's education and psychological development compared to children with parents at home. This approach tends to consider children as 'becoming' human beings (James, 2001) and assuming home-staying children to be in a more dependent, incompetent position (Corsaro & Molinary, 2008). Such connotations differ from the philosophy of social studies of childhood, where children are considered competent narrators of their lives. In this study, I adopt the methodology of childhood studies and hoped to do research with an emphasis on home-staying children's perspectives.

This study focuses on understanding home-staying children's experiences and knowledge about parental migration and social relations in their everyday lives. The project draws on empirical data from my fieldwork conducted with home-staying children and their families in Jiangxi, China. In the last decade, Jiangxi has been one of the top three provinces in China with most population migrating to other places for work and consequently, with the highest number of home-staying children (Chen, Yang and Ren, 2015). In my fieldwork site and other nearby villages, the majority of households have home-staying children. During the fieldwork period, I was privileged to participate in children's experiences of happiness, hardship, hope, and ambitions. I hope this master thesis can offer an alternative presentation of home-staying children from previous media coverage and charity advertisement, which depict these children as growing social issues or youngsters without parenting (Zhou, Murphy, & Tao, 2014). Nonetheless, home-staying children experience risk factors in their lives, and the problems require serious attention. I believe a greater understanding of both opportunities and vulnerabilities of the home-staying children's life experience can provide essential knowledge for the institutions and public to best support these children and their families.

1.2 Conceptualizing home-staying children

Among scholars, there are still disputes on the definition of 'home-staying,' especially about the specification of age and the period of parent-child separation. The most common interpretation of this term is considered as children whose father and/or mother work outside the rural community as migrant laborers for more than six months cumulatively per year, with one parent (usually mother), grandparents, relatives or neighbors as the caretakers in their daily situations (Mu & Hu, 2016; Ye & Pan, 2011). In Chinese articles, scholars mostly use *Liushou Ertong (Stay and Guard Children 留守儿童)* to describe this group of children. This term has also been widely used by media and Internet in China. However, in English literature or English abstracts of Chinese articles, there is not a universal translation on *Liushou Ertong*. Some scholars use the term 'home-staying' (She, 2013; Sun et al., 2015; Xiong, 2007), whereas some use 'left-behind' (Biao, 2007; Chang, Dong, & MacPhail, 2011; Mu & Hu, 2016; Ye, 2011). There are also terms like 'parent-absent' (Wang & Wang, 2005), 'guarded' (Lin, 2003), 'stay-at-home' (Zhao et al., 2009), and 'leftover' (Zeng & He, 2007). Among translations, 'left-behind' and 'leftover' focus on the status of children concerning their parents' physical location. The word 'left' implies both children's passive position and, possibly, a negative 'moral' connotation of children being left behind by parents who do not care about them. 'Parent-absent' states the

physical absence of parents and can interpret as the missing of parenting or caring in children's lives.

'Left-behind' and 'home-staying' are the most commonly used terms in English articles. While both words illustrate the situation of a parent-child separation, 'left-behind' addresses the location of parents as the core of families. In a similar way, 'home-staying' highlights the family's base in hometowns. According to the kinship (Bélanger & Li, 2009) in the Chinese countryside, which will be further explained in the second chapter, the core of the family refers to the eldest generation in the family. Thus, where grandparents live is often considered the real home. Meanwhile, children who participated in the project expressed their dislike of the term 'left-behind' because they related this term with negative connotations such as loneliness, neglect, and abandonment. Therefore, in this thesis, I will use 'home-staying' as the English translation for *Liushou*, where children and the rest of family stay in hometown while one or both parents work in cities for a better living condition at home.

Based on previous research, home-staying children experience particular vulnerabilities in their everyday lives. Home-staying children's families chose to migrate because they encounter more financial hardship than other families do in the same area (Liu et al., 2013). In the research of Chang et al. (2011), home-staying children, because of the physical absence of parents, take more responsibilities in chores and farming at home. According to Zhao et al. (2009), home-staying children also have a higher risk of experiencing mental health problems. In a survey conducted in 2015, researchers collected 2763 responses from home-staying children in Jiangxi, Anhui, and Yunnan regarding four types of abuses (physical abuse, mental abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect). The occurrence rate of these abuses among home-staying children was 65.1%, 91.3%, 30.6%, and 40.6% respectively (Chen, Yang and Ren, 2015), which confirms the potential risk factors in home-staying children's everyday lives.

While home-staying children could experience hardship, the home-staying situation could also bring opportunities to them. Sun et al. (2015) indicated that labor migration could improve the family's financial situation, thus helping home-staying children to gain a better education. Furthermore, some children in the survey stated that they were more motivated to study because their parents were labor migrants. For home-staying children, they could earn more pocket money because of the increased house chores and farming, thus exercise more freedom in leisure activities (Chang et al., 2011). Meanwhile, in the Chinese countryside, the use of the Internet is booming. In 2018, 87% of rural Chinese children (under the age of 18) had access to Internet, which is 34% higher than the data of 2015 (CNNIC, 2019). With the Internet, home-staying children could connect with their parents spontaneously and interact with people through social media, gaming, and various phone applications.

1.3   Aims and objectives of the study

The aim of the study is to generate contextual knowledge about the experiences of home-staying children's everyday lives, as well as to gain insights into their social interactions with peers, adults, and the community. Thus, the study seeks to:

1. Explore the family conditions of home-staying children after parental migration
2. Explore home-staying children's conceptions of home and family after parental migration
3. Explore the social relations and their influence in the everyday lives of home-staying children

1.4 Research questions

The following research questions have been constructed in order to approach the aim and objectives:

1. How do 'home-staying' children experience their everyday life?

2. How do 'home-staying' children experience their relationships with friends, family, and school?

3. In which ways does labor migration transform the childhood structures of 'home-staying' children?

1.5 Significance of the study

In 2009, there were 58 million home-staying children in rural areas, which constitutes nearly 29% of the population of Chinese children (Mu & Hu, 2016). In 2015, the number increased to 69.7 million (Chen, Yang and Ren, 2015). Home-staying is a widespread social phenomenon in China because of the large-scale rural to urban migration. In the last decade, home-staying children often appear in the media as the victims of violence, abuse, or neglect. A news story in 2015 reported that four children, whose father worked in Guangzhou and mother stayed home, were found to have committed suicide at home in Bijie, Guizhou (Wu, 2015). The majority of news articles cover the negative outcome of the home-staying situation, focusing on living conditions, psychological issues, and juvenile crimes. The media has in many ways helped to raise public awareness on solving the social problems experienced by home-staying children. However, the media has also created and enhanced the biased stereotypes of home-staying children in public. Sometimes even depicted home-staying children as the 'social problems.' In 2018, a 28-year-old male Didi-driver (web-based taxi mobile application similar to Uber) raped and killed a 22-year-old woman in the taxi (Souhu, 2018). The crime went viral in social media because Didi was one of the most popular taxi applications in Chinese cities. When people on the Internet found out that this driver grew up as a home-staying child, many argued that the home-staying experience was the cause of his atrocity. The media and the public eventually depicted him as a victim who grew up to commit a felony.

As the number of home-staying children has increased in the last decade, their representation in public has not become diverse but even more partial. The publicity highlights the dependence, risks, and lack of agency in childhoods. Thus, it made me curious about the actual experiences of home-staying children, whether they are as victimized as depicted or they experience other positive aspects. Furthermore, my father had worked in Guangzhou for six years since I was three years old. He would come home once every two months. When reflecting on my experience of separation to the media depiction of home-staying children, I could not resonate with this single-sided narrative. Combining my research interest and personal experience, I found it necessary to explore everyday experiences of home-staying with a study addressing children's perspectives.

Research about home-staying children and youth has increased drastically in the last decade (She, 2013). Among the articles and books, there are two characteristics in the current home-staying studies. First, the content of much research has a focus on home-staying children's academic performance and psychological development. These studies often try to determine a causal effect from parental migration to children's behaviour. However, the results of many researchers have been argued to be varied and inconsistent (Fan & Sang, 2005; Sun et al., 2015; Zhou et al., 2014). The contradictory results could come from the interest of addressing parental physical absence while overseeing other factors in home-staying children's lives. Second, considering research methods, the

majority of the research are quantitative questionnaires, psychological performance charts, and tests. The comparative study between home-staying and non-home-staying children is also a common approach. Meanwhile, very few research has used methods such as observation, interview, and case study. Questionnaires and psychological tests are convenient in producing a large quantity of data and in finding a significant difference among comparisons, but these methods do not get close to participants' everyday lives. Additionally, they might not open a space where participants can explain and share their experiences, thoughts and feelings.

In all, the study has been conducted in the hope of filling the gap by exploring children's experience and knowledge of parental migration; and to examine their interactions with peers, adults, and the community. By emphasizing children's perspective, it is hoped that the society and institutes could achieve a more comprehensive image of home-staying children's lives, thus the social understanding and policymaking could be more accurate and beneficial to these children.

1.6   Thesis outline

Chapter 1 provides a brief introduction to this study. The chapter starts with stating the background of the study, and then discussing about scholars' definitions on the term for children experiencing parents' labor migration. This discussion settles in choosing 'home-staying' to describe participants experience of parents' labor migration. The content is followed with aims and objectives of the research, the research questions, and significance of the study.

Chapter 2 gives an overview of the background context that is relevant to this study. First, it illustrates the economic development and the rural-urban development gap in China and then, it explains the labor migration and why children of labor migrants stay at home. Furthermore, a more detailed description of childhood in the Chinese countryside is given, with focus on kinship, agriculture, Internet, education, and current issues around these topics. This chapter finishes with a literature review on 'home-staying' children in China.

Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework and concepts that this study is based on. The social studies of children and childhood is essential in paving the orientation of this research. The social construction and structural sociology of childhood will be emphasized. The chapter follows with an introduction of theoretical concepts, which are primarily discourse, generational order, interdependence, and individualism.

Chapter 4 elaborates the methodological perspective of this study. It covers the methodological perspectives underpinning the research design and the experience of selecting the research site, access to the site, sampling, and obtaining consents. Further this chapter describes the different methods which were conducted in the study, which are participant observation, naming, household visits, drawing/recalling, photovoice, and interviews. It then critically reflects on the ethical issues that took place before, during, and after the fieldwork. Some of my experience in the fieldwork is chosen to discuss as in challenges and limitations of the study. The chapter ends with methodological discussions in the choices of data transcription and analysis.

Chapter 5 is the first analysis chapter, *constructing 'home-staying' children and childhood.* In this chapter, it presents and analyzes the empirical data from the study. In this chapter, discourse and social construction theories are implemented as core theoretical bases for the analysis. Through the experiences of participants, the discussion revolves around major

discourses, such as helplessness, gender, responsibility, and schooling, in their everyday life and the construction of their childhoods.

Chapter 6 is the second analysis chapter, *societal changes and the (re)shaping of 'home-staying' children's family relation*. In this chapter, it develops further analysis in social relations based on the empirical data from previous chapter. This chapter focuses on the major societal changes such as education reform, Internet development, and labor migration that took place in 'home-staying' children's lives. The theoretical bases are structural sociology, generational order and ordering, dependence and interdependence, and rising Chinese individualism. These perspectives were chosen for a structural perspective analysis, exploring how societal changes reformed structures of 'home-staying' children's childhood in complexity. In all, this chapter aims to analyse the potential reforms in the structure of 'home-staying' children's childhood under societal changes.

Chapter 7 provides a conclusion to this thesis. Here, the research findings were demonstrated in response to three main research questions. A further reflection on transcription and researcher role is added to this chapter. The chapter ends with some suggestions and recommendations as takeaways from this study.

2 Background

This chapter presents the background information of the research. It begins with the country profile of the People's Republic of China (PRC), and an overview of Chinese work migration. Then, it provides an outline of Childhoods in rural China with supplemented data and reports, addressing on the living and education conditions. These aspects are necessary to learn in order to comprehend how the society and policies impact home-staying children and their families. A literature review on home-staying children in China is given in the last section. In all, this chapter aims to provide a good basis for understanding the situation for the children in the project.

2.1 Country profile

China, officially known as the People's Republic of China (PRC), is a country in East Asia and the world's most populous country, with a population of around 1.428 billion in 2017 (Statista, 2019). Covering approximately 9,600,000 square kilometers (3,700,000 sq. mi), it is the third-largest country by total area (Statista, 2019). In the 1970s, China experienced an economic reform which made a vast impact on modern China (Hansen & Svarverud, 2010). After Deng Xiaoping took power in 1978, China gradually opened the free market and shifted from collective to the centrally planned economy (Mu & Hu, 2016), due to the impact of reform and opening-up policy. Since then, China had significant economic growth, which indicates its GDP per capita.
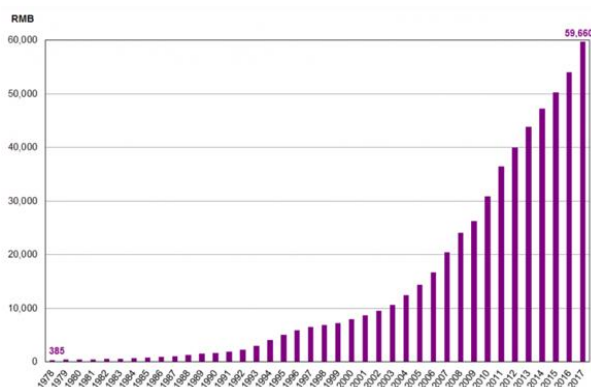
Figure 2.1 GDP per capita 1978-2018, China Source: (Statista, 2019)

While the drastic growth of economy is obvious, what comes with economic growth is complicated. On the one hand, Chinese people's living condition has improved. The government tunneled economic growth into education and medical care. Nowadays, China has a nation-wide nine-year compulsory education and healthcare system. On the other hand, economic growth is primarily in eastern coastal cities. The bias of the development is a legacy from reform and opening-up policy (Pun, 2005). Coastal cities have the privileges of imports and exports because of geography and supports from national policies. As a result to that, most oversea companies chose to locate their factories in coastal cities such as Shenzhen and Dongguan. These factories contributed as the major economic growth of coastal cities. At the same time, this uneven distribution of economic growth leads to a development gap between the East and the rest of China, between urban and rural areas. In 1996, the urban per capita GDP is three times higher than the average

for villages and rural market towns. The standard of coastal cities is double that of the urban, and the special economic zones is again double that of the coastal cities (Pun, 2005). The GDP differential is twelve times higher when we compare special economic zones to villages and rural market towns (Jing, 2000).
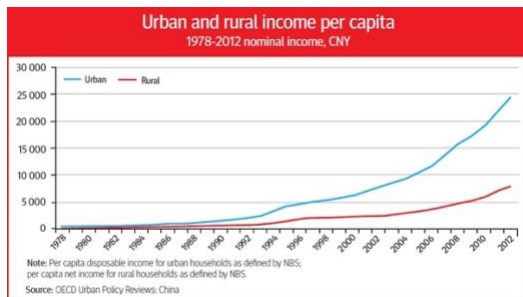
Figure 2.2 Urban and rural income per capita Source: (OECD, 2016)

With the previous figure, we can see the rapid growth of the Chinese economy. Meanwhile, if we look at this picture, the income per capita of rural and urban households, the gap between them has increased in the last two decades. The per capita income of urban households in 2012 was about three times that of the rural households, whereas in 1978 it was about two and a half times higher (OECD, 2016). This economic development gap between rural and urban areas led to a rural-to-urban labor migration and the emergence of 'home-staying' children in China.

2.2   Labor migration in China

In the last thirty years, the industrialization of China introduced a booming era of secondary industries in coastal cities, which led to a dramatic increase in internal migration from rural to urban areas (Chang et al., 2011). Transnational migration started with the implementation of several economic policies. In 1978, Deng Xiaoping initiated the Reform and Opening-up Policy (*Gaige Kaifang*). As China opened her door to the world, a massive injection of foreign investment into the Chinese market created a multitude of employment opportunities, particularly in urban areas (Mu & Hu, 2016, p. 7). In rural areas, collective farming communities ended in the late 70s, the countryside experienced liberal policies first and the household became primary producers again with the 'household responsibility system' (Unger, 2002). Each household received some private farmlands from the former collective community, regardless of the land condition. It resulted in an unfair distribution of land productivity in each household. Some families farmed with fertile land and kept themselves self-sufficient, while some families could not (Chang et al., 2011). Moreover, the taxation on farming increased and gave farmers more burdens. With increasing prices for farm inputs, demonstrated by the double-digit growth of the fertilizer cost in the late 1980s, this made farming increasingly difficult to sustain (H. Yan, 2003).The increasing job opportunities in coastal cities and the shrinking profits from farming were two main results from the Reform economy policy in the 1980s, which led to over 150 million people migrating from rural to urban areas in China (Chang et al., 2011). The purpose of migration lies in people's pursuit of better income, to know the outside world, and most importantly to support their children's education financially, expecting that children will make a better life than their parents were able to do (Ye, Murray, & Wang, 2010).

In labor migration, one Chinese policy need to be addressed in order to explain the situation of 'home-staying' children, which is *hukou. Hukou* is the compulsory household registration system in China.

The system officially registers, records, and recognizes a Chinese citizen as a legitimate, usual resident of a particular area. Identifying information is recorded in the Household Registration Book (*Hukou Bu*) issued per household, and usually includes each family member's demographic information, such as name, gender, nationality, date and place of birth, blood type, body measurements, marital status, education qualification, religion, occupation, current residency, and history of moves. Since the Household Registration System entrenches social strata, especially the stratification between rural and urban residency status, it is often considered to be an institutionalized instrument of class distinction in China. (Mu & Hu, 2016, p. 10)

In the 1980s, state control over labor mobility decreased; a person with rural *hukou* could live and work in cities. However, he or she could not become a permanent urban resident. While living in cities, migrants or their companies must pay an annual "city maintenance fee" to the urban government. The modification on the *hukou* system allowed an enormous surplus of laborers from rural China to cities (Ye & Pan, 2011), but stopped the laborers from starting a family in cities. Labor migrators often work in factories or construction sites. They live in dorms and collective housings instead of individual apartments. With such living conditions, it becomes difficult for them to raise children. Thus, the state allowed rural migration to meet the needs of global capital and national development at the same time that it constrained and contained the formation of this new working class (Pun, 2005).

Children of labor migrators will face similar challenges if they want to stay in cities. As they hold a rural *hukou*, families need to pay an extra fee to attend public education or go to private schools. In many cities, children without local *hukou* are not permitted to attend public middle schools. Compared to the free schooling back home, living in cities would be an extra financial burden for families. Furthermore, children must take high school entrance exam at their *hukou* registered place. High school entrance exam, which will be explained further in the following, is a vital exam for their future. Because the education curriculum and contents of the exam vary between provinces, children often stay in their hometown school for preparing the exam and continue their education in local high schools (Zhou et al., 2014). In all, the economic reform policy and the *hukou* system contributed to the situation where millions of parents working in cities while millions of children were staying at home in the rural areas.

2.3   Childhoods in rural China

In the section above, I have demonstrated shortly about country's economy and labor migration as two important background aspects of how children became 'home-staying'. While these two sections explained how societal reasons created the population of 'home-staying' children, the following section provides background information on 'home-staying' childhoods in rural China, which is the geographical context of this population. In the following text, I will introduce agriculture and kinship as two historically fundamental elements in the Chinese countryside and how they impact family structures and gender roles in rural China. Next, these two aspects will be discussed in the contemporary context, as how they are shaping today's rural childhoods. The third part of the discussion will focus on the education in the Chinese countryside, in which the education system, education policies, and statistics will be addressed.

2.3.1 Chinese countryside: the society bounded with earth

To explain childhoods in rural China, I find it necessary first to discuss the cultural and historical aspects of the Chinese countryside. Naming this section *Chinese countryside: the society bounded with earth*, I was inspired by Fei Xiaotong's *Earthbound China* (1984), a

book analyzing Chinese rural society with its relations to the physical environment. *Bounded with earth* refers to two characteristics of the countryside: one is the reliance on agriculture, and the other is the immobility of rural community established through kinship (*Zongzu*). Similar to many civilizations in the world, the history of China started with farming. Along Huanghe and Changjiang, the longest rivers in China, the first few Chinese people chose to settle down, cultivate grains and plants, instead of living as nomads (Harari, 2014). The significance of agriculture performs in many cultural practices. Chinese traditional calendar, also known as the lunar calendar, is based on 24 season intervals (*Jieqi*). The intervals indicate the time of activities like loosening the dirt and drying the grains, which are summarized by farmers' experience through generations. Agriculture also influences Chinese local religions. Nowadays, many people in the countryside keep the tradition of 'welcoming Kitchen God (*Zaowang Ye*) and Earth God (*Tudi Ye*)' on the fifth day of Chinese New Year. People leave a small gap of the front gate and put dishes of food and fruits on the table, which means that the gods will arrive hungry and cannot leave the house through the small gap because of overeating, thus will stay in this household for a whole year and bless the place with a good harvest. In the fieldwork, practices from local agricultural religions were prevalent.

In the Chinese countryside, agriculture shapes not only cultural practices but also plays a vital role in the history of reforms and policies. Before the 1950s, landlords and rich peasants owned the majority of Chinese farming lands as their private properties. In the late 1940s in parts of northern China and the early 1950s in the rest of the country, the newly established government, Chinese Communist Party, had carried out a land reform (Unger, 2002). The first step was leading the class conflict against landlords and rich peasants and redistributed their lands to landless households. The second step was establishing collective farming, where households received agricultural yields based upon their contributions of labor (J. Kong, 1993). Then, collective households formed into communes under the Great Leap Forward program. This radical program introduced unrealistic production competitions among communes and eventually led to a three-year famine (Unger, 2002) and a leap backward on the economy. The following reform was the one taking place in the late 1970s and now called the 'household responsibility system.' It proceeded after the termination of communal farming and gave farmers incentives to work harder. This reform was a significant fact behind the bumper harvests in successive years (Jing, 2000).

Similar to the importance of agriculture, kinship is also an important symbol for rural China. Chinese kin is a patrilineal and patrilocal group of related Chinese people with a common surname sharing a common ancestor (Bélanger & Li, 2009). Chinese kinship is a lineal continuation through men and male offspring. Daughters in the kin will eventually marry into another kin and continue the kinship for the other family (Fei, 1984). An example in the countryside is that most Chinese villages are named after the local kin's surname, such as Chen's Village (*Chenjia Cun*). The fieldwork location also has this characteristic, where small villages around the town are named after family names and the majority of the population shares one family name. In rural China, cultural practices reflect the importance of kinship. In most villages, there are shrines and temples for worshiping their ancestors. Villages and households often keep updating a genealogy book (*Zupu*), which contains stories of the kin's origins, male lineage, and illustrious members (Fei, 1984).

As described above, kinship continues through generations of offspring; the community of kinship is blood bounded. However, the function of kinship includes productivity but expands upon it. Kin or a clan, the basic formation of Chinese villages, has complicated functions including politics, economy, and religion (Fei, 1984). Historically, the renowned

figures in kin or a clan often run the villages. Governance is different from government in that although governance also requires authority, it does not have to be an institution (Yu & Xu, 2004). The governance under kinship is fluid; it can refer to a community as big as hundreds of thousands of people; it can also represent a household with three generations. The more expanded the network under kinship is, the stronger the influence of the clan will be (Fei, 1984). In the last century, along with the changes in the political system, the governance of the countryside experienced several reforms. Since 1949, the local impact of a clan's governance has decreased. Qian and Xie (1995) claimed that the restrictions on policies and the increasing range of villages limited even powerful clans on their influence or control on the local government. The clans' influence on economy and politics has reduced to a smaller range while remaining a powerful symbol of the cultural identity. In history, presence, and future of rural governance, the clan is like a red line crossing the transformation.

2.3.2 Contemporary rural childhoods

Currently, 41% of the Chinese population lives in rural regions (Statista, 2019), which is 585 million people of the total population. According to the National Survey of The Population (2010), there are 160 million children who live in the countryside, which constitutes 27.3% of the rural population. Among rural children, 61 million are home-staying children, which amounts to 37.7% of the rural child population and 21.88% of the nation's child population (Liu et al., 2013). Statistically, there is a gap between urban children's and rural children's current living conditions. In 2015, the rural infant mortality rate was 7.3%, twice that of the urban areas. The mortality rate of children under five-year-old is 4.4% in cities and 10.2% in the countryside (Chen, Yang and Ren, 2015). Rural children experience malnutrition in their physical development, compared with urban children. On average, rural children between six to twelve years old experience a 12% development delay in comparison to same-age urban children. Height is six to fifteen centimeters shorter, and weight is seven to fifteen kilograms less (Liu et al., 2013). Poverty is a crucial reason for these development gaps. In 2011, the Chinese government released the new ten-year poverty reduction program and raised the bar of poverty subsidy qualification. The households with per capita annual income less than 2,300 Yuan can receive the subsidy, and this standard approximately doubled the original one (UNICEF, 2014). In the last twenty years, the Chinese government has nearly eliminated extreme poverty, which is the condition of a household with a per capita annual income of less than 895 Yuan (≈125 US Dollar). With the new standard, there are 8.5% households in Chinese rural areas under the line of poverty, and 11% of the poverty population are children (UNICEF, 2014), which is about 52 million poverty population and 5.7 million children in poverty. The town where my fieldwork was conducted is one of the poverty subsidy towns and five families in the research receive poverty subsidy as explained above.

In the previous section, we discussed agriculture and kinship as two historically essential elements in the Chinese countryside. Furthermore, they play essential roles in shaping childhoods in contemporary rural China. In a traditional farming society, people's roles are gendered; because of men's physical ability, they are the producers of food and necessities. Meanwhile, women represent reproduction (Bélanger & Li, 2009). Thus, In combination with the kinship system, boys are the future labor assets, while girls will marry into another kin, which explains some differences of so-called one-child policy (UNICEF, 2014) between urban and rural areas. In the last decades, urban couples can have one child, and rural couples can have a second child if the first one is not a boy. However, this alteration on the policy does not solve the issue of rural families with two girls. Families longing for a

boy might thus give away, abandon, or even take more extreme measures to deal with the girls in the family (Pun, 2005). Currently, the birth policy has changed to two children for urban households and three for the countryside. In rural areas, male births per 100 female births in China increased from 111.8 to 122.9 from 1990 to 2005 and dropped to 114.8 in 2015 (CNBOS, 2020). Another aspect of rural childhoods is children's contributions to chores and farming. Though there is limited data on time use patterns of rural children in China, Chang et al. (2011) found that children in rural households normally help adults with house chores and farming, and home-staying children's daily amount of work increased because of parents' labor migration to cities.

In the system of kinship, the Chinese family is a symbol of continuation. Traditionally, an individual in the family exists for the sake of perpetuating his (or her husband's) family (Hansen & Svarverud, 2010). The authority and power are lineal and depend on one's relative age, generation, and sex. Though we cannot conclude a single 'traditional Chinese family' image, it is acceptable to claim that children, especially girls, have less power in such family lineages. Nonetheless, the situation of women/girls changed, from many perspectives, in recent decades. First of all, the Communist government took power in 1949 and tried to replace the old family system with a new system based on equality, affection, and mutual support (Ikels, 1996). The 1950 and 1980 marriage laws and the 1985 Inheritance Law were intended as instruments for individuals whose new rights were being ignored or violated by family members (Ikels, 1996, p. 136). The second aspect is the mobility of individuals because of the economic development since the 1980s. While the Chinese kinship has multiple functions locally, it performs limited power to the family members who study or work outside the hometown. The third aspect is the rising significance of the Internet, which has become an increasingly important public space for hundred millions of Chinese (Hansen & Svarverud, 2010). In 2018, 87% of rural Chinese children under the age of 18 had access to Internet, which is 34% higher than the data of 2015 (CNNIC, 2019). The main activities children engage in online are listening to music, playing mobile games, and watching short videos on apps like Douyin (the original app of Tik Tok) and Kuaishou (similar to Vine) (CNNIC, 2019). Both Tik Tok and Vine are social media platforms where users can upload ten-second videos with editing, filter, stickers and music.

2.3.3 Education in the countryside

Education is an integral part of contemporary Chinese childhoods. In China, the complete standard education system goes from kindergarten to college.

End of nine-year compulsory education

Age (year)	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18……
Year of study				1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13……
	Pre-school Education			Primary school						Middle School		High School			College	
										Vocational M.S.		Vocational H.S.			Vocational college	

Table 2.1 Chinese education system Source: UNICEF (2014)

The Compulsory Education Law took effect on 1st, 1986, which requires everyone to complete at least nine years of education. The arrow in table 1.1. indicates the endpoint of nine-year compulsory education. However, the implementation of this policy has been far from universal. In 1990, only 74.6% of primary school graduates (including both rural and urban students) enrolled in middle school (Li & Liu, 2014). Since 2000, the central Chinese government has ordered local governments to enforce the free nine years of compulsory education in rural areas (Lu, 2012), which led to 98.6% of primary school enrollment rate and 90% of middle school enrollment rate (Chen, Yang and Ren, 2015). After nine-year compulsory education, students will face high school entrance exams and college entrance exams in order to continue education. These exams are the only means to get admitted to high schools and colleges. The education curricula for the middle school and the high school mainly focus on preparing for these two exams.

In recent years, the government has endorsed several significant policies concerning rural education. The first one is 'Two waivers and one subsidy' (*Liangmian Yibu*) policy, which waives tuition and supply fees and subsidizes boarding expenses (UNICEF, 2014). This policy aims to encourage children from low-income families attending schools. However, it does not alleviate schools' financial issues, which leads to many schools requiring families to pay for fees such as 'school infrastructure' and 'students nutrition supply' (Liu et al., 2013). The second policy is the School Mergence Act, conducted since 2000 because of the dwindling numbers of school-age children (Li & Liu, 2014; Liu et al., 2013). This act led to a drastic decline in schools. Institution numbers dropped from 178,060 in 2000 to 66941 in 2010; at a rate of 62.41% (Liu et al., 2013). The merged schools were mostly primary schools in villages; thus, rural primary school children were the most influenced ones. Children who lost their local schools had to travel a long distance on foot every day. This means of schooling could influence negatively on both children's health and family's finance. Li and Liu (2014) found that access to local primary schools has a significant positive effect on girls in the countryside. In 2012, the government urgently stopped school merging, due to the failings of the policy. However, the issue that schools in villages are short of students and finance still exists (Liu et al., 2013). The third policy is the Boarding School Act, which came after the School Mergence Act to support children with long distances to schools. Up to 2011 there were 33 million boarding students in the compulsory education stage, which constitutes one fifth all students. There are 11 million primary school boarding students, which takes 10.89% of all primary schoolers. There are 21.9 million middle school boarding students, which takes 43.3% of all middle schoolers (Chen, Yang and Ren, 2015). In the countryside, 39.8% of primary schoolers and 61.6% of middle schoolers live in school dorms in 2012 (Liu et al., 2013). The boarding situation mainly concentrates in middle school years, rural areas, and Mid-West provinces (UNICEF, 2014). Along with the boarding system, there are two chief concerns; which are the lack of infrastructure and malnutrition. Previous research has revealed that over twenty students live in a room less than ten square meters (Li & Liu, 2014). Many schools do not have food, bath, or hot water supply (Liu et al., 2013). While rural children are generally having malnutrition problems, rural boarding children on average have a worse nutrition and health condition compared to other children (Liu et al., 2013).

2.4 Home-staying children in China
The first appearance of the term 'home-staying children' (*Liushou Ertong*) in scholarly articles was in 1994 (She, 2013). Up until 2011, very few articles or research were published. Until 2011 and 2012, the 'home-staying children' related literature boomed to the amount of 1454 and 1730 each year (She, 2013). The published work in the recent six

years constitutes nearly 95% of all literature, with a focus on psychology and education (She, 2013). Scholars interpret the term 'home-staying' in various ways. The first definition is the children with one, or both parents working outside the hometown. In this definition, some scholars consider children under sixteen as *Liushou Ertong*, some use compulsory education as the range, and some extend the age definition to eighteen (Ye et al., 2010). The second definition is that the children of both parents working outside the hometown are *Liushou Ertong* (Fan & Sang, 2005). The third definition focuses on the separation between parents and children but does not limit the range in rural areas. This definition distinguishes *Liushou Ertong* and *rural Liushou Ertong* (Feng & Luo, 2005)*.* Nonetheless, most articles share some standard definitions of *Liushou Ertong*: 1) children live in the countryside with rural *hukou*; 2) one or both parents work outside hometown; 3) children have experienced a certain amount of time of child-parent separation. Meanwhile, 'floating children' is another term used to describe children's status with parental work migration. This term refers to the children who live with their parents in cities (Xu & Yang, 2007). 'Floating' states the situation where children study and live in an urban area without permitted local *hukou* (N. Zhang, 2015).

The literature points to three principal aspects in the research of home-staying children. They are the impacts of the home-staying situation on study performance, behavior and social relation, and psychological health. Firstly, regarding study performance, researches have different findings. Zhu, Li, and Zhou (2002) conducted quantitative research with fourth and eighth-grade children from Jiangxi, Hunan, and Henan. They found that there was no significant difference in study performance between home-staying children and children with parents at home, as does the finding of Lu (2012). However, the research of Zhou et al. (2014) shows that children's Chinese and Mathematic test scores are significantly lower when both parents have migrated. Secondly, on behavior and social relation, researchers claimed that home-staying children often engaged in behaviors like lying, stealing, and bullying (Lin, 2003). Sun et al. (2015) found that these behaviors are more evident among home-staying boys in middle schools. Some researchers had the study focused on home-staying children's psychological health and emotions. The factors of parents' migration impacting children's psychology and emotion can be complicated. On the one hand, the increase in income can enhance children's satisfaction with living conditions. In the research of Sun et al. (2015), some home-staying children have more motivation in study and life because of parents' out-migration. On the other, the physical absence of parents could bring potential harm and stress on children's life (Liu et al., 2013). According to Zhao et al. (2009), 30.3% of home-staying children of middle school age in Fujian Province had a variety of mental health issues, including anxiety, study pressure, being sensitive towards interpersonal relations[1], depression, and emotional instability. Fan and Sang (2005) found that home-staying children tend to be less emotionally stable and more impulsive. The more extended in time parent-child separation is, the more prominent are children's psychological issues (Wang & Wang, 2005). In addition to these three aspects, some researchers have also analyzed the home-staying situation in public policies. The Chinese *hukou* system has mostly restrained population mobility. Currently, public policies and laws have addressed the issue of floating children but overlooked the situations of home-staying children, which could be a result of the lack of power as a group of children in the countryside (Xu & Yang, 2007). Xiong (2007) gave several suggestions to better the

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[1] In the study, being sensitive was used to describe participants being shy, unconfident in making friends, prefering to stay alone, being not open to new relations, etc.

situation of these children, which are extra funding on boarding school infrastructure, advocating the importance of family for children's education, and regulation on schools' surrounding environment.

2.5 Summary

This chapter aims to provide the background context of 'home-staying' children's everyday life. It elaborates causes as industrialization, economic policies, and farming reform that led to labor migration in China. It further presents descriptions and statistics of childhoods in rural China in both historical and contemporary contexts. Agriculture and kinship, as two indispensable elements in the Chinese countryside, shaped the community in aspects of gender roles, expectations, and family structures. The policies regarding rural children's health, education, and social well-being were also addressed in this chapter. The chapter ends with a literature review on 'home-staying' children

3 Theoretical framework

This chapter presents the theoretical foundation that guides the analysis in the further coming chapters. This chapter starts by explaining the core theoretical perspectives of the research, which proposed childhood as a social construct and a structure. The first perspective presents the multiplicities of childhood realities concerning the context (Jenks, 1996; Prout & James, 2015), and the second explains childhood as a fixed form with generation structure (Alanen, 2009; Qvortrup, 2009). The chapter then presents the theoretical concepts chosen for this thesis, which are discourse (Foucault, 1972), generational order (Alanen, 2009), dependence and interdependence, and individualism.

This thesis is written from a Childhood Studies perspective (Prout & James, 2015). Alanen (2001) has suggested a three-fold division in Childhood Studies, which are actor-oriented perspective, structuralist-conflict perspective, and constructionist perspective. In this study, both constructionist and structuralist-conflict perspectives are implemented as theoretical bases. The actor-oriented perspective is not used in the analysis, but the methodological perspective of this study was considered and written based on this aspect, as to, for example, conduct research with children in their own narratives and to stay aware of the power relation. These will be further discussed in the methodology chapter. This chapter explains constructionist and structuralist perspectives as theoretical bases and how they could help analyze from different angles while complementing each other. The theoretical concepts are also essential for upcoming analysis. Discourse (Foucault, 1972) and generational order (Alanen, 2009) are familiar concepts in the childhood studies. Dependence, interdependence, and Chinese individualism are the theories that revealed their importance during the fieldwork, thus becoming vital analytical tools for this thesis. These concepts are essential because they provide theoretical approaches to discuss the experience of participants in their cultural and social contexts.

3.1 Social studies of children and childhood

3.1.1 Childhood as a social construction

Jenks (1982) explains the social construction as a process that people collectively create, through actions and interactions, a mutual 'reality', where people share similar cultural, historical, and social understandings. Berger and Luckmann (1991) first introduced social construction in their book, as that knowledge and many aspects of the world around us is not real in themselves, because they are concepts being created and utilized by people in one social system, leading to the society as a subjective reality. It is to hold a critical stance to taken-for-granted knowledge and the belief that knowledge is generated by and sustained with the social process. In the lens of social constructionism, the idea of childhood is not a natural, biological but social construct (Jenks, 1996). If we could argue that there are multiple realities on the premise of social constructs, there should be differentiated childhoods instead of a biological, universalistic childhood. As Prout and James stated, "Childhood, as distinct from biological immaturity, is neither a natural nor universal feature of human groups but appears as a specific structural and cultural component of many societies" (Prout & James, 2015, p. 7). Ariés (1962) was one of the pioneers to conceptualize childhood as a cultural and social construction. He claimed that childhood was an idea invented rather recently and did not exist before the Middle Age.

Though being criticized for relying on (religious) art to interpret the childhood (Gittins, 2009), Ariés' theory was a ground-breaking progress that allowed scholars after him to understand childhood with a new perspective. Zelizer (1985) adopted it and conceptualized childhood in American society from the late 19th to early 20th century with social constructionism theory, where societal changes led to a different interpretation of ideal childhood. In her book, she exemplified with the preference of adopting orphans shifting from good physiques to vulnerable infants in thirty years, because the concept of childhood was constructed differently from industrialization to post-industrialization time. The social constructionism theory highlights how childhoods are formed and understood. The process does not lead to a fixed and essential truth but a continuous and fluid construction that is ongoing with historical and societal changes. As Nilsen described, "Various constructions of children and childhoods are part of ongoing processes of cultural production and reproduction, acted out by agents at all ages, in different ways and in different contexts" (Nilsen, 2008, p. 39).

The perspective that sees childhood as socially constructed helps this study to give a representation of home-staying children and their childhoods. The ideas, images and values relating to the term 'home-staying' could differ among parents, grandparents, teachers, peers, and home-staying children themselves. The social constructionism theory of childhood could support the exploration of children's experience with close family and friends in relation to the concept of 'home-staying'. Additionally, in the Chinese society, certain discourses about 'home-staying' children are popular and construct images of them as either helpless or delinquent. Social constructionism theory is a necessary tool for us to examine the construct of images and discourses around this population and how do they impact the children.

3.1.2 Structural sociology of childhood

While the (de)constructive sociology of childhoods argues that childhood appears as a specific cultural and structural component of many societies which produce and reproduce depending on the specific location and time (Prout & James, 2015), the structural sociology of childhood views childhood as a fixed and rather permanent form of any generational structure (Alanen, 2001; Qvortrup, 2009). Though these two theoretical perspectives interpret childhood with different approaches, it is not to argue that they contradict with each other. Instead, the structural sociology of childhood could complement social construction theory by orienting the exploration and analysis of childhood as a relational form, both on structural relations between children and adults and on the constitution of concepts and values.

Qvortrup (2009) argues childhood as a segment of social structure, which is independent of individual children's age. Children who exceed the definition of children, such as biological age, marital status, and fertility depending on different societies, leave the childhood structure while more children join in the structure. According to Mayall, childhood is "an essential component of a social order where the general understanding is that childhood is a first and separate condition of the lifespan whose characteristics are different from the later ones" (Mayall, 2002, p. 23). This is to acknowledge childhood as a persisting structural form as other traditionally recognized categories such as social class, gender, and race. The structural sociology of childhood provides us with a framework to draw upon the social structure and mechanisms around childhood and child-adult relation (Alanen, 2001). Such a theoretical perspective introduces a macro-level interpretation of childhood, which avoids analyzing childhood as a universalistic or individual life span. It is an essential theoretical perspective in this thesis, as it allows us to examine home-staying children's

life in a bigger picture. In order to interpret contemporary home-staying childhood, we can set the vision on the development of rural childhood along with the industrialization process of China.

3.2 Theoretical concepts

After introducing two theoretical perspectives implemented in this study, in this section, more concrete theoretical concepts will be illustrated. I chose concepts of discourse, generation and generational order, dependence and interdependence, and Chinese individualism as main theoretical concepts for analysis. The concept of discourse and generational order are chosen because they supplement the constructionist and structuralist perspectives; thus, they will strengthen the analysis under these two aspects. Dependence, interdependence, and Chinese individualism are the concepts linked to social and geographical contexts of this study, therefore helping to contextualize the arguments in analysis.

3.2.1 Discourse

Among several concepts from Michel Foucault and followers with a social constructionist perspective, the concept of discourse has become a key concept in studying children and childhoods. Foucault (1972) argued that there was no universal fact in history, but 'regimes of truth', embedded in institutional practices. These regimes of truth were understood as discourses. One way to define discourses is to describe them as the sets of interconnected ideas, which are rooted in a historical, social, and political context (Montgomery, 2003). In childhood studies, discourses are used to explain that there is no universal childhood but different understandings of childhood in the historical and cultural contexts. In discussing the power of discourse, Foucault explains that there comes to a point where power reaches the very gain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning process and everyday lives (Foucault, 1980, p. 39) It has also been argued that discourses could influence the way we interact with one another (Connolly, 1998, p. 13). Discourses have an inherently formative power in fundamentally shaping our beliefs and knowledge and the way we come to think about and understand the social world (Connolly, 1998, p. 13).

For example, Burman (1994) illustrated how the discourse of politics presented images of childhood underlining the 'Global South model', that children were in desperate need from the outside for provisions. By providing such imagery of childhood, institutes and politicians contribute to political and cultural judgments which bring real social changes, both in provision for children and in adults' treatment of them (Holland, 2008). The example from Burman (1994) was that the discourse impacted greatly in charity appeals, which demonstrated the discourse of children in poverty as vulnerable and dependent while implying the ideologies of childhood. This example relates to the policy and charity appeals towards 'home-staying' children, where a similar concept of helplessness was used in promoting policies and donations. In the analysis chapter, I will further illustrate this discourse and the responses of participants towards it.

It is necessary to state that there is not just one dominant discourse, but many which come to overlap, articulate with and contradict with each other (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Additionally, as Foucault (1972) stated, discourses involve knowledge in this specific setting and knowledge generates power for the actors in discourses. It is to recognize the possibility of multiple discourses coexisting in the same space and how groups are conceptualized and understood is related to the power relation in discourses. For this study, discourse is an essential concept to interpret the contemporary childhood of 'home-staying'

children. In the fieldwork, discourses were constructed in various cultural spaces where different levels of actors were involved.

3.2.2 Generation and generational order

While structural sociology views childhood as a structurally fixed form, scholars found the necessity of defining the relation of childhood to other social categories, in order to present a more complete image of the childhood's position in society (Alanen, 2009; Qvortrup, 2009). According to Mannheim, a generation is "a historically positioned age group whose members undergo a similar socialization process which brings about a shared frame of experience and action and makes them into an 'actual' generation" (Alanen, 2009, p. 164). Qvortrup argues that the social categories of both 'childhood' and 'adulthood' have structural attributes relative to each other (Alanen, 2009, p. 159). Alanen describes this attributing relation between generations as a generational order, which is explained as "a structured network of relations between generational categories that are positioned in and act within necessary interrelations with each other" (Alanen, 2009, pp. 161-162) It is to say that either 'adulthood' or 'childhood' can be an independent category that exist individually. On the contrary, they stand in a position of interdependent mutual constitution where they reciprocally presume each other (Alanen, 2009).

At the same time, generational ordering theorizes the social positioning where one position is or becomes is dependent on the reciprocal action taken by the other (Alanen, 2009, p. 165). This theoretical concept derives from the class theory based on Marxian dialectics and consider generations as structural concepts such as class. The class theory assumes that relations between classes are internal, which is in the sense that what one class is dependent on its relation to the other, and the existence of one necessarily presupposes the other (Alanen, 2009, p. 165). For example, a nuclear family is a system of relations, linking individuals in the unit with roles of husband/father, and wife/mother and the children. Generational ordering is often adopted to the interpretation of the interdependency of parenting - 'childing' (Mayall, 1996) and teacher-student relations, which are often not symmetrical in both directions (Alanen, 2009).

Generational order acknowledges a system of social ordering that specifically pertains to children as a social category, and circumscribes for them particular social locations from which they act and thereby participate in ongoing social life (Alanen, 2009, p. 161). It also highlights the interdependent positions that these generational structures define for generational groups to take and to act from (Alanen, 2009, p. 170). In the thesis, generational order is used to explore the interactions between home-staying children and their families, while trying to find the constitutive principle in such social ordering of child-adult relations. Additionally, as Alanen (2009) stated, a generationing frame will be on revealing the social and cultural practices of positioning – both self- and other-positioning – through which the current generational structures, and the generational order as their composite structure, are generated, maintained and (occasionally) transformed (p. 170). In this thesis, the presence and absence of parents through the years could create an environment where home-staying children reshape both intergenerational and intragenerational social orderings.

3.2.3 Dependence and interdependence

In this study, I will implement generational order and ordering for discussing the structure of 'home-staying' children's childhood. Generational ordering also deals with issues of dependence and interdependence. In addition to those, it is necessary to explain them in an individual section because they are dominant concepts in the family relation of 'home-

staying' children, in the lenses of culture and migration, which serves as a continuation and contextualization of Alanen's theory. In many cultural contexts, dependence is an apparent character of childhood. Children are highly dependent on the family for providing material resources such as housing, grocery, and leisure activities. Dependence of children to parents (or adults) is an indispensable aspect of the child-parent (or child-adult) relation (Mayall, 2002). Children's dependence could also expand to the socialization process, under the notion that parents are responsible for raising their children to become a member of the society (James & James, 2004). While relying on the adults in their childhood, children in such power relation are often asked to obey the authority of parents. For example, among the children in modern rural China, the obedience was shown as no open disagreement to the adults, cohesion with their parents, and less conflict with the family (W. Zhang & Fuligni, 2006).

At the same time, the dependence of children coexists with interdepended as child-adult relation is not unidimensional. Mayall (2002) stated that participants in her research gave love to their parents and contributed to the domestic division of labor. Russell, Chu, Crockett, and Lee (2010) described that, whereas Western culture have been described as individualistic, Asian families have been described as interdependent and collectivistic. Such interdependence and collectivism reflect in cultural traditions of filial piety and family closeness (W. Zhang & Fuligni, 2006). One example is that, in rural China, the elders in the family have taken care of their older and younger generations, in order to receive the same care when they are old (Thøgerson & Anru, 2010). In such cultural and social context, children are expected to contribute to the family in a life-span perception. Nonetheless, family interdependence is not only apparent in China but also in other countries like Ethiopia and Bolivia, where the structural context of collective livelihood shapes children's family relation with rewards, constrains, and negotiation (Abebe, 2019; Punch, 2015). Additionally, interdependence on family is obvious in migrations, where immigrant families sometimes have high expectations on children's future contributions to the family because adults made sacrifice for a better future for the next generations (Mayall, 2002; Russell et al., 2010), and young people who migrated to work were interdependent to their families for financial and physical support (Punch, 2015). In this study, 'home-staying' children experience their everyday lives in a collective rural Chinese community, where interdependence is at the core of caregiving structures within and across generations. 'Home-staying' children are the outcomes of labor migration in China, but also the cause of it. Many parents became labor migrants in order to provide a better living condition for their children (Ye et al., 2010). The parental expectations for 'home-staying' children would potentially shape the structure of their relation. Thus, in order to analyse the dynamic of the family relation between 'home-staying' children and adults, it is necessary to understand the concepts of dependence and interdependence.

3.2.4 Rising Chinese individualism
Individualism, or the rise of individualism, has been a key theory of reflexive modernization, to understand and interpret the development of individuals exercising their power and agency in a particular society (Hansen & Svarverud, 2010). There have been rising interests in studying the characteristics of individualism and the individualizing process in China (Hansen & Svarverud, 2010). The interests come along with China's national development from regulated socialism to state-regulated capitalism (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2010) and individual experiences in personal pursuits and social constraints.

To explore Chinese individualism, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2010) stated the necessity of first understanding the varieties of individualization. In order to avoid a Europe-centered

outlook of individualization, it is significant to stay reflexive in the process of social change and to understand the multidimensionality of the process of individualization (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2010, p. xv). Y. Yan stated that the individualization process as a theoretical construction captures the particular changes in the nature of social relations in Western European societies, changes which have certain features that do not exist in China, such as individual rights and freedom are regarded as given; and individual identity increasingly being defined by lifestyle and biography instead of by social groups like the family or social class (Y. Yan, 2010, p. 5). To understand the rising individuals in China, Y. Yan summarizes it with certain characteristics: 1) the rise of the individuals has become a social reality in everyday life of ordinary people at the beginning of the twenty-first century, which, in turn, is transforming Chinese society. 2) Central to this transformation is the ongoing negotiation and contestation between the rising individual and the various forms of the collectivity, including the Chinese state and the family. 3) The individual is still perceived by the state and society as a means to a greater end and thus cannot gain fully autonomous and indivisible status (Y. Yan, 2010, pp. 14-15).

While individualism is rising in China, there are characteristics, which could be partially explained as restraints, among Chinese individuals. This comes to an understanding of individualism in China, in which individual rights and freedom are earned instead of given (Y. Yan, 2010). Additionally, individualism is still regarded as a selfish, utilitarian, and hedonistic morality that places self-interest above that of the group or other people (Y. Yan, 2010, p. 27). When analyzing his previous fieldworks, Y. Yan found that, due to the hostility of the Chinese state towards self-organizations and an autonomous society, the rising individual has shown a tendency to emphasize rights while overlooking obligations and other individuals' rights, running the risk of becoming what (he) refer(s) to the 'uncivil individual' (Y. Yan, 2010). This analysis is reconfirmed in the study of Hansen and Pang (2010), where they find young rural people have a strong urge to express their free will and individual space while acknowledging their necessary contributions to families. Thus, it attributes to a dilemma between individual and social relations, which sometimes leads to an idealization of individualism (Hansen & Pang, 2010).

According to mentioned books and articles, it is fair to assume that China is undergoing a process of individualization. I decided to use the perspective of individualism in my analysis because such ideas of it constantly appeared in interviews and observations. Children often expressed their visions on their future life as individuals. These expressions often come with complicated reasons, sometimes conflicting with families' expectations on them while sometimes complementing each other. The prevalence of Internet becomes a key resource for children to express their 'free thoughts' and personal interests. Thus, the theory of individualism in China will assist the exploration of children's experience as individuals.

3.3   Summary

This chapter illustrates different theories that build up the foundation for the analysis in this study. The thesis is based on social studies of children and childhood above and pays attention to constructionist and structuralist perspectives. Constructionist perspective is important to this study as it can lead discussions about 'home-staying' children's childhood with its cultural, historical, and social contexts. This provides theoretical bases in analyzing how different parties influence the construction of participants' childhood and this will be the focus of first analysis chapter. Discourse (Foucault, 1972) and constructionist perspective will be mainly used in the first analysis chapter to explore and explain constructions of 'home-staying' childhoods. Additionally, structuralist perspective will serve as the theoretical foundation for the second analysis chapter, where the structural relations

between participants and their families, peers, and others will be addressed. Concepts such as generational order (Alanen, 2009), dependence, and interdependence will be made use of explaining the family structures. Chinese individualism serves as a concept in explaining the dynamics of relations and structures of 'home-staying' children's childhood. By applying aforementioned theories, the analysis hopes to bring new insight into 'home-staying' children's everyday lives in rural China.

4 Research methodology

This chapter aims to explain the methodology of the research, the methods, and the ethical considerations in the fieldwork. In the social studies of childhood, children are competent interpreters of the social world (James, 2001). In the research, the aim was to develop a better understanding of home-staying children's everyday life and the social relations around them. To achieve these objectives, I found it necessary to recognize children's competence in their narratives, to actively engage children in the research process, and to stay aware of the researcher's role. Bearing this in mind, I designed the research on the methodological perspectives of childhood studies. The methodology of childhood studies initiates the objectives of this research as studying children's everyday lives through children's narratives. Researching with children has a long history of development, from children as objects in the research to children as participants of the research (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000). At the beginning, psychological researchers focused on the developmental stages, considering children as becoming human beings (James, 2001). Such an approach neglects the presence of children as in their current being. Nonetheless, the research of children would not be accurate unless we learn from the children. The research approach should be designed to empower children and their voices. Additionally, one important aspect of childhood studies is to recognize the agency of children, which is their capacity to navigate the positions and contexts of their lifeworld. We could not truly understand children's interactions with the surroundings until we look at the world with their perspectives (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000).

To ensure the trustworthiness and authenticity of children's narratives, ethnography enables children's views and ideas to be rendered accessible to adults as well as to other children (James, 2001). . Ethnography also highlights that researchers should always stay reflective while conducting research with children, especially with sensitive topics. Meanwhile, the participatory approach comes into the research because it could help children to express their voices in various methods in the fieldwork, I started with participant observation and continued through the entire fieldwork. In the last two weeks, I conducted semi-structured interviews with children and their caretakers. Additionally, I used naming, household visits, drawing/recalling, and photovoice to build rapports and generate data. Meanwhile, reflexivity is always important to discuss and reflect on how I, as a subjective being, influenced the research. Thus, I would use the following chapter to describe the process and reflections of my fieldwork experience.

4.1 Ethnographic participatory approach

A key aspect of ethnography is to understand the flexible and dynamic characters of researching with children. Historically, children's voice had been often neglected or 'muted' (Hardman, 1974), which was because people did not perceive children as active contributors and actors in their life. Ethnography emphasizes on observation in various forms through close attention to the everyday and familiar through which the social world is both created and sustained (James, 2001), thus is particularly useful in childhood studies. As Punch (2002) stated, researching with children is not entirely different from adults but there is a focus on seeing children's special competencies and skills. I chose the approach of involving multiple methods such as observation, naming, drawing and semi-structured interviews over an extended period, which helps to understand the perspective

of children in a multi-dimensional way. Implementing ethnographical methods reminded me to always reflect upon power relations (Thompson, 2007) and my subjectivity. I was cautious on my choices of language, location of interviews, and how I dressed because I hoped to be approachable during the fieldwork. In the fieldwork, it turned out to be an on-going balancing act between being recognized as an 'adult' and avoiding the preconceived ideas, practice, and connotations associated with 'adulthood' (Christensen, 2004). Through the research, I often realized how my subjective experience would impact the research. My assumptions about the position of home-staying children affected the methods chosen and how the methods were used in the research. For example, choosing the participatory method to counteract the adult-child relationship in China comes from my interpretation of this culture. While talking with participants, I shared some of my personal experience such as my hobbies and favorite actors to portray myself being different from a typical adult.

To generate reliable and valid data, researchers found it necessary to conduct the research with children but not on them. James (2001) considered that having children actively participating in the research could be beneficial to empower their voice. Instead of completing the research objectives and questions before the research, which comes from an adult's perspective, researchers could involve children in developing topics, collecting and analyzing data (Beazley & Ennew, 2006). In the context of Chinese culture, I felt the necessity of the participatory approach in the research design. Children's voice is often neglected in such a context. They are often considered the belongings of their families (Mu & Hu, 2016). In school, they are requested to be disciplined (Schoenhals, 1993). When I enter the fieldwork site as an adult, there is a chance that children will perceive me as the authoritative adult in their life, such as their parents, grandparents and teachers. Thus, it was important for me to tackle the image of an authoritative adult when conducting the research. As will be elaborated below, children actively participated from the beginning of the research. They were involved in defining the research questions, defining the interview questions, choosing the research method, and developing the research title.

4.2 The fieldwork

4.2.1 Selecting the research site

In May 2019, I was looking for a school that matches my research interests. It should be a school in the countryside of China, with some students whose parents work in the city. My other criteria are that the location of the school should be in Jiangxi, the province where I come from. This criterion was due to two concerns: First of all, people who live in the countryside, especially the elders, often speak dialects. Thus, I would not be able to understand people talking if the location is too far from my hometown. Second of all, being close to my home allowed me to commute easier and take some breaks during the fieldwork. I found Qingshan[2] school with help from an acquaintance. His colleague is from the town of the school and knows the principal of the school. After reaching out to him via WeChat[3] in June, he agreed to welcome me to his school for a two-month fieldwork.

[2] Pseudonym, the name comes from a district in my hometown. It means 'green mountain'.

[3] A Chinese communication/social media application

4.2.2 The research site

The school located in the countryside with some hours' drive from my home. The front of the school is an iron gate on the street. Walking through the gate, there is a playground with four ping pong tables, a basketball field, one store selling snacks and food, one four-story teaching building and a five-story dorm. The dorm is in front of the teaching building, with 20-meter distance. The basketball field is on the left of these two buildings. The school has approximately 650 students from grade one to nine. Each grade has two classes. The school separates grades as primary school section (1-6th grade) and middle school section (7-9th grade). Every student has classes in the same building but the daily routine is different between two sections. The middle schoolers live in the dorm and have schools six days a week, they go home on Sundays. The primary schoolers go home every night and have schools five days a week. Here is the daily routine in the school.

Middle School

6:40-7:00	getting up
7:10-7:50	morning reading
7:50-8:15	breakfast
8:15-9:10	first class
9:20-10:05	second class
10:15-11:00	third class
11:10-11:55	fourth class
11:55-12:20	lunch
12:30-14:00	noon nap
14:10-15:00	fifth class
15:10-16:00	sixth class
16:10-17:00	seventh class
17:20-17:50	dinner
17:50-18:30	laundry/ shower time
18:30-19:10	first evening class
19:15-20:00	second evening class
20:10-20:50	third evening class
21:00-21:40	fourth evening class
22:00	light out

Table 4.1 Daily routine in the school

As my participants are middle schoolers, I will introduce more details on their routine. Morning reading is for all students reading out loud Chinese or English textbooks in the classroom with a teacher supervising. Daytime classes are for subject teaching. Students learn Chinese, English, Mathematics, Physics, Biology, Chemistry, Geography, History and Politics, which are the subjects of their high school entrance exam. They have P.E once every other week and have no art or music class. Evening classes are for three purposes: teachers explaining questions, self-studying and exams. Everyone has lunch and dinner at school cafeteria and the fee is prepaid in the beginning of every semester. The laundry and shower time is the only time that students have access to the dorm. Eight to twelve students live in every dorm room, with one toilet in each dorm. Dorms do not have shower, which means that students and teachers need to take buckets to fill hot water on the first floor and bring back to the dorm to shower. During school days, students are not allowed to go outside of school unless they have teacher's signed permission.

4.2.3 Access and gatekeeping

As Corsaro and Molinary (2008) states, adult gatekeepers have a varying degree of control over the activities of children and access to the research site. To explain my experience of gatekeeping in the fieldwork, I think it is necessary to illustrate my first day at the school. On the day of my arrival, the principal messaged me and asked me to contact Ms. Xu[4], the English teacher for 8th and 9th grade. When I arrived, she gave me the key to the dorm and told me to settle myself as how I want. I settled my luggage in the dorm and walked into the teaching building. Then I found Ms. Xu in the office and sat down next to her. I asked her if it was possible to start my observation today, and she answered that it would be better if I have permission from the director of 7th-9th grade. So, I walked to him and introduced myself, also asking for permission to observe, he said that he did not know me. I replied that I had the approval of fieldwork from the principal beforehand. Then he said that he would wait until the principal is back to the school before discussing further with me. Later, I went to the primary school office. The same thing happened. Teachers asked me to get approval from the director of the primary school first. This director did the same thing as the others, refusing to discuss further before seeing the principal's approval. Two days later, the principal came back to school. I went to his office and got his signature on the consent form. Later, I went to both directors with the signed consent form. Both signed the consent forms. And with their signed consent forms, I could observe in each class.

Now looking back at this, I realize that I was a researcher who showed up in the school could have introduced uncertainty to the adults there. Their understanding of research and a researcher was not how I appeared to be, which was one person in a school with a small group of participants for an extended period. Their unfamiliarity towards my research resulted in the suspiciousness at the beginning. They were also unsure about the consequence of allowing me to do research there. One director asked about who would read this and what would they know about the school. He asked, "Will everything you see be documented?". Then I explained to him about confidentiality. Meanwhile, I sense that the scale of gatekeeping in this school is top-down hierarchical. To approve my research is to take responsibility for any possible negative consequence. Thus first, I had to be approved by the person who holds the most power in the school, the principal. Then to the directors and then to the head teachers of each class. It was like me trying to open doors one after the other, which made the word 'gatekeeping' so vivid.

4.2.4 Sampling

Before starting the fieldwork, my plan was selecting ca. 5 participants (home-staying children) from four different age groups, so that I could later discuss whether there was a variance of experiences among different ages. After one week of participant observation, I tried first with one 9th grade class. The headteacher of this class showed concern about students' privacy more than other teachers. She also suggested that I could involve both home-staying children and children with parents at home so that either party doesn't feel left out. In the afternoon, I collected 21 copies of signed informed consent forms. Fourteen students had one or both parents working in cities, and seven students had both parents at home (one divorced). Based on my previous observation, I figured that many children were hesitant about discussing the 'home-staying children' topic in a public space. It is not appropriate to only research with home-staying children as it is a sensitive topic. I decided to include everyone in the class who wants to participate so that some don't feel singled out, and others don't feel left out. Second, I do not want to select five out of 21 children

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[4] pseudonym, Xu is a common Chinese last name

by refusing the rest to participate. Third, I figured that with the limitations of participant observation, which I will discuss further in the method section, it is not helpful to my research if I move between four classes every day. Thus, I decided to focus on this one 9th grade class and to have a comparison between home-staying children and children with parents at home.

After the consent obtaining process, I had 19 children participating in the research. Five were not home-staying children, and fourteen were home-staying children. There were five boys and fourteen girls. All of them study in the same class and the age ranges from thirteen to fifteen. All live in the dorm and go home on Saturday every week. Everyone lives within ten kilometers from the school.

4.3   Research tools

In this section, I will discuss the methods I used in the study for generating data. One fundamental principle in research, especially research with children, is that the researchers hold the responsibility of protecting participants from potential emotional and physical harm (J Ennew et al., 2009). Based on my first experience in the fieldwork, the sensitive nature of the topic was confirmed. Thus, I included both home-staying children and children with parents at home in the research. This approach helped to identify if there were potential differences between the two family forms, whether the reality was more dynamic than the polarized theory. I also found the necessity to include the voice from adults in the family and school. When parents work in cities, children take more responsibilities in house chores and farming at home in the countryside (Chang et al., 2011). With the boarding school system, adults in the school take a primary caring job for children. To understand home-staying children's everyday lives, I found it necessary to include adults' perspectives.

This research was composed of traditional methods, such as participant observation and interviews, and multiple participatory methods. When implementing these methods with children and adults, I adjusted approaches to my fieldwork and context (Punch, 2002). Because I lived at the school, I had the advantage of being with participants in school, at home, and in the town. To demonstrate the methods, I split them into three stages. I conducted naming at the beginning of the research to build rapport and to gain a better understanding of the general information. In the second stage, I distributed a recalling and a drawing sheet for children to complete and visited several households on weekends. In the third stage, I conducted semi-structured interviews with both adults and children while presenting children's photos and drawings as visual stimuli in interviews with children. Through the research, I used participant observation as the major method to enrich my knowledge of children's everyday lives. By multi-method approach, I hoped to use different methods to cross-check data and avoid biased results over-relying on one method (J. Ennew & Morrow, 1994).

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
Naming (19 children)	Household Visits (8)	Photovoice (19 children)
	Drawing/ Recalling (19 children)	Interview (19 children/ 8 caretakers)
Participant Observation		

Table 4.2 Methods used in the research at different stages

4.3.1 Participant observation

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) wrote in their book, "… all social research is a form of participant observation…. we cannot study the social world without being part of it." (p. 97) I conducted participant observation from the start and throughout the research. Participant observation was necessary for me to begin the study. In a school where I am a stranger to children and adults, engaging in children's daily activities helped me to build rapport and establish initial trust, before being accepted by them and becoming sensitive to the complexities of children's everyday experiences (O'Reilly, Dogra, & Ronzoni, 2013). During the observation, I gained knowledge from children on their use of language and habits. I learned some catchphrases they spoke in dialect and names of their favorite shops or milk tea stores[5] in town. By informally communicating with children, I took on the role as 'least adult' (Christensen, 2004), which referred to researchers not acting as an typical adult in this social context, while holding the responsibility of respecting their privacy and rights. Participant observation was also vital for gaining a more in-depth insight into children's daily experience, in order to answer my research questions about home-staying children's everyday lives. As Kjørholt, Moss, and Clark (2005) described, observation and participation in children's daily life is a valuable tool to get a deeper insight into the unspoken words. My observation took place when I was in the classroom, the hallway, the playground, the dorms, and during hangouts on weekends. Details as to the show they like to watch, the ways of their communication, and the places they want to go are valuable information for my further analysis in the research process.

In the first two weeks, I often sat in the last row of the classroom and observed from 8:20 to 17:00. As described in the research site section, children have noon nap time from 12:30 to 14:00. I went to stay in the office or took a nap in the dorm at noon. In the daytime observation, I sat in the back and wrote notes when it was in a class. If there was an activity, I would follow the class to do it together. On Saturdays, the observation took place in hangouts. Because the opportunity to communicate with children in the school was minimal, hangouts such as going to milk tea store and grocery shopping on Saturdays became an essential factor in building a relationship with children. Many children first showed surprise when they saw me outside school, and then they kept on what they were doing. Outside school, I could be seen as less adult by them and did not interfere with their activities. It was also vital for observing children in a non-school condition, where they showed their interests, hobbies, and favorite places to hang out. Such information was useful to implement in the interviews and to fulfill the everyday life of home-staying children.

Along with field notes, this method assisted me throughout the fieldwork. Because I could engage in peer conversations and activities, it helped me to gain a deeper insight of their everyday lives. However, participant observation was hard to implement when the school had a tight schedule of classes. In the first few weeks, it was hard to step in a group without them being awkward. At the beginning, I sat in many classes to observe. For all classes, there was only teacher lecturing, so I had no chance to talk with any participants. Thus, I chose to read textbooks and engaged in their tasks during the observation. This

[5] Milk tea stores are common in Eastern/Southeastern Asian countries. They are stores selling mainly milk tea and snacks, while having few arcade machines in the store. Children and youth often hang out in milk tea stores. This information will also be further addressed in the analysis chapter.

method eventually became very useful in the analysis as it first provided background contexts to the empirical data gathered in other activities and it helped in forming the outlines of analysis because observations highlighted what was important in participants' everyday life experience.

4.3.2 Naming

Naming is an activity that researchers could conduct with one or multiple participants. In this activity, the researcher gives participants a paper and a pen, so participants can write down answers to questions such as what is your name, where are you from, etc (see Appendix 9.9). Naming was the first activity I conducted with individual participants. I discussed with the headteacher and then set up the activity time to evening class time. Initially, I wondered if we could do it in the dorm. However, the dorm was locked and students could not access this area during class time. Since all my participants had a tight studying schedule every day, I felt that such activity was essential as I needed to have some time to talk with them. Children chose the people they want to do the activity with. Many chose one or two friends, who were also participants in the research. Being interviewed together with friends was very helpful to the activity because the setting became more relaxing when friends accompanied them. In the Chinese situation, children being asked to talk with adults one-on-one tend to be a stressful scenario. When they have friends around, they discussed with each other when they had questions or thoughts. One case was that one boy was not sure whether he should tell me about his romantic relationship, then his friend encouraged him to speak out, 'talk to her is fine, she won't tell it to teachers.'

Personally, naming helped me to remember everyone as I am not good at remembering faces and names. For many children, they felt comfortable to do this task as their task was to answer the listed questions. In several cases, children asked their friends to read each other's answers. Meanwhile, there were limitations to this method. Because this activity only asks for short answers, the time spent in the activity varied among participants. Some children spent more than 40 minutes with me while some spent only 15 minutes, which resulted in varied information of each participant from this activity. Additionally, naming requires literacy skills. In my research, all participants are literate and participated in the activity. However, on the question of 'what is the meaning of your name,' some children showed confusion. This question requires the ability to interpret their names. Some children were not told by their family about the meaning and could not comprehend the name themselves; thus, this question did not provide any further information. This activity provided information like participants' social relations and their personal interests, which became useful in the analysis.

4.3.3 Household visits

Before the fieldwork, I planned to visit all home-staying children's home. However, due to time limitations and some participants' refusal, I visited a total of eight houses. I also interviewed with the caretakers when I visited each household. The household visit was a great opportunity to learn about participants' social relations and living contexts (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). For example, I could get an impression on the financial situation based on furniture, house size, and the 'poverty reduction subsidy' sign[6]. During the visit, I asked

[6] A household is required to present this sign in visible place, if they receive poverty reduction subsidy. This policy was previously explained in 2.3.2. Contemporary rural childhood.

the children if I could see their bedroom; most of them turned down the proposal. I only visited one boy's bedroom as he was playing video games in the room and asked me to come in. For the rest, I stayed in the living room. I asked to visit their bedrooms because many participants told me in observations that some of them shared bedrooms with parents, grandparents, or siblings. Therefore, I found it both interesting and necessary to look at their bedrooms, in order to understand their family relations better. However, household visits were conducted in the beginning of fieldwork, when participants were still unfamiliar to me and they considered bedrooms as private space, so most of them rejected my wish to visit bedrooms. Children acted in various ways when I showed up in their houses. Some seemed very excited and brought me many fruits and drink. Some called their caretakers out and sat on the side silently, watching me talking with the caretaker. Household visits were essential to the analysis because it gave empirical data in participants' living conditions and eventually led to a deeper understanding of how family structures shaped participants' childhood.

4.3.4 Drawing/ Recalling

Drawing is a common practice among children in different cultures. By drawing, children can provide various information to the research questions and be more actively engaged (Punch, 2002). In drawings, children can give flexible information based on their interests, emotions, and experiences through visual and creative expression, rather than only relying on verbal forms. Additionally, drawing can ease the imbalance of power between adults and children as children hold the narrative in their creations. It is a useful tool, especially considering the power relation of teacher to student in China. In my research, I asked children to draw two themes: 'the place you like to be' and 'the person you feel the closest with' (see Appendix 9.10). These themes are to answer the research questions and to cross-check the empirical data from photovoice and interviews. Through the drawing, children provided the information I did not observe, such as their favorite hiking place with their family. Some drawings confirmed my observation. When discussing their families, home-staying children could feel vulnerable. When discussing a sensitive topic, drawing as a tool provided us a space to buffer and explore.

When conducting this method, I felt that it related to children's ability to draw(Punch, 2002). Some children who felt confident in their drawing skills returned the paper fast. Others who did not feel confident asked me how good a drawing I would request. I highlighted that it was not about the skill but about reflecting your life and experience. "You could draw match man and tell me later who that person is," I said so, and children laughed about that. Many were uncomfortable to draw in front of others. Thus, I suggested them to bring on the weekend and return it next week. When discussing the picture with children in interviews, I found that some children got bored or tired from this. I first asked them to explain their drawings and asked follow-up questions. Some children interpreted that as I could not understand what they drew and felt annoyed to keep explaining a simple painting. I should have identified this emotion earlier and not insisted on explaining the picture.

Recalling was the activity I conducted in the same period as drawing. I asked children to choose from these two methods, and most chose drawing. Many chose drawing because drawing takes less effort than filling the recalling sheet. Some children decided to recall because they thought drawing required creativity while recalling was a literal task. I asked every child who chose to recall to fill in two sheets, one was 'a day in school,' and the other was 'a day at home' (see Appendix 9.11). These two themes aimed to help me confirm my observation in the school and provide further information about their everyday lives and

social interactions at home. In the analysis, recalling did not provide much new information but confirmed the activities and social relations of research participants, which was also necessary because it proved the validity of data. One improvement I need in this activity is to refine the sheet format. Though telling children to document everything they have done in one day, I did not divide each row with time, which resulted in one participant filling everything in one box, and another one writing activities without timely order. In all, both activities provided empirical data in participants' everyday life experience and their knowledge in their social relations. The data confirmed my observations and offered materials to discuss in the interviews.

4.3.5 Photovoice

Photovoice is the participatory method of engaging children with taking pictures and discussing pictures with the researcher. It is "a fun way for children to express themselves, and it did not depend on children's ability or their perceived ability to depict an image" (Punch, 2002, p. 333). Under the theme, children are free to take pictures of their interests. I asked children to take 4-6 photos with the idea 'what makes me happy.' I decided the number of images based on the interview time limitation. After knowing that every one of them has a smartphone at home (the phone is not allowed to use in the school), I asked them to take photos on the phone and then send pictures to me via QQ or WeChat. After receiving the images, I printed out the images as PDF and deleted them from my phone. I chose the smartphone instead of a disposable camera for two reasons. First of all, children only have one day per week at home. If we take turns using a camera, we would not have enough time for every participant. If I purchase 19 cameras for every participant, it would be a significant expense for me. Second of all, based on my observation, the Internet and smartphone were two essential elements of these children's life. Approving this point, many children gave me screenshots of a mobile game, song list on music app, and celebrity's social media account as the pictures of 'what makes them happy. Children asked me if they could use their favorite actors, singers, and celebrities as photos of 'what they like.' I considered that those famous people were popular among children in the class and the generation, so I agreed.

However, conducting photovoice met several limitations in the research. Since they were using the phone to take pictures, children could not take photos in the school. One boy told me that one place made him happy is the basketball field, but he could not bring the phone to the school. Other elements, such as the classroom and the dorm, could be missing from this method because of this reason. Another limitation is the characteristic of this method. Photovoice highlights the current environment but cannot capture everything in the past. Indeed, some children took pictures of their kitchen or yard at home and told me the happy memories growing up there. However, one boy said to me that the tree in his elementary school made him happy through childhood, but he cannot go there and take a picture. Photovoice served a similar function as drawing/recalling. It provided interview material and confirmed what participants valued the most in their life because certain topics recurred in various activities.

4.3.6 Semi-structured interviews with children

With children, I conducted semi-structured visual interviews supplemented by the drawing, recalling sheets, and photos from previous methods. I choose this method by adopting the "ignorance of age" method in Solberg (1996). It asks researchers to pay great attention on the situational context, and structure the process with children's interests. By using visual stimuli, the focus of the interview flows with children's choice on topics. With children

being the presenter during part of the interview, I took the role of a listener and became a less typical adult, which benefits the research (Christensen, 2004). I started by asking simple questions, such as their age and how they felt with the new year of school (see Appendix 9.7). Then, I asked questions about their family life, school experience, and technology.

Despite the structure of the interview, a power relation always exists between the interviewer and interviewee (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2009). Furthermore, Chinese relations between adults and children might make children uncomfortable in a one-on-one situation. Thus, evaluating the power relation was a significant consideration for me conducting interviews. What I did was putting interviews at the end of the fieldwork, which is due to several reasons. First, Brinkmann and Kvale (2009) and Alderson and Morrow (2011) both mentioned the importance of building rapport before conducting the interview. I used participant observation and informal dialogues to build a relationship with children before the interview. Second, it is necessary to adjust the interview questions through observations. I modified the question of the pocket money and added the section of the Internet/technology based on my experience before interviews. Third, I took the time to get familiar with the context of children's living conditions, school environment, and social relations before the interview so that my follow-up questions could be more specific and related to the children's daily interests.

However, it is not to say that the interviews eliminate the issue of power relations because of the procedure. One thing was that children have limited options on location and time of the interview. By negotiating with the headteacher, I could use her evening classes to take children outside the classroom for the interview. The dorm was locked at that time, and the playground was dark. Children and I had interviews in a third-grade classroom because third graders went home at night. Meanwhile, four participants wanted to interview together with another friend. I agreed after explaining that there would be sensitive questions in the interview. The interviews offered well-rounded information and explanation from participants regarding their experience and knowledge, which eventually built up the ground of analysis.

4.3.7 Interviews with caregivers

To understand children's relationships with the family and community, I found it necessary to engage adults' perspectives (Wyness, 2012). During household visits, I conducted interviews with caretakers at home. I gave the guideline to children first to have a look and asked them if there is any question I should edit or add. Then, children act as a mediator between the caretaker and me, to translate between dialect and Mandarin and to help each side understand the context better. In the interviews, I started with general questions regarding the family situation (see Appendix 9.8). Then, I asked their perceptions about the home-staying children's condition and the measures taken by the government. The questions were designed to be open, leaving space for answers, and following probing questions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2009). When conducting the interviews at home, the physical environment became more diverse than one-on-one interviews with kids. In most cases, there were other children at home, and they could be my participant's siblings, cousins, and neighbors. Two caretakers were taking care of their toddler grandchildren while having the interview. Some caretakers paused the conversations several times by offering me food and fruits. Interviews with caregivers provided essential empirical data for the analysis, especially in the discussion of family relations and family structures. Caregivers offered information so that we could understand 'home-staying' children's childhood from a different perspective.

4.4 Language

To state the impact of language in my research, I would like to address two aspects. The first part is the linguistic aspect, concerning the uses of Mandarin and the local dialect in my fieldwork experience. The second perspective is my choice of words and languages during the fieldwork.

As a Chinese native speaker, I could communicate with adults and children by speaking Mandarin. However, even though the fieldwork location is only a few-hour drive from my hometown, people here speak a dialect that I found difficult to understand. Thus, children talk in dialect with each other and speak Mandarin with me. Often, in activities and daily hangouts, they talk to each other in dialect and then repeated the conversation in Mandarin for me. This condition introduced both positive and negative scenarios in the fieldwork. When I interviewed with caretakers at children's homes, my participants took the role of translators. They sat in between the caretakers and me, translating between Mandarin and dialect. On top of that, they often explained for both sides to make the conversation smoother. For example, when I used the word 'reflection' in the interview, several children further explained it to their grandparents as I wanted to know the feelings of their everyday lives. Additionally, what frequently happened during my fieldwork was children teaching me catchphrases and helpful sentences in dialect. One occasion was two children helping me to call the local 'scooter-taxi' driver to come to pick me up in the school. In these scenarios, children took more initiative in participating in the research because of my language barrier.

On the other hand, my incapability of the dialect set up multiple challenges during the fieldwork. In the interviews, I can only rely on children to translate their contents. Children sometimes can't find the right words to translate from dialect to Mandarin, which could have impacted the quality of the material. When children are referring something with 'this' or 'that,' I could not understand because of lacking the local context. Another aspect is that the language barrier makes children uncomfortable to hang out with me. One time, when I was walking with one child to visit her friend, I asked her why she seemed a lot quieter when hanging out with me comparing with her friends. She answered that it was because I did not speak the dialect. "I only speak Mandarin with those teachers who are not local in the class", she says. At the end of the fieldwork, I also realized that who hung out with me more frequent during the recess and weekends were the children more comfortable speaking Mandarin.

In addition to the previous content, I would also like to discuss my choice of words and talking patterns in the when talking about the research project. Before the fieldwork, I wrote consent forms and information letters in language that would be easier to understand for research participants. For example, I changed the words of 'your rights' to verbal constructions of 'you can do xxx'[7]. This change is based on my cultural understanding of China, where 'right' is an unfamiliar term in daily life. With the authoritative figure of adults and teachers in Chinese culture, the word 'Privacy' and 'Confidentiality' became obscure. Thus, I wrote clear sentences to explain privacy and confidentiality (see Appendix 9.5) in consents, information letters, and interview guidelines. During the fieldwork, based on people's reactions, I described my work as the task for master graduation rather than research, for everyone understanding it better. Another behavior I noticed is that my way of talking and physical response can be different based on different participants in the

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[7] This was done in communication with the Norwegian Centre for Research Data, where the project was notified and approved for ethical clearance.

activities, such as I often chose a smaller, shorter chair when talking with caregivers so I looked up to them, while I sat in an equal height position with research participants.

4.5 Ethical considerations

4.5.1 Obtaining consent

As mentioned previously, I first asked the principal, directors, and teachers for their consent to participate in the research. Then I asked for children's consents. I started with children's consent instead of parental consent for two reasons. First, Chinese families constitute a high level of parental authority and discipline. If parents agree with the research first, the children might agree due to obedience, not self-willingness. Second, I hope to show my respect for children as individuals in the study. However, one could argue that my approach here comes from my personal experience of individualism, in which one's opinion should be respected disregarding the age. Furthermore, this sequence of consents made me feel better but not necessarily benefited the children, especially when their parents refused to participate after the children signed the consent, which happened to three children.

I went to the class with consent forms and had a short presentation of its content to the children. I added a 'family information' section on the consent form to know the children's parents' working conditions and the caregiving situation. After the presentation, the class started, and I went to sit in the last row to observe. Some students were peaking at the form while having the course, and I was not sure if the teacher thought I was disturbing the class or not. One student in the back was writing other student's family information on his consent and got caught by the teacher. It made me wonder that I probably should have left some alone time for them to write before the class started.

During the break, many students gave me consent. Later that day, I gave parental consent forms to all children who agreed to participate, which was 22 out of 42 in the whole class. For the ones with parents work in cities, I suggested that they could call parents by themselves or I could call the parents to explain the research myself. One home-staying child asked me to call her parents, and all others wanted to call parents themselves. Many children expressed a positive feeling about their relationship with parents. Then, I asked their approval to call the parent later next week to confirm the consent, they agreed. For the ones with a guardian at home, I gave them parental consent and asked for a signature back. Collecting consents from children prior to parents, on the one hand, enhances children's initiatives in the research beginning stage. On the other hand, it might hurt their feelings more. Two children quit the project as their parents disagreed to participate. They seem disappointed when parents refused. One girl kept on asking me if she could join after. I said that she could still help me during research and she helped me with things like printing.

4.5.2 Constructing relationship with participants

If I can use one word to describe my relationship with the children, I would describe it as 'multi-dynamic.' I can illustrate this first through my name among participants. In the beginning, most students call me 'Pan Laoshi,' which means Teacher Pan. Later, after me explaining that I am not here to teach but to be with them and learn how they live their lives, I started to own many names. Some call me 'Xiao Jiejie,' which is a popular Internet way to refer to someone with an elder-sister age to you. Some call me 'Da Pan,' which means Big Pan. Some call me 'Yueyue' or 'Panpan,' which are my nicknames among my friends. And some choose to call me 'Pan Yue', my full name, which is common to do in

China. Several participants expressed their confusion when trying to define my role, which is parallel to my multiple-name situation. Meanwhile, I want to explain the aspects which lead to such a relationship between my participants and me.

First, I tried to step in the fieldwork site as someone equal to my participants. From the first day of my observation, I chose to sit on the last row with children next to me. When I explained activities to children, I did not stand in front of the class as I feel that it's like a teacher to be there on the stage and tell children what to do. I chose to do it in the hallway during recess, in the dorms, or the cantina. During activities, I tended to refer to my personal experience when having a conversation with children, such as my school experience, my dorm experience, me being alone abroad, my struggles in the study, and my relationship with my boyfriend and my family. Sharing these was helpful to start a conversation about relating topics, and children also asked me such questions after I asked them.

Second, I was someone who listened to them. After a few days in the fieldwork site, children viewed me less than a typical adult in the school. I noticed that many children became eager to share their stories and feelings with me. Sometimes they complained about teachers in the school disciplining too hard. One time a child showing me the phone, she sneaked to school and the selfies she took. In one activity, a child was encouraged by his friend to speak out, 'talk to her is fine, she won't say it to teachers.' Such a sentence was rewarding for me to hear because I tried to demonstrate that there is no negative consequence of what they share.

I hope to use two examples to demonstrate my precious relationship with my participants. One day in the class, a girl passed me a note saying, 'we go buy rice noodles after class' This suddenly made me feel more included in her social life because passing notes in the class is what children do among friends. Moreover, the note was passed from the right side to the left side of the classroom. All students who passed the note seemed surprised and laughed when they saw me getting involved. Another occasion to demonstrate the relationship was during the assembly in the field. I went outside with all the children, standing in the back because of my height. In the field, teachers stood together in the end. I asked the student in the class if I should go to the teacher's line. Many said, "no, you are one of us."

Another important aspect of my relationship with the participants is that they were the great help of my fieldwork. Not only were they translating for interviews with caregivers, as previously mentioned, they were also helping me through everyday life in the countryside. Moreover, they were my emotional supports. During my fieldwork, one girl drove her e-bike with me from home to home for household visits on weekends. We also had the chance to hang out with other participants in town. They invited me to go to the milk tea store and Internet café with them. We went shopping in the grocery store and ate at the night food market. These helped me to see their interests outside school, but also constituted the major part of my social life there for two months. Till now, I still remember that one participant, who sits next to me in the class, said that it was so pleasant to have me beside him for all those classes. I was also motivated to continue my fieldwork when some children recognize me being stressed and tired during the fieldwork.

In the fieldwork, I became friends with research participants. On one hand, it was helpful because participants treated me as equal and shared their personal experience with me. It was also helpful for me to introduce myself to them in an equal position. One thing I noticed in the beginning of fieldwork was that my foreign education background made me distant from them, positioning me more as an outsider to them though I came from the

same province. Because of this, becoming friends with research participants was necessary to tackle both images of adult and outsider. On the other hand, there were ethical concerns along with this. The main concern was the sensitive nature of 'home-staying', that I left the fieldwork site after staying there for two months and participants stayed at home. They now had experienced separations from their parents, teachers[8], and I. Additionally, there were occassions of role conflict in the fieldwork. One time, I was asked to teach P.E. for participants' class. When I took this job, teachers expected me with teacher's role while participants and other children in the class viewed me as someone without teacher's authority or power. P.E. teaching was eventually chaotic because I did not have teaching experience in this subject and children in the class were showing me several skills and games in their physical activities.

4.5.3 Managing power relations

In consideration of Chinese power relations between children and adults, on top of the sensitivity of the topic, I paid close attention to any possible power imbalance in the research. Meanwhile, as Punch, Robson, and Costello (2007) stated, power can be relational and fluid. It is not an object that belongs to a certain age or social group. Thus, I spent the effort to recognize and minimalize the impact of imbalanced power relations between children and me in the fieldwork.

With my observation in the school, a child often shows rigidness and uncomfortableness when summoned to talk with the teacher. Thus, I conducted most of my activities with children in friend groups. I chose to do this because of 1. I observed that before signing the general informed consent, they asked friends to join the research together; thus, it is convenient to form group conversations. 2. I saw that many participants were more comfortable to talk with me with their friends present. In both activities such as Naming and Household visits, this approach helped to lessen my presence as a more powerful adult.

Another approach I took was to not comment on participants' miscellaneous behavior. Children who sat along the last row with me in the classroom used phones or read novels. They often looked at me and laughed when I reacted nothing on their behavior. One day during the exam, some were cheating. Initially, they would stop when they saw me, but then they kept on doing it after seeing no reaction from me. I tried to present as a researcher but not a teacher through behaving so.

However, there are challenges in managing power relations. One aspect was that I did not continue participant observation in the latter half of the fieldwork. I spent most daytime in the office transcribing interviews. It reduced my chance of interaction with participants during the breaks and made me less visible to them daily. Another aspect was that teachers in the school got confused with my role. Two teachers asked me the same question, which was why did I barely sit in the back of the class. Ms. Xu commented that my research seemed like an easy job because I did what appealed to the children. "Of course, they would like you to be here. You do what they want all the time.", she said. One day when I was observing in the classroom, two girls in the back were talking very loud. The teacher started to discipline them in dialect, "how can you be so loud when there is a teacher

[8] Many teachers in the fieldwork school came to teach out of a three-year contract, in which they were promised a position in an urban school after this. This information will be further discussed in 6.1. Education and the path to a better future.

(meant me) in the back watching?". Then the students started laughing. While I tried to be easy approaching children, I could have neglected to explain my methodology to many teachers adequately. Though I have presented my schedule in the fieldwork to teachers involved, they only understood my activities but not how I positioned myself in the institution, which might result in their confusion on my role and distant my relationship with adults in the school.

4.5.4 Protecting anonymity

In this research, all participants, children, adults, and the institutions are given pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of research participants. I conducted the naming activity with children to have everyone created aliases. Some used their social app names, some used the hobbies they enjoy, and some made a name with the meaning of an ideal person they want to be in the future. The children were excited to give themselves another name in the activity. However, I chose not to use some of the pseudonyms as they would easily identify the children.

During the fieldwork, I conducted Photovoice with participants. Instead of using a disposable camera, they used their cellphones to take pictures and sent them to me. Alderson and Morrow (2011) accentuated that, "While images can bring new freedoms of creative expression to research, they can increase risks of participants being identified…" (p. 46). I asked children to avoid taking photos of any faces, including their own. I downloaded those photos and printed them out, then I deleted all of them on any electronic device and only used printed papers as material for analysis.

4.5.5 Preserving privacy and confidentiality

Privacy and confidentiality are vital concerns when researching with children, especially with home-staying children because the sensitive nature of this topic. Ennew et al. (2009, p. 2.13) mentioned that "researchers are responsible for protecting all research participants from any emotional or physical harm." When children gave me the consent forms back after signing them, they folded the forms, many with three-time folding even in order to prevent others from reading the form. Furthermore, the children felt that the term 'home-staying' renders negative connotations and a sense of helplessness and did not want to be defined in those terms. One day, a teacher was discussing with me about my thesis. After acknowledging that my project is about 'home-staying' children, he waved at two girls in the hallway and told them to come here to 'get researched' by me because they are home-staying children. I could not forget their faces of anger and disbelief to that teacher for being summoned in this way. Thus, my priority was to bring no harm to the children in the research.

To preserve the privacy and confidentiality of participants, I explained to the headteacher thoroughly about this concept in my research. I explained to her that she could not participate in children's interviews and I could not share the information in interviews with her. She gave me a great understanding of this and supported me throughout the research. All children were informed about the importance of ensuring confidentiality before joining in the study. I also addressed and explained confidentiality before every activity. For activities, we used a spare classroom during evening classes. It was attempting to safeguard participants' privacy. However, there were many students or friends of the participants coming to check the room during breaks. What I did was pausing the activity and asked them to leave when the break was over.

4.6 Challenges and limitations of the research

Though I thought I was prepared for the fieldwork, I did not expect that the first encountered challenges were physical discomfort. Sitting on a small chair in the classroom of 40 Celsius degrees with no air-conditioning was hard for me to get used to at the beginning. Often, I had to use breaks to stretch. I lived in the dorm for two months, and the living condition was very different from my life experience. I shared a room with two teachers. There was no shower and no mattress on the bunk bed. I was also sick in the second week.

However, the more significant challenge was the emotional experience. As I described before, I started working with many suspicions around. It was intense to live in the fieldwork site. I felt the necessity to observe everything, but it was easily worn out to observe from morning to evening every day. Though adults and children were kind to me, I still had a strong sense of not belonging. I did not know how to behave myself in this environment. It seemed like I have many privileges without realizing it, and that made some teachers distant from me. But I was not sure whether I should try to make friends with the adults or stay in the distance. Every day before I fell asleep and after I woke up, I thought about what I should do in the school. It, in general, felt quite stressful. Along with the fieldwork, I kept writing field notes and diary. They were necessary for the research, but they were also vital for me to process everything that happened in the fieldwork site, emotionally and physically.

There were several occasions when I observed corporal punishments and physical abuse such as teacher smacking students. Personally, I wanted to stop adults from doing it again. However, I also realized that there was a potential of me harming children further if I chose to report. I talked about this with children and discussed how they cope with such a scenario instead.

There were certain limitations to the research. One is the limited interactions with children, especially in school. Children have a packed schedule of classes every day, and I could do activities in a few night classes. It made my intention of participant observation lacking a significant portion of participation. Meanwhile, at the later time of the fieldwork, I spent most time sitting in the office doing transcriptions, which could distance me from children and enhance a more similar role to teachers. Second, though I planned to conduct interviews with adults in the school, I did not achieve any. After I scheduled an interview with teachers and directors, the schedule interfered with their plans later. My observation and participants' interviews could partially compensate for these missing data. It is still a loss in this research.

4.7 Data transcription and analysis

During fieldwork, in addition to doing observation in the daytime, I spent time transcribing. I transcribed naming activity and interviews. When transcribing the material, it helped me to rewind what happened at the activity. It also helped me to improve my way of talking. For example, I found that I said 'really' often when participants were talking. This was a catchphrase I did not realize that I used often and it seemed to stop some participants from sharing more. I supposed that it was because 'really' sounded as questioning the authenticity of participants' shared information. Thus, because I realized it in the transcription, I stopped using it in further activities and interviews. Through transcription, I also figured out that I used my personal experience a lot to trigger a conversation with children. For example, in my school experience, my dorm experience, me being alone abroad, my struggles in the study, and my relationship with my boyfriend and my family.

These are helpful to start a conversation about specific topics and children also ask me such questions about me after I asked them. On one hand, it was nice to build rapport and a sense of trust and contact with participants. On the other hand, it is necessary to reflect upon whether my words shaped the responses. I used my personal experience mainly in naming activity, which was the first time participants and I sat close together. I used my experience to initiate conversations when some participants were not eager to talk. Implementing my experience possibly restricted the topics we discussed because the conversations after that were often similar.

When transcribing interviews, I chose to use my name (Yue) and P (for participant) instead of pseudonyms when specifying who was talking. This choice was first due to privacy concern. Because I categorize interviews in different topics, conversations with one participant could be use in different sections. It is more likely to be identified if information from the same person is repetitively mentioned. Thus, I used 'P(articipant)' for all participants to protect their privacy. A concern with this method is that readers might be unsure about the number of participants involved. To counter this, I explained the gender, age, and whether participant was 'home-staying' child or not before each data use. Another concern is that using this method would make readers feel more vague and distant from each participant.

4.8 Summary

In this chapter, I have presented the methodology of this research project. Here I first discussed methodological perspectives that are essential to plan this fieldwork, access, gatekeeping, and consent obtaining process in the beginning stage. I then presented the methods implemented in this research. Before and during the fieldwork, several ethical concerns emerged and I discussed in this chapter how I perceived these concerns and what I have done to keep being aware of them. In the end of this chapter, I reflected upon my fieldwork and transcription experience, in order to elaborate the challenges and limitations experienced in this study.

5 Constructing 'home-staying' childhood

As defined in the first chapter, a 'home-staying' child is a child whose father and/or mother work outside the rural community as migrant laborers for more than six months cumulatively per year, with one parent (usually mother), grandparents, relatives or neighbors as the everyday caretakers (Mu & Hu, 2016; Ye et al., 2010). This definition emphasizes the physical location of parents and child, and the shift of primary caregiver from parents to other relatives. In the 'real' social world, this term is not only a definition but carries meanings, images, and implications towards the group of 'home-staying' children, and these various aspects of knowledge eventually form into particular discourses. Discourses have an inherently formative power in fundamentally shaping our beliefs and knowledge and the way we come to think about and understand the social world (Connolly, 1998, p. 13). Discourses of 'home-staying children appeared, in a macro level, in the policy making, the media and charity appeals. In a micro perspective, the discourses shape both adults and children's values in their everyday lives, such as their attitudes towards notions of responsibility, education, and future planning. Moreover, it has been argued that such discourses also influence the way we interact with one another (Connolly, 1998, p. 13) and therefore significantly shape children's relations to friends and family. Meanwhile, it is necessary to state that there is not just one dominant discourse, but many which come to overlap, articulate with and contradict with each other (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). In the village of the fieldwork, discourses and social constructs such as gender, age, kinship and education come together with the discourses of 'home-staying' children and mutually constitute 'home-staying' children's everyday lives. However, it is not to claim that all individuals' identities and interactions in the research were shaped only by discourses. In the local community, the meaning of 'home-staying' childhood is a social construct through actions and interactions among the people, a mutual 'reality,' where they have shared and conflicted understandings (Jenks, 1982). Children and adults in the research reacted to discourses in various ways and they collectively constitute a 'home-staying' childhood through interactions with peers and others. Thus, in this analysis chapter, I will first discuss about how helplessness discourse shapes 'home-staying' children's everyday lives and the children's response to it. Following that, I will elaborate the different aspects of participants' everyday life that construct a 'home-staying' childhood. Using mainly with discourse and social construction theories, this chapter will explore the construction of 'home-staying' children's childhood and how individuals responded to discourses and social constructs.

5.1 The image of helplessness

Describing children as helpless is a narrative common in many aspects of our everyday lives. It pictures children as the incapable ones who need protection and security from adults, which accentuates children's dependence and powerlessness. This narrative is frequently used in charity appeals, because it can evoke adults' senses of their own potency and power and therefore it stimulates people to donate (Burman, 1994). Thus, to begin with this section, I would like to present a picture of UNICEF 'home-staying' children charity program in China.

Figure 5.1 UNICEF 'support the disadvantaged child in rural China' program Source: (UNICEF, 2019).

This image contains a young child and an old woman, with both their faces looking dark with dirty clothes. The big white characters on the left say 'Loneliness, came too early' and the yellow characters mean 'your support, let him be accompanied by love.' There is a button on the left bottom to click, with the words 'act immediately' on it. In this charity campaign, there is a direct linkage between parents' labor migration to the lack of love and companion of caregiving adults. This image does not stand by its own in portraying such images. In addition to UNICEF, there are numerous charities in China choosing this way of picturing the childhood of 'home-staying' children. As Holland stated, the images of suffering children precisely connote those qualities of dependence and powerlessness that constitute the defining characteristics of childhood; thus, it evokes adult viewers a sense of potency, a reassurance of adult capacities (Burman, 1994). By highlighting 'home-staying' children's helpless situation, especially the notion that children had no choice in becoming lonely or not loved, charities could attract donations from adults through affirming their position of power comparing to the position of children.

This narrative of 'home-staying' children is not restricted to the field of charity. Instead, it has a further social impact and shapes the society's understanding of 'home-staying' children. Nowadays, there is a prevalent media coverage regarding 'home-staying' children in China. The news we often hear is concerning children's long-term lack of parenting, poverty, or poor public infrastructures (Wu, 2015). Such a narrative creates an image of 'home-staying' children's lives as young children who live in the remote countryside with extreme poverty and no love or care from family members.

As Holland stated, the imagery of childhood can have a real impact on children's lives, partly as it contributes to their consciousness of who they are and the ways in which they deal with everyday experiences, but even more importantly as it contributes to political and cultural judgments which bring real social changes, both in provision for children and in adults' treatment of them (Holland, 2008). This narrative, or the imagery of 'home-

staying' children has greatly impacted on policy making. One is 'Two waivers and one subsidy' (*Liangmian Yibu*) policy, which waives tuition and supply fees and subsidizes boarding expenses (UNICEF, 2014). This policy aims to encourage children in poverty to attend education and 'home-staying' children's families tend to experience poverty more often than others. The other is the Boarding School Act, which aims to support children with long distance to schools. It is a common concern in the countryside where children might live far from the closest school; thus, spending much time in commute or dropping out early. In the countryside, 39.8% of primary schoolers and 61.6% of middle schoolers lived in school dorms in 2012 (Liu et al., 2013). The school where I conducted the fieldwork is one of the many schools containing students who are entitled to both policies. The local government endorses extra subsidy to 'home-staying' children and their families.

The policies mentioned above could improve the family conditions of 'home-staying' children; but they also have a certain impact on shaping the perceptions of 'home-staying' children. In the interviews, two participants belonging to this group of children said that they knew the term 'home-staying' child from local events and registrations held by the government. The first 14-year-old 'home-staying' girl said:

> Yue: Have you heard the term 'home-staying' child?
> P: Yeah, I heard about it in the primary school, the officials came to ask us fill in some forms, about 'home-staying' children.

The other participant who is a 15-year-old girl said:

> Yue: Have you heard the term 'home-staying' child?
> P: Isn't 'home-staying' child the one without parents with them? Yeah, I know a bit about it, through the local village office. There was a guy from the office who came to take photos for us and asked if we were 'home-staying' children. You would get money if you are one.

Both participants have parents who work in the cities and they heard of the term 'home-staying' children in activities held by the local government. In the first response, the local government office asked children to fill in the form for registration purposes. In the second case, children were categorized as 'home-staying' children and 'non-home-staying' children. If you are a 'home-staying' child, the officials take a photo of you and give you some money. This way of subsidizing 'home-staying' children is a rather direct approach. It could risk singling out certain groups in the whole population, which was reflected in one 14-year-old 'home-staying' girl's experience:

> Yue: Have you heard about 'home-staying' children?
> P: Yeah, I know. I have heard about it in primary school. Maybe from 4th or 5th grade? I just heard that school asked 'home-staying' children to do something, then they will get some money and books and stuffs like that. So, I heard the name 'home-staying' children.
> Yue: How do you see this term?
> P: I think this term…mmm…how should I say (laugh), I don't know how. I feel it is not that fair to us who are not 'home-staying' children. Because they are 'home-staying' children, they can get stuff, then we feel quite jealous because we don't get them. It is only both parents away from home qualify as 'home-staying' children, one at home is not.

This participant's father is a migrant worker while the mother stays home, which is a rather common scenario for many 'home-staying' children. However, the local government defines 'home-staying' children as those whose both parents are migrant workers. Thus,

the participant does not meet the criteria and could not get financial assistance. There can be certain differences from concepts to policy practices, but offering help to 'home-staying' children, especially directly offering money and goods in a physical space such as schools, could potentially risk singling out 'home-staying' children and expose them to a situation of prejudice or even discrimination.

5.1.1 Responding to helplessness as discourse

If I could analyze the public narratives of 'home-staying' children as a discourse, it is necessary to take a look at the discourse of the nature of childhood. Foucault (1972) argued that there was no universal fact in history, but 'regimes of truth', embedded in institutional practices. Thus, to interpret this theory in childhood studies, there is no universal childhood but different understandings of childhood in the historical and cultural contexts. A certain discourse of childhood used in the charity appeals is to emphasize the powerlessness, dependence, and vulnerability of children, expressing adult preoccupations with themes of protection and security (Burman, 1994). If we parallel this discourse to 'home-staying' children, there are striking similarities in terms of how the society depicts these children and portrays their childhood.

Discourse is a set of connected ideas which are rooted in a historical, social, and political context (Montgomery, 2003). Meanwhile, it is not just congregated ideas, it has an inherently formative power in fundamentally shaping our beliefs and knowledge and the way we come to think about and understand the social world (Connolly, 1998, p. 13). In the interviews, there were several occasions of participants mentioning their knowledge about the 'home-staying' children discourse. One 15-year-old 'home-staying' participant shared her feelings when she hears the term 'home-staying' child:

> Yue: Do you know the term 'home-staying' child?
> P: 'Home-staying' child, just means the kind that parents work outside, there is only you left, or with your siblings and grandparent.
> Yue: How do you view this term?
> P: I feel it is negative. If I feel I have some self-esteem, then other people say to you that, your parents are not home, you are 'home-staying' child, then you would be not that happy. But maybe it is also a caring to us, it can be used to generalize us. I would feel a bit upset [to be described as 'home-staying' child], it feels like you have a rather tough heart, and then get shot by others on the heart, just feels very very down.

In this discussion, the participant recognized that the 'home-staying' children discourse had a tendency of describing these children in a dependent, vulnerable position. She shared her mixed feelings of this discourse. On the one side, she found that this discourse highlighted the powerlessness of her situation; on the other side, she felt that this discourse raised the social awareness to care for children like her. The girl also said, "… it feels like you have a rather tough heart, and then get shot by others on the heart, just feels very very down." We see that being called as 'home-staying' would emotionally hurt her.

In addition to shaping our beliefs and knowledge, discourses have further influence in the way we interact with one another and therefore shape the life experience (Connolly, 1998). As previously stated, some participants showed negative feelings in relation to the 'home-staying' children discourse. This emotion was further approved in their interactions with others. A 15-year-old 'home-staying' girl discussed this term as following:

Yue: What's your impression with the term 'home-staying' child?

P: At the beginning, I feel this word is so pathetic, like you are forced to stay home. But I don't feel much different as a 'home-staying' child (laugh).

Yue: What would you feel if someone calls you that?

P: I think, I would feel a bit angry. Because here most are 'home-staying' children, I don't think anyone would call others with that term. I rather feel that 'home-staying' children would not call others with this term. If you are one, and you call the other with the term, isn't it a bit mean?

In another interview, a 15-year-old girl with parents at home replied:

P: If they call my friends as 'home-staying' children, I think I will fight back. I will say things like 'don't think you are something better just because your parents are at home.' But I would not say that my parents are at home, so that the person will think I am the same with my friends, that our parents are outside working.

In both participants' responses, it is obvious that 'home-staying' child is a negative term to be referred as. As a result, 'home-staying' children would not call each other with this term and children with parents at home would also avoid using this term to protect their friends' feelings. As of how the negative connotations of this discourse could appear in interactions, one participant who is a 14-year-old 'home-staying' girl shared with me a rather extreme example:

P: I don't feel that I am different from others, but I don't like others to call me [home-staying' child]. Some girls say that I don't have manners, I don't know why, but I end up having bad relations with some people in the class. They would text me messages like 'should I teach you how to be a proper human being, I am sure that your parents never taught you that.' Why do I need them to teach me? She does grow up with her mom, but that does not mean that I don't have my parents growing up. They just like this kind of verbal attack…

These examples illustrate how discourses do not only influence 'home-staying' children's perceptions on themselves, but also impacts how other people interact with them. In one case, a participant chose to pretend to be a 'home-staying' child in order to protect friends. In the other case, the participant is verbally bullied by other children stating the helplessness in the 'home-staying' children discourse.

One point which is necessary to clarify is that, in the observation and interviews, participants were not hesitant to identify themselves as children whose one or both parents are labor migrants. While we were talking, they often brought up topics like traveling in the summer vacations to visit their parents in cities, or their parents telling them to study harder through video chats. It is also a commonly acknowledged fact in the community that the majority of children in the village have parents that are labor migrants. In the interviews, it seems like participants expressed a rather negative attitude towards the connotations in the discourse itself than to expressing that their parents work in cities. The experience that they do not feel much different in their everyday lives as 'home-staying' children comparing to others is not accurately described in the prevalent discourse of 'home-staying' children. Quite the contrary, participants described this discourse carried images of children being 'pathetic', 'not-loved', 'left alone', and 'like an orphan', which was not how they themselves felt about their lives.

5.1.2 Rejecting the discourse

One aspect that stands out in the previous dialogues, and in most of my interviews, is that participants found the discourse of 'home-staying' children depicted a different childhood from their own. It was specifically evident when participants mostly said that they did not feel much difference living as 'home-staying' children, but they were negative if someone would call them by this term. Other than disagreeing to be called this by others, some participants declared themselves as not 'home-staying' children. In an interview, a 15-year-old participant responded to my question as following:

> Yue: Do you know the term 'home-staying' child?
> P: Yes, I have heard about it.
> Yue: How do you know this term?
> P: I think I read it in some articles, and on the phone, like news.
> Yue: What do you think of this term?
> P: I don't think I am a 'home-staying' child. Those children are much more miserable and totally different comparing to us. Because they are all, I think 'home-staying' children live in those mountains, and the conditions in mountains are very bad. We living here are much better than them. Also, I think 'home-staying' children do not get care from parents and they are very poor, so I don't think I count as a 'home-staying' child.

This participant and her other two siblings are raised up by their grandparents and her parents have been labor migrants since the first child was born. Thus, by the definition of 'home-staying' children on paper, she is one of these children. However, the prevalent narrative of 'home-staying' children in the social world creates more meanings and perceptions of this group of kids than simply referring to the physical distance from parents. Therefore, the participant does not recognize herself accordingly with this narrative. It is also noteworthy that many participants expressed the similar feeling regarding their relevance to the term 'home-staying' children. Some argued that the 'home-staying' children in the TV were always small kids, so they do not see themselves, who are older than 12, as 'home-staying' children. Some others claimed that they have grandparents taking care of them and loving them while 'home-staying' children are the ones who nobody cares about or loves.

In discussing the power of discourse, Foucault explains that there comes to a point where power comes to affect individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning process and everyday lives (Foucault, 1980, p. 39). To a certain extent, we can see 'home-staying' children's absorption of the discourse. They generally recognize that the term is depicting them. However, what became more apparent in the fieldwork was somehow the way they chose to 'fight' against the identity that came along with the discourse. In the aforementioned interviews, the participants recognized themselves as not 'home-staying' children. In other cases, participants said that they were 'home-staying' children but immediately added more information that counteracted the helplessness, powerlessness, and dependence in the discourse. One 15-year-old 'home-staying' boy said, "I might not have as strong emotions to my parents as others, but I have strong emotions to other people in my life." Another participant who is a friend of him said, "Being a 'home-staying' child has not much difference, we all have family members around us." It appears as participants are well aware of the discourse of 'home-staying' children in the society and how the discourse is different from their life experience. Thus, they rejected this discourse on themselves. Indeed, it is vital to acknowledge the vulnerabilities of 'home-staying' children's life. It is certainly necessary

to have more public awareness, through media and charity, on these children's potential hardships and dilemmas when growing up. However, this does not mean that all 'home-staying' children experience a singular type of 'home-staying' childhood. Not all 'home-staying' children live in mountains, not all of the families are in extreme poverty, and certainly not all of them are only helpless and powerless. It is necessary to state that there is not just one dominant discourse, but many which come to overlap, articulate with and contradict each other (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). If the society recognizes only one discourse, while neglecting other discourses like geography, gender, age, and class, people might overlook certain vulnerabilities and opportunities in the everyday life of 'home-staying' children and their families.

5.2 The 'home-staying' childhood

In the interviews, I asked participants about their understandings and experience with the term 'home-staying' children. Many responded to me that they found that public discourse of 'home-staying' children does not correspond to their everyday life and some participants did not consider themselves as 'home-staying' children in that sense. In the interviews, participants also directed the conversations to topics like extended family support and friendship, which deviates from the public discourse of 'home-staying' children, in which children are portrayed as helpless and dependent to their parents who work in cities. In addition to the interviews, the observation of participants' speech and actions, the interactions with participants, and the participatory research activities provided and constituted an understanding towards the childhood of 'home-staying' children. In the following paragraphs, I will demonstrate several elements, i.e. care-support system, leisure time, and gender, of the participants' everyday life, which are substantial to the construct of a 'home-staying' childhood for children encountered during fieldwork.

5.2.1 A responsible childhood

In comparison to a Europe-based ideology of children and childhood, in which children should be care-free and play, many places and cultures consider that children should have certain responsibilities to the family and others. In some aspects, researchers found that 'home-staying' children in China hold certain responsibilities in the household or families (Mu & Hu, 2016). One perspective of responsibility is interpreted as labor work. Among several studies, scholars found that 'home-staying' children contribute more than other children in house chores such as cooking, laundry, and farming because of lacking primary labor force at home (Chang et al., 2011; Ye et al., 2010). In the fieldwork, there was not much information found to support this statement. When talking about house chores, 'home-staying' children seemed to have a similar amount of work comparing to other children. This might come with the fact that they live in a boarding school from Sunday to Friday; thus, they do not have much time spent at home to help with house work.

However, it is not to say that children have less responsibilities because of living in the boarding school. Through observations and interviews, responsibilities of 'home-staying' children come in many forms such as being a role model for the younger siblings and handling their own finances[9]. In the school, all students are expected to be responsible for organizing meals in the class, cleaning certain areas of the school and keeping the dorm

[9] In some cases, parents give children money once or twice a year, expecting the child can spend it accordingly.

tidy. Among various responsibilities, schooling became the most obvious one based on my interactions with children and their caregivers.

When discussing about schooling with participants, most of them used the word *Shangxue*10. This word does not refer to a singular movement as going to school, but more as a continuous practice of schooling. The meaning of schooling could vary tremendously in different historical and geographical context. It also varies among the actors such as children, student, parents, caregivers, and teachers. Here, I would like to specifically discuss the meaning of schooling to caregivers and 'home-staying' children, with particular focus on how the knowledge is constituted and how different beliefs about schooling complement and contradict each other. In several interviews with caregivers, they talked about how disadvantaged they are because they did not finish education. In one scenario, I started the interview with one caregiver:

> Yue: I am honoured to have the interview with you, shall we begin now?
> P: (laugh) Yeah, you can start. But I can't talk, I don't know how to talk. I don't have the level of good talking because I dropped out from primary school.

In a different interview, a caregiver gave me a similar response:

> Yue: If you could use three words, or just one word or term, to describe your daily life, which one would you choose?
> P: Oh, words to describe my life? I can't have much experience like that, I am not that educated. I only studied up till third grade.

When conducting these interviews, these caregivers were modest about themselves because, despite of saying that they were unable to share thoughts in logic, they later shared many experiences and information of their everyday life to me. While being capable of communication, it is noticeable that the participants both extend the meaning of schooling from studying. In their words, schooling could entitle the ability and the right of expressing yourself. This knowledge is further illustrated in another caregiver's words:

> P: (…) It is very necessary to study, they [the grandchildren] should try really
> hard in the school. People nowadays will not get respect from others if you are not
> educated. You would go out of the town and understand nothing.

It is necessary to note that all the aforementioned caregivers are grandparents to the participants who are 'home-staying' children. When they were of school age, the compulsory education policy was not initiated. In fact, most children in the fieldwork are the first of three generations in their families to have the nine-year compulsory education. As illustrated above, caregivers consider schooling as the means to gain the rights to respect and expression. According to observations, many families also view schooling as the means to a better life for children's future. Schooling is viewed as the means to earn financial capital for both children and the collective future of the family (Kjørholt, 2013; P. A. Kong, 2015). In many cases, schooling is considered the only option to achieve a good life. Caregivers shared about their experience of hardships and difficulties in farming, and discussed about how their children and children-in-laws work in the cities. Neither being a farmer nor a labor migrant is considered ideal or proper for children's future life because both require considerable amount of labor contribution but do not pay back enough financially. In this way, children need to be helped with making choices and caregivers have the authority in making these choices. China has two general exams for high school

10上学, which could be translated as 'going to school.'

entrance and college entrance, which are the 'keys' to the 'door' of higher education. Students in China need to take these two exams in order to attend high school and university. It is believed that, by finishing high school or higher degrees, young people could have more chances to get jobs that are less demanding and higher paid. Thus, many caregivers consider the most preferable way for the children to have a good future life, which should not involve farming or working in factories, is by studying hard and attending good high schools and universities.

The caregivers' views on schooling does not stand alone. Parents who work in cities also consider schooling as the vital key to the success of their children. As described in the background chapter, one major reason of parents becoming labor migrants is to provide financial support to their children's education (Mu & Hu, 2016). According to the participants, the majority of conversations they would have with parents and grandparents were about schooling, if they finished their homework, how did they do in previous exams, and so on. Some participants experienced their parents telling them to study hard as a reciprocity to parents' hard work. The importance of schooling from adults' perspective has shaped children's daily experience in many aspects. To some extent, 'home-staying' children are expected to view schooling as their responsibility and the only focus at this stage. In the photovoice activity, one 15-year-old 'home-staying' participant chose a photo of her favorite singer as what makes her feel happy. I further asked if she had the posters of this singer, she told me:

> P: I don't dare to put the poster on the wall at home, I am afraid that my mom would rip it off when she comes home and sees it. She might say, 'ah, no wonder you don't do well in exams, thinking about this kind of thing every day.' So, I put my posters away after I bought them, hide them well (laugh).

In another interview, a 14-year-old 'home-staying' participant shared her experience with her caregivers at home:

> P: They only talk about studying, studying, studying… When I am home on the weekend, my grandparents don't like me playing on my phone. They would take it away if they see it and ask me to read books. So, I just pretend I want to sleep and then play with the phone in my bed.

In both scenarios, families hold expectations on children to do well in schooling. Children expressed their negative attitudes toward the expectation and this attitude is rather prevalent among participants. Many participants stated that such expectation was impossible to achieve as they need leisure time outside of schooling. Meanwhile, they chose discrete methods to follow their own interest while avoiding conflicts with the adults, like hiding the poster and playing with phone in bed. Discourses have formative power in shaping people's actions and interactions to the others in a social world (Connolly, 1998). When the adults view schooling as the solely important focus of 'home-staying' children, adults express their expectations through sayings and actions. 'Home-staying' children responded with actions like avoiding adults to see the posters and secretly playing with the phone. Further, the expectations from adults became the dominant discourse of the childhood because adults as authority figures possess a more powerful position, compared to children. Other than hiding the leisure activities, the authority of family members could influence 'home-staying' children's understanding of their own identity, as one 14-year-old 'home-staying' participant responded to me:

Yue: Do you experience anything happy or not happy at school?

P: Well, I am a student, so every happy thing should be about study, like if others say, 'you have a chance to get in good high schools.', then I would be really happy. If I am not happy then it is about studying too, because students can only care about studying.

This participant attached feelings and emotions with the identity of being a student. As the adults expected him to put studying as the only focus of his current life, he internalized the expectations to be his identity. Thus, when I asked him about his feelings at school, he responded to me in the way that he felt obligated to. Because his identity was a student, he should feel happy or sad only about his study. Here we can see the formative power of discourse in shaping one's identity (Foucault, 1972). Even though 'home-staying' children might not think schooling as their top priority, the discourse could form how she thinks about herself. However, this might not be the whole picture. The same participant as in the above example also said:

P: I want to ask you, can studying really change life? I don't think it is so certain, because there are many people on the Internet who have really nice jobs and earn a lot of money, while they never go to college. So, I don't think it is only possible to get a good life through studying.

In another case, one 13-year-old 'home-staying' participant told me that he would like to join the army after high school instead of going to college because he likes mechanics and saw on the Internet that others who finished the army training could find good jobs afterwards. Nonetheless, families are not the sole source for children to evaluate the importance of schooling. In the fieldwork, many participants said that they thought their grandparents were exaggerating the positive outcome of schooling because of their limited understandings. "The elders would just tell us to study hard because that is what they know.", one participant told me.

Whether schooling is the only way to the success, children might get answers also from their peers. In the naming activity, which was the first activity conducted with participants in order to know their names and other basic information, a 14-year-old girl and a 14-year-old 'home-staying' boy discussed with me about one friend of them:

P1: We have this friend, he is already 16 years old, he also graduated from this school. He did not go to high school, instead he just went to (a city) and became a chef apprentice!

P2: Yeah! And he said that he would come back in New Year vacation and cook for us.

P1: He must be really good at cooking by then, also he can live how he wants when he is just 16 years old.

Right before this conversation took place, we were discussing about the school life. The two participants were both complaining that their current school day is too long for them to focus on any class and they found little interest in studying. One participant brought up this friend of them, who works as a chef apprentice instead of being in the high school as a 16-year-old. It seems as their friend sets an example of a possible life path other than studying in the high school. In the interviews, I asked the following question: "Would you discuss with your friends about labor migration?". Most of participants said yes, then they further explained as they would not talk about their parents' labor migration, but they discussed whether they would become labor migrants in the future. Sometimes they discussed about their friends who graduated from middle school and started working in

different fields instead of studying. Some of them described it as teasing others, as quoted "sometimes we say to each other that, if we cannot get in any high school, we will just go move bricks in the construction places in the cities (laugh)". It is obvious that participants share information with each other about their visions and their friends' stories relating to the future without schooling. Certainly, it is not to say that participants do not wish to continue education. While they discussed with peers about the future, many of them also stated their goals were to study hard and get in a good high school because they preferred this path and believed that it would lead to a good future life.

While being influenced by the adults in the families, who are generally considered as authoritative, these children gain experience and knowledge through quite diverse sources. As for being responsible of schooling, 'home-staying' children might have different responses from their families because of their experience and knowledge gained in other places. In certain ways, children might reject the narrative that schooling is the only way to a good life and choose an alternative path instead. These results challenge the previous discussion on the power of discourses. When we argue that adults' expectations on schooling has a formative power in shaping the interactions in 'home-staying' children's everyday lives and forming their identities, it is under the assumption that children are exclusively influenced by this one group of figures. As Foucault (1972) stated, discourses involve knowledge in this specific setting and knowledge generates power for the actors in discourses. In the discourse emphasizing that children should be responsible for schooling, adults make choices for the children based on their knowledge from life experiences. Their experience and age constitute their position as more powerful than the position of children in this discourse. However, adults' knowledge is no longer the sole source for 'home-staying' children to comprehend the importance of schooling. Children acquire information from peers and Internet to understand their possible future life. Thus, the newly introduced knowledge encourages children to find alternative paths from the way that adults suggested. Furthermore, quite contrary to how adults value the purpose of a good future, which is to improve the finance of family (p. 53), 'home-staying' children view the good future as living on their own with decent income. This links to the idea of Chinese individualism (Y. Yan, 2010), where young people potentially seek to leave the family collectives and emphasize their identities as individuals. I will discuss further about participants' influences to each other regarding individualism in the next analysis chapter.

5.2.2 An interdependent childhood
In addition to 'home-staying' childhood characterized with responsibility, interdependence is also essential in it. In the situation of parents migrating to work in cities, it is common that 'home-staying' children are taken care of by other family members. In this study, among fourteen participants who are 'home-staying' children, one participant has her mother as the primary caregiver and the remaining thirteen children have one or both grandparents as the primary caregivers. This confirms the care-giving system analysed in other 'home-staying' children research and statistics reports, which is that grandparents are the majority of caregivers to 'home-staying' children (Chen, Yang and Ren, 2015; Ye et al., 2010). The caring of grandparents could start at an early age. In several cases, grandparents became the primary caregiver of the participants when they were months old and kept on taking care of them, sometimes until the children move to another place for study or work. This potentially leads to a strong bond between grandparents and children. One of the participants stayed home until she was six, then moved to her parents' city during primary school education, and then moved back to her hometown for middle

school education. The grandmother of the participant described this experience in the following way:

> P: When she moved to [the city name] to be with her parents, I found it so hard to let her go! She was also like that. She kept on calling us and asked grandpa to take her back, then she was six years old. Even after being there for twenty-ish days, she was still calling us and said that she did not want to leave us.

In the drawing activity, children could use a different method than talking to express their feelings and experience. In drawings, participants presented their favorite activities and the close relationship they had. When asked to draw the person(s) they feel the closest with or the person who means the most to you, several participants drew their grandparents. Here is one of the drawings:

Figure 5.2 The picture drawn about the person(s) you feel the closest with/ means the most to you

In this picture, the participant drew her grandparents holding farming utensils as the persons she felt closest with. Further, she explained that her grandparents, especially her grandmother, were the family members she communicated the most with. On a daily basis, grandparents give care in both visible and invisible ways. The most obvious one is to cook and do laundry for everyone at home. Many grandparents described that their most worried experience was when their grandchildren were sick, then they took the children to clinics and hospitals in nearby cities for treatments. There are also invisible ways of caring. P. A. Kong (2015) found that the parenting in many rural Chinese areas constituted many hidden efforts when it came to the help on education, such as that parents were not involved in direct homework help but were actively engaged in creating a good learning environment for children. In the previous section, I described that families expected the children to fulfill their responsibility of schooling. At the same time, family members also believe that they have responsibilities in creating good environment for schooling. One aspect is to ease the financial burden, which reflects in parents' labor migration. The other aspect is the relief from household chores, where grandparents take the majority of the work. It is also to state that the 'home-staying' children's childhood does not necessarily resonate with the helplessness discourse in the public portrayals. Based on how participants experienced in their everyday lives, growing up with their grandparents is to receive physical, material, and emotional support, and it carries more meanings in this grandparent-grandchild relationship than simply as a substitute caregiver for children's parents.

As this section is named 'an interdependent childhood', it is to suggest that one characteristics stood out in the field work and it was the interdependence of the care-support system in 'home-staying' children's everyday lives. The first aspect of the interdependence is the extended support from other family members. While the primary caregiver of the participants are grandparents, the care system that supports them through the childhood does not merely depend on grandparents. One participant shared the drawing with me, which had the theme of 'your favorite place'

Figure 5.3 The picture drawn about your favorite place

The 15-year-old 'home-staying' girl described the drawing the following way:

> Yue: Could you describe this drawing to me? Explain it a bit?
> P: This is at my relative's house that belongs to my grandmother's sister. Our relationship is very nice, my grandmother has really nice relationship with her too. So, I would just call her *Nainai* (grandma in Chinese), with the dialect.
> Yue: What did you draw in this? Is this where your grandmother's sister lives?
> P: Yeah, yeah, on the left is the gate to her house, on the right is her house. The house has *Pashanhu*[11] on it, a lot of it. I really like this place, I go there a lot, it is so quiet and has some training facility. I don't know why people don't come here to play. I can feel not disturbed here.

In this case, the participant described her favorite place and the relationship between her and grandmother's sister. She used a linguistic example to state the closeness between the two of them, which is that she called grandmother's sister the same as her grandmother. In the opinion of the participant, the physical environment around grandmother's sister's house is her favorite place because she enjoys the quietness there. In the photovoice activity, with the theme of 'this makes me happy', the participant took a picture and explained that it was the same place as the drawing.

Figure 5.4 Photovoice about 'this makes me happy'

[11]爬山虎, a type of wall-climbing plants

Historically, because of the kinship, families in the Chinese countryside are inclined to build and extend the households in the same area as other family members live (Bélanger & Li, 2009). Nowadays, the legacy of it kept extended families in the same villages so that children could easily visit other relatives. In the interviews, participants shared several examples of extended family care in addition to their primary caregivers. One participant said that he would often visit his sister's home and had meals with her family, his sister also gives him pocket money sometimes. Another participant talked about how her aunt and uncle-in-law would take care of her when her grandparents were sick, also they would often have dinner together at both aunt's and grandparents' homes. When 'home-staying' children stay at home while their parents work in cities, the family that is also at home could be more than grandparents. In fact, through participants' experience, it shows that the system of care can be diverse and the family members are interdependent on each other to raise children in the family.

The second aspect of the interdependence is children's care and support of their caregivers and the family. On the weekends, I often observed that the participants, similar to many other peers, were driving electrical mopeds to the town, with their grandparents sitting behind. It was often for the errands such as grocery shopping and grandparents visiting their friends. Sometimes, participants drove to the town by themselves, but it was to buy fertilizers and medicine for grandparents at home. When participants drove to the town for having fun with their friends, they would often receive phone calls or text messages from their grandparents, asking them to bring certain goods or grocery back when they are finished. Driving the electrical moped was a quite prevalent thing among participants; among nineteen participants, thirteen of them have mopeds at home while the others take rides with their friends. Most of them were allowed to drive it when they became middle school students. Running small errands for the family was common among all participants, regardless of whether they were 'home-staying' children or not. In one way, it could reflect children's responsibility to the family. In the cases that grandparents are incapable of driving moped, children take the responsibility of the commute and purchase of necessities.

Another part of children's care and support is 'home-staying' children's emotional care to their grandparents. This aspect became obvious during the interviews with the grandparents. Because the elders in the village speak mostly dialect, I asked the children to join the interviews for translation and clarification. One question in the interview was 'did you experience any difficulty or hard moments while raising up the children?', one grandmother got emotional when describing taking care of her grandchildren when they were sick. The participant went to grab some tissue paper for grandmother and stood next to her, patting her back while she was sharing the experience to me. It was as if they experienced the hardship together and understood each other from the past situations.

5.2.3 A gendered childhood

'Home-staying' children are the ones who stay home in the countryside of China. As described in the background chapter, one characteristic of Chinese countryside is the gender role influenced by agriculture and kinship (Fei, 1984). Gender differentiates itself from sex, which is a biological distinction of male or female. Gender is based on sex, but extended from the biological stand to the meanings, expectations, and knowledge of the sex. If we view gender as a discourse, it could render various understandings depending on historical and cultural contexts (Connolly, 1998). Specifically in Chinese countryside, gender discourse has played an important role in shaping people's everyday lives. For example, the mother is often the one who stays home with the children in the situation where one parent is a labor migrant (Chang et al., 2011). One can argue that this decision

made in families certainly influenced by the gender discourse in Chinese countryside, which is that women are supposed to take care of the children while men take more physical labor works (Bélanger & Li, 2009). In this section, the influence and power of gender discourse in the everyday lives of 'home-staying' children will be presented through children's interactions with the family members and peers and their own understandings.

Discourses have the power in shaping our beliefs and knowledge and it further shapes the actions and interactions among people (Connolly, 1998). One impact from the gender discourse is the expectations that adults or family members have to the children based on their gender. A rather obvious difference in the fieldwork was that girls and boys had different curfews. On the weekends, the participants stayed home for two nights. When we hanged out in the town, the girls told me that they were expected to go home before dinner and then stayed home at night. Meanwhile, two boys in the interview said that their grandparents set the curfew at midnight. They also told me that people in the Internet café around midnight were mostly male. This variation is based on the understanding that girls are more vulnerable and likely to face risky situations outside at night than boys. It could also come from the expectation that girls should behave in the proper manner of staying home at night.

As introduced in the background chapter, traditionally girls are valued less than boys in the rural families because of the kinship system, where girls will eventually grow up and marry into another family (Pun, 2005). This first comes from the idea of viewing children as the future and financial assets to the family (Kjørholt, 2013). Meanwhile, boys are considered essential to the household because they will pass down the kinship (Ikels, 1996). The gender discourse became apparent in the practice of naming children. Currently, Chinese policy on childbirth is to allow two children born in one household in urban areas and three children in rural areas (Chen, Yang and Ren, 2015). Among my participants, families who wanted to give birth to boys put their wishes in naming their daughters. In the naming activities, participants explained the meaning of their names and told me that when families named their daughter with characters like Ting (婷), Man (满), Yuan (圆), it meant that they hoped to not have more daughters because these characters referred to the meanings of 'stop', 'filled', and 'full' for example. Gender discourse thus shapes people's understandings and influences families on naming their children.

This influence has further extended into everyday lives of 'home-staying' children. Because of the traditional gender ideas, siblings could be treated differently based on their gender. One 13-year-old girl once told me:

> "I think my family likes my brother more than me. They treat us differently. There was one time, my brother and I used my dad's phone together. I accidentally locked his phone and my dad scolded me for that. But if my brother deleted an important file on his phone, my dad would not scold him but just let it go. So, I feel it is so not fair, even though they think they treat us equally, because they give us the same food and clothes. But emotion and language are different from that. So, I feel that they value boys more than girls."

While being provided with the same material resource, the participant noticed the difference between her and her brother through parents' interactions with them. This participant and her siblings are mostly taken care by their grandparents. Their parents come home twice a year. The difference also lies in family practices at a distance, as the participant said that her parents would ask to video chat with her brother more than with

her. Despite the physical distance, actions like asking to video chat could still reinforce the gender preference on children themselves.

In the everyday lives of 'home-staying' children, there was a distinction of activities based on the gender difference. On the weekends, girls tended to hang out in bubble milk tea stores and grocery stores while boys were mostly in Internet café. In the photovoice activity, one girl presented a photo of the milk tea store as what makes her happy.

Figure 5.5 Photovoice 'what makes you happy'

She explained that this place made her happy because she could hang out with her friends here, they did not worry about studying but watched short videos on Tik Tok. Meanwhile, a boy presented a photo of Internet café as what makes him happy.

Figure 5.6 Photovoice 'what makes you happy'

The boy explained that the Internet café made him happy because he could be with his close friends. Sometimes, he did not play any video game on the computer but sat there, and chatted with others. Based on these information and observations, both milk tea store and Internet café served as physical spaces for the participants to be social with their friends while the places' basic function did not come as the primary reason for the participants to gather. While being the places for people to meet, the milk tea store and Internet café have a clear gender distinction as social spaces. This shows that gender discourse has a power in influencing 'home-staying' children's interactions with their peers and therefore shapes the activities and physical locations for them in their everyday lives.

Further, the gender discourse has a formative power in shaping children's understanding of their identity. When both adults and physical spaces reinforce the distinctions on gender, it envisions images of gender in the social world, such as what it means to be a girl, or a boy, dorms in gender, and gender-divided activities. So, this gender discourse does not only influence 'home-staying' children but all children in the fieldwork. Children would

internalize the discourse and expect their peers to act along with the gender distinction. In the school, most participants only hanged out with people of the same gender. One participant, who was a 15-year-old girl, hanged out with boys often and she was called as 'the girl around boys'. Another participant, who was a 14-year-old girl, told me that she used to be good friends with seven other girls and they lived in a dorm together. In the last year, three of them, including herself, had become close friends with four boys in the class. Then, the other five girls in the same dorm stopped talking to them. In her case, she and her friends were singled out and ignored by dorm mates because they hanged out with boys, which contradicted the gender distinction. Based on these two examples, we see that children internalized the gender discourse and they were specifically aware of others who were not following the gender rules. Thus, it is possible to state that gender discourse did not only shape their life and activities, but also influenced how they viewed and acted towards their peers based on gender.

5.2.4 A boring childhood

In the interviews with 'home-staying' children, there were two questions in the categories of school life and life experience, which were 'can you use three words to describe your school life?' and 'can you use three words to describe your everyday life?'. Most of the participants prefer to use one word or one term to describe it and many of them described both their school life and everyday life as *Wuliao* (无聊). In the dictionary, this word is described as 'a feeling of emptiness in the mind, nothing to care about' (Xinhua, 2013). When I asked the participants about their reasoning of choosing this word to describe their life, they further described their feelings about the everyday life as 'nothing to do', 'always repeat the same things', 'nothing excited happened', and other terms similar to those. These responses could be different from people's expectations of an 'ideal' childhood, especially in the cultures where the ideal childhood should be fun and playful. In the following text, I will further demonstrate why the participants consider their everyday life boring and the factors involved in this feeling.

What constitutes the boredom comes from mainly three aspects, according to the interviews. The first aspect is the lack of motivation in classes, the second one is the lack of activities in the school, and the third one is the limited activities on the weekends. The lack of motivation in classes comes from both discussions with the participants and my observation. In the school of the fieldwork, the participants were in 9th grade, which was considered an important grade for the students to prepare for the upcoming high school entrance exam. According to the participants, it is common among schools that the middle school study would be heavily exam-based because of the upcoming national exam. During the two-month fieldwork, the exam-based teaching was reflected in the daily schedules of the participants' class. They only had classes of the subjects in the exam, which were Chinese, English, mathematic, physics, politics, chemistry, geography, and biology. They did not have any music or art class, and had two P.E. classes in two months. One 14-year-old boy described the daily school life to me as:

> "School is so boring, just study study study all the time. Sitting in the classroom from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. is killing me. I don't understand what the teachers are saying, even when I tried hard. Then I ended up just sleeping in the class all the time."

What this participant said corresponds to my observation in the class. In the classroom, I sat in the corner of the last row with a student next to me, which gave me a good chance to observe everyone from the back. There were six rows of students in total, with eight

students in a row as 2-4-2 formation. During school time, it almost seemed like there was a division line between the third and fourth row, where the students in the front were writing notes and focusing whereas the students behind were drawing on their notebooks, reading novels, and sleeping. There was only one method of teaching, with the teacher lecturing in the front with the blackboard, while students listening and writing notes. During the fieldwork, there was no other formats such as group work taken place. When the school prioritized the upcoming exam, students who find no motivation in the learning ended up feeling bored in the school. In addition to the reason of exam preparation, the school did not have enough art, music, P.E. classes because of the lack of resources, both of material equipment and teachers.

The second aspect of the 'boring' everyday life is the lack of activities in the school. This perspective first appeared in an interview with a 14-year-old 'home-staying' girl:

> Yue: What words would you use to describe your life at school?
> P: Non-changing, I would say. Everything is always the same with no changes. Despite the poem reading before the National Day celebration, we have no activity here. Even the primary school students have no celebration on Children's Day now. I heard from them that it was all cancelled. We only had a small celebration for New Year, just in our class. As for sports competition, the school would select few students to the town for competition.

Here when the participant described the school life, she used examples of extracurricular activities in the school. She did not use the word 'boring', but what she implied in the text was similar to the meaning of 'boring'. Another 14-year-old 'home-staying' boy mentioned the same aspect in the interview:

> Yue: What words would you choose to describe your school life?
> P: I think it is… boring and rigid. This school has no activity.
> Yue: What kind of activities would you want to have here?
> P: According to me then it would be like New Year celebration, like a grand ceremony. But here has no stage. I am using my old school as a comparison here, that school would have activities every year, we celebrated Christmas eve. Then there were competitions on poem reading, singing, and also sports competition for example.

Here the participant viewed the current school as boring in comparison with his previous school. He studied in the city where his parents lived, then moved back to hometown for the middle school. This was a rather common situation for 'home-staying' children because they need to take the high school entrance exam where their *hukou* belongs, which was discussed in chapter 2. This conversation reflects the differentiated resources in Chinese schools form urban to rural (Mu & Hu, 2016), the lack of a stage or a hall room in the countryside school would already obstruct the organization of many types of activities. Participants also complained about their school's facilities through the comparison with other schools they saw on the Internet, which were shared to the public through apps like Tik Tok by students in other schools.

The third aspect of the boredom is the limited activities on the weekends at home. The participants lived in a boarding school, they went home every Friday afternoon and came back to school on Saturday nights or Sunday mornings. When asking what they normally do on weekends, the majority said that they would play their phones for the whole weekend. In the school, it was banned to bring their phones. Thus, the weekend was the only time for them to use it. In the interviews, there was a section of questions about

technology and the use of Internet. Among the participants, they said that the amount of time they used on Internet was about 50% to 80% of the time on weekends. Many said that they would be on their phone the whole day except eating or doing homework. When asking them why they spent much time using the Internet, the participants replied that they were bored at home and there was nothing to do but watching stuff on the Internet. Meanwhile, the participants talked with me about the activities which they would have been interested in:

> "Even when we go to the town, there is not much to do but drink bubble tea or go to Internet café, then it's still playing online games [like on the phone]. I hope that we could have an amusement park, just like in [the nearby city]. Then we could have so much fun in there."

Here we can see that the participants spent a lot of time on smartphones and Internet mostly because Internet is the only alternative to studying on the weekends. Participants also described that they used Internet to 'relax' and 'take breaks from studying'. It could be argued that the lack of activities on the weekends is the main reason for participants to feel bored and use Internet.

Meanwhile, the caregivers expressed a rather negative attitude towards using smartphone. One caregiver responded to me in the interview:

> Yue: What words would you use to describe your everyday life?
> P: Quite happy, just as long as my grandchildren have good health and good study, then I am happy. If they listen to the elderly like me, I would be happy. They should study, read more books, play the phone less. Using the phone is no good to their brain, then [the brain] wouldn't be good for studying, you know.

Here we can see that the caregiver believed that using smartphone would not help and even prevent the children from studying. This is similar to how the public relates 'home-staying' children to Internet. The use of Internet among 'home-staying' children is prevalent and has been described as problematic in several research and media, the narrative describes the use of Internet as the reason of 'home-staying' children's social misbehaviors and bad school performance (She, 2013). Sometimes the news and research use the term 'Internet addiction' (Mu & Hu, 2016) to describe the 'home-staying' children who spend large amount of time on Internet. As She (2013) stated, there is a strong research focus on the consequence of Internet use among 'home-staying' children, but few on the exploration of why 'home-staying' children use Internet more frequently, or why the use of Internet is highlighted when relating to the discussion about 'home-staying' children. In this study, it gives a possible approach through children's boredom in their everyday lives, which comes from the lack of activities and could lead to the frequent use of Internet.

5.3 The conflicted and coexisting discourses, constructions, and narratives of 'home-staying' childhood

In the fields of charity, media, and public policies, 'home-staying' children are represented as the helpless children. Without their parents, these children grow up in an incomplete household where they are alone and at risk. This image was, however, challenged by the everyday life experience of 'home-staying' children's families. Children rejected the helplessness discourse because it does not resonate with the support system they had at home. As Jenks (1996) stated, childhood could be a social construct that differentiates from the idea of a universal, biological childhood. The notion that 'children are supposed

to be taken care of by their parents' is a dominant discourse (UNCRC, 1989) but the 'home-staying' children's childhood could vary from that. Built from the kinship system, households in the Chinese countryside have the historical understanding of elders taking care of the youngsters. Raising up children is considered as a family responsibility that might involve two generations (parents and grandparents) (Gottlieb & DeLoache, 2016) and the generation of children (Mayall, 1996). In the fieldwork, the family support system even extended from the single-family line to the larger kinship that involves grandparents' siblings, uncles and aunts, and in-laws. Participants who are 'home-staying' children often mentioned that they felt no difference in their life from others because both groups of children had family members taking good care of them. When 'home-staying' children refused to identify their childhood different from the childhood of others, it became necessary to discuss the complexity about the social construction of childhood. Because 'home-staying' children's parents work in cities, there are certain characteristics uniquely constituting their childhood, such as physical absence of parents, children traveling in vacations for visits, and some children receiving support money from parents annually. Their childhood is also constructed by the local social and physical context, such as they stay in school 6 days a week and they are not allowed to use phone when in school. Thus, participants cannot call or contact parents whenever want to, but friends are always accessible in person. These conditions constructed their childhood and participants' descriptions towards their childhood. Furthermore, these descriptions were prevalent among both 'home-staying' children and non-'home-staying' children. Meanwhile, the helplessness discourse of 'home-staying' children focuses on their parents' status instead of the social context, where children live in the Chinese countryside with their families and friends. Thus, a potential problem of this discourse is that it emphasizes the risks of 'home-staying' children's life relating to parents' absence but ignores the potential opportunities and risks in other aspects of these children's daily experience. Based on the experience and knowledge from participants, we could argue that the helplessness discourse does not represent the everyday lives of 'home-staying' children.

Another aspect of constructing 'home-staying' childhood is to explore if various constructions of the ideal childhood result in people holding different expectations of the childhood. Prout and James (2015) described childhood as an actively negotiated set of social relationships. Based on the interviews with caregivers, we could summarize that education, or schooling specifically, is important for a proper 'home-staying' childhood in the perspective of adults. Oftentimes, the caregivers required children to spend time only for schooling-related activities. They urged children to study because schooling was considered the only option to a better future life and children could not understand such importance yet because they are immature. Prout and James (2015) explained that the immaturity of children is a biological fact of life but the ways in which this immaturity is understood and made meaningful are a fact of culture. The immaturity of children was interpreted by the caregivers as the inability of making right choices, thus, caregivers need to take the responsibility of making choice for the children. The immaturity of 'home-staying' children was often described by caregivers as *Budongshi* (不懂事), which literally means the person who does not understand things. In this context, it is used as that the children could not understand family's sacrifices to support their education and life.

On the other hand, 'home-staying' children view their childhood a bit different from the caregivers. While participants agreed to the importance of schooling, they were not as motivated in studying as adults expected. Participants described their everyday life as 'boring', which was connected to their experiences in real life and on the Internet. They hoped to have more activities both within and outside of the school and some of them

envied the life of other students by watching their uploaded videos. Some participants also hoped to have a future different from constant studying as they were inspired by peers in both real and virtual worlds. Here the Internet provided a medium for 'home-staying' children to explore the choices and possibilities and granted them a space of individual practice (Y. Yan, 2010). While anticipating to have more freedom outside family's expectations, 'home-staying' children also expressed their interdependence with the family. They understood the immaturity of children as they should not take much responsibility yet and the family need to support them in chores and finance. Thus, the situation demonstrates a certain complexity of the idea of individualism among 'home-staying' children, as they desired individual freedom accompanied by family provision. In the next analysis chapter, I will further discuss the influence of Internet and how does it shape 'home-staying' children's life experience in family structures, peer relations, and individualism.

From the fieldwork, we found that the childhood of 'home-staying' children was constructed with different discourses and meanings, based on various narratives and ideas. From the media and policy-making perspectives, these children were depicted as helpless and dependent. The adults in their families perceived these children as the ones who held responsibilities of schooling and supporting the family in the future. From participants' own perspective, they were dependent to their families but they viewed their life with possibilities outside schooling and family expectations. Additionally, they rejected the helplessness discourse from the public. Though these constructions of 'home-staying' childhood, to some extent, conflicted to each other, they coexisted at the same time. This proved that there was no single representation of 'home-staying' childhood and there were constant dynamics in these narratives and ideas.

5.4 Summary

In this analysis chapter I have discussed everday life experience of 'home-staying' children using the concept of discourse (Foucault, 1972) and social construction theories. The chapter started with presenting the helpless children discourse and how 'home-staying' children perceived this narrative. The second section of this chapter aimed to explain major characteristics in participants' everyday life. Here the important actors in their life were family members, peers, and adults at school. Their daily activities majorly took place at school and home, while going to Internet café or town center on weekends. The second section of the chapter demonstrated how the 'home-staying' childhood is constructed by social, historical, and cultural elements in this context. Participants' childhood entailed responsibilities, interdependence, gender roles, and schooling, which was complex and therefore contradicted the helplessness discourse of 'home-staying' children.

6 Societal changes and the (re)shaping of 'home-staying' children's family relation

In the previous chapter, we discussed the helplessness discourse of 'home-staying' children and how their childhood is constructed within specific cultural, physical, and historical contexts. In this chapter, the discussion will focus more on the relations between 'home-staying' children and other actors in their life. As Qvortrup and Mayall interpreted, childhood is a structural form independent from individual children's age, and it is an essential component of a social order where childhood is a first and separate condition of the lifespan whose characteristics are different from the following lifespans (Mayall, 2002; Qvortrup, 2009). These statements explored the idea that childhood as a structure would continuously exist while individual children grow out of it. While this structure remains constant and universal, its temporal location in generational history means that its character is shaped by changes in the laws, policies, discourses, and social practices through which childhood is defined (James & James, 2004). Meanwhile, it is essential to link this generational character with family relations because the understanding of childhood could be dependent on the understanding of adulthood, and generation is a key concept here (Mayall, 2002). As Qvortrup stated, both childhood and parenthood have structural attributes relative to each other (Alanen, 2009). When living at a distance, parents and children could both experience certain fluidity in the concepts of generational order and ordering. Thus, 'home-staying' children's childhood could be understood as a childhood shaped under specific societal conditions. Based on the empirical data, some societal changes stand out in shaping the everyday life of 'home-staying' children, which are the rising importance of education and the increasing access to the Internet. For the first aspect, we will discuss the education in 'home-staying' children's everyday life. While the responsibility of schooling is explained in the previous chapter, here I will further elaborate on social relations through focus on the importance of schooling. The second aspect is to illustrate how increased access to Internet partakes in shaping 'home-staying' children's family relations. The discussion will focus on the Internet as a tool for communication with parents and the Internet as a virtual community without physical limits, and discuss how adults potentially lose the authority over children because of the Internet. In the third section, I will combine these changes with the labor migration to discuss how the childhood of 'home-staying' children is shaped by these societal changes.

This chapter aims to extend the discussion of the previous chapter, where the main particularities of 'home-staying' children's everyday life experience were illustrated, to an examination of how 'home-staying' children's family relation could have changed by the characteristics of their social circumstances.

6.1 Education and the path to a better future

There are several societal changes in relation to the education of 'home-staying' children, and the first aspect is public policy. In 2008, China conducted further approaches to implement nationwide free compulsory education in order to provide access to education for both cities and the countryside (CRC, 2012). One of the approaches was the 'Two waivers and one subsidy' (*Liangmian Yibu*) policy, which waives tuition and supply fees

and subsidizes boarding expenses for students from low-income families (UNICEF, 2014). This policy was conducted in the local village of fieldwork in addition to free compulsory education. Some caregivers also confirmed that the children in their households received this subsidy for boarding expenses. The government has also implemented changes in the curriculum in order to have more school subjects which are not exam-based (CRC, 2012). According to China's national report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Social Practice[12] as a school subject became mandatory for students from 3rd to 12th grade (CRC, 2012). Based on the policies, we could tell that a focus from the government is to shrink the gap of education quality between cities and the countryside.

The other aspect of the societal changes is briefly discussed in the previous chapter, where family perceives farming and labor migration as not ideal for children's future; rather, the family considers education as the only way for 'home-staying' children to have a 'better future.' This belief is constituted by two reasons. The first is the Chinese education system, in which the system highlights the importance of academic performance. Students need to take national exams in order to continue their education. The second aspect is the limitations of being a migrant worker. As mentioned in the background chapter, labor migrants face barriers in migrating to cities as permanent residents because of the Chinese hukou system. While working in factories could bring more income to the family, labor migrants experience prejudice and potential discrimination in cities (Pun, 2005). When caregivers hoped to provide a 'better future' for their children and families, the comparison was with the life of themselves and their own parents (i.e. grandparents of research participants). If 'home-staying' children were becoming labor migrants like their parents, the family considered that they could not receive respect and social status in cities, because labor migrants are the ones who failed to continue to higher education. In this situation, societal changes lead to a specific set of knowledge about education among the adults in the family. This knowledge is generational because the understanding was built upon a shared experience which the older generation had in specific social and historical contexts.

While perceiving education as the best option for the children, families go to great efforts to ensure the opportunity of education to their children. This is also one of the main reasons for adults to work in cities. Meanwhile, it becomes necessary to ask whether labor migration has shaped families' expectation on their children, and eventually shaped the family relations between 'home-staying' children and their family members.

6.1.1 Education policies in practice in the school

The fieldwork was conducted in a rural school with about 650 students from first to ninth grade. This school was one of the institutes that receive help from the 'Two waivers and one subsidy' policy. Students in the school had free education, and middle schoolers paid for their boarding fees because they stayed overnight at school. The students with financial difficulties receive a subsidy on the boarding fee. The provincial education bureau is directly in charge of the school instead of the local education department. This is a rather recent policy among rural schools in Jiangxi province, which aims to decrease the processing time of executives from the bureau to individual schools in the countryside. This policy specifically targets rural schools with poorer infrastructures so that they could collect direct funding from the education bureau. Additionally, the school received lunch subsidy from

[12] A class that aims to teach children social skills and requires volunteering and reflections as homework.

the government as a part of the nutrition improvement program because rural children experience an average of 12% development delay comparing to same age urban children (Liu et al., 2013). These policies ensured children's access to education, aimed to solve the malnutrition issue among rural children, and improved the efficiency of executives from bureau to school.

In the meantime, the government implemented an alteration in the national curriculum in order to increase the interest in subjects. The alteration was mainly on general education in social practice, such as volunteering, art, music, and P.E. (CRC, 2012). It was also required to add laboratory practices in Physics and Chemistry. While the policy required more diversity in subjects, it was rather difficult in practice. The first concern is the lack of resources of space and material. In the school, there was one teaching building for all students. There were two spare rooms outside of the classrooms and the teacher's office, and one of them was used as a meeting room. The school could not hold individual rooms for laboratory, music, or art teaching subjects. Furthermore, the school lacks the equipment needed for these subjects. When teaching physics, the teacher had one set of circuits with battery and light bulbs. She used it for demonstration, and students watched how she did the experiment without practicing themselves. On another occasion, I was held responsible for a P.E. class while acknowledging that the only sports equipment the school had was a basketball. The teacher further told me that students had P.E. class once every two weeks, even if scheduled each week. Thus, it is adequate to conclude that the limitation of physical resources restricted the possibilities of activities in this school, which was a common issue among rural schools.

Another aspect that potentially limits the implementation of policies in practice was the lack of teachers. Teachers in the school told me that most of the teachers here were on a three-year contract with the school. This was connected to a local government policy for distributing more teachers to the countryside. Teachers who passed the public teaching qualification exam were distributed to different schools. Because the schools in cities were more popular than the ones in the countryside, teachers assigned to rural schools can only move to urban schools after working for three years in the countryside. This policy helped rural schools to have more teachers and more subjects. However, most of the teachers moved to cities after three years of teaching. There could be many reasons for teachers to leave, and one reason could be the lack of infrastructure and convenience in the countryside. As one participant, a 15-year-old boy told me in the interview:

> "Teachers always leave when they can. No one likes to stay here. They complain that there is no proper shower in the dorm, and this place doesn't have any shopping malls or other similar infrastructures. For example, we had a geography teacher last year, but she also left."

While having the policy to support the school in recruiting more teachers, the frequent mobility of teachers made it difficult for schools to improve the teaching quality. Furthermore, the policy brought the teachers to the school but could not bring enough teachers for all subjects. Thus, the school had to prioritize the subjects which were important in the national exams. The class of research participants only had classes of exam subjects because they were to take the exam at the end of the year. Pupils of lower grades had classes as long-term preparations for this important exam. For example, the first and second graders only took Chinese and Math classes because of lacking teachers and for exam preparation. The school remained in a strong exam-based system even though the national curriculum required schools to become multi-oriented and diverse.

Education-wise, the school functioned as an institute for the preparation of the national exam.

6.1.2 School as a second home

Because the school was strongly exam-oriented, students spent the majority of their time in the school to attend classes, write exam exercises, and correct exercises with teachers' supervision. To fulfill the demand for exam preparation, the school started a boarding section for middle schoolers in 2015. In China, there are 21.9 million middle school boarding students, which makes out 43.3% of all middle schoolers (Chen, Yang and Ren, 2015). In the countryside, 39.8% of primary schoolers and 61.6% of middle schoolers live in school dorms in 2012 (Liu et al., 2013). The increase of boarding schools in rural China was mainly for the students schooling a long distance from their homes. The boarding school system could improve their living conditions by less commuting and providing school meals. The school in the fieldwork was different from that because all students lived in the range of 5 kilometers and the village had two more middle schools that students could choose in the nearby town. This school started the boarding system for extending school hours in the evening and for managing students' daily routine, the students therefore lived in the school for other reasons than the factor of distance. Here is the daily schedule of my participants as middle schoolers:

6:40-7:00 getting up	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thur.	Fri.	Sun.
7:10-7:50 morning reading	English	English	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese	
7:50-8:15 breakfast						
8:15-9:10 first class	Math	Physics	Math	Math	P.E.	Math
9:20-10:05 second class	Math	Geogra-phy	Politics	Math	English	Math
10:15-11:00 third class	English	English	Math	Chinese	Biology	English
11:10-11:55 fourth class	Chinese	Physics	Chinese	English	Geogra-phy	Chinese
11:55-12:20 lunch						
12:30-14:00 noon nap						
14:10-15:00 fifth class	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese	Physics	Chinese
15:10-16:00 sixth class	Chemis-try	Chemis-try	English	English	Physics	Chemis-try
16:10-17:00 seventh class	Politics	Biology	Chemis-try	Chemis-try		
17:20-17:50 dinner						
17:50-18:30 laundry/ shower time						
18:30-19:10 first evening class	Math	Math	Physics	English		Physics
19:15-20:00 second evening class	Math	Math	Chinese	Politics		Physics
20:10-20:50 third evening class	Chemis-try	Math	Chinese	Chemis-try		Chemis-try

21:00-21:40 fourth evening class	English	Chinese	Chinese	Chemis-try		Physics
22:00 light out						

Table 6.1 Daily routine of the middle school section on schooldays

Here we could see that participants have a full schedule from 6:40 to 22:00 on every weekday. As mentioned before, schooldays are from Sunday to Friday, so participants have this routine for six out of seven days every week. Living in a boarding school could potentially shape many aspects of one's everyday life, especially the time at school is significantly more than the time with family members. As one participant described, "school is like my second home now." The relations participants had in the school could contribute to reshaping the family relationships that children have with their families.

In the interviews, I asked one question, "do you feel any difference in everyday lives comparing to your peers who (do not) have parents at home?", to all participants. This was to explore whether 'home-staying' children subjectively perceive any difference in their lives in comparison to their peers. The majority of participants responded that they did not feel any difference, which reflects to what they shared to me in the previous chapter, and many of them mentioned their life at school to support this. One participant who is a 14-year-old 'home-staying' girl responded to that question as follows:

> Yue: Do you feel any difference in your everyday life compared to your peers who have parents at home?
> P: No, I don't feel any difference. We do the same thing together at school, take all the classes together, buy some snacks during the break, and chat in the dorm at night. Whether having parents at home or not does not matter here, we are all the same at school.

Here the participants claimed that she does not feel any difference from her peers because they had the same life at school, which was presenting the circumstance of school as an independent space from the family's situation. In the previous discussions, participants had described that the few times that they felt different from others was when they were at home because parents would discipline their children more than grandparents did. Some also claimed that parents would cook a bigger meal than grandparents on weekends. In the boarding school, the aspects that could make them feel different from their parents became less obvious than at home. This could be an advantage of boarding school, considering some 'home-staying' children did not want to be related with their parents' labor migration.

Living in school could shape children's experiences in many aspects. First, school as a physical space where participants spend the majority of their time is an essential part of their daily life. In the drawing activity, a 15-year-old 'home-staying' girl drew the hallway outside of her classroom as her favorite place in everyday life.
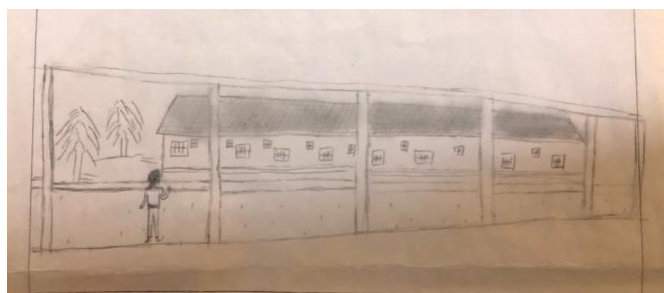
Figure 6.1 The drawing of 'your favorite place'

The participant explained the reason for drawing this painting as:

> "I drew this because this was the first place coming up in my mind… It is a pretty spot where you could see some nature and the dorm building. I remember that we always hang out in this hallway during breaks. In the winter, you could feel the sun here, and it is warm."

According to the participant, we could see the importance of this hallway is reflected in the experience she had in the space. Those memories were in relation to her friends who hang out together during breaks. This expression is prevalent among participants, based on the empirical data, many of their best memories happened in the school. In the photovoice activity, some participants chose the snack store, basketball field, and dorms as the subjects of 'what makes me happy'.

Figure 6.2 The photovoice of 'what makes me happy'

A 14-year-old participant presented the above photo, which is the dorm she shared with eight other girls. When being asked why she chose this photo in the photovoice activity, she described that she and her friends had many fun memories in the dorm:

> "You know, my best friends also live in this dorm. The light is out at ten o'clock at night, but nobody goes to sleep at that time! We would just talk about gossip and random topic. Oh yeah, [my friend] likes to tell horror stories to us, sometimes she told stories with flashlight on her face so it is scarier [laugh]. But the teacher on patrol could see the flashlight through window or hear us laughing. When the teacher came to ask us, who was the one being noisy, we would be quiet and never point at anyone of us so that the teacher would either punish everyone or no one."

In this activity, the participant described some instances of her dorm life to me. The first aspect is the activities they do together in the dorm, such as chatting and storytelling. The second aspect is how they acted in response to the teacher's discipline. When the teacher was trying to find the misbehaving one, everyone in the dorm formed in an 'alliance' against the authority of the teacher. It seemed as they acted and reacted to the potential punishment together. The dorm is not only a physical space that girls share as living space, but it is also a symbolic space where everyone in it forms into a sense of together-ness. This relation of belonging is also reflected in the participant's description, where she perceived the girls in the dorm as her best friends.

To state that children feel the school as a second home does not only refer to the amount of time they spent in the school but also the relations they had with peers in the school.

These relations came from the interactions they experienced with each other and eventually generated shared understandings of their life. In the previous chapter, we discussed that schooling was considered by adults as the responsibility of children. Meanwhile, participants in the research elaborated on their understanding of schooling and education, which was different from adults' expectations. Participants' understandings about schooling and their future predominantly came from the discussions and interactions they had with peers, and school was the physical space where they could spend the majority of time with their peers. When schooling became the dominant activity in their everyday lives, firstly, participants eventually valued their relations with peers as the most important relations. This is reflected in observations and several drawings from the participants, where they considered friends and dorm life essential for them. Secondly, participants' relations with their families were changed because of schooling. In the understanding of the importance of schooling, participants relied on the knowledge from their peers than from their caregivers. As quoted from some participants, "grandparents think schooling is the only path to a better future because they are the older generation."

6.2   Increasing access to Internet and the rising individualism

In 2018, 87% of rural Chinese children (under the age of 18) had access to the Internet, which is 34% higher than the data of 2015 (CNNIC, 2019). In the fieldwork, the prevalence of the Internet was obvious in many aspects. First, all of the households I visited had Wi-Fi installed at home, while some of the houses had not installed a TV. As one participant described, "the Internet is more necessary than television because you can watch everything online anyway." Second, in observations and hangouts on the weekends, participants frequently used smartphones and talked about their experience in social media, online shopping, and so on. On one weekend that I went to a milk tea store with five girls, they were using their phone to take selfies, watch short videos on Tik Tok, and chatting with friends on QQ and WeChat[13]. Third, the school has a no-phone policy, which means that all students are restricted from bringing their smartphones to school. This rule is conducted in all local schools, which underlines the prevalence of smartphones and the Internet among children in the Chinese countryside in contemporary times. While the prevalent use of the Internet is evident amongst participants, one question is how the use of the Internet shapes their family relations. On the one side, people's attitudes towards using the Internet could be different and complex. In the interviews, caregivers expressed their negative attitude towards children using smartphones because using a smartphone is taking their time away from studying. Meanwhile, caregivers used smartphones to connect with their children and in-laws in the cities. For some caregivers who could not use a smartphone, their 'home-staying' children helped them to communicate with the family who had migrated. On the other side, the Internet as a virtual space provided children with both expanding their social experience and enhancing the relations with friends in the community. Children also explored their interests of hobbies and skills in the communities on the Internet. Furthermore, the rapid increase of Internet usage in this decade has made this generation distinct from the previous generations. Internet, as a virtual community, could potentially become the platform for children to express their individual identities outside the structure of a family. In this section, we will first discuss the practical use of the Internet among participants and their families, then illustrate what

[13] Tik Tok is a popular short video application on phones, where users can watch ten-second videos uploaded by others. QQ and WeChat are both popular Chinese communication/social media applications on phones.

the Internet means to the participants, and last to explore the rising individualism with the Internet and in which ways the increased use of the Internet partakes in shaping the family relations of participants.

6.2.1 Family relations through Internet

Contact with their parents was one of the practical uses of the Internet among the participants who are 'home-staying' children. They could have contact with their parents on Saturday, because phones had to be put away during schooldays. The frequency of contact with their parents ranged from once a week to once a month. While being physically apart for the majority time of a year, parents and children often communicated through applications on their smartphones. According to participants, video chatting was the most used method for them to talk with their parents. They often communicated on weekends, when 'home-staying' children could use smartphones and grandparents were next to them in the video chats. While finding the prevalence of 'home-staying' children communicating with their parents on the Internet, I thought it would be relevant to ask participants about what topics they often talked with their parents. Thus, in the interviews, I asked the question of "what do you normally chat about with your parents on the Internet?" to all of the participants who are 'home-staying' children. Here is one of the conversations:

> Q: Do you use applications like WeChat and QQ to talk with your parents?
> A: Yeah, of course. We send messages sometimes, but mostly they would call me with video chat on weekends.
> Q: What do you normally chat with your parents on these applications?
> A: They would always ask how I am doing in the school, what is the grade of my recent exam, whether I behave in the class, those kinds of questions. They would also ask how my grandparents are doing. Also, ask if we have enough money at home.

From this dialogue, participants responded that they chatted mostly in the aspects of school performance, relations with their caregivers and whether children and caregivers are financially sufficient. These are the common topics among other 'home-staying' children and their parents. Parents seem to care the most about children's school performance, which corresponds to the previous discussion in adults valuing schooling as the most important responsibility of 'home-staying' children. Another aspect of their chats is that conversations were dominated by questions from parents to children. In those video chats, parents would ask children how they and their grandparents are doing at home while children hardly ask similar questions back. Many 'home-staying' children have rather vague information about their parents' working location and their jobs in cities. When being asked why they did not know such information about their parents, participants replied that their parents thought they as children did not need to know about this. "We should pay all the attention to studying at this age," one participant described what her parents required her to do. As Alanen (2009) described, a generational order is a structured network of relations between generational categories that are positioned in and act within necessary interrelations with each other. Even though 'home-staying' children and their parents live at a distance, the structure of the family is still confirmed through their interrelations on the Internet. Their roles as 'parents' and 'children' were obvious to each other when parents inquired information about children's everyday life but rejected children to ask about their life because such interactions defined their parent-child relations in this specific social context. Thus, to a certain extent, we could argue that the Internet serves as a medium in confirming the family relations of 'home-staying' children.

Another perspective of the family relations at a distance is that 'home-staying' children are dependent on their parents' material resources. Children's dependency on parents' economy is a common characteristic of parent-child relations. Oldman once argued that the generational ordering of social relations between parents and children is under the logic of production (Oldman 1994, in Alanen 2009, p. 167). In the case of 'home-staying' children, the factors which shape the family relations could be complex, but the material resource is a vital influence connected to the quality of housing, the quality of schooling, and the character of children and caregiver's life at home. Many participants responded that the main interaction with their parents through the Internet was to ask for pocket money. The spending in the school, such as bottled water and snacks, was provided in cash by caregivers at home. Participants often asked their parents to give them money to the 'virtual wallet$_{14}$' in WeChat and paying for their spending on online shopping. Because of the technology improvement in stores and shops, they no longer have to ask for cash from the adults at home. 'Home-staying' children asked parents to give them money in the virtual wallet so that they could go out with their friends in the town and shop online. Though 'home-staying' children and their parents were physically distant, children's dependence on parents for money in their mobile phone, which then again gives access to friends and to spaces and times outside the home (Mayall, 2002) was still apparent in this scenario. Meanwhile, in some cases, 'home-staying' children got pocket money only if they did well in their exams. Some parents also set up restrictions on children's behaviors if they wanted to get pocket money. But built on what said above, here we could adapt the generational order theory to 'home-staying' children in relation to their parents. The interaction about pocket money resonates with the cultural and economic aspects as the constitutive principle in social ordering (Alanen, 2009). The parent-child relationship is not necessarily symmetrical because parents could have more power in the culture where obedience of the younger generation is highlighted, and parents have a job with income. Meanwhile, this power relation reinforced the order of parents and children, thus further constitute the role of each party. Based on the material, we could state that the economic dependency of 'home-staying' children on parents is obvious despite the physical distance. It is possible to claim that the Internet built frequent interactions between parents and 'home-staying' children on the topic of material resources, reinforced the authority of parents to children, and constituted the generational ordering between 'home-staying' children and their parents.

6.2.2 A virtual community without physical limits

Other than contact with their parents, the major use of the Internet among participants focused on their interests with friends and people on the Internet. Some participants stated that the biggest influence that the Internet brought to them was being able to see more things than what happened in the village. As illustrated in the previous chapter, some participants considered their school a boring place because they had seen videos of schools with interesting activities in social media. One participant described to me about her experience with the Internet:

> Q: What do you think are the impacts that Internet has made to you?
> A: Mmm... I think…it made me to see more and know more. I would not have known that [referring to a conversation] if I did not have access to the Internet. Also, on [a website], someone asked a question of 'how does your college

14 A function in WeChat application that allows users to store money and pay through this application.

acceptance letter look like'. There you see the letters from the Chinese best colleges. I can't even imagine going to universities like those. I think people do not dare to upload the pictures of their college acceptance letters in that forum if their schools aren't that good [laugh].

This participant discussed two aspects of the Internet's impact on her. The first is that she learned about world news and more information about other countries through the Internet. The second aspect is that, on the Internet, she saw people admitted to the top Chinese universities, to which she could not imagine going. The Internet is a virtual space where the participant could access more information and people than she experienced in the village, which possibly provided her with new information in everyday life.

Additionally, Internet performs as a community where participants found people with similar interests on this platform. Online gaming is a popular topic among participants, and many of them were involved in group chats and forums of various games. On behalf of discussing games, they also chatted about their everyday lives with each other in those chats. One participant told me that, because of these group chats, he met friends from other provinces in China, and they would share their life experiences with each other. Another participant said that she was a huge fan of Chen Linong and she joined in an online fan forum of this singer. Every day, there were people posting photos, videos, and blogs about this singer in the forum. "I like that we could share our appreciations of that singer together in the forum. Also, I like to see some small updates about Chen Linong every day, that could already make me really happy.", the participant described her experience about the forum to me.

Many participants found that connecting with people on the Internet had made their life more interesting. From meeting people and acquiring information, participants found inspirations of what they wanted to do in the future, such as joining in the army and becoming a teacher. The participant mentioned above would like to continue her education in the city where her favorite singer lives. She found the place attractive by following the singer's activities in that city, and she liked that the city was located beside the province where her parents worked. When being asked what their future plans were, many participants responded with the university they hoped to study or cities they wanted to move to impressions they got online. While living in a village with limited information on their future choices, participants relied on the Internet to be inspired and motivated in planning their life.

Additionally, I found that the Internet did not only expand participants' social experience to people outside the village but also extended their everyday interactions with friends from offline to online. Participants spent a large amount of their leisure time on weekends with their smartphones, many of them spent the time chatting and playing games with their friends in the school. The Internet, in this situation, serves as a platform of social activities that participants and their friends could enjoy together. One participant presented a screenshot of a victory in a mobile game that she and her friends played, as the photo for the photovoice activity 'what makes me happy'.

Figure 6.3 The photovoice of 'what makes me happy' (Part of photo was blurred for anonymity)

She explained that she chose this photo because it was their first victory in this game. She said, "this game is really difficult because you need to win out of a hundred people, and we tried several weekends to make it happen". At the same time, several participants chose screenshots in their phones for the photovoice activity as a fun chat with a friend, an interaction under a friend's post in QQ, and a QQ music playlist shared with friends. The Internet also helps participants to connect with their friends at a distance. In the fieldwork, three participants who are 'home-staying' children had moved to the city with their parents and back, which often happens among the children of labor migrants (Mu & Hu, 2016). Those participants have close friends in the previous school, and they are in contact by using chat applications. Participants also stay in contact through the Internet with friends who graduated from this school and study or work in another place. This means that participants have frequent interactions with their friends in school and at home. The Internet, as a medium, assists them to contact and stay close with their friends through the activities they could do together online.

From the above material, we could summarize that the Internet constitutes an important part of participants' everyday lives as they spent time on the Internet reading news, meeting people, and doing activities with their friends. Meanwhile, the influence through the Internet is not limited to leisure activities for participants. In previous discussions, I mentioned that participants often talked about their future plans in relation to the Internet. They planned their life based on the information of others' life or job, or by hearing from a friend's working experience in cities and found it attractive. In the fieldwork, it was noticeable that many participants expressed their desires and individual choices, and some of those wills were against the family's expectations. In the naming activity, one participant who is a 14-year-old 'home-staying' girl asked me a question which led to the following discussion:

> P: Did your parents say something about you studying abroad? Isn't Norway so far away from China?
> Yue: I have been living abroad for several years, so they didn't say much about me moving to Norway actually, I guess they are used to me being abroad now.
> P: That's nice… I don't want to stay here either. I want to study in a university far away from this village, but my family hopes that I stay close by.
> Yue: Why do they want you to stay close?
> P: So that they have someone taken care of them when they get older, I guess, or because it is nice to have family at a close distance. But I am not gonna listen to them [laugh], I want to study in [a university] because I saw on TikTok that it had really pretty cherry blossoms in the spring, also it is a really good university.

Y. Yan (2010) described Chinese individualism as the rise of the individual has become a social reality in everyday life of ordinary people at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In the study of Hansen and Pang (2010), they found rural young people have a strong urge to express themselves for individual space. In the fieldwork, it was evident that participants envisioned their future based on their experience in everyday lives. It was also clear that many of their visions were established through their experience on the Internet. Furthermore, the Internet serves as a platform for them to express themselves as they communicate with their friends and others online about their plans and wishes in the future. Meanwhile, the plans of participants sometimes are in conflict with the expectations of family. This could result from the fact that Internet, a technology with rapidly increasing access to everyone, is a distinct character of this generation that deviates from the previous ones. Before the prevalent use of the Internet in the Chinese countryside, there was already rising individualism among young people in the rural China, along with the society transforming from regulated socialism to state-regulated capitalism (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2010). The development of the Internet has possibly enhanced the rise of individual expressions as participants could observe and practice individual choices online nowadays. These individual choices could be in an opposite position to family's expectations because families tend to value the collective attributes from participants, while participants value more about their individual wishes. Thus, it is possible to argue the family relation is shaped as adults having less authority to the participants because of participants being more exposed to the people and communities on the Internet.

6.3   Labor migration (re)shaping childhood

In China, there are 69.7 million 'home-staying' children (Chen, Yang and Ren, 2015). In certain aspects, we could interpret 'home-staying' as an individual experience because children became 'home-staying' when their parents became labor migrants. It is therefore a change in personal life based on the individual choices of parents. However, when we look at the prevalence of this 'individual' situation in China, it is possible to look at it from a structural perspective. According to Mannheim, a generation is "a historically positioned age group whose members undergo a similar socialization process which brings about a shared frame of experience and action and makes them into an 'actual' generation" (Mannheim 1952, in Alanen 2009, p. 164). In the background chapter, the societal changes that led to labor migration were briefly introduced, which were primarily the hardship in farming and the rapid industrial development in coastal cities. According to the children and caregivers in the research, most of the parents of 'home-staying' children became labor migrants since they graduated from school. Labor migration is a shared generational experience among them. The generation of labor migration eventually resulted in a large number of children staying at home without parents because of the limitations of hukou (household registration system) and access to urban education. 'Home-staying' children constituted a large population in China. Thus, we could argue that 'home-staying' children are a group of the generation who share a similar experience with positioned characteristics such as living at a distance from parents and growing up in the countryside.

When stating that 'home-staying' children share characters of physical distance from their parents and living in the countryside, it is to say that societal changes shape the structure of childhood in a physical way. Meanwhile, the question arising is whether societal changes (re)shape the structure of 'home-staying' children's childhood in their relationships with families and friends. In the following section, these aspects will be elaborated through the participants' understandings and experience.

6.3.1 Family here and family at a distance

Family is one of the most common terms we hear in everyday lives. It represents the basic unit we belong. Yet, the definition of family nuances among cultures and regions. In some cases, it refers to a 'nuclear' family of two generations (Jing, 2000), while in some settings, 'family' could indicate an extended kinship where hundreds of individuals are involved. One specific character of the family is its structuring of the adult-child relationship (James & James, 2004). The meaning of either parenthood or childhood is interlinked, thus constituting the idea of family in a specific context. This theory aspect became obvious in the fieldwork as the participants gave various definitions about family, in their interpretations. At the beginning of the interviews, I started with simple questions, and one of them was, "how many people are there in your family?". This question was originally designed to start the conversation with participants. Surprisingly, many participants who are 'home-staying' children asked me, following that question, "Which family do you mean?". This question raised my attention to the concept of family, because I would assume that it referred to the nuclear one including parents and siblings. Participants who are not 'home-staying' children also replied to me using this definition, stating that there were parents, siblings, and themselves in their families. However, 'home-staying' children seemed to have a different understanding of family, as illustrated in the following conversation with a 15-year-old girl:

> Yue: Could you tell me how many people are there in your family, and who are they?
> P: You mean now or my own family?
> Yue: Could you describe both?
> P: All right, now at home, there is my older cousin on my dad's side [*Tangjie*], my grandma, my younger cousin on my dad's side [*Tangdi*]. My older cousin does not often come home, so then it is just me, my grandma, and my younger cousin. If it is my own family, then there is my younger brother [*Didi*], my dad, and my mom.

Here we see that the definition of family has several layers in the participant's description. First is the temporal context, where she defined that the family 'here' depended on how many were currently living in the household. Second is the physical aspect, where her older cousin, who lives in a boarding high school, was not considered as at home currently. The third is the notion of belonging, where she underlined 'my own family' twice. While growing up with her grandmother since she was a baby, the participant separated the concepts of caregiving and direct biological bloodline in defining her family. She stated that her own family included her siblings and parents, and some other participants who were 'home-staying' children also described it like that. This situation is similar to the result of previous research which focused on asking 'home-staying' children's family relations, where the majority of children considered siblings and parents as their direct family (She, 2013).

Among participants who are 'home-staying' children, responses could also vary. While the previous participants held an understanding that family included siblings and parents, another 14-year-old girl replied to the same question as:

> Yue: Could you tell me how many people are there in your family, and who are they?
> P: There are my grandparents and my younger brother. My dad is away because he works in [the city name].

Similar to this response, several participants described their definition of family as to where they live now with siblings, relatives, and grandparents, while parents are currently away

from the family. This understanding lies together with the cultural and social context of kinship, in which family is a continuing concept across generations (Bélanger & Li, 2009). The family in this context is understood as where the kin or the older generation lives instead of the physical location of children or parents. While labor migration impacts family relations as to how 'home-staying' children interpret the idea of family, the impact is complicated and not universal. According to participants, some expanded the notion of family to a large unit including several generations while some distinguished families in a spatial dimension.

The spatial dimension also impacts participants in perceiving themselves as children or not. 'Childing' as a theoretical concept was first elaborated by Mayall (1996), and this concept raises up the attention on the meaning of being a child, especially in the discussion of generational ordering, because it draws attention to the less mentioned group of the generational structure, as parenting is a much more frequently heard concept, whereas childing is not. Here I would like to further explore how 'home-staying' children interpret their identity as 'home-staying' and how they reacted to the structural changes in their family. According to participants, who are 'home-staying' children, they did not feel that their life was much different from the life of other children. This has also been illustrated in the previous chapter. Meanwhile, one aspect that they mentioned, which they experienced differently from other children, was connected to practices of discipline. In an interview, a 14-year-old 'home-staying' boy described his impression of discipline at home, in comparison to others:

> Yue: Do you feel that your everyday life is any different from the children with parents at home?
> P: Mmm… not really… but those who have parents at home are so poor on weekends [laugh], their parents are so strict with them with this and that. Parents would tell them to do homework and stuff. I have a lot more freedom compared to them [laugh].

Here the participant described that as a 'home-staying' child, he experienced less discipline from parents than the other children, because parents were not at home. This impression was not only from 'home-staying' children but also other children. In another interview, a 14-year-old girl who has both parents working locally told me that:

> Yue: Do you feel that, because the parents of [the participant's friend] are labor migrants who work in the city, then her life is somehow different from yours?
> P: Yeah, I feel it is quite different. I feel she is a lot freer at home while there is not much difference in pocket money. It's just she gets it in one time and I get it every week.
> Yue: You describe that you feel her life is freer than you, what makes you feel like that?
> P: I would get scolded, just for playing with the phone a bit too long [laugh]. But if they [parents] ask me to wash dishes or sweep the floor, I wouldn't do it if I don't want to. But I helped most of the times.

Participants of both groups perceived that 'home-staying' children had more freedom in their everyday lives because parents were not physically present. However, it is not to say that grandparents do not discipline the children. In the interviews with caregivers, grandparents mentioned that they would tell the children not to play with the phone and study hard, for example. In the interactions with parents and grandparents, it seemed as participants viewed their parents with more authority than their grandparents. This authority confirmed children's role as a child in relation to their parents. In the example of

what 'home-staying' children experienced during Chinese New Year, it became obvious that they rejected to be positioned as a child by avoiding contact with their parents.

> Yue: How often do your parents come home?
> P: Once a year, they would come home during the Chinese New Year.
> Yue: How do you feel when they come home at that time?
> P: I like Chinese New Year, it's fun and crowded everywhere. The positive side is that you could get a lot of red pocket money [*Hongbao*15] from relatives. But I don't really want my parents at home, they would just talk and talk and talk, about my grade and school performance, makes me feel like a small child again.

This conversation was different from how the media perceived 'home-staying' children in the Chinese New Year, where children were depicted as glad and exciting to see their parents. The conversation made itself different from the helplessness discourse, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, which was prevalent in the media and charity appeals. Another participant who is a 'home-staying' child described her perception with 'home-staying' children in linkage with Chinese New Year in the media as, "fake, it is all so fake, on TV we are like these little kids waiting at the door of the house, so excited to see the parents back, that's not realistic at all". Indeed, this depiction on TV is quite different from what the participants described to me. They often found it strange to see parents at home, felt distant from them, or did not know what to chat about with their parents. In the previously mentioned interview, the participant said that she 'felt like a small child again' when parents were at home. This was a common experience among 'home-staying' children, stating that they had less freedom under the strict discipline of their parents when they were at home. In relation to the 'childing' concept (Mayall, 1996), it is interesting to see that 'home-staying' children made a connection between being disciplined by parents and the identity of children. When their parents worked in cities, they felt 'less child' at home. Meanwhile, the identity of the child reappears when parents came home. To a certain extent, we could argue that children's self-identification is dependent on the space which they share with other people in the relation, it is spatially related. The physical space highlights the authority of parents in the parent-child relationship and influences children's' perceptions of themselves. This adds a spatial dimension in the understanding of generational ordering, that the social positioning of parents and children is more confirmed when they are physically close.

6.3.2 An extended form of caregiving

The closest Chinese translation to the word 'caregiving' is *Zhaogu*16. When translating the word 'caregiving', I found that there is no word for 'parenting' or 'grandparenting' but only 'caregiving', as there is no distinction of the caregiver in Chinese. In the interviews, I asked children 'who takes care of you on a daily basis,' and they responded that adults at home took care of them, such as 'home-staying' children who have grandparents at home responded that grandparents took care of them:

> Yue: Who takes care of you on a daily basis?
> P: My grandparents, of course, they also take care of my younger brother [*Didi*].

15红包，usually given by older relatives to the children at home as a gift in New Year.

16照顾, meaning looking after someone/ take extra care on someone (Xinhua, 2013)

Participants' answers to this question illustrated who were their major caregivers in their everyday lives and provided a basis for asking about their relationships with caregivers. As elaborated in the previous chapter, many grandparents in the research raised their grandchildren since they were months old. Grandparents do house chores such as laundry and cooking at home, and these house works were parents' duties if they were at home. They said that the hardest times in their lives were when they worried about the children, especially when they were sick.

> "There was a period when Xiaomei was constantly sick, and I think it was when she was ten? Her dad could not come back from Xining[17], so her grandfather and I had to take her to the nearest city hospital. We don't have a car, so we had to drive a moped for two hours to get there."

In the fieldwork, it was frequent to observe the caring that 'home-staying' children and grandparents gave to each other. For example, I visited a participant's household on one weekend to hang out with several of them in the town. The grandmother saw that we were going to the town and gave 10 Yuan to her grandchild for the expense. At the same time, the grandmother was leaving the house to visit her friend. The girl told her grandmother to take a moped taxi if the walk was too long instead of saving her own money. This example illustrated caring in the form of a short notice before leaving home. Incidents like this demonstrate the interdependence between caregivers and 'home-staying' children. As illustrated in the previous chapter, interdependence is vital in the families with labor migrants. Family members rely on each other for care and the family support system could extend further to cousins and in-laws.

When Alanen (2009) described generational order, examples did not restrict within parent-child relationship. She also stated that teacher-student relationship can be one example of a generational order, so this could also mean that grandparents-grandchildren could be one example of this kind of relationship. When being asked who takes care of them, they said it was their grandparents. In the drawing activity, many 'home-staying' children drew their grandparents as the ones they felt the closest with.

Figure 6.4 The picture drawn about the person(s) you feel the closest with/ means the most to you

The drawing to the left involves three people, who are grandfather, grandmother, and younger brother of the participant. The right drawing includes grandfather, grandmother, younger sister, and participant herself. In observations, it was obvious to see the intimacy

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17 Pseudonym, it is taken from the name of a city in Northwestern China. It has no connection to the actual city in the fieldwork.

and trust between 'home-staying' children and their grandparents. It might first seem contradictory of the children to exclude their grandparents from the definition of a family while simultaneously include grandparents in their closest relations. However, this 'paradox' could be explained by children's differentiated understanding between the term 'family' and 'caregiving', where 'family' is understood as the unit of biological bonds and 'caregiving' is understood as the daily activities and experience involved in the relationship.

This resonates with the theory of generational ordering, as the concepts of 'children' and 'parents' are mutually constituted structures (Alanen, 2009). While child-parent relations could first be a biologically fixed fact, the relationship in practice became meaningful through interactions. In the everyday lives of 'home-staying' children, their interactions with grandparents through childhood constituted the essential meaning of the relationship. They confirmed the roles of each party in the relationship. This adds to the generational order as the order is not just confirmed by hierarchy or power, but also constituted by guide and support. This is also to that grandparents-grandchildren relation is a form of caregiving. In a nuclear family structure, caregiving is related to parenting. In the structure of families with labor migrants, members look for extended support and the form of caregiving is also extended. The caregivers of 'home-staying' children take the main responsibility of caregiving and 'home-staying' children consider them as the ones they feel the closest with. Therefore, one may argue that caregiving could extend from parents to others who entitle the responsibility. However, it is not to state that parents who are labor migrants could not fulfil their responsibilities as parents. There was a limited choice for the parents to stay home and to earn enough money for the family. To acknowledge grandparent-grandchild relation as a form of caregiving is to recognize that the structure of caregiving could be extended, especially among 'home-staying' children's families. It is also to acknowledge the relationship between caregivers and 'home-staying' children is more than a substitute to the parent-child relation.

If we take a step further, the concept of caregiving does not restrict within 'home-staying' children's families but also extends to their peers. From previous examples, we learned that participants reached out to their friends in aspects like sharing their troubles, giving others advices, and supporting each other when families did not understand them. In the premise of boarding school, participants spent the majority of time with their friends in shared spaces like classroom and dorm. The boarding school served as a collectivity, where participants took shared responsibilities in cleaning duties and disciplinary action from teachers, and in this collectiveness, interdependence is enhanced among the children. Additionally, the interdependence between them extended from school to future plans, where one participant considered to move to her friend's working city after graduation. The interdependence among them became more obvious when participants' individualistic desires contradicted to their family values. All of these elements resulted in peers becoming part of the extended form of caregiving to 'home-staying' children, because of the guiding, advising, and support they received from their friends. Generational order acknowledges a system of social ordering that children locate in particular social positions from which they act and thereby participate in ongoing social life (Alanen, 2009). It also highlights the interdependent positions that these generational structures define for generational groups to take and to act from (Alanen, 2009, p. 170). With 'home-staying' children and their peers, we see that this structure does not only exist across generations but also within the generation. From empirical data, it is evident that participants positioned themselves with their friend in practices within and outside school. Thus, it is possible to argue that the peer relation among 'home-staying' children and their friends is also an intragenerational order. Furthermore, by positioning themselves with their peers, there was an emotional

kind of taking care of each other in addition to the material-based caregiving that already existed across generations. In addition to interdependence, there was caregiving that peers provided to each other.

6.3.3 A childhood with continuity and change

Because of parents' labor migration, one can say that there are structural changes in the childhood for 'home-staying' children. The first aspect is the sources of support for 'home-staying' children. The form of caregiving has extended to other family members. Meanwhile, the structural change does not only come from labor migration but also includes impacts from education and Internet. Because of the access to boarding school and Internet, children built strong relationship with their peers that included guiding and support. The concept of caregiving has extended from the unit of family to include peers and peers became an important role in the everyday life of 'home-staying' children.

The second aspect is to look at the structure of 'home-staying' children's childhood through their constituted relations to others. In the structure of generational order, one's identity is positioned in relation to the other (Alanen, 2009). The determination of generational structures and positions are always dynamic and complex (Alanen, 2009). In this study, it is found that the generational order of participants' relations could be interpreted with spatiality. Spaces as home, Internet, and school are three major areas of social positioning. At home, there is grandparent-grandchild relation. Parent-child relation is apparent at home when parents visit in the Chinese New Year. Otherwise, it is mostly present on the Internet, through interactions between two parties online. At school, teacher-student relation and peer relation are the primary relationships. Because of the changes in education, Internet, and labor migration, the structure of generational order does not only exist through mutually constituted actions between groups, but it also needs to take into concern the spatial dimension. Parent-child relation, for example, became more obvious when they were both at home because parents could discipline their children without physical distance. On the other hand, 'home-staying' children perceive themselves more in the position of a child when they are disciplined by parents at home. Additionally, there is a spatiality of generational order from home to school. Participants said that one reason they enjoy being at school is that there is less difference between 'home-staying' children and others.

> "In the school, no one talks about that [home-staying] because it is irrelevant."

Participants' identity as 'home-staying' children is apparent when they are positioned with their grandparents or parents. Meanwhile, their identities at school are positioned with teachers and peers, and being viewed as 'students' and 'friends' in such relations. Therefore, the distance between families and the boarding school system have influenced 'home-staying' children's childhood both in terms of adjustments in generational order and in the spatiality of child relations to others.

Alanen (2009) illustrated generational order as the structure for generational groups to take and to act from, which is defined by one's position in a generational relation to the other, who perhaps is often in a different generational category and in a hierarchically opposite relation. Because participants were in a boarding school system six out of seven days at school of the week, the amount of their social interactions has been focusing on their peers, which shaped their attitudes in the relations with caregivers. The becoming of one position is dependent on the mutually constituting action taken by the other. Because participants value the knowledge of caregivers less, the authority of caregivers in this generational structure, for the participants in the research, became less significant. While

caregivers considered schooling as a must for children and encouraged them to continue the education, the interactions that children had with peers in the school shaped their understandings about education which deviated from caregivers' understanding. Thus, it is possible to argue that the societal changes in education have shaped participants' family relations in the way that caregivers became less authoritative figures in the structure.

Labor migration can be said to have (re)shaped the structure of the family. While interdependence has been long viewed as a character of families in Asian culture (Russell et al., 2010), we also see that the family structure in China has become more nuclear and parent-child centered under the process of industrialization (Jing, 2000). The power of kinship has shrunk in this time of development and governance (Yu & Xu, 2004). However, along with labor migration, labor migrants searched job opportunities through their relatives and they often worked in the same factory with their cousins and in-laws.[18] Furthermore, labor migrants need to ask their families at home to take care of their children. Through economic dependence on their parents, families could be understood as solidifying, or enhancing the traditional Chinese family structure. It is to say that the labor migration under industrialization preserved the structure of interdependence in migrants' families. Meanwhile, 'home-staying' children grew up in this family structure with increasing access to the Internet, where they experienced an increasing expression of individualism from other people. At the same time, interactions among peers enriched the individualistic impact, thus participants often discussed their individual desires on personal pursuit, which was contradictory to the interdependent structure of their families. Y. Yan (2010) described Chinese individualism, central to this process, is the ongoing negotiation and contestation between the rising individual and the various forms of the collectivity. In this study, if the rising individual and the form of collectivity are explained as 'home-staying' children and their families, we could find several examples where participants told me that their future plans were against families' proposals. Thus, it is possible to state that under the time of labor migration, individuals rely more on the interdependent structure of their families while 'home-staying' children become more individualistic than the previous generations.

While families could be viewed as one form of collectivity, we can think about the school setting as another form of collectivity. As mentioned previously, participants went to boarding school six days per week, where they took shared responsibilities of cleaning duties and disciplinary action from teachers in the classroom and dorms. Furthermore, the school principle was to assist students in their high school entrance exam and the curriculum and schedule were designed around this principle. Among participants, it was obvious that some of them disagreed with the dominant narrative of the value of education. They said that schooling was not necessarily the only option to a promising future and the curriculum should include more than exam subjects. "It would be helpful to have different classes to explore our personal interests so we know our potential careers.", one participant explained. These opinions were calling for diversity and individuality in curriculum and daily schedule. Participants obtained such opinions from the information on Internet and the interactions among peers. In accordance with their opinions, some participants told me their choices opposed to school's expectation, which were that every student should try to

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[18] According to the interviews from Pun (2005), research participants, and caregivers, labor migrants often started working in factories and locations based on their relatives' recommendations. Some obtained the job by relatives recommending them to the employer. This resulted in a network in factories with kinship relations.

continue education in regular high school, were to study in a vocational high school or to work in fields they were interested in. In both family and school settings, we see the conflict of ideologies from two sides. Research participants as rising individuals were challenging the values in both family and school system. Meanwhile, participants were dependent on both systems. In family structures, dependence of children to parents (or adults) is an indispensable aspect of the relation (Mayall, 2002). Furthermore, interdependence is a dominant character in Asian families and families with migration (Abebe, 2019; (W. Zhang & Fuligni, 2006; Punch, 2015). Extended family members needed to support each other in terms of labor migration. As for 'home-staying' children, they could not ignore the social relations that they were involved in when the family structure was shaped by labor migration. Furthermore, parents worked in cities for improving their children's education quality. This sacrifice was made because their children will become responsible of the family later. For 'home-staying' children, it was necessary to consider their future contributions to the family. In school setting, though participants disagreed with the practices, school was the setting where they built and maintained relations with their friends. As one participant said, "I sometimes hope that I would never graduate, so that I could experience middle school again with my friends." While looking forward to pursuing their individual desires after graduation, participants were also reluctant to lose the space where their social relations with peers were steady. Research participants were dependent on the school in a way that their positioning as student and friend was strongly related to this setting. Thus, in consideration with both settings, we could find a conflict between individualism and (inter)dependence both at home and school. While children searched for spaces to practice their personal pursuits, they relied on the structure of family and school to confirm their positions. In addition to that, this kind of Chinese individualism, or rising individuals in China, was more like being more individualistic from family bond and authority bond, but not necessarily independent from peers, in which another form of collectivity was actually enhanced in this context.

6.4 Summary

This analysis chapter is developed from the first analysis chapter, it implemented the empirical data such as schooling, Internet usage, and labor migration from the previous chapter and built on a discussion in how societal changes (re)shaped family structures. Education reform led to extended hours for children in the school, which resulted in many of them consindering school as a second home. Increasing access of Internet ensured the interactions with their parents at a distance, while providing children with increasing information online. In addition to these societal changes, labor migration had great impact on family structures in terms of interdependence and caregiving. Families under labor migration were more dependent on each other and children received caregiving in an extended form. Also, both education reform and Internet development in the Chinese countryside resulted in a frequent interaction between research participants and their peers. 'Home-staying' childhood was eventually constituted by family relations at a distance, extended time in schooling and Internet, and caregiving from grandparents, relatives, and peers. From Internet and peers, participants acquired information that led to their pursuit in individual wills. These individual pursuits stood in conflict with the collectivities of family and school, while children still relied on both place to confirm their social positions with family members and peers.

7 Conclusion

I remember that my first time hearing the term 'home-staying' children was in a donation event I participated when I was thirteen years old, where we were asked to collect donations for the students from a friendship school. At the time, they were described as 'the children without parents taking care of them.' After that, I frequently saw news and charity appeals about 'home-staying' children in all forms of media. I became used to this term and did not pay further attention until I started studying in this master program. When we discussed how children's childhood in different locations was impacted by social changes, the term 'home-staying' children came into my mind. Children experience the impact from migration in many regions and historical times, while 'home-staying' children in China is special in its large population and the labor migration under industrialization. In contemporary Chinese media, two narratives are frequently used in describing 'home-staying' children. One describes young 'home-staying' children as the helpless, powerless ones without parents' care. The other imagery came from media coverages of older 'home-staying' children and youths as the problematic ones and, sometimes, juveniles. These news often suggested a connection between parents' absence and children's problematic behaviors. In their childhood, 'home-staying' children are depicted as both the helpless ones and then the problematic ones. These two narratives, to some extent, contradict to each other but coexist in the public. This contrast eventually led me to conduct this study and to explore how 'home-staying' children experienced their everyday life besides these two narratives.

To examine this contrast, I came up with the first research question, which is 'how do 'home-staying' children experience their everyday life?'. I was curious about how their experience was similar or different from the media's depiction and how they perceived the media's depiction. This research question was designed to be explorative, so that research participants could tell me what the important aspects are in their everyday life. Under this question, I learned that most 'home-staying' children stayed at home with their grandparents, relatives, and in-laws of the family; they spent six days per week at school; they used most of their leisure time on Internet. These information eventually composed the empirical data for the first analysis chapter, as how their childhood is constructed with concepts like responsibilities, interdependence, gender roles, and schooling. As for how research participants perceive the media's depiction, their negative attitudes towards this term constituted the discussion on the helplessness as a discourse and how participants rejected this discourse.

The second research question is 'how do 'home-staying' children experience their relationships with friends, family, and school?'. I designed this research question in the curiosity of their social relations and who interacted most with them when parents were physically absent. Through interviews, activities, and observations, research participants showed me that their caregivers and friends took important roles in their everyday lives. 'Home-staying' children's relations with their primary caregivers proved that the form of caregiving could extend from parents to other family members. Their positions in this relation were mutually constituted through the actions of dependence and interdependence. Furthermore, peers acted essential parts in 'home-staying' children's everyday life because they provided guiding, advising, and supporting to each other. The relations among peers were both an extended form of caregiving and confirmed each

other's positions in this intra-generational order (Alanen, 2009). Additionally, 'home-staying' children connected with their parents through Internet and their relations were confirmed through online interactions in finance and support. Therefore, this finding contradicted to the narrative of 'home-staying' children lacking parents' care because of their physical absence.

The third research question is 'how does labor migration impact the childhood of 'home-staying' children?'. This question focused on this societal change and asked whether it brought structural changes to 'home-staying' children's childhood. In this study, I found that it was necessary to include other factors into the discussion, which were the other societal changes that also shaped the structure of childhood. While labor migration resulted in these children staying at home, the policies and social events in their community also affected their everyday life. From research participants, I learned that schooling and Internet were obvious characteristics in their childhood. Thus, education reform, increasing access to Internet, and labor migration have together shaped their childhood. A major finding of the changes was that research participants became more inclined to their individual desires under the influence of peers and Internet, while these desires were often opposite to structures of family and school. Meanwhile, they belonged to these structures, entitled to responsibilities, and relied on the structures to confirm their social positioning with family and peers.

7.1.1 Reflection on the term
In the fieldwork, research participants shared their opinions on the term 'home-staying' children with me. Few considered this term neutral and the majority did not want to be related to this term because it delivered negative connotations on their life. Thus, I used this term only in the interviews with participants, when I asked them how they perceived this term. In the first paragraph of introduction, I illustrated that the title of this study was suggested by one participant. I chose this title because first to respect participants' opinions, and second to state that this study is about participants' experience and knowledge instead of their allocated group identity.

Meanwhile, though not using the term in fieldwork, I found it inevitable to use the term when writing this thesis. The term 'home-staying' could connect to groups of children who experienced parental migration around the world. It is also effective to use this term within text for specifying children's family background. However, I am also continuing the usage of this expression and it is still likely to link this term with aforementioned media narratives. By implementing this term in the thesis, I found myself in a dilemma where I hoped to raise the awareness of children's narratives while I risked enhancing the framing of these children.

7.1.2 Some suggestion and recommendations
If we look back to the two narratives mentioned before, these participants, who were thirteen to fifteen years old, experienced being described by both narratives because their age was between the definition of children and youth. Participants denied being related to such narrative partly because both reflected how the children were only viewed as the dependent ones. They rendered a connotation that what children became was solely the result of their parents' decision in labor migration. In this study, it was found that such narrative was problematic because it ignored the caregiving structures, education structures, and social relations of 'home-staying' children, thus it ignored the experience they had through these structures and relations. Therefore, this study aims to explore 'home-staying' children's experience and knowledge through their narratives, in order to

tackle those two images and to provide some insights to the life of 'home-staying' children. From this study, we see the importance of peers to 'home-staying' children. The caregiving and interactions among peers should be considered as an important factor when researching with 'home-staying' children. In policy making and school setting, we may pay more attention to the influence from peers and how to promote a friendly, supporting environment for 'home-staying' children to live and study in.

Meanwhile, I found a few questions remained after the study. First, the disputes on defining *Liushou Ertong* did not touch upon the aspect of children's experience. Furthermore, how should we define the children who have their parents returned home? Is home-staying a temporal stage of childhood or the definition of the children? Second, children's home-staying situation does not solely exist in contemporary Chinese society. It happened in China historically (She, 2013) and in other nations, too (Parreñas, 2001; Yeoh et al., 2002). A comparative study among the time or place might help us to understand the social phenomenon of Chinese home-staying children better.

Additionally, all research participants in the fieldwork were in the 9th grade, which was the dividing point of education as this was the last year of compulsory education. What comes next could be various choices and opportunities outside of high school education, such as vocational training, apprenticeship, and working in cities as labor migrants. When they shared information to me, they were describing their visions about the future. But what will take place in the future is still unknown. It would be interesting to further study about how they make their choices later on, as how they would negotiate in their family relations, peer relations, and education in such dynamics of societal changes.

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9 Appendices

9.1 Research information for school (English)

A letter about my research project

Nin hao, (a respectful way of saying hello in Chinese)

My name is Yue Pan, a master student from NTNU. My education background is Sociology and Early Childhood Education, while my master study program is Childhood Studies, also understood as Social Studies of Childhood. From April 2019 to May 2020, I and my supervisor Ida Marie Lyså will complete my master research project, which is titled Everyday Lives of Left-Behind Children in Rural China. My supervisor Ida Marie Lyså will help and support me during the process. Left-behind children as a social group has raised high attentions of our government and people of different fields. There are also numerous academic articles about them. In my previous research, I found out that most articles focus on data analysis and quantitative studies. Some articles are from social science field but mostly discuss left-behind children's psychological issues. Social Studies of Childhood highlights the child-centered methodology, conducting small-sampled deep research. Left-behind children are not merely young people with parents as labor migrants, they are also the product of the time. They construct this social phenomenon with our nation's fast developing economy. Through methodology of Childhood Studies, I can conclude the social factors which impact children's everyday lives, and analyze how children and families counteract the left-behind social phenomenon. In an ideal situation, my research could fill the gap in this field and contribute to improvements in policies and education curriculums.

My ideal research group will be about 20 students, 6-18 years old, with one or both parents as labor migrants. If the conditions allow, my fieldwork will be conducted in September and October in 2019, a period of two months. First I will start with everyday observation, getting involved in children's daily activities and raising questions to their acts. Then, I will conduct in-depth interviews, with participants such as children, families, teachers, and adults with close contact to them. During the fieldwork, I will also use participatory methods, gaining more information through drawing, storytelling, having children taken photos of their important places and taking a walk with children. These methods will help me to build a closer relationship with children, allowing them to participate in the research in a relaxed, interesting environment.

One point I should mention is that everyone in this research will participate voluntarily. Before the research starts, informed consent is very important. I will also make sure that information in the consent is clear and easy to understand. According to the guideline of NSD (translated as Norwegian Research Center), participants under 16 years old need their guardians to sign. I will follow this rule. After the caretakers of children have signed, I will also get oral or written consent from children before starting the research. All participants' information will be anonymous. I will also delete all information (audio tapes, photos, notes, interview content, etc.) after completing the research project in May 2020. My research result will publish in June 2020, if you are interested, I am very glad to share the thesis and results with you.

In the end, thank you very much for your patience and time reading this letter. I am very grateful for your interest in my research project. If there is any confusion or content I did not explain well, or you have other questions, feel free to contact me through my email yuep@stud.ntnu.no. You can also contact me through WeChat: 962145463. I am very happy to answer questions for you.

Best regards,

Yue Pan

07.04.2019

9.2 Research information for school (Mandarin Chinese)

关于我的研究课题的一封信

您好，

我叫潘玥，是一名来自挪威理工大学的研究生。我的专业背景是社会学和早期教育，研究生项目为 Childhood studies，儿童社会学。从 2019 年 4 月到 2020 年 5 月，我和我的导师 Ida Marie Lyså 将一起完成我的研究生项目，即对中国留守儿童每日生活的深入观察与探讨（Everyday Lives of Left-behind Children in Rural China）。留守儿童是我国政府和各界人士十分关心的群体，在学术领域也有很多关于他们的文章。在我的前期调查中，我发现大多数论文都注重在大数据分析和定量研究上，社会科学领域方面也大多是研究留守儿童的心理情况。社会儿童学的研究方法强调从儿童角度出发，进行小样本且深入的研究。留守儿童不仅仅是一群父母外出务工的孩子，他们也是这个时代的产物，随着我国经济的快速发展而出现的社会现象。通过社会儿童学的研究方法，我可以从孩子们的日常生活中总结出社会里方方面面的因素对他们的童年的影响，并且分析孩子与家庭在这个社会现象中他们自己的应对措施。在理想的情况下，我的研究可以为这个领域填补空白，并且回馈于政策实施和教育理念的改进。

我的理想研究群体为大约 20 名在校学生，年龄 6-18 岁不限，父母有一位或双方为进城务工人员。条件允许的话，我的调研时间将会是 2019 年 9-10 月为期两个月的时间。首先以每天的观察为基础，参与到孩子们的生活中，可能会对他们在课堂，生活中的表现提出一些问题。之后，我会进行一些深度的访问（in-depth interview），对象主要是这些孩子，同时包括他们的家人，老师，或和他们生活有紧密联系的大人。在调研期间，我也会运用多元的参与研究方法（participatory methods），通过画画，讲故事，让孩子们自己去拍对他们重要的地方，和孩子一起散步聊天等方式获取更多信息。这些方法主要是帮助拉近我和孩子们的距离，让他们在一个轻松有趣的环境下参与研究。

我必须提到的一点是，在这个研究里的所有人都将是自愿参加。在所有研究开始之前，参与人都需要在知情同意书上签字，我也会保证同意书上的所有内容清晰易懂。根据挪威研究中心的规定，16 岁以下的参与者需要他们的监护人签字，我会履行这个义务。在照顾他们的大人已经同意的情况下，我也会在研究开始之前询问孩子们的同意，口语或是书面的形式。所有研究参与者的信息将会完全匿名，我也会在 2020 年 5 月完成研究之后处理掉所有的研究信息（照片，笔记，访谈内容等）。在 2020 年 6 月，我的研究项目成果将会发表。如果您希望的话，我非常乐意于将我的论文和研究成果分享给您。

最后，非常感谢您耐心地读完这一封信，同时也非常感谢您对我的项目的兴趣。如果有任何我没有解释清楚的地方，或您有其他的问题，您可以通过我的邮箱 yuep@stud.ntnu.no 联系我。您也可以通过微信联系我，号码是 962145463 。我将非常乐意为您解答任何疑问。

此致，

潘玥

2019 年 4 月 7 日

9.3 Information letter and consent form for parents (English)

Are you interested in taking part in the research project

"Everyday Lives of Left-Behind Children in rural China"?

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to gain a greater understanding of the impact from parents' migration on children. In this letter I will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

Purpose of the project

Hi there! My name is Yue Pan, and I am a MPh student from NTNU. My education background is sociology and early childhood education, and I am currently in the master program of Childhood Studies (Social Studies of Childhood). The purpose of this project is to gain a greater understanding of the impact of parental migration on children. The project will focus on children's family condition, generational relationships, and education in relation to parental migration. This project will be solely used for my master thesis.

Who is responsible for the research project?

Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Why are you being asked to participate?

You have received this information letter because you are a teacher or caretaker of children in a left-behind situation, attending this school. As the project discusses about left-behind children in China, the criteria is that one or both of children's parents are labor migrants in cities. I received the family background information from the school. For this reason, you have received this inquiry.

What does participation involve for you?

The study is based on observation, interviews and participatory methods. Observation is a research method where the research spends time with individuals in order to gain a greater understanding of the impact of parents' migration on children. In order to deepen my understanding of the children , caretaker and staff's perspectives, as time passes I wish to conduct informal interviews/conversations with the children, caretakers and the staff. The interview with staff and caregivers will involve questions about specific children in the class, or in the family. Any names or personal identifiable information concerning specific children will not be included in the transcription. The anonymity is of great concern in this project. In addition, I hope to conduct participatory methods with children, such as drawing, photo voice, which I will ask children to take pictures of important places in their life, and explaining it to me later, and walking around with children at the school playground, places they often go and the path from school to home while listening to them explaining their everyday lives to me. I will not be involved with the educational work of the school teachers.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

Only me and my supervisor will have access to your personal data. I will only use your personal data for the purpose specified in this information letter. I will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act). Next to field notes, which will be written each day, I might make use of an audio recorder for interviews and participatory methods. Both written and audio information will be handled with great care and confidentiality. Both names of children and schools will be replaced by fictitious ones in the written result and in any written or oral presentations so that no children can be identified. I will follow scientific standards of ethical responsibility and take specific caution in relation to the children. The project has been reported to and approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (http://www.nsd.uib.no/nsd/english/index.html), whose task it is to attend to privacy protection and research ethics.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The project is scheduled to end on 15.05.2020. By that time, all personal data, including any audio recordings, will be deleted and not recoverable.

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

I will process your personal data based on your consent.

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you can but not have to:

access the personal data that is being processed about you

request that your personal data is deleted

request to provide limited personal data

request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified

receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

Based on an agreement with Norwegian University of Science and Technology, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

me via WeChat 962145463 or email alicepan628@gmail.com

Norwegian University of Science and Technology via my supervisor: Ida Marie Lyså, by email ida.marie.lysa@ntnu.no

Our Data Protection Officer: *[insert name of the data protection officer at the institution responsible for the project]*

NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: (personverntjenester@nsd.no) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely,

Yue Pan

Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project *Everyday Lives of Left-behind Children in Rural China* and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

(Signed by participant, date)

9.4 Information letter and consent form for parents (Mandarin Chinese)

亲爱的家长，

您好！

我叫潘玥，是挪威科技大学儿童研究中心的研究生。在此我恳请您同意您的孩子参与我的一个研究，研究结果将作为我的硕士论文发表。研究主题是《对中国留守儿童每日生活的深入观察与探讨》（Everyday Lives of Left-behind Children in Rural China）。

从 2019 年 4 月到 2020 年 5 月，我会在我的导师伊达·玛利亚·丽莎（Ida Marie Lyså）的协助下完成我的研究生项目。在此期间，我会在江西的一所学校停留两个月进行田野研究。您的孩子就在我进行研究的学校上学，从而我通过他/她的班主任联系到了您。

我的研究基于社会儿童学和人类学的方法，强调从儿童角度出发，进行小样本且深入的研究。其中主要的研究方式是参与式观察，这种研究方法要求研究者长期而深入地参与被研究者的每日生活，以更好地了解被研究者的行为，习惯和文化。这一方法引起对儿童视角的关注而在国际上被公认为适用于以儿童为中心的研究。在本研究中，我希望能与老师，孩子和孩子们家里的大人相处，而以孩子作为主要被研究者，孩子在自己及其家长都同意的前提下参与本研究。为了深入体悟孩子及他们身边的成人的视角，我希望能在研究后期与孩子，老师和照顾孩子的大人进行非正式的访谈或对话。除了每天的研究日记，我会在访谈对话时使用录音机。所有文字和语音资料予以保密，在研究报告以及任何文字或口头陈述中，孩子和学校的名字会用化名表示，以确保孩子的信息不外传。我将恪守科研伦理原则，并对孩子的信息保护予以特别关注。这个研究已向挪威社会科学资料服务中心申报（http://www.nsd.uib.no/nsd/english/index.html)并获批准，该中心致力于规范研究伦理和隐私保护。

一旦学校及孩子加入研究，所有信息将以化名方式保存。研究报告将以英文专题论文的形式呈现，并且我将为对研究报告感兴趣的家长提供一份中文版的摘要，请需要的家长在此同意书结尾处提供邮寄地址，我将在大约一年后寄出报告摘要。

为使研究顺利进行，我向各位家长提供这份知情同意书，并希望家长能签署同意。但是，在是否让孩子参加研究这一点上，家长是完全自愿的，并且，家长有权在任何时候让孩子退出研究。同时，我会向孩子解释这一研究，并且在孩子也愿意的情况下才让其参与研究。

最后，非常感谢您耐心地读完这一封信，同时也非常感谢您对我的项目的兴趣。如果有任何我没有解释清楚的地方，或您有其他的问题，您可以通过我的邮箱 yuep@stud.ntnu.no 联系我。您也可以通过微信联系我，号码是 962145463 。我将非常乐意为您解答任何疑问。

您诚挚的，

潘玥

挪威科技大学研究生

我已阅读此知情同意书并同意让我的孩子参与由潘玥主持的研究《对中国留守儿童每日生活的深入观察与探讨 》。

孩子所在的学校/日期

孩子的姓名

家长签名

9.5 Information letter and consent form for children (English)

Are you interested in taking part in the research project

"Everyday Lives of Left-Behind Children in rural China"?

This is my request to ask you participate in my where the main purpose is to gain a greater understanding of your everyday lives in relation to your parent's working in cities. In this letter I will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

Purpose of the project

Hi there! My name is Yue Pan, and I am a master student from NTNU. I study Childhood Studies now, and it is a program to learn and interpret childhoods in many cultures and times. The purpose of this project is to learn more about your life with your parents work in cities. The project will focus on your school life, you and your friends, you and your family. Everything I do with you will be only used for my master research.

Who is responsible for the research project?

Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Why are you being asked to participate?

You have received this information letter because you are attending this school and one or both of your parents are labor migrants in cities. Thus, you have received this letter.

What does participation involve for you?

The study is based on observation, interviews and participatory methods. Observation is me participating and observing your everyday lives in order to learn. To deepen my understanding, as time passes I wish to talk with you for more knowledge. In addition, I hope to conduct participatory methods with you. We can draw together; write a story; you could take pictures of the important places for you; and we might take a walk together too. In addition to the activities with you, I would also like to talk with your teachers and family members about your life at school and home.

Participation is voluntary

You choose to participate in this project or not. If you chose to participate, you can quit at any time without giving a reason. If you participate, all information about you will then be made anonymous, which means that no others will know who you are. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw. It will not affect your relationship with your school/teacher.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

Only me and my supervisor will have access to your data. I will only use your data for the purpose mentioned in this letter. During my stay, I will write some notes everyday, and might make use of a tape recorder for interviews and participatory methods. Both written and audio information will be handled carefully. Your name and the school name will be replaced so that no other people know your identity.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The project is scheduled to end on 15.05.2020. By that time, all personal data, including any audio recordings, will be deleted and not recoverable.

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

I will process your personal data based on your consent.

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you can but not have to:

access the personal data that is being processed about you

request that your personal data is deleted

request to provide limited personal data

request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified

receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

Based on an agreement with Norwegian University of Science and Technology, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

me via WeChat 962145463 or email alicepan628@gmail.com

Norwegian University of Science and Technology via my supervisor: Ida Marie Lyså, by email ida.marie.lysa@ntnu.no

Our Data Protection Officer: *[insert name of the data protection officer at the institution responsible for the project]*

NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: (personverntjenester@nsd.no) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely,

Yue Pan

Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project *Everyday Lives of Left-behind Children in Rural China* and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

(Signed by participant, date)

9.6 Information letter and consent form for children (Mandarin Chinese)

亲爱的同学，

您好！

我叫潘玥，是挪威科技大学儿童研究中心的研究生。

在我的学校，大家会研究不同文化和国家的童年，思考孩子们在不同的环境下如何长大的。所以，我想邀请你加入我的一个研究，研究主题是《对中国留守儿童每日生活的深入观察与探讨 》。这个研究想要弄清一个问题：对于你来说，你的每一天的生活是什么样的，你又是如何看待你的家长在城市里工作的，你和朋友，老师和家人是如何相处的。我认为关于这一点，除了和大人们交谈，你的看法和思想是非常重要的。

如果你愿意加入这个研究，那么你要做的就是在我有疑问的时候，帮助我理解生活里每天发生的不同的事。比如说，你可以告诉我你平时喜欢做什么以及为什么，又比如说，你可以给我解释一些我不明白的词语或概念。在研究后期，我会与你进行一些非正式的访谈或对话。除了每天的记录下我看到的东西和想法，我会在访谈对话时使用录音机。我会将所有文字和语音资料保密，你不用担心你告诉我的内容会被除我以外的任何一个人知道，其中包括你的老师和家长。

我问过你的家长是否可以让你参与研究，他们同意了。但是，如果你不愿意参与，那么你可以选择拒绝。另外，如果你在同意参与研究之后，又改变了主意，那么你可以随时退出。

关于这个研究，如果你有任何问题，欢迎向我提问。

如果你愿意参与研究，请在下面写上你的名字。你和你的家长会拿到这份知情同意书的复印件，请保管好它。

你所在的学校/日期

你的姓名

你的签名

9.7 Interview guide for children

Interview guide children

Hi! My name is Yue Pan, and I am a master student from NTNU. I study Childhood Studies now, and it is a program to learn and interpret childhoods in many cultures and times. My project title is 'everyday lives of left-behind children in rural China'. To have this interview, I hope to learn more from your knowledge about your everyday life experience, both at home and in the school. I will use the tape recorder during our interview, and I will show you how it works now. During the interview, feel free to ask me questions and further explanations. You can stop the interview whenever you what, and there is no bad consequence with it.

General questions

How old are you? Which grade are you?

How does it feel as a 9th grade student?

How do you feel at school? What would you do to relax yourself?

(Here implements drawing/photovoice in discussion)

Family life experience

How many people are there in your family? Who are they?

Where do your parents work?

Who takes care of you the most at home?

How would you describe your relationship to your parents, do you talk often?

How would you describe your relationship to your caretaker (and other family members like siblings for example)?

What do you feel about parents' labor migration? Have you expressed your feeling about it?

Did your parents' labor migration change anything in your life? How did you experience these changes?

How often do you see your parents? How long would it be?

When your parents come back for visit, what do you feel about it? How is your emotional reaction to it?

Do you often talk with your family? What kind of topic?

Do you have pocket money? How much do you have? Who do you receive it from? How do you spend it?

(Here implements recalling at home in discussion)

School life experience

How far do you live from school?

Who are your friends in the school? Do their parents work in the city?

How do you feel about having friends who are (not) left-behind children? Do you think there is a difference in your daily life?

Do you know the term 'home-staying' children? How do you view this term?

If someone calls you with that term, how do you feel about it?

Labor migration is common here, would you talk about this with your classmates and friends? And share what do you think about it?

Have you experienced happy or unhappy moments at school?

If you could choose three words to describe your school life, which would you choose? Would you explain the words to me?

 (Here implements recalling at school in discussion)

Technology

Do you use Internet frequently? Through which platform? How many hours per week on average?

What do you often do on Internet?

The community, life, and people you encountered on Internet, do they differ from your experience in everday life?

What kind of impact do you think Internet has brought you?

Ending questions

What do you usually do after school?

What do you usually do on the weekends?

What is your favorite thing to do?

If you could choose three words to describe your life, which would you choose? Would you explain the words to me?

Is there anything you want to add?

Do you have any question for me?

9.8 Interview guide for caregivers

Interview guide caretakers

Hi! My name is Yue Pan, and I am a master student from NTNU. My education background is sociology and early childhood education, and I am currently in the master program of Childhood Studies (Social Studies of Childhood), which is a program to learn and interpret childhoods in many cultures and times. My project title is 'everyday lives of left-behind children in rural China'. The purpose of this project is to gain a greater understanding of the impact of parental migration on children. To conduct this interview with you, I hope to learn more about your experience with left-behind children and your knowledge about this social phenomenon. I will use the tape recorder during our interview, and I will show you how it works now. During the interview, feel free to ask me questions and further explanations. You can stop the interview whenever you want, and there is no negative consequence with it.

Situation of the family

1. How many children do you take care of?

2. How long have you been taking care of the children?

3. What is your occupation now? (work/ stay-home/ retired/…)

4. Would you describe a typical day of yours to me?

5. How do you view your relationship with the children?

6. Have the children expressed any emotions about their parents' migration? If yes, how do you experience it?

7. What aspects you think are important for the children's emotional wellbeing?

8. What things do you do on a daily basis for the children?

9. Do children do house chores or work at home? If yes, what kind do they do and how often is it?

General perceptions

1. In your opinion, how does the labor migration impact the local community?

2. How does the labor migration impact your family?

3. Do you think left-behind children experience challenges because of their parents' migration? Could you explain your response?

4. Measures taken

5. Do you encounter any challenge in you daily life with children? If so, how did you experience it and how did you deal with it?

6. I have seen articles and news mentioning government's investments on left-behind children. Does your family receive help from the government? If yes, would you describe it for me?

7. How do you experience those measures the government has taken on left-behind children?

Ending questions

1. How does it feel to be a caretaker for the children?

2. If you could choose three words, how would you describe your everyday life with the children?

3. Is there anything you want to add?

4. Do you have any question for me?

9.9 Activity Naming

What's your name?

Where do you come from?

What language/dialect do you speak?

What's the meaning of your name?

How did you get the name?

Do you have other names?

We need pseudonames for the research, could you give yourself a pseudoname?

Ccould you explain it a bit?

In the end, please present your signature here, a drawing is fine too.

研究活动：我的名字

你叫什么名字？

你来自哪里？

你会说什么语言/方言？

你的名字有什么含义？

谁给你取的名字？怎么得来的？

你有什么别名吗？（小名，外号，昵称，英文名…）

我们的研究需要全部使用化名，你希望自己用什么化名？

可以稍微解释一下你的化名吗？

最后你可以留下你的签名，画画也可以

9.10 Activity Drawing

My life
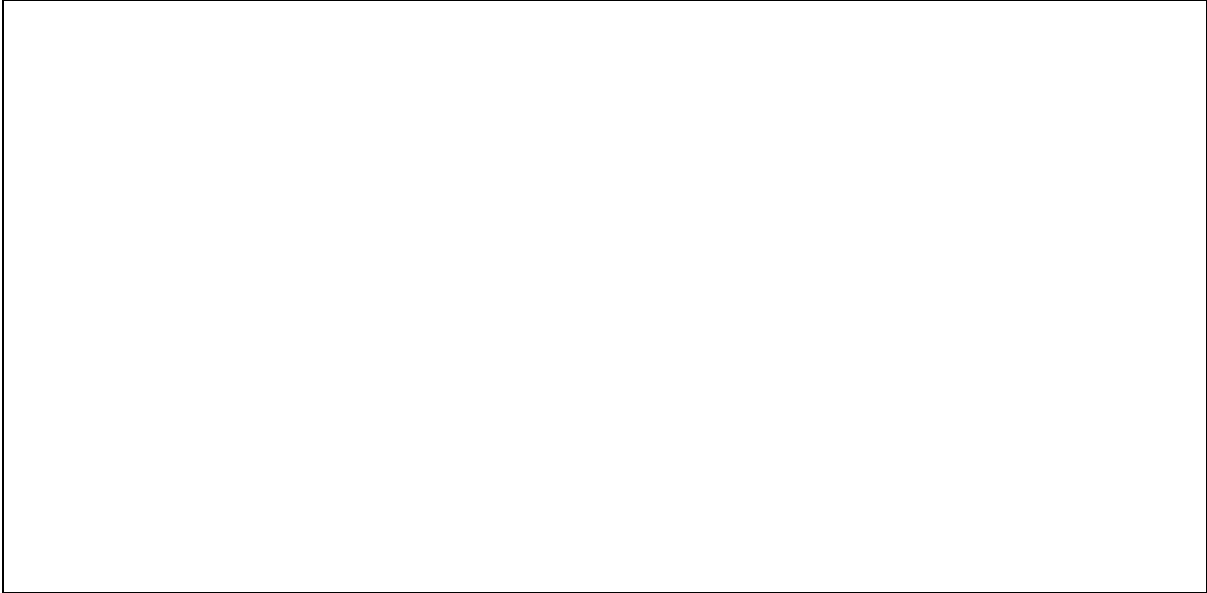
I was born in :   Gender:

The person who works in city in my family is:

the place you like the most
the person you feel the closest with

Please draw on the back side if there is not enough space here. ☺

我的生活

我出生于：..........................年　　　　我的性别：

家中在外面打工的人: (请写明和你的关系，例：爸爸/妈妈/大姨等)

我最喜爱的地方
对我最重要/亲近的人（们）

如果空间不够，你可以在纸张背面画。☺

9.11 Activity Recall

Recall sheet (school)

I was born in :   Gender:

What did I eat/drink	What did I do

Please write on the back of the paper if there is not enough space on this page. ☺

Recall sheet (home)

I was born in :   Gender:

What did I eat/drink	What did I do

Please write on the back of the paper if there is not enough space on this page. ☺

一天生活的记录（学校）

我出生于：_____年　　性别：

我吃了/喝了什么	我做了什么

如果本面不够记录，请将内容写在背面。 ☺

一天生活的记录（在家）

我出生于：_____年　　性别：

我吃了/喝了什么	我做了什么

我出生于：_____年　　性别：

我吃了/喝了什么	我做了什么

如果本面不够记录，请将内容写在背面。☺

我出生于：_____年　　性别：

我吃了/喝了什么	我做了什么

Yue Pan

The Experience of Children in the Chinese Countryside towards Their Parents' Labor Migration

NTNU

Norwegian University of
Science and Technology