

Quality Before Care Entry

Conceptualising Risk Assessment and Decision-Making for Vulnerable Children in China

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Quality begins before placement: how children’s circumstances are understood, how risk and need are assessed, and what support is available all shape whether residential care is necessary, appropriate and in each child’s best interests.

WHY BEFORE ENTRY?

Quality is usually discussed after placement. Yet children’s pathways are shaped earlier: by

- who is identified,
- what counts as risk,
- how need is distinguished from neglect,
- whose knowledge is prioritised,
- which responses are considered possible.

298M
Children aged 0-17
(21.1%, 2020)

2.95M
Children registered as
“children in difficult circumstances”
in the national information system

Source: Ministry of Civil Affairs, reported by Xinhua News Agency (2019).



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CHINA’S CHILD WELFARE LANDSCAPE

An expanding but still category-based system

- Beyond the earlier focus on orphans and poverty
- Support organised through categories such as children in difficult circumstances
- Greater state responsibility and mandatory reporting
- Multiple actors, with local variation in coordination

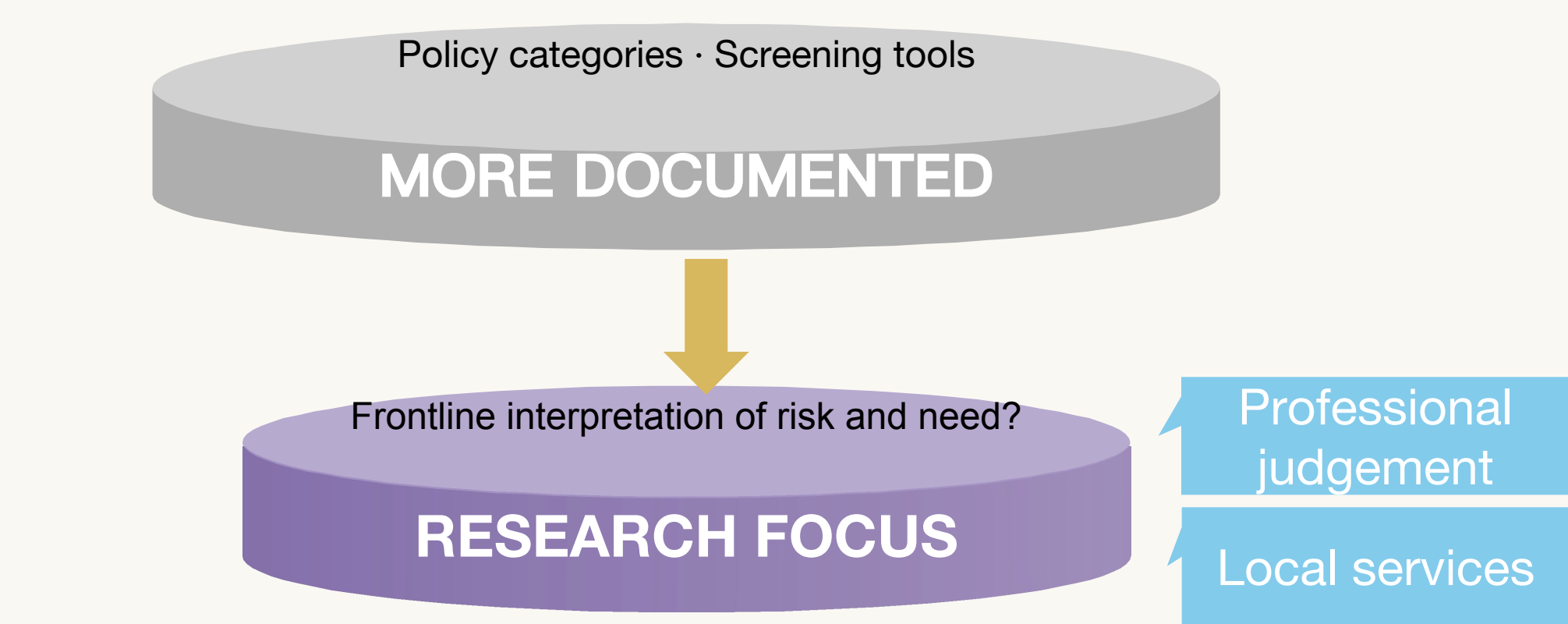
Administrative identification at local level

- Local welfare network: county-township-village/ community levels
- Child Welfare Supervisors and Child Directors
- Household visits, registers, standardised forms and graded classifications
- Material and guardianship problems are more visible than emotional or relational harm

Where professional social work enters

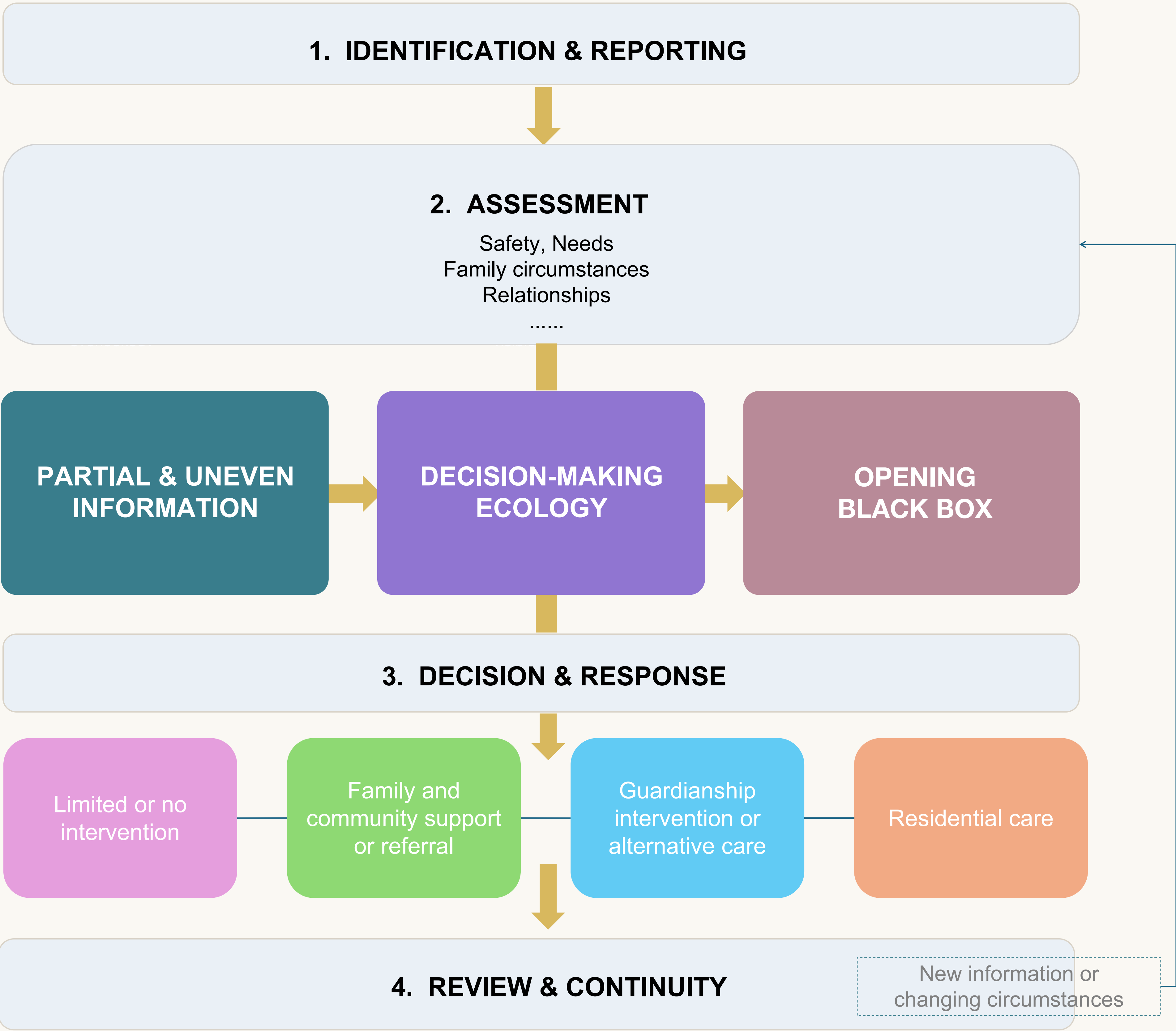
- Working alongside the administrative system, often through government-purchased services
- Assessment, referral, family support and service coordination
- Administrative demands, professional ethics, cultural expectations and local resources

RESEARCH FOCUS



HOW DO THESE SHAPE CARE PATHWAYS?

FROM IDENTIFICATION TO CARE: WHERE QUALITY IS PRODUCED



PRACTICE TENSIONS IN THE CHINESE CONTEXT

Identified across policy and research literature, and informed by the researcher’s prior practice experience.

■ Poverty or neglect? ➢ Context-sensitive judgement distinguishes hardship from harm.	■ Screening or assessment? ➢ Relational, multi-source and child-centred assessment.	■ Risk identified, then what? ➢ Feasible support, proportionate intervention and ongoing review.
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EXPECTED CONTRIBUTION

01 Quality across the pathway Extends quality beyond residential care: from identification to review.
02 Decision-making made visible Shows how information becomes action or no intervention.
03 Practice priorities Participation · professional reasoning · coordination · service capacity

WORKING PROPOSITION

The pathway into care forms part of residential care quality. Stronger assessment and decision-making can support timely family assistance, reduce unnecessary separation and clarify when residential care is required.



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This poster draws on an ongoing literature review conducted as part of my doctoral research. I thank my supervisors, Professor Lisa Holmes and Dr Rachel Larkin, for their guidance and support, and acknowledge joint funding from the University of Sussex and the China Scholarship Council (CSC).

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