



**Question and Answer with 2007 Child Rights Award winner,
Catherine Lee Yuk San, documentary producer with
Hong Kong Broadcaster, TVB Jade**

“Children Left Behind”, a 30-minute documentary, chronicles the lonely lives of “home-alone” children in rural villages in China, a problem acutely felt in Hunan, Szechuan and Chongqing provinces. With parents migrating to urban centers in search of work, large numbers of children – over 22 million - are left on their own or under the care of elderly relatives.

Catherine Lee Yuk San is a documentary producer with Hong Kong broadcaster TVB Jade. This programme was broadcast as part of their Sunday Report series.

What inspired you to make this documentary?

Currently, there are over 120 million people estimated to have left their rural homes for work, especially to the factories in the provinces of Southern China. Initially, when I started my research, I planned to make a documentary about these migrant workers. I intended to focus on how and why they left their families, their experiences starting a hard life in a new place, how they felt about it and what they experienced.

However I changed my focus after I met these migrant workers and had long conversations with them. Most of them had not seen their kids for years. On the one hand, they felt regret that as a parent, they can't live with their kids and look after them while they grow up, but on the other hand they felt they should earn more money to improve their lives.

Estimates show that more than 22 million children are left behind in rural areas and separated from their parents. **“Children who left behind”** is a relatively new phenomenon in China and is particularly serious in some extremely poor provinces.

When the parents leave to go away and work, often it is the grandparents who take on the responsibility to care for the grandchildren. Daily cultivation occupies most of their time. Often the children think that their grandparents are too old to understand their needs. What they need is not only food but parental love and care. The generation gap is very serious. In other cases, the situation is even worse. The children live by themselves and take care of themselves. Every day, they eat alone, play alone, sleep alone...they live like orphans. The parents of these children are always worried about them and that they will go astray. They have constant problems.

Through the conversations and filming, I could see how upset and how helpless many of these parents had become. When many citizens in China are getting rich, these people struggle daily to survive and are still at the bottom in society.

I made the film to show the impact on these children and to demonstrate the importance of a parent's love and concern in their lives. It is a basic right and society needs to give this much more attention.

I have made two documentaries on the subject of migration. This one, that focuses on the children themselves, while the other is about the lives of migrant workers in Guangdong.

What was the reaction of the audience?

After the broadcast, we received a lot of feedback from our audience. They were deeply moved by the children's experiences. What the children said and the loneliness they talked about broke their hearts and made many of them cry. Many people have expressed their wish to help these children. Some have offered to send books, clothing as well as money.

What project are you working on now?

As a journalist, my colleagues and I keep an eye out for important social development stories, not only in mainland China but also elsewhere in the world. We hope to produce more high quality documentaries in the future.