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Left Behind

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Left Behind

Abstract

Over the past decade, the massive urbanization in China has created a whole new generation known as the “left behind children” – kids left to their grandparents in rural homes by parents who migrated to cities to make a better living.

Living solely with their grandparents or relatives in small villages and towns in south China, some 20,000 preschool children look no different than millions of other “left behind children” across the country except they are Americans by birth and hold US passports.

For many years, these villages and small towns in southern China’s Fujian province have seen an influx of such special “left behind children” sent from the US by their parents. The parents are originally from these Chinese towns and villages. They immigrated to the US beginning in the late 70s and late 90s.

Working long hours and on minimum wages, many of these parents have no choice but to send their newborns back to China where the cost of raising a baby is lower and grandparents are willing to offer their help. In one kindergarten in Guantou Town, 75 percent of the preschool’s kids hold US passports. Given the demand, the kindergarten also offers English classes, an unusual practice among kindergartens in rural China.

Having spent the early childhood with their grandparents in China, most of these kids will then be sent back to the US by the age of 5 when they are old enough to attend elementary schools.

The story follows the lives of several children and their grandparents in China. It explored the harsh reasons behind parents’ decision to separate with their newborn infants for so long.

Source list

Jiang Huizhen, Principal of Kinber Kindergarten

Lin Zuxun, Vice President with Guantou Overseas Chinese Association

Script

The scene opens with a shot of the front of kindergarten then moves to kids doing morning exercises out in the yard. Kids running in the track field, practicing Kungfu.

Nat sound:

Kids making noise while doing morning exercises in the yard.

LEO: THIS IS KINBER, A PRIVATE KINDERGARTEN IN A SMALL TOWN

Children reading after an English video in the classroom.

Interview with the principal. Some shots of her interact with students. The scene then flashes to the street in town.

Archive still photos and videos showing the smuggle and immigration in the past

Interview with the local official. Some shots of the town.

IN SOUTHERN CHINA'S FUJIAN PROVINCE. LIKE MANY SCHOOLS IN CHINA, THE DAY HERE BEGINS WITH MORNING EXERCISE.

Sound bite:

Kids yelling when playing Kongfu.

LEO: WHAT IS DIFFERENT ABOUT THIS PLACE IS MOST OF THESE CHILDREN ARE AMERICANS BY BIRTH. IN CHINA, THEY ARE KNOWN AS "YANG LIU SHOU ER TONG", OR "LEFT BEHIND FOREIGN CHILDREN".

Sound bite:

Principal: Many people in Guantou have emigrated to the US. Most parents work in the restaurant business there. Restaurant work is very busy. They don't have time for day care so they send their kids back to live with their grandparents.

LEO: THE CHILDREN ARE ONLY A FEW MONTHS OLD WHEN THEY ARRIVE, AND IT WILL BE YEARS BEFORE THEY MEET THEIR PARENTS AGAIN.

Nat sound:

Street noise. People walking toward the pier.

LEO: IN THIS SMALL TOWN OF GUANTOU, SOME 60,000 PEOPLE, ALMOST THE ENTIRE POPULATION, HAVE EMIGRATED. OLDER GENERATIONS RISKED THEIR LIVES CROSSING TO AMERICA ON SMUGGLING SHIPS, WHILE TODAY THEIR CHILDREN EMIGRATE LEGALLY.

Sound bite:

Local official: We are surrounded by the sea and without much land for farming so we had many people without work. Beginning in the early 80s, many managed to enter the US through tourism or other ways.

B-rolls of Chinatown in the US. Driving shots of empty villages and houses.

The scene cuts back to the kindergarten. Weijie's grandpa picks him up after school. Shots of them walk back to their house.

Weijie playing with toys his mother sent from the US.

Weijie and his grandfather walk upstairs to the bedroom. Weijie turns on the laptop and logs into the chat app only to see her mother offline.

Weijie shuts down the computer.

The scene cuts back to the kindergarten where the children are having a drawing class.

LEO: FOR MOST PEOPLE, IT WAS A ONE-WAY TRIP. AFTER YEARS OF TOILING IN CHINATOWNS ACROSS AMERICA, THEY SENT MONEY HOME TO HELP BUILD HOUSES FOR THEIR PARENTS. STRUGGLING TO SURVIVE IN THE US, THEY ALSO BEGAN TO SEND THEIR YOUNG CHILDREN BACK.

Nat sound:

Weijie: SpongeBob! SpongeBob!

LEO: THIS BOY NAMED ZHAO WEIJIE WAS SENT BACK WHEN HE WAS A YEAR OLD. HIS GRANDPARENTS HAVE RAISED THREE OTHER CHILDREN FOR THEIR SONS AND DAUGHTERS WOKING OVERSEAS.

Sound bite:

Grandfather: There is no other way to make a living. What can you do? You can't make money if you don't send them back.

WEIJIE'S MOTHER SENDS HIM TOYS, CLOTHES AND GIFTS FROM AMERICA. BUT THE CONTACT HE'S HAD WITH HER HAS BEEN THROUGH A COMPUTER SCREEN.

Nat sound:

Weijie and his grandfather talking while walking upstairs.

LEO: WEIJIE. WHERE IS YOUR MOTHER?

Weijie: Here! Here! He replies, pointing at a chat app icon on the screen.

Nat sounds:

The laptop shuts. The kindergarten door clanks open.

LEO: CHILDREN LIKE WEIJIE ARE COMMON IN GUANTOU. AT KINBER KINDERGARTEN ALONE, MORE THAN TWO-THIRDS OF ITS 250

B-rolls of grandparents picking up their grandchildren after school.

Enters Liang Lexin reading book in a class to her classmates. Some b-rolls of her at school before cutting to the interview.

STUDENTS WERE BORN OUTSIDE OF CHINA. THE NUMBER IS AS HIGH AS 20,000 ACROSS THE REGION.

Sound bites:

Teacher: In today's class what I would like you to draw is you in a house during New Years with your Mom, Dad and grandparents. And the whole family is playing together.

Teacher: Who is this that you are drawing?

Boy: Me. And this is my dad.

Teacher: Where is your dad?

Boy: In the US.

Teacher: Do you miss him then?

Boy: Yes. I cried.

Teacher: So when does your Dad come back then?

Teacher: What would you like to say to your dad?

Teacher: Anything?

Boy: I want to tell him to come back.

Sound bites:

Principal: The turnover in my kindergarten is quite big. Sometimes when relatives come back and leave again, they are asked to bring the kids if they reach the age. Come and go. It's always like this.

Leo: BY THE AGE OF FIVE OR SIX, MOST CHILDREN ARE BROUGHT BACK TO THE US TO ATTEND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. IN LESS THAN A MONTH, THE SIX YEARS OLD LIANG LEXIN WILL TAKE THAT JOURNAY.

Sound bites:

Liang Lexin: My name is Liang Lexin. I am six years old. I was born in my Mom's belly. I will go to the US 9 days after the break.

Leo: Why do you go to the US?

Lexin: Because I miss my parents.

Leo: How long has it been since you last saw them?

Lexin: Very very long.

The scene cuts to Liang Lexin leaves the school and get on the bus. Leave the bus and run away to her home.

Lexin: I have a friend named Liang Zeying. Her parents and grandma have all come back. His grandpa is in the US.
Lexin: Other kids all have parents I only have grandma.

Sound bites:

Principal: My heart really goes out to these kids. No matter how much the grandparents love their grand children, you can never replace a mother's love. But parents need to make money in order to let them have a better future.