

## MASTER'S THESIS

### Migration for grandchildren: grandmothering of rural-urban migrant elderly in China

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**THESIS ACCEPTANCE**

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**Migration for grandchildren:  
Grandmothering of rural-urban migrant elderly in China**

**MA Huan**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Philosophy**

**Principal Supervisor:**

**Dr. PENG Yinni (Hong Kong Baptist University)**

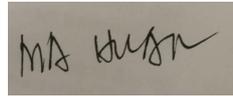
**July 2018**

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis represents my own work, which was completed after registration for the degree of MPhil at Hong Kong Baptist University, and it has not been previously included in a thesis or dissertation submitted to this or any other institution for a degree, diploma, or other qualification.

I have read the University's current research ethics guidelines, and accept responsibility for the conduct of the procedures in accordance with the University's Committee on the use of Human & Animal subject in Teaching and Research (HASC). I have attempted to identify all the risks related to this research that may rise in conducting this research, obtained the ethical and/or safety approval (where applicable), and acknowledged my obligations and the rights of the participants.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in black ink. The signature appears to be 'MA HUNG' written in a cursive style.

Date: July 2018

## ABSTRACT

In recent years, an increasing number of rural grandmothers in mainland China have migrated to cities for the sake of their grandchildren and to share the burden of childcare with their adult children. In childrearing cooperation, the rural-urban migrant grandmothers face not only intergenerational differences but also rural-urban differences in childrearing. When rural-urban grandmothers provide childrearing assistance in cities, their grandmothing is influenced by the urban childrearing discourse through their cooperation with urban parents. However, our knowledge about their grandmothing is limited. Moreover, existing studies on the migrant elderly tend to describe grandparents as having outdated values and being passively constrained by the structure; therefore, these studies have neglect their agency.

In my research, I explore how rural-urban migrant grandmothers contribute to grandchildren's daily care, education and discipline under the influence of urban childrearing discourse, which is mainly reflected in their cooperation with their adult children. I will examine both the intergenerational solidarity and conflicts in the cooperation. Moreover, inspired by the concept of agency, I argue that rural-urban migrant grandmothers are strategic agents, and I examine their agency in response to the urban childrearing discourse.

My qualitative data are obtained through in-depth interviews and participant observations with 20 rural-urban migrant grandmothers in two field sites—Beijing and Taian—on mainland China. I find that the cooperation mechanism reflects flexibility, diversity and dynamic. The rural-urban grandmothers use diverse methods to cooperate with their adult children and to contribute to grandchildren's daily care, education and discipline. To fulfil their tasks, grandmothers face challenges such as uncertainty, financial disadvantages, and educational

disadvantages. Moreover, the grandmothers experience many different childrearing conflicts with the parents, such as consumption, nutrition and health care. However, grandmothers can actively respond to these challenges and use the strategies of constructing an alternative discourse, using alternative methods and learning to cope with the problems. To deal with the conflicts, grandmothers emphasise two narratives: family harmony, which is most important; and, all for the child. Based on these two narratives, grandmothers use different strategies, such as direct and indirect communication, using hidden strategies, compromising, and keeping silence, when helping their adult children during childcare. Located in the context where the family is regarded as a union and the intergenerational relationship is protected, the agency of rural-urban migrant grandmothers is solidarity-oriented and altruist-oriented agency.

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Last but not the least, I thank all my friends and classmates. Their encouragement and their attitude on their own work inspired me to study hard. They also help me to contact their

relatives who can be my potential informants.

## **NOTE ON LANGUAGE**

Most of the interviews and conversations in my fieldwork were conducted in Mandarin and I used Yantai dialect to interview two grandmothers from Yantai city. The interviews and conversations were later translated into English by the author.

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## **Introduction**

According to China's Floating Population Development Report, which was published in 2016, there were 18 million people aged over 60 migrating in 2015, and 54% of them were aged between 60 and 64. The three main motives for their migration were to take care of their grandchildren, to search for elderly care and to seek employment. About 43% of these elderly people migrated to take care of their grandchildren.<sup>1</sup> Migrant grandparenting has become an important issue in recent years, and it has attracted the attention of both the government and the public. For example, the Beijing and Shenzhen governments have launched a policy of allowing ageing migrants to register in the cities where their children live.

Grandparenting migration can be seen as a family strategy to respond to the childrearing burden that is caused by the discourse of intensive parenting and the double burden of the working mother, and it can also help to maintain the functional solidarity of the family. After migration, the grandmothers co-reside with their adult children and grandchildren. A multigenerational family structure emerges, where the grandparents are the older generation, the adult children are the middle generation and the grandchildren are the younger generation. The two adult generations build up a childcare coalition to share the childcare obligations. The grandmothers play the role of active caregivers for grandchildren whose parents work. When the parents return home after work, grandmothers also give childcare assistance to the parents.

This research focuses on the rural-urban migrant grandmothers who have migrated to take care of their grandchildren. In the coalition, the grandmothers face urban childrearing discourse, which is reflected in intensive parenting. Intensive parenting has become a hegemonic childcare discourse in urban cities that is widely accepted by middle-class parents in urban China (Kuan, 2015). Educated and living in the cities, urban parents as the primary caregivers in the coalition

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<sup>1</sup> The data come from the National Health and Family Planning Commission of the PRC website: <http://www.nhfpc.gov.cn/xcs/s3574/201610/58881fa502e5481082eb9b34331e3eb2.shtml>

adopt and internalise the discourse of intensive parenting. Although the influence of intensive parenting discourse on Chinese urban parenting has been widely explored (Fong, 2004; Kuan, 2015), the influence on grandparenting is under-studied. Grandmothers interact with the urban childrearing discourse through their interaction with the middle generation on childcare. Moreover, the grandmothers are not a homogeneous group. With typically lower education levels and limited economic and social resources, rural-urban migrant grandmothers are very different from local urban grandparents and urban-urban migrant grandparents in terms of social and economic status. Their socio-economic status shapes their interaction and power in the childcare coalition. Even though the experience of urban grandparents in childcare coalitions has been examined in the literature (Fong, 2004, 2007; Kuan, 2015; Xiao, 2016), the grandparenting experiences of rural-urban grandparents have received relatively less attention.

My research investigates the grandmothering of rural-urban migrant grandmothers in mainland China. My research subjects are rural-urban migrant grandmothers who co-reside with their adult children (who have settled down in urban cities) to help take care of their grandchildren. I examine how rural-urban migrant grandmothers fulfil their grandparental roles under the influence of urban childrearing discourse. The following questions are explored in this thesis:

*How do rural-urban migrant grandparents experience childrearing in the childcare coalition with urban parents under the influence of intensive parenting discourse in cities?*

*What is migrant grandparents' agency in response to urban childcare discourse?*

I explore the agency of these grandmothers rather than their dependence on the family and the receiving society. My research highlights the contribution of migrant grandmothers because their migration and grandmothering promotes the labour market participation of mothers. These grandmothers should be regarded as an important and indispensable resource for both the

family and urban cities. Moreover, their willingness and ability to participate in childcare, their knowledge and childcare experiences empower both themselves and their adult children in raising the grandchildren.

Overall, this thesis examines rural-urban migrant grandmothers' experiences in the intergenerational childrearing collaboration and analyses their agency to overcome the challenges and intergenerational conflicts caused by urban childrearing discourse.

The second chapter reviews the related studies on grandparenting, childrearing, intergenerational relations, ageing migration and agency. First, it explains the concept of grandparenting and intensive parenting to give a conceptual understanding of the research question. Second, this chapter examines the grandparenting in the case of China. In addition, studies on the living conditions and demographic characteristics of rural-urban ageing migrants are reviewed to describe the heterogeneity of the grandparents. Lastly, through reviewing the theory of agency and related studies on the agency of ageing people and migrants, this chapter outlines the theoretical framework of the study.

The third chapter introduces the methodological framework, the sampling, the methods of data collection, the recruitment of the participants and the data analysis. There are two field sites in the research: Beijing and Taian. Instructed by the qualitative research method, I used in-depth interviews and participant observations to collect data. I only focus on rural-urban migrant grandmothers whose adult children are middle-class in cities and have grandchildren younger than 6 years old. Twenty grandmothers were interviewed in this research project. The strategies of open coding and constant comparison are used for data analysis.

The fourth chapter explores rural-urban migrant grandmothers' experience of providing daily physical care to their grandchildren. First, it introduces three methods of intergenerational

cooperation in childcare: working together, listening to the parents and working alone. It then discusses the challenges that rural-urban migrant grandmothers face when providing daily childcare due to the demands of urban childrearing and explores intergenerational disagreements on daily physical care. This chapter also explores the diverse strategies that the grandmothers use to overcome the challenges and deal with the intergenerational conflicts, such as learning, using an alternative method, building up alternative discourses, communication, compromising and using hidden strategies.

The fifth chapter introduces the grandmothers' contributions to the grandchildren's discipline and education, which are overlooked in existing studies. I describe the grandmother's contribution to children's discipline, such as the social ethics they taught, and the personality they cultivate. I then introduce the intergenerational cooperation on the children's discipline. Both the pattern of warm parents with strict grandmothers and the pattern of warm grandmothers with strict parents are identified. Conflicts over discipline are mainly on the ideological level because of the different attitudes towards a behavioural issue between caregivers and the different discipline styles. The resolution of conflicts on discipline is influenced by the grandmothers' acceptance of a new philosophy. The grandmothers temporarily use the strategy of compromising, adhering to their attitude, communication and change to deal with the conflicts. To contribute to the children's education, the grandmothers face the constraints of limited education background, less knowledge of the urban education system and lack of resources. However, the grandmothers still highlight the importance of education. Even though some grandmothers give little help, most of them try to give indirect assistance, such as giving emotional support and passing on information from the child's teacher. In addition, some grandmothers directly tutor their grandchildren. The intergenerational conflicts often come from the grandmothers' discontent with the parents' excessive requirements on their children. However, they can also understand the parents because they are

also structured by society.

The final chapter summarises how the grandmothers provide childrearing under the influence of intensive parenting. The high requirements of intensive parenting stimulate the grandmothers to spend most of their time on childcare and advance their childcare standards. However, they also experience uncertainty over meeting the high requirements for their work. Failing to give a certain contribution also challenged the grandmothers. Moreover, there is both solidarity and conflict in the childrearing cooperation. As the grandmothers learn to accept certain parts of urban childrearing, the two adult generations cooperate with each other to achieve a shared goal. However, the different attitudes of a method or a philosophy can generate competition and conflict. This chapter also describes how the rural-urban differences influence the grandmothers' childcare experiences in conjunction with intergenerational differences. Lastly, this chapter summarises the grandmothers' agency through how they reflect on the intensive parenting, how they overcome structural constraints to fulfil duties and how they resolve intergenerational conflicts. My research contributes to the academic debate on agency by revealing how agency works in the context where the cooperation and solidarity are emphasized. The agency of grandmothers is solidarity-oriented agency. To protect the harmony of the family, grandmothers prefer to use the communicative, compromised, and hidden strategies to deal with the family conflicts. Moreover, the agency of grandmothers is altruist-oriented agency. Grandmothers actively used various strategies to take care of their grandchildren and to protect the interest of the whole family rather than their own interest.

## **Literature review and theoretical framework**

Grandparenting is the generative process whereby grandparents play grandparental roles through interaction with grandchildren, parents and the community. Grandparenthood is regarded as a second chance at generativity for ageing people to maintain generative functions (Schoklitsch and Baumann, 2012). Generativity includes the activities and concern to establish and guide successive generations (Erikson, 1963), and it reflects the grandparents' agency to influence and communicate with the next generations (Cheng, Chan, and Chan, 2008).

Scholars have presented a variety of models of the grandparents' roles in the family, such as the roles of surrogate parents, distant figures and fun-seekers (Kornhaber, 1996; Neugarten and Weinstein, 1964). There are two main roles in grandparents' daily childrearing practices: nurturer and mentor. The grandparents engage in physical care work as nurturer, such as cooking and feeding (Moore and Rosenthal, 2017). As mentors, the grandparents transfer values, knowledge, skills and experience, and they provide spiritual guidance to their grandchildren (Moore and Rosenthal, 2017).

Grandparents play different roles in childcare based on different family structures. Given that geographic proximity influences the grandparental roles, coresident grandparents could play a more active grandparental role in the family compared with non-resident grandparents (Moore and Rosenthal, 2017). However, childrearing may cause intergenerational constraints in the extended family. The concept of generativity mismatch is used to explain the intergenerational constraints. Social changes, such as technological transformation and education development, extend the intergenerational gap and the older generation's experiences and guidance may fail to fulfil the younger generation's demands for new knowledge (Cheng, Chan, and Chan, 2008). This may cause inconsistency between the generations on accepting childrearing values and childrearing behaviours, which causes intergenerational conflicts in childrearing.

Grandparenting tends to be a normative work that is influenced by the childcare discourse (May, Mason, and Clarke, 2012). Childrearing discourse is defined as a constructed and broadly accepted method and philosophy that guide constant childrearing attitudes and behaviours in a society. For example, studies in the UK, the United States, Japan and Singapore have shown that the grandparenting discourse of ‘non-interference’ discourages grandparents from playing an active role in their grandchildren’s life (May, Mason, and Clarke, 2012; Thang et al., 2011).

Studies have shown that intensive parenting has become a normative and dominant discourse of contemporary childrearing (Hays, 1996; Takševa, 2012). Intensive parenting means that the caregivers are ‘expected to acquire detailed knowledge of what the experts consider proper child development and then spend a good deal of time and money attempting to foster it’ (Hays, 1996: 8). This expectation is mainly internalised by middle-class families (Vincent and Ball, 2007). This discourse has three aspects. First, intensive parenting is influenced by commercialisation and consumer culture. The language of the market permeates private life and influences people’s practices and behaviour, including childrearing (Takševa, 2012). Second, this discourse positions childrearing as risky and emphasises that children’s wellbeing depends on their parents’ proper upbringing, for example, in the products and activities provided (Takševa, 2012). To avoid risk, caregivers, both parents and teachers, are encouraged to rely on expert guidance (Faircloth, 2010; Shirani, Henwood, and Coltart, 2012). Third, because of the importance of concerted cultivation and the investment of resources, childrearing tends to be a time-demanding enterprise and calls for caregivers’ physical and emotional efforts (Lee, Macvarish, and Bristow, 2010).

Because grandparents take care of the grandchildren and play an important role in childcare, they also interact with the intensive parenting discourse. However, the influence of intensive parenting on grandparenting needs to be further explored. This research gap may have arisen because intensive and active caregiving grandparents are uncommon in developed countries,

and many of them are the surrogate parent figures in working-class families and black families, where the middle generation in the family fails to provide parental care because of teen pregnancy, criminal behaviour or drug use (Barnett, 2008; Chase-Lansdale, Brooks-Gunn, and Zamsky, 1994; Pruchno, 1999). Because the intensive parenting discourse is mainly internalised by middle-class families, its influence on the surrogate grandparents in working-class families is limited. However, because caregiving grandmothers are common in China, my study offers an opportunity to contribute to the literature.

Grandparenting is also influenced by migration. When grandparents migrate, their grandparenting is influenced by the new social and cultural values in the receiving society. Studies on immigrant grandparents have discussed how the tension between the values from the sending country and those of receiving country have influenced grandparenting experiences, and they have obtained different outcomes (Da, 2003; Nagata, Cheng, and Tsai-chae, 2010; Xie and Xia, 2011). For example, Williams, and Torrez (1998) investigated synthesis studies on Western Hispanic grandparents and found that immigration is a process of modernisation that transforms grandparenting from bonds of obligation to bonds of sentiment to meet the social norms in the receiving country. However, different findings have been found in studies of Asian grandparents. The existing studies on the influence of international migration of Chinese migrant grandparents mainly focus on how the decreasing emphasis of filial piety and the individualism in the receiving society influences the intergenerational relations between the grandchildren and the grandparents. For example, it has been shown that Chinese immigrant grandparents in the United States want to play a traditional authoritative role in their new home and they expect to be respected by the younger generation, which may bring disagreements with younger generation who internalise individualism (Holmes and Holmes, 1995). Kamo's (1998) study on Asian grandparents in the United States showed that the grandparents' and grandchildren's different levels of assimilation can cause generative mismatches and the

grandparents' lower assimilation level constrains their role in the grandchildren's socialisation. It is hard for Chinese grandparents to provide childcare for their grandchildren in the United States because they are not in charge and need defer to their adult children's rules; they also think that the grandchildren have become too Americanised (Xie and Xia, 2011). Even though their roles are limited, the grandparents still play a role as family historians, and they transfer their ethnic identity to the grandchildren (Phinney, 1990; Xie and Xia, 2011).

### *Grandparents in Chinese families*

The three-generation family is an important family structure under which Chinese grandparents build a childcare coalition with the middle generation and play grandparental roles. Chen, Liu and Mair (2011) found that 45% of Chinese grandparents co-resided with grandchildren aged 0–6 based on data collected in Liaoning, Heilongjian, Shandong, Jiangsu, Henan, Hubei, Hunan, Guangxi and Guizhou provinces from 1999–2004. The time that residential grandparents spend on childcare is almost equal to the time that the mothers spend on it (Chen, Liu, and Mair, 2011).

Traditionally, three-generation household is a common family structure in Chinese society that facilitates interaction between grandparents and grandchildren. In these families, the grandparents hold the authority and control the family's resources (Chen, Liu, and Mair, 2011). Recently, three-generation families have tended to become temporary and based on practical issues, such as the increased capacity of the grandparents and the burden of working mothers. The elderly's capacity to provide childcare has increased due to their enhanced physical health, and improved cognitive capacity and psychological wellbeing (Silverstein and Cong, 2013). Moreover, in urban China, about 75% of married women were in the labour market in 2010 (Wu and Zhou, 2015). The dilemma between encouraging women's labour participation and the state's emphasis on women's responsibility to nurture children and their families has led many

mothers to experience role conflict between their roles as workers and caregivers (Short et al., 2002). Because of the relatively lesser participation of fathers in childcare, the lack of public childcare services and the unaffordability of commercialised childcare services for many families, the help of grandparents is significant for women to balance their family duties and their work responsibilities.

Some scholars have paid attention to the grandparents' role in the childcare coalition in urban China. Goh (2009, 2010, 2011) conducted research on the intergenerational parenting coalition [*kuadai yuer zuhe*] in Xiamen and studied how the grandparents play and interpret their role as caregivers of their grandchildren based on choice theory. She found that grandparents experience three dilemmas: altruism versus exploitation, freedom to pursue one's own interest versus filial obligations and intergenerational responsibilities versus other retirement choices. Instead of being harmony all the time, there are often internal conflicts in the coalition between the parents and grandparents because of different childrearing methods and philosophies. Xiao (2016) studied the division of childrearing between the grandparents and the parents in coalitions, and also the intergenerational power relations in childrearing and finds that the model of 'grandparents feed and mothers teach' [*yanmi cizu*]. The mother is the manager in the childcare coalition: she makes the decisions and takes responsibility for all of the childcare activities and for the child's social-cultural reproduction (Xiao, 2016). Grandparents, as the helpers in the coalition with less authority, only engage in physical care and family chores, and they are marginalised in the decision-making process (Xiao, 2016).

Grandparenting is shaped by intergenerational power and resources. For example, the transformed power relations between grandparents and adult children influence the grandparents' response to the intergenerational childrearing conflicts. Traditional Chinese intergenerational relations are influenced by Confucianism and emphasise the authority of the older generations and the children's loyalty and obligation to their parents. After 1949,

following the communist revolution and the market reforms, the intergenerational relations have transformed. Davis (1983) examined ageing life before 1978 with both rural and urban elderly and found that the older and younger generations in the family developed a more interdependent relationship, which reflects the increased earning power of the younger generation. Even though the government called for people's loyalty to the state, which undermines their loyalty to the family, the family unit remained strong and the elderly still held a position of advantage in the family and kept their financial interdependence with their children (Davis, 1983). After the market reforms, intergenerational relations continued to be influenced by the process of marketisation, commercialisation and modernisation. However, there is a debate on how family relations have been transformed. The argument that intergenerational relations tend to be individual-oriented and that the power of ageing people has declined has become dominant. For example, Ikels (1990) investigates 100 households in Guangzhou with both the younger and older generations on their resolution of intergenerational conflicts. At the beginning of the market reforms, Ikels (1990) found that the older people preferred to respond inoffensively to family conflicts because they valued family harmony more than the younger generation did and were more likely to rely on their families (Ikels, 1990). Yan (2003) studied rural life after the market reforms and found that traditional family values have been weakened by individualisation and that the older and younger generations tend to be more independent of each other. The elderly are located in a vulnerable position in the market and family because of their disadvantaged earning capacity (Yan, 2003). However, even though Yan's arguments have been influential in studies of Chinese family relations, there are some different voices. For example, Qi (2016) conducted a qualitative study in Guangzhou on the family bonds between adult children and their elderly parents in post-reform China. Qi (2016) found that the family pattern tends to be relational rather than individualistic or collectivistic. Instead of following the market logic of equal exchange, the adult children and their parents express concern for each other and cooperate to obtain cross-generational interests

and maintain intergenerational reciprocity (Qi, 2016). Moreover, grandparents' investment in their adult children empowers them to intervene in their adult children's decisions (Qi, 2016).

### **Childrearing in Chinese families**

Childrearing in urban China tends to be a normative work that is influenced by the discourse of intensive parenting (Fong, 2004). This parenting discourse is mainly accepted by middle-class families and it is becoming hegemonic (Kuan, 2015). In the past three decades, the PRC government has launched a one-child policy and has tried to cultivate a generation of children with competitive quality [*sushi*]. Influenced by modernisation, marketisation and the one-child policy, childrearing in urban cities tends to follow child development values from Western countries. Parents invest most of the family's resources in their children's nutrition, daily life, education and entertainment to maintain their children's quality of life and to develop their competitive strength in the education and job markets (Kuan, 2015). A survey of People's Childbearing Willingness conducted by the National Health and Family Planning Commission in 2015 found that childrearing expenses occupy 50% of family expenses. Furthermore, childcare tends to be a demanding task that requires parents to be well rested so that they can meet its high mental and physical demands (Fong, 2004). Many parents feel uncertain and anxiousness about their children's mental health and development, and they try to follow advice from experts, educators and social media (Kuan, 2015). Such parents feel that they should not only be the primary caregivers but should also be well-educated about parenting skills (Xiao, 2016). They also feel mentally and physically exhausted, and they experience a high economic burden (Fong, 2004).

Because grandparents play an important role in childrearing in a Chinese family, their childcare may also be influenced by intensive parenting. Some studies point out that the child-centred childrearing philosophy can cause grandparents to feel exhausted and feel marginalised in the

decision-making process in the childcare coalition (Goh, 2010; Goh 2011; Xiao, 2016). However, studies have oversimplified the grandparents' experiences and have failed to point out the complexity of grandparenting. First, grandparents with different backgrounds may have various reactions to the child-centred discourse. Second, childrearing is a complicated process that includes many diverse tasks, such as physical care, education, consumption and discipline. Grandparents' experiences of contributing to different tasks can also be different. Moreover, the agency of the grandparents to deal with the challenges of caregiving and their marginalised position in the family is often overlooked. In my research, I explore the influence of intensive parenting on the childrearing experiences of rural-urban migrant grandmothers, and I emphasise their responses to this discourse.

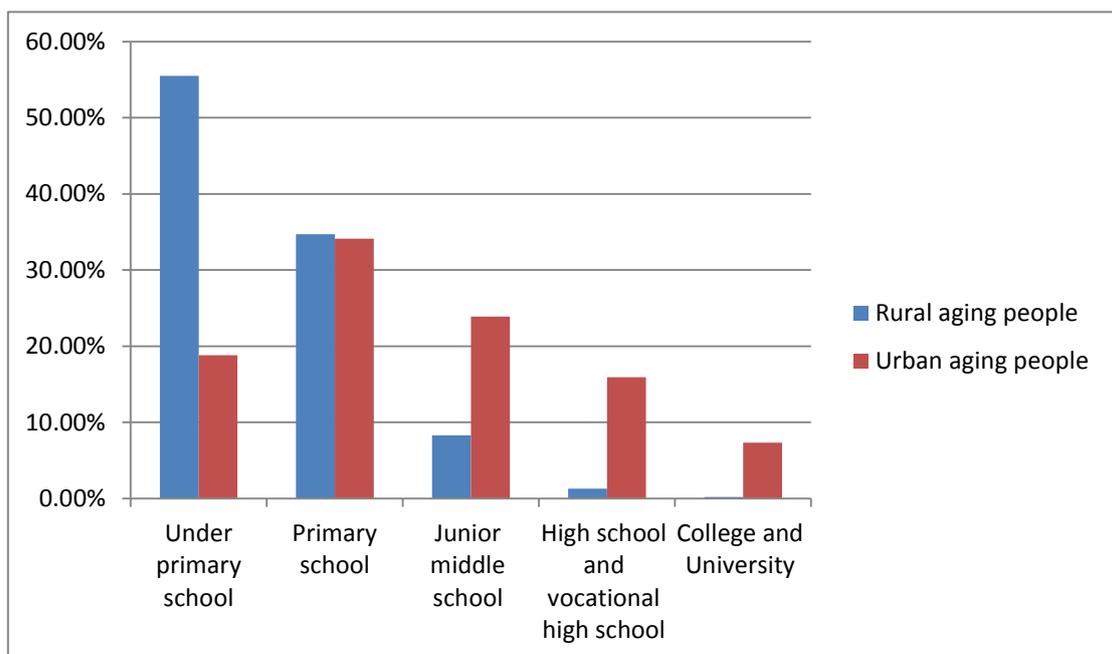
### ***Rural-urban migrant grandparents in China***

Migrant grandparenting is a functional solidarity approach in which rural grandparents and urban parents build up a childcare coalition to share childcare in an urban household. In the childcare coalition, grandparents face requirements and expectations from the middle generation, which gives the grandparents a stage to face the urban childrearing discourse. The middle generation migrates to urban cities to search for education and job opportunities. By settling down in the cities, obtaining official citizenship and getting married, they obtain upward social mobility and become the middle class in urban cities. Having been educated and lived in cities for a long time, their childrearing values and behaviours are influenced by the urban childrearing discourse: in other words, intensive parenting.

When rural grandparents migrate to urban cities to join their children's household, the migration not only combines the older generation and the younger generation together in one household but also combines rural and urban residents. Migration gives rural grandparents two identities: as grandparents in the family and as rural migrants in cities. This makes them

different from urban local grandparents and urban-urban migrant grandparents.

Rural-urban migrant grandparents are different from urban grandparents because of their typically lower level of economic resources. The inequalities between rural and urban areas have increased since the market reforms (Kanbur and Zhang, 2005). The Ministry of Civil Affairs conducted a survey of people over 60 years old in 2015 and found that in 2014, the average income per year of the rural elderly was 7621 Yuan, compared with the 23930 Yuan earned by urban elderly<sup>2</sup>. Rural grandparents showed more dependence on the younger generation for ageing care, which undermined their power and authority in the family and in the childcare coalitions (Giles, Wang, and Zhao, 2010). Moreover, the difference between rural-urban migrant grandparents and urban grandparents in education level is significant. A survey of Chinese elderly people shows that the education level of rural older people is much lower than that of urban older people, as shown in Figure 2.1. The economic, educational and cultural differences between rural and urban areas have a significant influence on rural-urban ageing migrants' interaction with urban society.



<sup>2</sup> Data come from the website of Ministry of Civil Affairs  
<http://www.mca.gov.cn/article/zwgk/mzyw/201610/20161000001974.shtml>

Figure 2.1 The educational levels of rural and urban ageing people (Source: Investigation on Chinese rural and urban ageing people in 2006)<sup>3</sup>

Rural-urban migrant grandparents may experience childrearing differences between rural and urban areas. Existing studies found that parents in rural China are more likely to recommend traditional childrearing values, such as group-oriented and adult-oriented parenting strategies (Chen and Chen, 2010; Luo, 1996; Wang, 2003). Compared with urban childrearing, which emphasises children's self-confidence, creativity and independence, childrearing in rural China is more likely to endorse controlling and power-assertive parenting and to be less assisted by the new media and communication technologies (Chen et al., 2010; Yu, 2002). In addition, the intimate parent-child interaction is less emphasised in rural areas (Chen et al., 2010).

Existing studies on rural-urban ageing migrants have mainly focused on their demographic characteristics, migrant patterns, reasons for migration and the challenges that they face in receiving cities. For example, Zhou (2002) examined cross-province ageing migrants during the 1990s in Beijing and found that this migration is mainly based on the family and on kinship, and he found that 60% of the migrants were female. Meng et al. (2004) explored the demographic characteristics and migration motives of ageing migrants without Beijing Hukou in Haidian district and found that although they migrated primarily for family reasons, there can be more specific reasons for their migration. For example, they may migrate for family reunification purposes, to help with the grandchildren's childcare and family chores or to obtain care for themselves, and 18% of them have agricultural Hukou. The social and economic status of the younger generation influences the migration of the elderly and the children's stable and high-income jobs and sufficient living space promotes the aging migration. Wu (2013) studied ageing migration under the one-child policy and found that the migration of the only child promotes the migration of the parents. In other words, as the only child moves to bigger cities

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<sup>3</sup> These data come from the website of China:  
[http://www.china.com.cn/news/txt/2007-12/17/content\\_9392818.htm](http://www.china.com.cn/news/txt/2007-12/17/content_9392818.htm)

through education, their parents show more intention to migrate to cities. These studies emphasised the challenges to social welfare in the receiving society as ageing migrants are regarded as the care receivers in their families and as dependents in the receiving society. For example, they point out that the institutional barriers of the local Hukou and social welfare have resulted in vulnerability for ageing migrants, while ageing migration increases the shortage of public resources and services in cities (Meng et al., 2004; Wu, 2013; Zhang and Zhou, 2013).

Previous studies defined ageing migrants as a burden on the receiving society and have tended to neglect the ageing migrants' identity as caregiving grandparents in the family. However, instead of searching for ageing care, many elderly people migrate to help the younger generation. Therefore, in this thesis, I explore their contributions to the receiving society and families, particularly as caregivers to their grandchildren.

### ***Theoretical framework***

Using the concept of agency, I explore how rural-urban migrant grandparents provide childrearing under the influence of the urban childrearing discourse. To break down the dualism between objectivism and subjectivism, Giddens (1984) emphasised the duality of the structure. The structure could constrain and enable activities, while the actors could reproduce and transform the structure through their practices. Giddens (1984:14) defined agency as 'to be able to intervene in the world, or to refrain from such intervention, with the effect of influencing a specific process, or to be able to deploy a range of causal power.'

Some researchers have used the concept of agency to explain migrants' decision-making and choices in the migration process, and have included the migrants' efforts to interact with the structures in the receiving society. For example, Richmond (1988) reviewed studies on refugee migration and demonstrated the success of structuration theory in explaining refugee migration.

He argued that even though refugees migrate because of political forces, they make choices and decisions to move after they consider and evaluate all of the relevant information (Richmond, 1988). Goss and Lindquist (1995) used agency to explain the employment of labour migrants from the Philippines, whose overseas recruitment institutions are controlled by the government. They found that migrant employees are knowledgeable agents who know the rules and can exploit resources to obtain employment opportunities. For example, these migrants explore rich information and choose from different employment scenarios to avoid risks in the labour migration process, and they make efforts to accomplish their working plans after the migration, such as taking training courses (Goss and Lindquist, 1995).

The agency of the elderly in their grandparenting activities is also explored in Western studies. Grandparents use strategies to play grandparental roles under the constraint of the family and social structure. For example, Gibson (2005) found that African-American grandmothers can use several strategies to undermine the influence caused by the absence of parents in the family, such as maintaining intensive communication with the grandchild and involving the grandchildren in community activities. Timonen and Doyle (2012) argued that grandparents can actively use strategies to keep contact with the grandchildren and can compensate for the grandchild's emotional loss after a divorce in the middle generation.

These studies have inspired me to explore the agency of rural-urban migrants and ageing people, and to challenge the stigma that they face. Ageing Chinese people face two kinds of stigma. First, existing studies have tended to portray ageing people as constrained by powerful social structures and as passive responders to social changes, which overlooks their agency. For example, using both statistical results and qualitative descriptions, studies regarded ageing people, especially rural ageing people in post-reform China, as maintaining outdated values, lifestyles and knowledge, and they are marginalised in the process of modernisation (Davis, 1983; Goh, 2009; Liu, 2014; Silverstein, Cong, and Li, 2006). Second, studies have showed a

tendency to define ageing people as losing their independence and becoming reliant on the family, which overlooks their contribution to the family and society (Cong and Silverstein, 2014; Giles, Wang, and Zhao, 2010; Guo, Aranda, and Silverstein, 2009; Liu, 2014). For example, Guo, Aranda and Silverstein (2009) researched the impact of out-migration on intergenerational support and found that migration undermines instrumental support for the parents. Giles, Wang, and Zhao (2010) explore the primary support of rural elderly and find that elderly with migrant children have more possibility to experience the risk of falling into poverty because of the increased possibility of a breakdown of reciprocity network.

Recently, some studies have paid attention to the agency of ageing Chinese people and have constructed a more positive image of ageing life (Boermel, 2006; Liu, 2014; Qi, 2016). For example, Boermel (2006) explored the agency of ageing people in Beijing, considering how ageing people construct new meaning for ageing when the discourse of old age has recently been negatively constructed by the younger generation as a burden on society. Liu (2014) explored the agency of the rural elderly facing the separation resulting from migration of the younger generation and found that instead of depending on the family, ageing people try to keep their economic autonomy and make contributions to the family, such as by taking care of the children. Qi (2016) examined the family bond in post-reform China and found that ageing parents have the agency to reinterpret filial piety and family obligation under a transformed family bond. To further explore the agency of ageing people, I examine how Chinese ageing people respond in the context of migration and grandparenting. I argue that, as strategic agents, rural-urban migrant grandmothers can actively make choices, develop strategies, and use resources to fulfill their childcare duties under the influence of childrearing discourse in urban China.

### ***Research questions***

By conducting qualitative research on rural-urban migrant grandmothers, I particularly focus on the interpretation and meanings that the rural-urban migrant grandparents attach to their roles, experiences and practices in the childcare coalition. My research examines how rural-urban migrant grandmothers experience daily childrearing cooperation with parents under the influence of urban childrearing discourse and method. I focus on their cooperation and conflicts with their adult children. Through examining grandmothers' interactions with the parents, the influence of intensive parenting discourse on grandparenting can be reflected. Furthermore, I explore the agency of rural-urban migrant grandmothers to respond to the urban childrearing discourse: how they use resources, experiences and strategies to overcome challenges to fulfill their duties in the cooperation and how they deal with the intergenerational conflicts on childrearing.

This research focuses on grandmothers' experience of contributing to the following three childrearing tasks: daily physical care, education and discipline. Daily physical care relates to how to nurture children's physical strength, such as through eating, sleeping, playing, hygiene and health care. Education relates to how grandmothers mentor their grandchildren's schooling work, and it includes how they transfer their knowledge and skills to the grandchildren (Moore and Rosenthal, 2017). Discipline relates to how grandmothers cultivate their grandchildren's behavioural habits and manners, including how they transfer values and give spiritual guidance. To examine their experiences in cooperation, I analyse both intergenerational solidarity and conflicts. As the grandmothers described accepting or rejecting different aspects of urban childrearing methods, their interaction with the intensive childcare discourse can be identified.

First, I examine how these grandmothers cooperate with the urban parents and outline their duties in this cooperation. Because intensive parenting calls for considerable mental, physical

and financial contributions from the family, how the two generations collaborate to respond to this discourse is examined. Moreover, I explore the challenges and difficulties that they face to maintain their cooperation and do their duty. Second, while intensive parenting has now become dominant, there is wide variation in how caregivers react to and follow its prescriptions, and this may cause conflict in childrearing (Shirani, Henwood, and Coltart, 2012). Consequently, this research explores childcare-related intergenerational conflicts caused by grandmothers' rejection of different aspects of this discourse. Importantly, I focus on their agency in making choices and engaging in reflection.

This research contributes to the theory in two domains: how the discourse of intensive parenting influences grandparenting and how ageing people experience grandparenthood through migration.

## **Methodology and data**

Grounded theory advanced by Glaser and Strauss states that ‘researchers attempt to derive theories from an analysis of the patterns, themes, and common categories discovered in observational and interview data, consisting of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data to construct theories grounded in the data themselves’ (Babbie, 2004: 284). In the light of grounded theory, I conducted initial fieldwork to obtain rich data and to explore the basic image of the rural-urban grandparents’ daily lives. After the preliminary data analysis, I identified a number of issues and concepts that are frequently brought up by the rural-urban migrant grandparents, such as intensive physical and mental investment and intergenerational conflicts regarding childcare. Consequently, during the second stage of the fieldwork, I paid more attention to these issues.

### ***Participants***

In 2010, Guangdong, Tianjin, Shanghai, Beijing and Shandong were the top five destinations for ageing migrants in mainland China, and together they received 48.5% of all ageing migrants (Liu, 2014; Zhang and Zhou, 2013). Therefore, Beijing and Taian in Shandong province were chosen as the two field sites in this research. To improve the diversity of the data, I chose two cities to include migrant grandmothers in both first-tier and third-tier cities. Beijing is the capital city of China, and it is the political and cultural centre of China. Beijing attracts migrants from all over the country for both education and job opportunities: in 2015, there were 272,000 ageing migrants in Beijing.<sup>4</sup> Taian is a third-tier city in Shandong province. The economy of Taian county ranks ninth in Shandong province. Migrants in Taian mainly come from nearby towns and the other counties of Shandong province. My social networks helped me to access the grandmothers in Beijing and Taian, which is another reason for my choice of

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<sup>4</sup> The data come from the website of the Beijing government:  
<http://zhengce.beijing.gov.cn/library/192/33/50/46/438657/141491/index.html>

field sites.

The participants are rural-urban migrant grandmothers. During the first and second field trips, both migrant grandmothers and migrant grandfathers were covered. At the end of the fieldwork, 24 migrant grandparents were interviewed. During the data analysis, the grandfathers' participation in childrearing was found to be not as intensive as the grandmothers. Goh (2010) in Xiamen showed that 62% of caregiving grandparents in three-generation households are grandmothers. Consequently, three grandfathers were moved from the sample and the research was narrowed down to focus on the experiences of grandmothers. Moreover, one urban-urban migrant grandmother was found and removed. However, the stories of the three grandfathers and the urban-urban migrant grandmother were able to provide a source for triangulation. Finally, a sample of 20 rural-urban migrant grandmothers was used in my research. At the time of the interviews, 10 grandmothers lived in Taian and 10 lived in Beijing.

The grandmothers' adult children are middle-class, and they live in these cities. There are two reasons why I chose to use middle-class families in this research. First, Meng et al. (2004) found that the migration of ageing people is influenced by the economic status of the middle generation. The migration of the elderly is encouraged by adult children's stable and high-income jobs, enough residential space and enough economic resources. Second, the intensive parenting discourse is mainly internalised by these middle-class families. Therefore, I chose to study middle-class families based on the educational background and the occupation of the middle generation. In the 20 families included in this research, four families had adult children with a PhD and nine families had an adult child with a Master's degree. The middle generation of the other seven families in Taian had a Bachelor's degree. The occupations of the middle generation include doctors, civil servants, researchers, assistant professors, senior managers, senior accountants, designers and owners of chain make-up stores. The standards of the middle-class that are used in Taian are lower than the standards in Beijing because of their

different development levels. For example, the adult children with a Bachelor’s degree in Taian are more likely to be regarded as middle-class because the job market in Taian city sets a lower requirement on education than that in Beijing. Moreover, Zhang and Zhou (2013) found that having a child younger than 6 years old enhances the possibility of elderly migration. Consequently, the grandchildren in the researched families are mainly younger than 6 years old, including preschool children, kindergarten students and primary school students.

Nineteen grandmothers had agricultural Hukou and worked as farmers. The only exception was grandmother Lu, who had non-agricultural Hukou because she had worked as a cook in a private kindergarten before the migration. Five grandmothers had part-time jobs, such as teaching in a primary school, owning a general store and cleaning. Two of the grandmothers had graduated from high school, eight had graduated from junior middle school and 10 had graduated with a primary school degree or below. Four of the grandmothers had migrated with their husbands, who regularly moved back to the hometowns for farm work and for ageing care. Sixteen families had one grandchild. Of the four grandmothers with two grandchildren in one family, only Lu took care of two children; the other three grandmothers only took care of one child. There were 3 maternal grandmothers and 17 paternal grandmothers. The informants’ details are provided in Table 3.1.

Pseudonyms (Receiving City)	Age	Education	Occupation	Adult Children’s Occupation	Grandchildren (Age/Gender/Pseudonyms)
Yan (Beijing)	65	High school	Farmer/ teacher	Doctor	6.5/M/Leilei

Qin (Beijing)	61	High school	Farmer/ teacher	Translator	3/F/Shanshan
Chen (Beijing)	54	Junior Middle school	Farmer/ migrants	Civil servants	2/M/Longlong
Qu (Beijing)	65	Primary school	Farmer	Researcher	3.5/M/Jiajia
Liao (Beijing)	53	Junior Middle school	Farmer	Doctor	1/M/Doudou
Feng (Beijing)	57	Primary school	Farmer	Civil servants	4.5/F/Linlin
Zhu (Beijing)	58	Junior Middle school	Farmer/ Cleanser	Researcher	3/M/Huhu
Yun (Beijing)	55	Junior Middle school	Farmer	Civil servant	2/M/Pengpeng
Fu (Beijing)	63	Primary school	Farmer	Professor	2/M/Qiangqiang
Tang	65	Primary school	Farmer	Designer	5/F/Yunyun

(Beijing)					
Jie (Taian)	65	Primary school	Famer	Senior manager	6/F/Xinxin; 2/F/Yangyang
Han (Taian)	62	Primary school	Famer	Senior manager	6/F/Qianqian
Lu (Taian)	61	Junior Middle school	Cooker	Lecturer	5/M/Xiaoying; 2/M/Xiaofeng
Liu (Taian)	60	Primary school	Farmer	Doctor	5 /F/Xiaoxiao; 1/F/Baobao
Xu (Taian)	59	Primary school	Farmer	Civil servant	5/F/Yangyang; 1/F/Caihong
Qin (Taian)	60	Junior Middle school	Farmer	Accountant	4.5/F/Xiaomei
Zheng (Taian)	65	Primary school	Farmer	Senior manager	4/M/Kunkun
Gong (Taian)	63	Primary school	Farmer/owner of a general store	Civil servant	6/M/Xiaoming

Wei (Taian)	62	Primary school	Farmer	Civil servant	1/M/Kunkun
Ma (Taian)	53	Junior Middle school	Farmer/cleanser	Senior manager	2.5/F/Yuanyuan

Table 3.1: Basic information of informants

### ***Recruitment***

The research subjects were accessed through key informants. The key informants in Beijing were my cousin and his wife, whose mother-in-law was a rural-urban migrant grandmother. They invited the mothers of their colleagues and classmates to participate in this study. My cousin graduated with a Master's degree in biology and works as a civil servant. His wife has a PhD in medicine and is employed in a hospital. as a result, the adult generations of researched families in Beijing are thus mainly civil servants and doctors with a Master's degree or a PhD, which guarantees that the researched families are middle-class families. The mother of the key informant took me to the public park and introduced me to the rural-urban migrant grandmothers that she knew. The two key informants in Taian were friends of my sister who worked as senior managers; their mothers were also rural-urban migrant grandmothers. They invited their work colleagues to introduce their mothers or mothers-in-law to participate in this study. To enrich the diversity of the participants' backgrounds, I also found informants from their neighbours and friends. The key informant first contacted the middle generation in these families and obtained their agreement to participate. The middle generation worried that the old grandparents might be in danger because of their lack of knowledge about urban life and academic research, so they served as the gatekeepers of the family. They asked for the consent

of the rural-urban migrant grandparents to participate in this research. The snowball method was used in the second stage because some of the adult children in the researched families introduced me and my key informants to friends whose mothers are rural-urban migrant grandmothers. Because this research covers the domestic and private life of these families, the key informants' familiarity with them provided a sense of security. This gave me the opportunity to visit the informants' families and increased the informants' willingness to share more private stories with me.

### ***Data collection***

My research uses in-depth qualitative interviews in conjunction with overt participant observation to obtain data on the rural-urban migrant grandmothers' interactions with their grandchildren, the middle generation and people in the local community. Qualitative interviews allowed the interviewees to express their opinions, experiences, feelings and daily practices in their own voices and in their own language (Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey, 2010; Peng, 2016). Through the interviews, the grandparents reflected on their childcare practices through their narratives, stories and activities. Moreover, the follow-up questions gave me the opportunity to gain insight into the grandparenting ideologies underlying these practices. They also allowed me to analyze how their ideologies interact with the hegemonic discourse and relate to other family norms. Participant observation was used to facilitate the data collection, which also worked as methodological triangulation and enhanced the validity of data (Seale, 2004).

I conducted three field trips to Beijing and Taian during the summers of 2016 and 2017 and during the New Year holiday of 2017. I used a semi-structured interview outline, which included questions about the grandparents' daily practices, their activities with their grandchildren, any conflict over childcare in the family, their everyday entertainment and their experience in the community. The interviews were conducted in Beijing Olympic Park during a

family picnic, the courtyard of the interviewees' communities, and in shopping malls in Beijing and Taian. I mainly conducted the interviews on weekends and holidays because the parents were able to take care of the children, giving the grandmothers more time to do the interviews. When I interviewed informants who had to take care of a child, I invited them to an indoor playground in a shopping mall to enable the child to play. As the child was playing, I accompanied the grandmother outside and conducted the interview. The interviews lasted from 1 to 3 hours. I also conducted interviews in the informants' households. This allowed me to observe the living arrangements in the family, including the living and leisure areas of the different family members. During the interviews, many informants shared photos of the family, the grandchildren's toys and even their homework. Some of them also showed pictures of their children on their iPads or mobile phones.

In each observation, I spent a whole day observing the interviewee's activities. I accompanied them to public parks, shopping malls and community clinics. I cooked with them, had meals with them and played with the children. This allowed me to observe their interactions with the grandchildren, middle generation and domestic helpers. I also had an opportunity to observe how the grandparents interact with their friends in the community, and I listened to their conversation about family issues. When I visited the families, I took a box of milk as a gift. According to the suggestions and requirements of the key informants, I prepared a gift valued at 50 Yuan or gave a red envelope with 50 Yuan in it to the informants.

### ***Researcher positionality***

The interview is a collaboration process between researchers and participants, and how the researcher presents herself and communicates with informants can influence the process (Peng, 2017). A few years ago, I migrated from a small city in Shandong province to Beijing to pursue my undergraduate studies. At this time, I experienced a culture shock because of the more

developed living standards in Beijing. Like some of my informants in Beijing and most of my informants in Taian, I also came from Shandong province. Moreover, my mother migrated to take care of my sister's children and she shared many of the experiences with my informants. During the fieldwork, I shared my background with my informants. Moreover, I always began my interviews with my mother's story. The co-ethnic identity, the similar feelings on migration and the informants' sympathetic feelings with my mother helped us to build trusting and close relationships. Even though I am single and have no children, I helped my mother to take care of my nieces, which gave me a little experience in childcare. When I interviewed the grandmothers, I encouraged my informants to share their knowledge on childrearing and the family operation with me.

### *Data analysis*

I transcribed all of the interview recordings in full by myself, and I integrated the stories and information collected from the participant observations with the interview data. The transcription process helped me to become more familiar with my data. Following the grounded theory to generate codes and themes from data, I conducted two rounds of coding. During the first-round data analysis, I conducted open coding. I found that the grandmothers' main duties were in childrearing, and I developed the following codes: daily physical care (including cooking, cleaning, accompanying for sleep, playing, and healthcare), consumption (including buying clothes, toys, and food, education and training) and education and discipline (including choosing the school and interests, contacting the teachers, tutoring during homework, preschool education, and standards of daily behaviour). I then compared the observation data with the interview data to verify the validity of the data. The second-round data analysis was facilitated by the method of constant comparison, which is based on inter-case and intra-case comparison, and selective coding was used to integrate and refine the central themes (Peters, Hooker, & Zvonkovic, 2006). The intra-case comparison helped me to find how grandmothers cooperated

with their adult children, the challenges that they meet, the conflicts in the families and the strategies that they use. As I conducted the inter-case comparison, I found that there were some shared experiences among the migrant grandmothers, such as taking the grandchildren to the playground, challenges of technology and the use of information and communication technology (ICT). Moreover, I found that there were some diversified cooperation patterns, such as listening to the middle generation, working together and working alone, and different strategies that were used to face these difficulties based on the grandparents' preferences, resources and abilities.

## **Migrant grandmothing and daily childcare**

### *The rural-urban grandmothers' migration motives*

Childrearing in urban China has become increasingly intensive, and most parents invest large amounts of time and energy in providing thoughtful daily childcare (Fong, 2004). Social discourse associates the importance of detailed parental investigation with children's emotional and psychological health and the brain development and intellectual potential (Wall, 2010). However, the double burden of paid work and housework causes many parents to face difficulties in meeting the requirements of daily life. Consequently, the presence of the grandmothers in three-generational families can release the parents' burden. Therefore, building intergenerational childrearing collaboration is the key strategy in child-centred parenting discourse.

Many studies influenced by exchange theory have regarded intergenerational childrearing cooperation as an exchange of time for money (Cong and Silverstein, 2008), which I would argue is an oversimplification. The grandmothers in my research had a different understanding of this cooperation. Even though four grandmothers expressed worries about ageing care and felt that coming to the city to take care of their grandchildren was also a chance for them to receive ageing care, most of the grandmothers regarded the family as a resource pool. Their migration is a family adaptive strategy to distribute resources to deal with family problems. The grandmothers emphasised that the adult children worked hard for the breadwinning of the family, while the grandmothers handled the housework and supported their work to keep the family stable. Grandmother Qu said, 'We all do what we can do for the family.' Four of the grandmothers also showed altruistic attitudes, emphasising their duty and contribution to the family as their main motivation. Grandmother Ma said, 'The children need help. I can't stand by and do nothing.'

Based on the understanding of intergenerational cooperation, the rural-urban migrant grandmothers in my research report two migration motivations. First, they migrated for the practical reason that the adult children face difficulties balancing work and childrearing tasks. Their migration not only fulfils their role as grandparents but also their parental role in helping their adult children. Grandmother Jie said, 'I help them to take care of the child so that they can concentrate on their work.' Second, the grandmothers migrated because of the social norm of the family responsibilities of a grandparent. Taking care of the grandchild is considered as a common duty of the elderly in the grandmothers' community. Grandmother Feng said, 'it is common that the elderly takes care of the grandchild.'

To migrate, the grandmothers have to overcome many difficulties, such as being separated from their husbands, balancing the duty of taking care of elderly parents with that of taking care of their young grandchildren and rearranging farm work and housework. In migrating to cities, the grandmothers also face challenges in adapting to urban life, such as using the complicated transportation systems, adjusting to different accents in the language used and isolated community life. The grandmothers in this study had diverse attitudes towards urban life. Six of the grandmothers had positive opinions and felt that urban life was decent, convenient, flourishing and better than life in their hometowns. Among these six, one grandmother had Beijing Hukou, two grandmothers had migrated with their husbands, one grandmother had an apartment in Taian, one grandmother's three daughters were all in Beijing and one grandmother had previously been a migrant worker in Chengdu. The better resources and networks in the cities gave them more opportunities to obtain a sense of belonging in a city. The other 14 grandmothers had more ambivalent attitudes towards urban life. They recognised the advantages of urban life, such as the polite people and the good sanitary conditions, but they also cherished life style in their hometowns. Grandmother Qu said, 'Beijing has its advantages, but east, west, home is best.'

### *Daily care of the grandchildren*

After migration, one significant grandparenting task is to provide daily physical care to the grandchildren. Xiao (2016) found that the grandparents mainly engage in the biophysical care in intergenerational childrearing coalition. Goh (2009) investigated the grandparents as full-time caregivers and pointed out that the image of grandparents' daily life is that they live around the grandchild. The daily arrangements of rural-urban migrant grandmothers in my study show a similar pattern. When the parents go to work, the grandmothers are the main providers of daily care. When the parents come home, the grandmothers play an assisting role to cooperate with the parents in childcare. The grandmothers with preschool grandchildren usually worked for at least 14 hours a day. Given that some of them accompanied the children when they slept at night, they may work even longer. Even though the grandmothers with a grandchild at school worked for 6 hours during the weekday, they all experienced a similar situation before the child started school. They also worked long hours during the weekends and holidays.

Zhu, from a village in Jiangxi province, is the grandmother of a three-year-old boy, Huhu. She shared her daily timetable with me (see Table 4.1). Although it is flexible, the timetable still provides a clear picture of her daily life.

6:30 AM	Prepare breakfast before the child wakes up.
7:00–8:00 AM	Wake the child up; wash and feed him.
8:00–9:30 AM	Cleaning, washing clothes, washing dishes.
10:00–11:30 AM	Feed the grandchild fruit.

	Take the grandchild to the park to play. Go to the market.
12:00 AM	Prepare lunch and feed the grandchild.
13:00–15:00PM	Accompany the child to take a nap, play, tell them a story.
15:00–17:00 PM	Take the child to play at the park or in the community.
18:00–19:30 PM	Prepare dinner and clean.
19:30–21:00 PM	Rest, take a walk, watch TV, speak to her husband on the phone.
21:00 PM	bathe the child.

Table 4.1 Grandmother Zhu's daily timetable

The grandmothers had ambivalent attitudes towards the pattern of living around the child and intensive childrearing work. They reported that childrearing occupied most of their time, but they also stated that childrearing tasks were not as tiring and hard as their farm work. They compared the urban childrearing method with their childrearing experiences in their hometowns and pointed out that childcare in their hometown was much easier. They also recognised some recent changes, as they reported that young parents in their hometowns also tended to pay more attention to childcare.

Even though I just take care of the child, it also takes me the whole day and most of my energy. But, no matter how tiring, it is easier than farming. [Qu]

Grandparents in my hometown don't have so much time to live centred on the child. Lots

of farm work is waiting. But young parents also take care of the child carefully now. They try to arrange the schedule so that one family member can take care of the child. [Chen]

### *Three ways of cooperating*

Studies have found that grandmothers experience different types of childcare involvement, such as a primary role, a supportive role and a combination, based on the family needs (Pearson et al., 1990). For example, in African-American families, grandmothers may serve in the role of biological parents, and they give more controlling and punishment parenting behaviour when the mothers are absent (Gibson, 2005; Pearson et al., 1990). In middle-class families, grandmothers may help in the care of the child, but they follow a non-interference strategy and play supportive roles as fun-seekers and financial supporters (May, Mason, and Clarke, 2012). However, while paying more attention to the inter-household differences of involvement, prior studies have failed to explain the intra-family diversity, flexibility and variation of the grandmothers' involvement.

The main role of the grandmother is to support the parents in intensive childrearing duties. Working long days, rural-urban migrant grandmothers face a wide variety of tasks and issues in daily childrearing. As an active agent, a grandmother can use diverse methods to cooperate with the parents to accomplish different tasks. In my research, the two generations share the childrearing workload in three different ways to ensure that an exquisite lifestyle of the grandchild. In the childrearing collaboration, the grandmothers make different contributions based on their different issues, resources and family relations.

### *Working together*

Working together means that two adult generations take complementary roles and support each other to work towards the same goal. When there is a problem or a crisis in childrearing, the

grandmothers and parents are all motivated to deal with the problem. The shared goal calls for an intergenerational union to work together, such as in the case of grandmother Qin's family members, who worked together to improve the nutrition of granddaughter Shanshan. Qin, the paternal grandmother of Shanshan, lived with her daughter-in-law in Beijing, and her son works in another city. When Shanshan was two years old, her hair was yellow because she lacked nutrition. This worried both the grandmother and the mother, and they discussed how to solve this problem. In this case, the different generations contributed to the task based on their knowledge and resources. The parents were more likely to explore childcare methods based on their professional background, childcare books, Internet, experts' suggestions and the information that they can gather from their experienced friends. In this case, Qin's daughter-in-law took the child to the hospital to have a physical examination, and she received a prescription from the doctor. Meanwhile, grandmothers are more likely to rely on their previous childcare experiences in their hometowns, help from a knowledgeable friend or information collected from the media. In this case, grandmother Qin cooked black sesame soup, which was good for Shanshan's hair, and she watched some TV shows on health-keeping to find a solution.

The family also uses the way of working together when there were tasks that could not be finished by one person and which required two or more people to work together, such as going to the hospital. According to grandmother Jie, when her grandchild was sick, going to the hospital was a complicated task, and it is difficult to accomplish it by herself. It was preferable for one person to accompany the child for treatment while the other family members did the registration, made the payment and contacted the doctor. Grandmother Chen stated the need for cooperation with her daughter with the atomisation treatment for her grandson Longlong's bronchitis:

His mother held the spray head of the machine and I controlled the child. Otherwise, he

moved around... his mother was too soft-hearted to force the child. [Chen]

Moreover, cooperation can happen not only between mothers and grandmothers but also between fathers and grandmothers. Qu cooperated with her son to deal when her grandson Jiajia refused to eat his vegetables. Qu proposed using vegetable juice to make noodles for the child, and Jiajia's father bought a juicer and used it to make vegetable juice. Then, grandmother Qu mixed the juice with flour to make noodles for the child. Qu reported that the child liked the noodles very much and ate them all.

In these examples, the family was able to allocate resources efficiently to deal with the difficulties in childrearing. Every member's ability was utilised. The parents' scientific knowledge and the grandmothers' rich experience were integrated, which enhanced the families' ability to respond to these difficulties.

#### *Listening to the middle generation*

In listening to the middle generation, the parents established requirements related to the children's daily physical care for the grandmothers based on the 'expert knowledge' that they learned and the habitus that they obtained in urban life. For example, Liao, from a village in Shandong province, is the grandmother of a six-month-old boy, Doudou. Her daughter-in-law has a PhD in medicine and works as a doctor in a famous hospital in Beijing. She has read many medical books on child nutrition and development. According to Liao's interpretation, the daughter-in-law worried that Liao lacked enough knowledge on hygiene. Consequently, the daughter-in-law gave the grandmother some requirements on hygiene for childrearing. For example, she required that all toys should be sterilised before the child played with them because the child always put them in his mouth.

This cooperation method is mainly used when the methods of the younger generation are

regarded as better and more scientific than those of the grandmother. The Westernisation and modernisation processes have led many people to adopt Western methods and follow a modern lifestyle and to regard the traditional style as outdated (Boermel, 2006). Moreover, urbanisation stimulates rural-urban divisions, while the Hukou policy creates a hierarchy between urban and rural society (Christiansen, 1990). The hierarchies between modern and traditional and rural and urban society influence the opinion on different childrearing methods. Urban parents want to adopt scientific methods and new knowledge to meet their children's needs and achieve their children's development (Kuan, 2015). Moreover, the high requirements of modern parenting discourse bring the anxiety to the parents and they then pass part of these requirements on to the grandparents. The parents set up these requirements because they think that the grandmothers lack expert knowledge, and their habits are rustic and unscientific, which may influence the child's development.

The grandmothers learn the parents' requirements in three different ways. First, the requirements are directly expressed to the grandmothers by the adult generation. Even though the daughters and sons are more likely to express their requirements directly, the daughter-in-law and son-in-law may also express them politely, or they may seek help from their mates. For example, grandmother Liao reported, 'She [Her daughter-in-law] told me directly sometimes. But she also worried that I may feel unhappy if she repeated too many times. My son reminded me if I forgot.' Second, some requirements were hinted at by the daughter-in-law and son-in-law. For example, grandmother Xu told me that her daughter-in-law sometimes forwarded some news to the family WeChat group, where she could find her daughter-in-law's preferred childcare method. She knew that the daughter-in-law had difficulty asking her directly. The third way that grandmothers can learn their parents' requirements is through a third party, such as a domestic helper or even the grandchild. Grandmother Fu's daughter-in-law is an assistant professor at a university in Beijing. A domestic helper was

employed by the family for the first month after the child's birth. Some requirements assigned to the domestic helper influenced the grandmother's childrearing. For example, Fu's daughter-in-law required the domestic helper to use a specific soap to wash the baby's clothes and to wash the child's washbasin separately. After the domestic helper left, Fu also followed these requirements. Grandmother Qu's daughter-in-law required the child to brush his teeth every night. When the mother was not at home, the grandson told Qu, 'Mum said I must brush my teeth before sleeping.'

### *Working alone*

When the parents go to work, the grandmothers take care of the child alone. The grandmother can interact with the child in her own way, make a decision by herself and set up her own requirements. However, this is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, there is less supervision from the younger generation. The grandmother can use her preferred method of physical care to decide what to cook or when and where to play. Studies have concluded that the grandparents are in a marginalised position in childrearing decision-making (Xiao, 2016). However, because they work alone, the grandmothers are also able to make their own decisions. For example, grandmother Qin asked the child to finish the meal and not walk around while she was eating. In another example, grandmother Ma did not take the child to the canteen for a meal because she thought that the hygiene standards of the purchased food were unsatisfactory. Grandmother Chen did not give the child snacks because of their effect on the child's diet even though the parents always bought them snacks.

Moreover, taking care of the child alone is also a chance for the grandmother to cultivate the grandmother-grandchild relations without the interference and mediation of the parents. The grandmothers reported that they could interact with the children intensively in this period and could cultivate trusting relationships by expressing their love to the child, passing their

experiences and the history of the family on the child, listening to the opinions and feelings of the child and playing as a fun-seeker. For example, Grandmother Feng and Zheng reported as follows:

I accompanied Linlin to sleep at night. I told her the name and zodiac of her grandfather and me... told her how many cousins she has in her hometown. [Feng]

Sometimes I use my bicycle to take him to the Municipal Plaza and we spend the whole afternoon here. He said, 'Grandma, you are very nice as you always take me to play.'  
[Zheng]

However, there is less support and suggestion from the younger generation, and grandparents have to respond to the children's needs and handle all difficulties and emergencies independently. Excluding the 4 grandmothers who had migrated with their husbands, 16 grandmothers took care of children alone during the day. The grandmothers are responsible for the safety of the children. For example, the grandmothers stated that taking the children to the park was exhausting because they had to guarantee the safety of the child in the condition with so much potential dangers, such as chaotic road conditions or child abductions. The grandmothers also faced the challenge of balancing childrearing tasks and other housework because they could not leave the children alone. Grandmother Yan told me of a time when her grandson was 2 years old, where she let the child play with some beans alone while she went to the kitchen to cook congee. When she came back, the boy had put three beans into each nostril, which was very dangerous.

### *Summary*

Chen, Liu and Mair. (2011) reported that grandparents' childcare loads were adaptive to familial needs, including the characteristics of the household, household members and the

mother's work activities. Consequently, their collaboration shows was flexibility in choosing a childrearing method, and they could employ multiple cooperation patterns based on different cases and periods rather than following only one pattern.

The grandmothers' available resources influenced their contributions in grandparenting (Falk, and Falk, 2002). Resources are an important factor that influences the division of labour in the collaboration (Szinovacz, 1998). These resources include time, money and valued knowledge. First, the grandmothers' flexible time and the parents' lack of time often require grandparents to finish some childrearing tasks alone. Second, the lack of money and availability of materials of grandmothers in cities may cause them to follow the younger generation's requirements. For example, Lu's daughter-in-law wanted her to buy food for the child in a supermarket rather than at the nearby market. Lu said, 'I mostly listen to her because it is her money.' Third, the reliability of information and knowledge and the familiarity with technology also influence how the two generations share their duties. When the grandmothers lack knowledge or the methods of the mother are regarded as better, the family prefers to listen to the middle generation. When the two generations face conditions that need more than one person's experience and suggestions, they tend to work together.

Existing studies have also found that grandmothers' contributions can be influenced by grandparent-parent relations, and a harmonious and non-judgemental intergenerational relationship can be more feasible (Falk, and Falk, 2002; Johnson, 1985; Szinovacz, 1998). In a harmonious relationship, the two adult generations are more likely to achieve a consensus and work together. In a trusting relationship, the mother is more likely to give space to the grandmother to take care of the child alone using her own methods. As the family relationship changes, their cooperation method may also change. For example, grandmother Qu experienced the transition from a pattern of listening to the middle generation to a pattern of working alone on the child's diet after she had lived longer with the urban family and became more trusted by

her daughter-in-law as the outcome of her childrearing was observed by the family.

In the beginning, she told me what Jiajia cannot eat, because she worried that some food I feed him was too hard to be digested by the 6-month child. I was very careful and always minced the vegetables and meats... Since I came here, the child has gained weight and looks very healthy. Then she relaxed and let me decide what to feed by myself. [Qu]

### *The grandmothers' uncertainty*

One difficulty of a rural-urban migrant grandmother in this collaboration is the uncertainty and anxiety caused by the demanding childcare discourse. Intensive parenting views children as a vulnerable group and childrearing as a task with risks (Wall, 2010). Consequently, Chinese urban parents who care for their only child experience uncertainty and anxiety (Kuan, 2015). The grandmothers recognised the child-centred parenting phenomenon through their observations in urban cities. They reported that the child is the family's treasure and the focus of all of the family members' attention. Grandmother Qu saw this phenomenon when she took her grandson to the hospital—if one child became ill, a crowd of people would follow to take care of them. Every baby was surrounded by two or three people, parents or grandparents.

As rural-urban migrant grandmothers are responsible for the daily care of the grandchild, they reported anxiety about the health and safety of the children. Fourteen grandmothers reported that they felt nervous when taking the child out alone. For example, grandmother Feng said, 'I felt nervous [when] I took the child to cross the road, [because of] the complex traffic light [and] a lot of cars.' Grandmother Qin told me how worried she felt when her granddaughter Shanshan could urinate.

That day, her mother went to work. Shanshan asked me to take her to urinate three times in one hour. But she passed little urine. She was uncomfortable and I was very worried. She

didn't want to leave the toilet. I kept kneeling on the ground and encouraging her for one hour. I felt really anxious. I even called her mother to come back home. [Qin]

Compared with the younger generation, the grandmothers' uncertainty is more complex because they lack experience living in an urban society, knowledge of the preferred childrearing method or the support of a social network to help them to respond to challenges. As reported by Han,

I kept my sight on her [granddaughter]. The news reported lots of cases of children lost...I should be more careful because I am not familiar here [Taian]. If I lose her, I don't even know how to find her. [Han]

The lack of knowledge on urban childrearing methods can be reflected in the grandmothers' anxiety about using urban childrearing technologies and ICT. Technologies such as telephones, television and computers have influenced childhoods and changed the functions of grandparenthood (Falk and Falk, 2002). In the process of modernisation, family life in urban China has been influenced by technological transformation. According to a recent report on Chinese families' use of mobile electronic products, 26.3% of the researched parents used a smartphone to accompany the child, and 36.6% of parents used a smartphone and computer with the child.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, as childhood and motherhood have become increasingly commercialised, the childrearing market has produced a variety of electronic devices for childrearing and teaching, such as an electronic disinfection machine and a children's tutor machine. When grandmothers take care of children, they sometimes have to use this new technology. However, with limited educational background and limited experience with ICT and smart technology, many grandparents face considerable challenges at first. For example, grandmother Qu found it difficult to play back a cartoon recorded on the smart TV.

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<sup>5</sup> These data come from the website of China:  
[http://www.china.com.cn/news/txt/2007-12/17/content\\_93928](http://www.china.com.cn/news/txt/2007-12/17/content_93928)

Grandmother Gong stated that she did not know how to use her grandson's smart storytelling device. When the parents were not at home and the child wanted to play with the device, she sometimes felt anxious.

Moreover, grandmothers can feel uncertainty because of their feelings of guilt if a negative event happens. Even though the grandmothers emphasised their love for their grandchildren, there are many differences between taking care of their own children and their grandchildren. In taking care of a grandchild, they are responsible for both the grandchild and the adult child. Moreover, taking care of a child is the grandmothers' main duty in the family, and it reflects their importance and contribution. The grandmothers were motivated to perform well in their childrearing work to prove their significance to the family. They worried that their ability and value may be damaged by accidents. Grandmother Han in Taian told me that her granddaughter had fallen on the road and broken her knee when she took her to kindergarten. She was sad [Xinteng] when the child felt pain because of the injury. She also felt sorry for her adult child. Moreover, she thought that she had not done well in her main work, as she said, 'I am only responsible for taking care of the child. But I didn't protect her well'. To avoid guilt, the grandmothers become more careful when they took care of the children.

Uncertainty enhanced the grandmothers' impression of rural-urban differences in childrearing. They realised that childrearing was more relaxed the acquaintance society in rural area. Grandmother Lu in Taian found considerable differences between going out to play in rural society and in urban areas.

In my hometown, my relatives and friends can help me to take care of the child when I leave for a while. But in cities, no one can help you... We are not so close to each other. [Even though] they want to help, our hearts cannot rest either [Bufangxin]. [Lu]

As the unfamiliarity about urban life and urban childrearing knowledge are two reasons causing the anxiety, the grandmothers adopt different strategies to deal with the problems. Learning is used to respond to the new challenges. Grandmothers used different ways to learn based on their abilities and resources, such as reading books, collecting information from media and learning from children, neighbours, other relatives and friends.

Grandmothers with a higher education background read childrearing books to learn urban methods. Five grandmothers stated that they had read childrearing books, four of whom had a middle school or high school degree and one of whom had a primary school degree but owned a general store and was used to writing and counting. Grandmother Yan, who had a high school degree, reported her experiences of learning from books when she took care of her grandson.

My daughter bought some childrearing books. I read them sometimes and I learned some new methods...When my daughters were children, I didn't allow them to tear papers. But the book showed that tearing helped develop the brain. Now I allow the child to tear paper.

[Yan]

The grandmothers also learned childrearing methods from the media, such as from radio, TV shows, newspapers and other new media (such as the WeChat Moment). In contrast to books, which send messages through words, new media deliver messages and information through multiple methods, such as images, video and audio. This allowed the grandmothers to conveniently and easily find childrearing knowledge. Learning from media was mentioned by more grandmothers than reading. Grandmother Zheng in Taian told me stories of getting information from WeChat, such as about how eating too much sausage could harm the health of the child. Because there were many pictures in the news, Zheng easily got the main points of the story even though she could not read all of the words.

The grandmothers also learned from their social networks, such as from their children, friends in the community and even their grandchildren, who often had more knowledge about urban life and childrearing methods. For example, grandmother Chen first learned how to send her grandchild's photo to her husband in their hometown from her friends in the community and from her daughter.

Another grandmother suggested that I use WeChat, and she showed me how to send a picture of the child through WeChat. I found it interesting...My daughter downloaded WeChat for me and taught me how to use it. Sometimes, his grandfather missed him [the grandchild]; I can also send pictures to his grandfather on WeChat. [Chen]

However, when grandparents learn from children, they want to protect their face. The sensitive attitude of grandmothers in front of the younger generation comes from their reflections on the environment and duty in the family. Modernisation and urbanisation tend to construct a view of people without knowledge of ICT and other modern technology as outdated. Moreover, because childrearing is the main work of the grandmother, they may lack other opportunities to prove their ability to learn. Therefore, learning childrearing methods is an important stage for them, and they want to perform this task well. The attitude of the child and their worries of being regarded as useless can lead grandmothers to seek help from the child. First, the grandmothers associated their willingness to learn from the child with the patience of the child when they ask for help. When the child lost patience, the grandmother felt frustrated and embarrassed. Grandmother Jie sought help from her daughter to learn WeChat at first. However, when she asked the same questions repeatedly, or she forgot some information that the daughter had taught her, her daughter might sigh and say, 'How could you forget it again?' Thus, Jie stopped asking. But even if the younger generation shows patience, grandmothers may still be hesitant to ask too much because they may be worried that the younger generation would view them as useless and unable to understand easy work. For example, grandmother Ma preferred to ask her

friends to teach her to use WeChat rather than to ask her daughter-in-law because she was worried that her daughter-in-law would feel that she learned too slowly.

Not all challenges can be resolved by learning. Finding an alternative method that fits the grandmother's ability is another way to resolve the challenges of new childrearing methods. The grandmother can recognise the aims and goals of a specific new method and can try to explore a method from her own experience to replace the new method and get a similar result. For example, when I visited grandmother Liao's family, I found a bottle steriliser on the desk in the living room. The steriliser was working, and it had two milk bottles in it. However, grandmother Liao told me that she could not use the steriliser herself after her daughter-in-law left for work even though her daughter-in-law had taught her how to use it. Moreover, she did not feel that this machine was necessary. Grandmother Liao had found two alternative ways to sterilise the milk bottles: one was to use hot water and the other was to use a steamer. She said, 'I used these methods to sterilise dinnerware when I was in my hometown.'

In some conditions, the grandmothers simply give up learning and accept that they cannot do everything well. They defend themselves by pointing out that they have made great contributions to the family as they take care of the grandchildren. The family should appreciate their efforts and recognise their hard work rather than blame them for little faults and demand too much. For example, grandmother Ma suggested her niece not to blame her mother-in-law after she got cold and infected the child.

I know you are worried about the child. But it is not easy for the elderly to help you to take care of the child. She didn't intend to infect her. I am a grandmother, too. If your sister-in-law blames me because of this, I may leave. [Ma]

### *Childcare and finance*

Intensive parenting discourse encourages families to invest financial resources in the development of the child. Market reforms in China have led to the commercialisation of private life (Schor, 2004). Consequently, childhood has been commercialised and consumer culture has influenced childrearing. The new discourse stimulates parents to consume for childrearing, such as by paying for good quality food, clothes and toys and investing in education and extracurricular activities. Childrearing expenses account for 50% of monthly expenses for many urban families.<sup>6</sup>

Working as farmers in rural China undermines grandmothers' economic resources and limits their ability to provide financial support to the younger generation for childrearing. Compared with the intensive tasks involved in daily physical care, the grandmothers' contribution to childrearing consumption is limited. Seventeen grandmothers reported that they spent little money on childrearing and that the parents in the family bore the financial burden. Among the three grandmothers who spent money on childrearing, one grandmother's husband worked as a cleaner in Beijing and gave money to the younger generation every month. Two grandmothers worked as part-time cleaners in Taian and spent 200–300 Yuan every month on food, snacks and pocket money for their grandchildren. However, the money that they contributed was mainly used for the basic daily care of the children, including eating and playing, rather than for their education and healthcare.

Their adult children do not expect a financial contribution of grandmothers because they understand that the financial resources that can be earned in rural areas cannot support the grandmothers in the urban childrearing market. However, the grandmothers still feel that they need to make some sort of financial contribution. The grandchild may ask the grandmother to

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<sup>6</sup> The data come from the website of *The People's Daily*:  
<http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2017/0123/c1001-29043362.html>

buy something, such as a snack or a toy. For example, grandmother Zhu reported that her grandson Huhu asked her to buy an expensive toy when she took him to the indoor playground. The grandmothers also made peer comparisons with urban grandparents. When they realised that other grandparents contribute to childrearing consumption, they also wanted to make a contribution. Grandmother Qu reported that the maternal grandmother of her grandchild bought clothes at GAP [a famous brand] for the child every year. However, she could not afford these expensive clothes, and this made her feel embarrassed. The grandmothers realised that consumption has become a way to express love; thus, failing to make a financial contribution can also cause guilt. As stated by Liao, ‘As a grandma, it is not good that I have not bought some good products for the child since he was born.’

Even though they did not provide money, they tried to contribute to childrearing consumption by purchasing basic products for the family with their children’s money and giving suggestions on decision-making for consumption. Because the parents had to work, they had no time to buy trivial daily childrearing products such as snacks and fruit. Even though the grandmothers can usually decide what to buy, they still face many requirements from the younger generation on what can and cannot be bought. The younger generation may require the use of specific shops, markets and brands and list requirements for quality. Grandmother Lu told me that her daughter-in-law did not want her to buy ice cream cheaper than 3 Yuan for the child because the cheap ice cream was made with only sugar and contained no milk.

The grandmothers also made suggestions, such as regarding the size of clothes and the freshness of food, to help the parents make decisions and cooperate with the younger generation. For example, online shopping has become more prevalent, and the grandmothers had positive evaluations of online shopping: it is convenient, cost-effective and gives more opportunities for a refund. The grandmothers support the mothers when they buy children’s products online. For example, they wait and sign for the delivery, as stated by grandmother

Feng:

They [the parents] are not at home in the daytime, so I receive the delivery at home. Generally, I receive an express mail every week... She [the daughter-in-law] has no idea about the size of the clothes and she always asks me. I use the ruler to measure the size.

[Feng]

Although grandmothers did not spend too much money on childrearing, they tried to provide childrearing products through alternative methods. Two widely mentioned methods were providing non-commercialised products (such as homemade products) and using their own money to buy affordable childrearing materials.

I request my sister to help me to make a suite of new cotton-padded jacket for the child every year. Even though it is not expensive, it eases my mind. [Jie]

Every time, I came back from my hometown, I bought some toys from my hometown. They were cheap. But I told her that these can't be obtained in Beijing. [Fu]

The second strategy used by grandmothers was to develop alternative methods to evaluate their contributions and the products that they provided. The grandmothers emphasised the importance of the instrumental and emotional functions of these products and stated that their value should not be measured by price alone. Instead of using the price to evaluate their love, the grandmothers emphasised the importance of their efforts. No matter how expensive, the gifts provided by the grandmothers represented their love to the child. With no famous brand and no price to give a standard to prove the quality of the products, the grandmothers emphasised the durability of the materials, the effort required to make them and the meanings of the products.

My daughter felt it [the handmade jacket] was outdated. But I told the grandchild, ‘This jacket is unique if you wear it. No child in your class can wear the same as you. If they laugh at you, tell them “My grandmother made it for me specifically. Even though you want one, it is unavailable.” [Jie]

The agency of the grandmothers is shown when they used different methods to play a role in childhood consumption. The grandmothers tried to overcome their limited financial resources to make economic contributions to childrearing. Facing the commercialisation of childhood, the grandmothers kept their autonomy by exploring non-commercialised ways to provide childrearing products. They could also attach meaning to the products, as non-commercialised products represented their love, effort and contribution.

### *Intergenerational conflict in daily care*

In intergenerational childrearing collaboration, the two adult generations may compete in different childrearing practices, and they may have conflicts and disagreements. Studies have explored the intergenerational conflicts caused by different childrearing values and methods (Goh, 2010; Xiao, 2016). However, they have mainly focused on the voice of the younger generation and their disagreements with the grandparents’ methods; the opinions of the grandparents are seldom explored. Moreover, childrearing in these families is not only influenced by the intergenerational childrearing differences but also by rural-urban divisions, which lead to different living standards between regions. Consequently, there are differences between the lifestyles and childcare practices of rural grandparents and urban parents, which makes this issue more complex. As Jie and Xu stated:

Life now is better...It is different from the conditions when I gave birth to my child...  
How could we imagine so much demand? ...I took care of my child by myself...No one

helped me. I had to do farm work and only made sure that the child didn't get cold and hungry. [Jie]

My hometown is still different from an urban area. In cities, you see, every aspect is better... The childcare method here is new. Ours is old. [Xu]

The first level of conflict concentrates on the physical care of children, including their nutrition (food and snacks), health care (hygiene, sleeping habits and illness treatment) and entertainment. There can be a considerable degree of competition between the different childrearing methods. In daily work, both generations can try to prove the effectiveness of their own methods. Parents and grandmothers both regard their daily care methods as better for the child. Grandmothers may face challenges from the younger generation about their methods, which are regarded as unsuitable for cultivating independent, self-disciplined and competitive children with good mental and physical health. Grandmothers may also disagree with the mothers' methods. The requirements of the younger generation are often regarded as too strict and excessive by the grandmothers. When grandmothers and parents have different aims, they may also have conflict, and even though they achieve consensus on one aim, they may prefer different practices.

For example, Jie and her son-in-law both wanted the child to sleep well, but they had different opinions about whether the grandchild was allowed to eat snacks before bed. The father argued that the news reported that eating before sleeping can have a negative influence on the heart and the quality of sleep. However, Jie had a different opinion.

The feeling of hunger kept the child from sleeping quickly... It was hard for me to say no when I saw the child toss and turn because she was hungry.

Some of the grandmothers felt that even though the younger generation had good childrearing

values, their daily practices were problematic because they were not good at housework and not as hardworking at childrearing as the grandmothers. Five grandmothers complained that the parents should be more concentrated on taking care of the child. Grandmother Ma felt unhappy that her daughter-in-law always washed the dirty clothes of the child 4 or 5 days a time rather than every day.

The second level of intergenerational conflicts is related to the consumption related to childcare. Consuming values refer to the consumer's evaluation and choice of a particular consuming activity and are influenced by the socialisation process, social-economical resources, social status, living conditions and culture (Xiao and Kim, 2009; Zheng, 2006). Consumers with different values present different consuming behaviours, which highlights the different functions of products, including instrumental, emotional, symbolic and epistemic values (Xiao and Kim, 2009).

Influenced by marketisation and Westernisation, Chinese people's consuming values have been transformed from traditional consumption patterns into consumerism. Zheng (2006), whose research was based in Nanjing and Zhenjiang, examined the intergenerational differences in consuming values. People over 60 are more likely to have frugal, economical and conservative consumption attitudes and emphasise the instrumental values including durability, quality or monetary value, and people between 20 to 40 years old prefer to consume to support a modern materialised life and tend to have more hedonic consumption (Xiao and Kim, 2009). Farrell, Gersch and Stephenson (2006) found that middle-class urban consumers in the Chinese market tend to demand branded global goods to satisfy their emotional and functional needs. Moreover, consuming values are influenced by economic and cultural conditions. Because of the rural-urban division and the reduced influence of Western consumerism in China's rural areas, there are considerable rural-urban differences in consuming values. For example, Sun and Wu (2004) find that rural and urban consumers in China use different products to reflect the

improvement of living standards and have different needs.

The intergenerational differences and rural-urban differences in consuming attitudes may cause intergenerational conflicts in childrearing consumption in the family. The grandmothers in the study all grew up in an impoverished era, and they all come from rural China. They are used to living frugally and have lower requirements for brands, fashions and games. Therefore, they pay more attention to durability, comfort and reliability. Although both generations emphasise the quality of children's products, they have different principles when judging quality. Grandmothers are less likely to relate quality to price, advertisements or brand.

In contrast, the younger generation tends to think that grandmothers' consuming behaviour is not in accordance with the families' social status and does not match the requirements of the intensive parenting discourse. Consequently, the grandmothers face challenges from the younger generation because of their consumer behaviour and habits, especially in their outdated styles and ideas of quality. Discussing the attitude of the younger generations' consumption behavior, most grandmothers reported an ambivalent attitude. On the one hand, the grandmothers complained that the younger generation wastes and over-consumes.

Last week [Mid-Autumn], I found that the plastic of Yuanyuan's sandals was broken. I fixed it with glue. But her mother said people may look down on this repair and she bought a new one in Wanda [a famous shopping mall] in the afternoon... The summer has already gone; the sandals will not be useful soon. Next year, they will be too small... They don't know the hardships of the life and waste too much money. [Ma]

On the other hand, grandmothers think that the precious only child is the hope of the family and deserves the best. Grandmother Jie provides a typical example of this. She emphasised the quality and beauty of a little girl's dress bought on the market and said, 'the material can absorb

sweat well, and it is soft... 50 Yuan for two.' At the same time, she remarked that the dress bought by the child's mother 'cost 300 Yuan but is not comfortable.' However, she still wanted the child to wear an expensive dress to go back to her hometown because it reflected the good life in the urban cities. The ambivalent attitudes towards the younger generation's consumption behaviour illustrate grandmothers' thoughts and struggles when faced with the trend of commercialisation.

However, two of the grandmothers did not complain about the younger generation's consumption; they felt proud that their grandchildren could enjoy a good material life. For example, grandmother Chen showed her pride on her face when she talked about the famous brands of the clothes and daily necessities that were bought for her grandson. She said, 'Children in a similar age in the community all bought from there.' Chen had previously been a migrant worker in Chengdu and was more influenced by urban consumption values. Moreover, when her grandson wore similar clothes as other urban children, she felt more of a sense of belonging in the city.

### ***The grandmothers' agency and conflict resolution***

Studies on intergenerational relationships and conflicts find that ageing people are more passive and tend not to intervene in the family conflicts because they are less empowered (Ikels, 1990; Yan, 2003). Grandparents are also found to have less power in decision-making during childrearing (Xiao, 2016). Marketing logic has been used to explain the less powerful position of the older generation. The older generation is regarded as unskilled labour, with fewer resources and who are in a vulnerable position, which causes them to place more reliance on the younger generation (Ikels, 1990). However, the grandmothers in my research employed diverse strategies to manage conflict. Even though they did not directly intervene in conflict, they presented different narratives to explain the strategies that they used. They are not passive,

but actively to make a choice.

### *Two narratives*

The grandmothers in this research provided a narrative to explain their attitude on intergenerational conflicts on childrearing: everything should be accomplished smoothly in a harmonious family [*jiahe wanshixing*]. In Chinese culture, harmony, social capital [*guanxi*], face [*mianzi*], seniority and authority are the five values guiding conflict management (Chen, 2002). Because the family is a place with constant interaction and mutual dependence, a conflict-free and congruent relationship is pursued (Chen, 2002; Hwang, 1998). Even though the modernisation process has changed perceptions of the family, such as less emphasis on the obedience of the younger generation, harmony is still an important factor in family relations. Hwang (1998) identified several methods used to resolve conflict in Chinese society based on how people balance personal goals and interpersonal harmony: if one wishes to achieve harmony rather than personal goals, then she may endure when faced with conflict; if one wants to maintain harmony without giving up a personal goal, then she may pretend to obey and do her own business in private; and if she values the harmony and can yield a little, then she may compromise.

When faced with different opinions on childrearing methods, the grandmothers wanted to protect the stability of the cooperation and the harmony of the family. Grandmother Ma told me, ‘How can I fight with her? It may cause the whole family to feel embarrassed and influence their conjugal relations.’ Grandmother Zhu, who worked as a cleaner in Beijing after her granddaughter went to kindergarten, stated, ‘The family is not a place to argue... Correct or wrong is not a question discussed in family... [Arguments] cause all family members to feel unhappy.’

The grandmothers emphasised the importance of family harmony for two reasons. First, it is a cultural construction and grandmothers' ideological understanding of the meaning of the family, as stated by grandmother Gong: 'Home should be a warm place with happiness. A family with lots conflicts and quarrels is laughed by neighbours.' The grandmothers' understanding of the family is influenced by their origins in more traditional rural areas. Because the acquaintance society highlights the importance of reputation and reciprocity, the grandmothers valued the stability of the family. Second, there may be practical reasons to maintain harmony in the family. In the process of the Westernisation and modernisation, Chinese family relations have become influenced by both collectivism and individualism, and they have formed a relational family structure (Goh, 2010). The family is regarded as a union; therefore, a harmonious relationship can benefit both generations. For the grandmothers, as migrants in cities with limited social networks, the younger generation is their closest relatives. Maintaining good harmony with them can protect the grandmothers' feelings of certainty and adaptation, as stated by grandmother Jie: 'When I just came here, I knew them [the daughter and son-in-law] only. If I quarrelled with them, I missed my hometown a lot.' For the younger generation, the grandmothers' maintenance of harmony ensured that they could focus on the work and protect the conjugal relations of the younger generation. As grandmothers Tang and Ma reports that

They work hard the whole day. When they come back home, they want to relax. If there are always quarrels, they may feel too tired. [Tang]

If I quarrel with her [daughter-in-law], my son may feel awkward. It is bad if they quarrel. [Ma]

The second narrative emphasised by grandparents is 'All for the child' [*weile haizi*]. The child-centred parenting discourse regards the grandchild as the only hope of the family and places the interests of the child ahead of those of the other family members (Fong, 2004). All

members contribute to the family and the interest of the unit according to their own resources. As the whole family attaches significance to the interest of the child, the grandmothers also place the interests of the child first. Grandmothers protect the interests of both the adult child and the grandchild. Grandmother Liu stated, ‘Sometimes, I also feel tired and want to leave. But everything can be abandoned except the child.’ Based on this narrative, the grandmothers tried to find strategies that will be good for the children’s development, and they used this narrative to justify the behaviour of the middle generations. Grandmother Jie reported, ‘Facing different opinions, we knew that no one aimed to hurt the child.’

Influenced by these two narratives, the grandmothers used several strategies to deal with conflict. When grandmothers chose a strategy to respond to a family conflict, they tried to avoid damaging the family harmony and to make decisions to improve the children’s development. They also used these two narratives to persuade their children and themselves to accept or give up some methods and strategies.

#### *Understand and follow*

When conflicts and different opinions arose, the grandmothers first showed patience and tolerance to understand the younger generation and then actively followed their suggestions. This strategy was used under diverse conditions. One condition is when the grandmother realised the benefits of the parents’ method. When the younger generation could explain the reasons and basis of the new method to the grandmother and patiently try to help her understand, the grandmother was more willing to follow their suggestions. Furthermore, the grandmothers can also understand and follow the younger generation’s suggestions when they witness the good outcomes of the method. For example, to help her granddaughter go to sleep quickly, grandmother Qin used to tell the child that if she didn’t sleep at night, a monster might come to take her away. The mother found that the child began to be afraid of the dark because

of the monster. The mother patiently told the grandmother about this problem and provided some alternative methods, such as feeding the child some milk or telling her a story. Then, grandmother Qin understood and she said that

When my son was young, I was too busy to accompany him to sleep. So I used this method to help him go to sleep quickly. But recent child is frightened and I have more time. I should have changed my method...I didn't realise [the bad influence] before. But after my daughter-in-law told me, I changed my method. [Qin]

In some situations, the grandmothers could not understand certain methods of the parents. But grandmothers can recognise that the intentions of the parents were good. Similar motivations to benefit the grandchildren allow the grandmothers to feel release with the conflict. They also emphasised that the new methods represented the urban lifestyle that they hoped their offspring would have, as grandmother Zheng states that:

I worked hard to send my son to the cities for a decent quality of life. In big cities, people all teach a child in this way. I hope that the third generation can have a decent life. [Zheng]

Grandmothers also justified the suggestions of the younger generation by recognising the middle generation's educational background and the sources of the method. Grandmother Qu reported that her children 'graduated with a Master's degree and read a lot of books. They know the new method'. Through pointing out the origin of the methods, the grandmothers felt that they were not following the advice of the younger generation, but they respected the authority of the book and the education, which protected their esteem in front of their children.

### *Communication*

When the grandmothers did not agree with the methods of the younger generation and insisted

on their own methods, they tended to actively communicate with the parents. Even though the family is not a place to judge right or wrong, the two adult generations still held active interactions to deal with their different opinions on childrearing. The grandmothers first used direct methods to interact with the younger generation when arguments and complaints were unavoidable. The grandparents expressed their opinions directly and defended their methods. These direct communications were more likely to happen between a grandmother and her daughter/son rather than between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law or son-in-law.

Grandmother Chen from Sichuan province had a complaint with her daughter over allowing the child to eat candy. Chen told me that she thought that the important thing is to eat a reasonable amount: eating too much was not good, but eating nothing is also not good. Chen responded to the daughter directly as follows:

I took the child to the public park today. A child was eating a lolly. Longlong also wanted one. He looked at me in expectation, and I didn't want him to feel disappointed. I brushed his teeth after he ate the candy. [Chen]

Grandmother Gong was also compliant with her son and daughter-in-law regarding allowing the child to watch TV for a long time. However, grandmother Gong thought that the TV was good for the child based on her past experiences. Because her son grew up in a rural area, the TV provided images of urban life and university to him, which stimulated his dream of working in a city. Grandmother Gong communicated to her son and daughter-in-law directly:

When his father [Gong's son] was young, we had no money to visit the big city. He watched a TV program about the life of university students in Shanghai. He wanted this kind of life and then studied hard. Indeed, [the grandson] shouldn't watch too long. But TV has its advantages. [Gong]

To persuade the younger generation to accept their methods, the grandmothers pointed out the instability of life and the value of being thrifty, as Grandmother Lu told her son.

People my age experienced the Great Chinese Famine in the 1960s and we know the feeling of starving and the importance of saving. We want to be prepared for the risk. [Lu]

However, in most cases, indirect communication skills and strategies are adopted to avoid the possibility of a dispute. One way is to talk about the experiences and stories of other families to reconsider conditions in their own families. When grandmother Jie wanted her son-in-law and daughter to stop using their smartphones when accompanying the child, she said:

Mejia [a neighbour child] hurt her head last week. Her father took her to the park. He used the mobile phone while walking and let Mijia follow by herself. Then she fell down. We all should concentrate on looking after the child. [Jie]

Another means is to get the agreement of the grandchild and let the grandchild express his or her view to the parents because the opinions expressed by grandchildren are more likely to be accepted. Grandmother Jie wanted her daughter to buy loose-fitting clothes for the grandchild, rather than complex, beautiful and inconvenient clothes. Jie taught the grandchild that she needed some sportswear to go to the indoor playground and told her that she could suggest that her mother buy sportswear. The next week after the grandchild communicated with her mother, , the mother bought two sets of sportswear.

### *Hidden strategies*

Sometimes, the grandmothers' methods were viewed negatively by the middle generation and the grandmothers did not want to use the middle generation's methods. When communication was ineffective, the grandmothers insisted on using their own methods when the middle

generation was not around. Using this strategy, the grandmothers tried to balance their willingness to use their methods with protecting the feelings of the younger generation. For example, grandmother Feng reported that her daughter-in-law did not want her granddaughter to wear the shoes that she had bought at the fair. Feng said, 'If I insist, her mother may feel unhappy. There is no need to quarrel for only a pair of shoes.' So, grandmother Feng took the shoes back to her hometown and gave the child to wear when the grandchild went back with her.

Grandmother Liao made a quilt for her grandson. However, this quilt was not used because it was regarded as inferior to those bought by her daughter-in-law from a famous childhood products store. Liao had a different opinion because she had expended great efforts to make the quilt. Facing this competition between quilts, the grandmother used a hidden strategy to struggle for the position of her quilt as follows:

Her maternity leave will end after the holiday of the New Year [2017]. Then the child will sleep in my room because the young parents need to sleep well before work. I can use the quilt at that time. [Liao]

By using these hidden strategies, the grandmothers showed their ability to evaluate and make sense of their own methods. While the younger generation was more likely to trust expensive childrearing products from good brands, the grandparents had a different understanding of the concept of good quality, as seen in their highlighting the instrumental values of the item's production. Using their own methods privately and using the parents' methods in front of them shows the grandmothers' ability to make choices under different circumstances.

### *Keeping silent and compromise*

Given these different opinions and intergenerational conflicts in childrearing practice, another

strategy used by the grandparents is to compromise: they kept silent and did not actively express disapproval even though they did not agree with or understand the younger generation's opinions. Grandmother Gong said that she did not say a word even though her daughter-in-law did not wash the child's clothes for three days – she simply washed the clothes herself instead.

The grandmothers' lack of power in the family is not the reason for compromising. Facing conflict, the grandmothers keep silent to avoid expressing negative emotions, which may damage the harmony of the family. The grandmothers' understanding of family relations is that disputes damage the harmony of the family. At least one person in the family has to be tolerant. Influenced by the social constructions that ageing people are calmer and the younger generation is more aggressive (Ikels, 1990), the grandmothers perceived themselves as those who should compromise first. Another reason why grandmothers compromise to avoid conflicts and disputes is to maintain a happy ageing life. The ageing life with a grandchild is constructed as a happy image [*tianlun zhile*], and a happy ageing life can improve the grandmother's health. Therefore, they should try to avoid family conflict, which may influence their mood. As stated by Liu as follows:

I don't criticise them...If you lose patience, there might be a fight...People my age should not think too much...stay in a good mood. A good mentality is most important for health.

Some of my neighbours who always fight with their children got cancer. [Liu]

Keeping silent and compromising is more likely to be used in conflicts between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law and mother-in-law and son-in-law because mother-daughter relations are more solid and less likely to be influenced by conflicts, and such conflicts can often be solved more easily. However, a dispute with a daughter-in-law may damage not only intergenerational relations but also damage conjugal relations. As grandmother Liao explained,

If I quarrel with my daughter, we make up at the next moment. But some words that can be accepted by my daughter cannot be said to my daughter-in-law. [Liao]

Jie has different opinions with her son-in-law on helping her elder granddaughter Xinxin to lose weight. Xinxin gained weight in 2017 and her father wanted to control her diet. However, Jie felt that it was all right to be a little plump because it meant that the child was getting good nutrition. But Jie did not stop her son-in-law.

He is my son-in-law, after all. It is not good for me to say too much. I can only remind. Sometimes, I expressed my views, but they didn't listen. I had no method. If I insisted, everyone would feel unhappy. [Jie]

## **Summary**

In sharing the intensive daily care work, grandmothers and parents cooperate in three ways based on the resources of the different caregivers, childrearing issues and family relations. The grandmothers can work with the parents, listen to the parents or work by themselves. The daily care work of the grandmothers is detailed and demanding, requiring a great deal of mental and physical energy. The grandmothers' past experiences on childrearing help them to give suggestions and support to the parents and to deal with daily care issues. However, their migration and rural background can create many difficulties. While they may readily accept physical exhaustion, they reported uncertainty because of the high demands of childrearing and their unfamiliarity with urban life. Their lack of economic resources also limited them and prevented them from making financial contributions to childcare. Moreover, because the parents preferred to use scientific childcare and the grandmothers relied on previous experiences, the two adult generations may have many conflicts. However, providing the child with good living conditions and good care is a shared aim of all caregivers. Therefore,

grandmothers and parents usually try to solve any conflicts and difficulties that may arise. The grandmothers take the harmony of the family and the interests of the children into account when they choose strategies to resolve conflicts and difficulties, such as communication, compromise and the use of hidden strategies.

## **Discipline and education**

### ***The grandmothers' contribution to discipline***

Sun and Zhao (2006) found that urban Chinese parents expect their children to obtain the personalities of intimacy, endurance and sympathy, and to be accomplishment-oriented, less aggressive and more self-acceptant. The discourse of quality [*Suzhi*] in China not only requires good physical quality but also encourages children to improve their mental health for moral attainment and a good personality (Fong, 2007). Children's discipline can help them to cultivate these competences. By building up rules and dealing with mistakes, the parents use discipline to help the children develop good behavioural habits and to ensure that they behave within social norms (Frankenberg, Holmqvist, and Rubenson, 2010).

In my research, the grandmothers not only gave intensive physical care to the grandchildren but also contributed to their discipline. In providing daily care, grandmothers can directly and indirectly influence children's social and behavioural development through face-to-face interaction and mediated interaction. Grandparental influence also comes from the symbolic role of grandparents within families (Denham and Smith, 1989). The rural-urban migrant grandmothers can help teach their grandchildren good manners and can help to correct behavioural habits, give punishment for mistakes and provide emotional care to the grandchild. However, even though there are various expected personalities and moralities for urban children, the grandmothers in my research show different preferences on suggested personalities.

A widely mentioned contribution made by the grandmothers in my research is to teach the children social ethics to direct them to interact with others in society. Grandmothers are more

willing to transmit ethics from their previous life experience to their grandchildren. Living in rural areas, these grandmothers have internalised rural ethics. Compared with urban areas, rural China is acquaintance community that emphasises stability and is much more influenced by collectivism and traditional culture. Consequently, grandmothers teach the children ethics, which can sustain the stability of the community and facilitate honest and reciprocal relationships and traditional ethics such as filial piety. For example, grandmother Ma found that her granddaughter sometimes lied to her. In Ma's opinion, lying is one of the worst moral qualities and can damage the reputation. She tried to teach the child, such as by telling her the story "The Boy Who Cried Wolf" and explaining to her that an honest child is grateful and that a lie will always be exposed eventually. Grandmother Han expects her granddaughter to be filial. She made an effort to influence the child in a variety of ways. When there was a story on filial piety on TV, she asked the child to watch with her. If the child wanted to help her do some housework, she always regarded the help as the child's filial piety and encouraged her to do more.

The grandmothers' preference of transmitting past experiences is also reflected in how they teach the children good personalities and social morals for self-development. The intense competition in the future stimulates parents to cultivate children who are hard-working and accomplishment-oriented (Sun and Xiao, 2006). The grandmothers in my research also stated that they tried to encourage the grandchildren to work hard and aim to do good. However, their motivation is less likely to be related to the popular social discourse and uncertainty for the future. Their motivation is because of their understanding of how people can achieve success based on their past experiences. The hardworking spirit and practicalism have been highly valued in China, both before the market reform and since.<sup>7</sup> Grandmothers of this generation were constructed by the spirit, and they attach importance to the attitude of hard-working.

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<sup>7</sup> These data come from the website of the government of China.  
[http://www.gov.cn/2013lh/content\\_2345536.htm](http://www.gov.cn/2013lh/content_2345536.htm)

Moreover, grandmothers recommend a personality that benefited them and their families previously to the grandchild. For example grandmother Jie's older granddaughter lacked perseverance, which Jie considered an important quality for study and work. She reflected on her daughter's successful experience and insisted that the granddaughter always tried to resolve all of difficult questions in the homework and earn a good grade on the exam. Jie thus told the child about her mother's spirit and taught her to always finish her work.

The grandmothers not only transmit previous experiences, which are similar with the urban expectations, but they also set up their own rules, which are sometimes neglected by urban parents. The grandmothers showed confidence in the philosophies of rural life and tradition. Consequently, they wanted to transmit these philosophies to the children, such as the benefits of thrift. Grandma Lu complained that her son and daughter-in-law wasted money and food. She worried that the children may also be influenced by this behaviour, so she required her two grandsons to learn to be frugal:

I taught them [two grandsons] to recite the poetry of 'Hoeing Millet in Mid-Day' [*chuhē ridangwu*]. And I told them that the food was planted with difficulty. I wanted them to be frugal. [Lu]

The grandmothers also transmit to the grandchildren the ethics that they learned in urban cities after their migration. Modernisation and Westernisation have stimulated the expansion of the public sphere in urban China, and led to the individualisation of Chinese society. Consequently, some new social norms have arisen, such as protecting the environment and keeping quiet in public. Through their daily observations, their communication in the community and their interactions with the middle generation, the grandmothers in my research were able to recognise these new rules and teach them to their grandchildren. Grandmother Zhu had experience working as a cleaner in Beijing for several months. She found that people were

required not to dispose of their garbage anywhere. She saw some young students who always held onto their garbage until they found a bin, so she taught her grandson to do the same.

### ***Intergenerational cooperation for discipline***

To cultivate children's personality and morality, the grandmothers do not work alone; they cooperate with the parents. The two adult generations first reach a consensus on their expectations of children's behaviour and then use diverse practices to achieve the shared goal. Their practice is influenced by their understanding of how children can be developed (Frankenberg, Holmqvist, and Rubenson, 2010). Studies have widely discussed different parental styles, such as warmth or rejection, autonomy or control and harsh or inconsistent discipline practices (Laskey and Cartwright-Hatton, 2009). Different philosophies can cause caregivers to use different methods to achieve certain goals, such as providing an explanation, taking time out, taking away a toy and spanking.

In my research, both the model of strict [*bailian*] parents with warm [*honglian*] grandmothers and permissive parents with strict grandmothers are found, where a complementary intergenerational relation is used to provide the child with both affection and rules. In some families, the division of labour is not a deliberate decision but an outcome based on the preferred discipline methods of the different caregivers. Some grandmothers also reported that they try to complement the parents' style.

In the model of strict parents and warm grandmothers, the parents set up more rules and use strict methods to supervise the child and give punishment. The grandparents play an affectionate role that places fewer requirements on the child, use warm methods to help the child to improve, provide comfort and encourage the child. The strict parents' strategy is used because parents are more uncertain about the child's competence. Stress and worries motivate

parents to use strict methods to achieve a certain goal. The popular discourse argues that grandparents are more likely to overindulge their grandchildren (Falbo, 1991). This is one reason why grandmothers may prefer warm methods of discipline. Moreover, the grandmothers are more patient because they are less likely to experience the uncertainty and pressure caused by the demand for high competence in society. Grandmother Jie's oldest granddaughter left her writing materials out and always lost her new pencils. Both her mother and Jie worried about her carelessness and wanted the child to manage her belongings better. Because the mother was strict, Jie chose a warm approach to emotional care for the child:

Her mother criticised her [grandchild]. She said, 'Mum felt you were not responsible.' (And she) cancelled her pocket money for next month. I felt that there was no need for us all to criticise. I don't like to see her cry...I encouraged her and found an empty drawer and put her name on it, and I helped her sort out her books, pens and notebooks in it. [Jie]

In the model of strict grandmothers with permissive parents, the grandmothers are more likely to use strict discipline while the parents prefer to guide the child. Childrearing in rural China is more likely to endorse controlling and power-assertive parenting than urban childrearing, which emphasises affection and democracy (Chen et al., 2010; Yu, 2002). Tang's husband was left behind in the hometown. When he visited Beijing, the child did not like him and hit him once. To help the child accept her grandfather, the parents tried to lead her by telling her that the grandfather was good at painting and could teach her how to paint. However, grandmother Tang was strict, telling the child that she was angry at her behaviour and would return to her hometown with the grandfather if she did again. The complementary attitudes of grandmother Tang and the parents was not pre-designed intentionally but are an outcome based on their opinions and feelings on the issue.

The parents and the grandmother can also use similar styles to discipline, and they can then

choose a specific strategy based on their capacities and their roles. Grandmother Han and her son worked together to cultivate their granddaughters' love of her grandfather. They both tried to lead and influence the child gradually. Grandmother Han played the part of a historian and told the child stories of her grandfather, such as how her grandfather taught her father when her father was young. The father also used WeChat to contact the grandfather every week and let the child communicate with him online. With such an approach, it is more likely that the grandmothers will follow the parents' pattern and support the parents to cultivate children who are acclimated to city life. The grandmothers worry that their lack of knowledge about urban life impairs their ability to do so, so, if the parents' requirements instil the ability and common skills for urban life, the grandmothers were willingness to follow.

Children here [Taian] are polite. They say please, thanks, and sorry. I didn't have that habit before and seldom reminded Kunkun. Her mother told me that Kunkun should also learn to say these things. Otherwise, people might think he was rude. [Zheng]

Furthermore, as the parents have more knowledge about urban life, including manners, social skills and appropriate behaviour, they are responsible for guiding children's behaviour and setting up rules on children's discipline. The grandmothers assisted the parents in strengthening their habits during their daily interaction with the grandchildren, especially when the parents were absent. They supervised the child, helped the parents explain the rules to the child and supported the parents when there were conflicts between the parents and children. Grandmother Tang's daughter-in-law focused on the manners and politeness of the child. For example, the child should keep silent when eating and get used to saying thank you and sorry. Her daughter-in-law explained that good manners were very important in current society and that details affected success. Grandmother Tang understood the importance of good manners and began to observe how the mother disciplined the child. When the parents were not at home, she required the child to continue using good manners.

In some cases, the grandmothers can have a similar attitude to one of the parents and a different style from the other parent. When parents have conflicts regarding the child's discipline, a grandmother may choose one parent to support. Grandmother Qu's son thought that her grandson Jiajia was too naughty and often told him to calm down. However, both grandmother Qu and her daughter-in-law thought that a three-year-old boy should be active and lively. Thus, when the father criticised the child for naughty behaviour, the mother and grandmother sometimes both defended him.

### ***Conflicts and disagreements in child discipline***

Even though the two adult generations cooperated with each other most of the time, conflicts can be caused because of their different parenting ideologies on child discipline. The conflicts first come from different understandings of the importance of a certain personality and manner characteristic or behaviour. Conflict may arise when one generation regards one personality as important and tries to cultivate it and the other generation does not agree.

The development of public space and civil society generates behavioural norms to guide public behaviour. In urban China, public behaviour is analysed to evaluate the quality [*Suzhi*] of people, especially by the middle class (Tomba, 2009). In 2014, the Chinese government furtherly promoted the construction of public behavioural norms, including protecting the environment, public hygiene, public order and being friendly, frugal, honest and polite.<sup>8</sup> Society, educators and parents also expect the young to follow these social norms. However, the public sphere is less developed in rural areas, and grandmothers obtained more behavioural norms in the private sphere, where family ethics and the different modes of association dominate people's interactions. They are less likely to understand and accept behavioural norms in the public sphere. Because these two adult generations show different understandings of

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<sup>8</sup> Data are from the website of the Beijing government.  
<http://www.bjqx.org.cn/qxweb/n153891c911.aspx>

public norms, they may have conflicting views on teaching grandchildren the social ethics and behavioural rules that are expected in the public sphere.

For example, in the public sphere, keeping silent and talking softly is expected in urban society. However, speaking loudly is viewed differently in rural areas, as the population density is much lower than Beijing and speaking loudly is less likely to disturb other people. Thus, rural residents don't related loudness with person's quality, but regard it as a normal behaviour to facilitate face-to-face communication in an open area. Grandmother Qu's daughter-in-law always told the child to speak in a low voice in the passageway at night because the neighbour might be sleeping. However, as the child felt that the voice-controlled lamp was interesting, grandmother Qu sometimes allowed the child to shout suddenly in the passageway. Grandmother Qu's daughter-in-law worried that the child might be blamed by the neighbours and regarded as a low-quality [*mei sushi*] boy. She complained to her mother-in-law:

That day, his mother complained when she opened the door for me. She said she could clearly hear from inside our house on the sixth floor. She didn't say too much to me. But she asked Jijia [the grandchild] if he remembered how she had told him. [Qu]

Public ethics encourage the balancing of the interests of the self and others (Zhou, 2008). For example, children are encouraged to protect public materials and the environment. Although grandmothers are not selfish, they can find it difficult to distinguish the public sphere and private sphere and the interests of others and the self because collectivism in rural areas does not emphasise boundaries between people (Yan, 2003). This can cause conflicts to develop. For example, grandmother Jie used a hotel towel as a floor mat in the washroom when the family was on holiday in 2016. Her daughter reprimanded her strictly about this in front of all of the family members: 'You always say you like to be clean. Is that true?' Her daughter's words embarrassed Jie. Jie's daughter considered the towel public property by considering the next

customer to use it. Thus, the towel should be used in the proper way. However, with little experience staying in a hotel, grandmother Jie views that the room of the hotel a private place rather than a public space and she treats the towel as a private property. She then used the towel in her own way to fulfil her own interests. This intergenerational conflict emerged because of the different attitudes towards what is public property.

Children are also taught personal morality for self-development such as a strong work ethic, independence and creativity so that they can succeed in public life (Sun and Zhao, 2006). Even though the grandmothers agree with some qualities, such as a strong work ethic, they have difficulty understanding and accepting others. For example, the public sphere encourages autonomy and independence (Zhou, 2008), which is also encouraged by the intensive parenting discourse. Middle class parents want their children to be independent so that they can survive by themselves, as middle class parents have concerns that they may be unable to help their children in the future and that the burden of ageing care will be a challenge for them (Fong, 2004). For example, grandmother Han's son and daughter-in-law kept her from helping the child pack the schoolbag after he finished his homework because they wanted to teach him not to depend on others. However, grandmother Han wanted the child to have more time to play, as he had worked on his homework for two hours. Han knew that the parents tended to feel unsatisfied because they once complained to friends that 'it is impossible to cultivate a good grandchild as long as grandma is here'. The parents believed that Han helped the child because of overindulgence. But Han reported another reason for her behaviour. Grandmother Han lack understanding about cultivating independence: she did not think that this minor matter would influence the child's independence. She stated that she also helped her son when he was young, and he became independent.

Although different parenting styles provide parents and grandparents with more strategies to achieve their goals, they can also generate conflict. Conflicts may be generated because one

generation prefers a permissive attitude with warmth, acceptance and involvement and the other prefers more demand, control, maturity and supervision (Baumrind, 1991). In the model of strict parents with tolerant grandmothers, grandmothers tend to believe that the parents' requirements are excessive for a little child. Parents expect that a child can behave themselves all the time. However, in grandmothers' opinion, a young child can make mistakes and be naughty, which is their nature. Even though the grandmothers agreed to some requirements, they preferred warm methods. In their opinion, strategies such as corporal punishment are too strict.

For example, when I visited grandmother Qu's family, the grandson Jiajia was made to stand in the corner because he was too excited and kept yelling. During the interview, grandmother Qu stated her disagreement.

He was only three years old. [He] can't control his emotions well...His father should not punish him in front of the visitor [the researcher]. It hurts the children's self-respect. [Qu]

In the model of strict grandmothers with permissive parents, the grandmother is blamed by the parents because of their strict ways. For example, there was a case in grandmother Zheng's family where the grandson Kunkun lay on the ground and cried and refused to get up if his demands were not met. The parents showed patience to persuade the child. However, grandmother Zheng was impatient and sometimes yelled at the child. The daughter-in-law complained, but that Zheng's behavior may lead to the reversal mind of the child. However, grandmother Zheng thought believed that this behaviour should be treated immediately and strictly. Excepting the ideological differences, Zheng's impatience also was practical:

They were with him for only two hours after work. It was easy to be patient. But I was with him the whole day. Sometimes, I was cooking and he was crying. It was hard to keep

calm. [Zheng]

### ***Grandmothers' resolution of conflicts and agency***

To achieve good child discipline outcomes, the grandmothers often tried to resolve the conflicts. The grandmothers emphasised the benefits to children and family harmony in choosing a resolution strategy, such as communication or compromise. However, the practice of a particular strategy in the context of discipline is different from the practice in the context of daily care. Conflicts in daily care mainly centre on practical and concrete issues, such as what to eat and what to wear. Both generations want to resolve these issues, but they prefer different methods; therefore, the mechanism of resolution is simpler. However, the conflicts concerning discipline are mainly caused by differing ideologies, which are abstract and hard to express and accept. The two generations' essentially different understandings of discipline complicate the mechanism of conflict resolution in discipline.

To maintain the harmony of the family, the grandmothers expressed their willingness to communicate with the parents and to understand them. The communication process can then be more efficient and prosperous if the grandmother can recognise and understand the parents' thoughts. A concrete suggestion on particular behaviour is easier for the grandmother to understand and to follow. Grandmother Yan argued with her daughter when Yan helped the three-year-old child to put on her clothes and shoes. However, Yan began to understand her daughter when she saw the improvement in the child. When the child went to kindergarten, he was the only one who was able to eat and dress himself, and he received a reward from the teacher. This led grandmother Yan to realise that the mother's requirements can help the child become independent. Moreover, the reward let her know that the urban society welcomed an independent person. After she understood her daughter, she encouraged the child to dress himself.

However, most of the time, understanding a different discipline ideology is difficult. Consequently, communication becomes a repetitive and constant process. Two generations may communicate and discuss one issue several times. The grandmothers also experienced the process of hesitating, understanding, forgetting and re-offending. For example, they may not understand the parents' suggestion at the beginning, but they comply to maintain family harmony. They may then go back to use the old practices. In the repeating process, some grandmothers changed gradually. For example, grandmother Lu sometimes promised the two grandchildren gifts to get them to behave, but she seldom fulfilled her promises. Her daughter-in-law regarded this as dishonest behaviour that might be emulated by the children. The first time the daughter-in-law reminded her to keep her promises, Lu changed for a few days and then went back to making empty promises, as she can't understand the mothers' opinion and said that 'They are too young to understand trustworthiness'. Her daughter-in-law and her son both kept reminding her that the children might emulate Lu's behaviour. Lu began to realise that the children took her promises seriously, and they sometimes complained. Lu reported that she was trying to change to make fewer promises or to fulfil her promises.

However, in some situations, the communication is ineffective, and the grandmothers show inflexibility and confidence in their own methods. For example, grandmother Ma always defended her granddaughter when her son and daughter-in-law criticised her. The parents considered Ma's defending unhelpful to the grandchild's correction, so they talked with Ma several times, but Ma did not want to change because her protection strengthened the relationship between her and the child. Mutual trust and dependence had been created, and Ma wanted to maintain that trust to ensure constant smooth communication with the child.

Grandmothers also used communication to express their complaints and suggestions to the younger generation. This communication can be a formal conversation, a mediated communication or even a gesture and a sigh. The parents sometimes changed their methods

after these communications. The grandmothers' victories resulted not only because they convinced the parents; in some cases, the parents made changes so that the grandmother could save face. Grandmothers are important to parents because they are the most trusted assistant caregivers, and this gives them power. But grandmothers use this power carefully because harmony and the interests of the child are the highest priorities. The power mainly works because of the parents' apprehension that the grandmothers are uncomfortable and want to go back home. During my interviews, I also communicated with the parents, some of whom stated their worries and concerns. Grandmother Qu felt unsatisfied that her son often criticised the child harshly at night. She tried to communicate with her son and told him that the child sometimes cried and had nightmares because of his criticism. She also suggested the mother to help. Sometimes, she sighed loudly and went back to her room to show her unhappiness when her son criticised the child. Qu stated that her son began to use a warmer attitude with the child after her suggestions.

Similarly, parents can also be persistent in communication. Then, Grandmothers may keep silent in front of the parents and compensate the child privately, but they do not oppose the parents face to face even though they do not agree with the parents' methods.

One time, Yangyang threw her father's iPad on the floor. Her father required her to pick it up, but she refused. Her father shut her in the washroom as punishment. After her father ended the punishment, I took her to my room and gave her a candy. It would not be good for us all to criticise her. Someone needed to encourage her. [Jie]

### ***The grandmothers' role in the child's education***

Studies have examined grandparents' influence on their grandchildren's educational attainment in a wide array of cultures and contexts (Falbo, 1991; King and Elder, 1998; Zeng and Xie,

2014). In Western countries, the lower rate of coresidence limits grandparents' role in children's education. However, diverse mechanisms have been identified through which grandparents can influence grandchildren's education, such as helping and supervising children to do homework, reading to the child, serving as role models and transmitting values of the importance of education (King and Elder, 1998). Recently, studies on Chinese multigenerational families have focused on the influence of grandparents on their grandchildren's education. Falbo (1991) explored grandparents' influence on grandchildren's outcomes found that frequent contact with well-educated grandparents positively affects children's academic outcomes. Zeng and Xie (2014) explored the influence of grandparents' living arrangements and education level on children's education in rural China. They found that the education level of the grandparents exerts an influence, mainly in families with coresident grandparents: well-educated grandparents reduce dropout likelihood, while grandparents with little education do not affect educational attainment. However, even though the influences of grandparents have been discussed, the grandparents' feelings, experiences and interpretations are neglected. Their physical and mental investment, the efforts they make, the difficulties they face and the strategies they use should be further researched. Moreover, even though the grandparents with lower education have less influence on academic outcomes, this does not mean that they make no effort and pay no attention to children's education.

I asked the questions on education to grandmothers whose grandchildren were older than three because these children are at the age to attend kindergarten and primary school. However, two grandmothers with 2-year-old grandchildren also talked about educational issues, including early education classes and family preschool education. Therefore, a total of 16 grandmothers answered the related questions.

The rural-urban migrant grandmothers' limited education experience, lack of knowledge about the urban education system and lack of resources in urban cities impedes them from playing an

intensive role in some educational activities, including choosing schools and interest classes, helping with homework, participating in school activities and making future education plans. Therefore, some rural-urban migrant grandmothers preferred to give up directly contributing to education to concentrate on finishing other work. Three grandmothers graduated from primary school reported that they seldom contributed to their grandchildren's education, as the parents were responsible for the education. Their little contribution to the education is a rational choice and the outcome of a distribution of family resources. The family works as a unit to exert every member's resources to provide good educational resources to the child. Because the younger generation has the better educational background, it can accomplish this task more effectively. The grandmothers regarded themselves as better at housework and daily care, and they felt satisfied with the parents' contribution to education. As stated by grandmother Han,

I didn't pay attention to these tasks [education]. I only wanted to take care of the child well. Their parents performed well. They helped with all of the homework when they got off work. [Han]

The other grandmothers showed an optimistic understanding of their limited roles and made efforts to contribute to the children's education and to overcome the disadvantaged conditions based on their own abilities, even though they did not make the decisions. The parents were mainly responsible for tutoring the children and making decisions and future plans, and the grandmothers gave indirect support to the parents.

The grandmothers in my research contributed to their grandchildren's education because their adult children and their family benefited from the education in terms of upward social mobility. Consequently, the grandmothers believed that education can guarantee their grandchildren a good future. For example, grandmother Han quoted a famous sentence— 'knowledge changes fortune' [*zhishi gaibian mingyun*]. Moreover, even though the quality discourse advocates

various qualities, such as good manners and personality, what the grandmothers agreed with most was working hard on education.

However, the grandmothers differed in their attitudes towards investment in education. Most grandmothers mainly highlight the importance of school education and academic knowledge rather than early education and interest cultivation. They expected that children can obtain high grades in school and did not understand the importance of early education or interesting classes because their influence on children's development is not obvious. However, the other grandmothers also agreed with the importance of early education and the cultivation of interests. They obtained this opinion through their observations of other urban children. The peer comparison stimulates them to have similar requirements for their own children. The good performance of the child provides the grandmothers with a feeling of pride and helps them evaluate the merit of early education and interest classes.

No matter which aspect they emphasised, the grandmothers actively used strategies to contribute. The grandmothers with less education expressed their expectations on education to their grandchildren and used strategies such as rewards to encourage them to pay more attention to education. Grandmother Gong was often concerned with the grades of her 6-year-old grandson. She said that:

Every time he took his grade back, I asked his grade... Last semester, he got a full mark. I was very happy, and I took him to eat at McDonald's... I always told him, 'you should follow your father. He has a happy life because he studied hard.' [Gong]

The grandmothers also expressed their expectations to their adult children that they should pay more attention to their children's education and utilise their resources to help them, even though most of the parents in my research took education seriously. Grandmother Ma, whose

granddaughter was 2.5 years old, required her son and daughter-in-law to spend less time using their computers and to use that time instead to teach the child English and literacy.

Moreover, the grandmothers expressed their concern for education by contacting the teachers to ask about their grandchildren's performance and to ask the teacher to pay more attention to their grandchildren when they took them to school, even though the teachers also maintained contact with the parents. Grandmother Yan's grandson had an English class in an institution called Education First. Yan took him to the institution every week, and she wanted to maintain good relations with the teacher and to know child's performance.

The teacher of the child was a foreigner and spoke English. I don't speak English. Every time, I asked the parents of other students to translate for me. If the teacher told me about academic issues, I didn't understand. But the teacher told me that he was naughty, I always criticised him on the way home. [Yan]

The grandmothers with better educational background can provide a little tutorial to the grandchild. There are five grandmothers who report that they also contributed to teaching the child in the family, in which two grandmothers have high school degree and three grandmothers graduated from middle school. They can teach the child to read the alphabet, storybooks, and ancient poetry, help the child to play educational toy and games, and accompany the child to finish elementary homework, as in the case of grandmother Ma, who attended the interview with her granddaughter. When I first met her, grandmother Ma encouraged the granddaughter to recite of ancient poetry to me. Ma reminded the child when she did not remember a sentence. During the interview, grandmother Ma told me that she recited a poetry book *300 Tang Poems [tangshi sanbaishou]* specifically so that she can teach the child.

Even though the grandmothers in my research did not make decisions on school selection, they

offered suggestions and requirements. They first tried to enhance their knowledge about urban education by inquiring with other grandparents in the community, paying attention to their adult children's conversation, visiting the nearby kindergartens and primary schools and collecting flyers about student recruitment. When I interviewed grandmother Qu in late July 2016, her grandson had not received an offer from a kindergarten, while most of the children in the community had received an offer. Grandmother Qu was worried and called some grandmothers she knew in the community to ask whether their children's kindergartens still had room.

The two adult generations frequently had disagreements on children's education even though they both stressed the importance of education and had higher expectations. In families in which the grandmothers mainly emphasised the academic work and schooling, the conflicts were because the grandmothers considered the parents' high requirements of parents, the early education and having interesting classes bring the child too much burden. Even though the grandmothers had requirements for their grandchildren's education, the strict requirements of urban parents are still excessive in their opinion. Grandmother Yan reported that her grandson not only had homework assigned by teachers but the homework assigned by her mother. Grandmother Lu stated that her daughter-in-law tutored her older grandson to repeat English vocabulary every night. The child could not go to sleep unless he remembered all of the words. They both complained that the children were too tired and had no time to play. However, some grandmothers recognised that parents' high requirements were related to a social trend caused by the high degree of competition. They explained that the parents also don't want to require the child so strictly, but the condition causes they feel anxious, as stated by Lu that,

They have no other choice. They also know that the child is tired. But situation is like this. You must follow the trend. [Lu]

Some grandmothers objected to the intensive investment in education and high requirements on

the child by helping and convincing the parents to relax. For example, grandmother Zheng's grandson failed to get an offer from a famous kindergarten in Taian that offered bilingual education because of a late reply. The parents were very anxious. However, grandmother Zheng and her husband thought that a kindergarten with responsible teachers, enough room to play and good meals would suffice. In their view, knowledge could be made up in the future, and a happy and comfortable childhood was valuable. The grandparent tried to convince the parents as follows:

You grew up in a rural area. The kindergarten here was not good. But you still got a good grade and went to university successfully. As long as the child wants to study hard and make an effort, he can get a good degree no matter where he is. [Zheng]

While studies have concluded that grandmothers are marginalised in the decision-making on children's discipline and education, this chapter shows that the grandmothers try to make efforts and give contributions to children's education based on their past life and the new experiences in urban cities. Moreover, the diversity of grandmothers' contributions is based on their varying opinions on urban discipline and education and on their different abilities. The grandmothers' experiences in children's discipline and education show that their living experiences in rural areas influenced their contributions, as they wanted to transfer the good qualities and behaviours they had learned in rural areas to the grandchildren. However, their past living experiences also brought some difficulties. Their lack of education and lack of knowledge about public life impeded them from contributing more and led to conflicts with parents. However, the grandmothers showed their ability to adapt to urban life. They observed and reflected on urban people's behaviour. They learn the parts that they can understand and agree with. They also have the autonomy to judge the disadvantages and the problems of the urban discipline method and education system. Grandmothers' interpretation of the advantages and disadvantages of urban discipline and education and grandmothers' agreement and

disagreement with the urban method shows their ability of reflection. The resolution of conflicts and grandmothers' agency were complex because such conflicts were mainly caused by differing ideologies. The grandmothers chose their strategies according to their acceptance of new ideologies to solve the conflicts. They also tried to balance the interests of the child, their own beliefs, and the harmony of the family.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

The findings of my study contribute to the literature on grandparenting and childrearing in urban China by examining how rural-urban migrant grandparents cooperate with urban parents to provide childcare under intensive parenting. My research has the engagement with the studies on intergenerational relations and cooperation through lighting on both the solidarity and conflicts between migrant grandmothers and urban parents. In the family, even though the generative mismatch may cause intergenerational conflicts, the older generation and the younger generation both value the interest of the family, and they can cooperate with each other to protect it.

Intensive parenting in an urban setting is demanding work that requires parents to obtain scientific knowledge and provide extensive childcare (Kuan, 2015). The childrearing experiences of rural-urban migrant grandmothers are also influenced by this discourse. The grandmothers spent most of their time taking care of the grandchildren and advance the standard of their care work attempting to meet the high requirements of the parents and the discourse of intensive childcare. Urban childrearing has high expectations for children's nutrition, behaviour and education, and grandmothers agree with and accept part of them and enhanced their expectations on the children, too. As a result, the two adult generations were able to achieve the solidarity and cooperate to achieve a shared goal. The mechanism of intergenerational cooperation is complicated. The intergenerational cooperation can be influenced by diverse factors, such as intergenerational relationship, resources of each generation, the needs of the family, the nature of the issue. As a result, the intergenerational cooperation shows diversity. According to the intergenerational relationships in the family, the resources of each caregiver, and the nature of the issue, grandmothers mainly provided care in

three ways: following the parents' suggestions, supporting and working with the parents and working alone.

However, the intensive parenting also presents challenges to grandmothers in two ways. Different from the existing study which highlighting the physical exhaustion of the grandmothers (Goh, 2009), the grandmothers in my research emphasised their mental uncertainty caused by the unfamiliar conditions and high requirements. Because they wanted to provide good childcare and offer financial and educational support, they were anxious about their ability to meet expectations given the economic and educational constraints, and perceived considerable structural obstacles, such as rural-urban inequality and differences.

Moreover, their disagreement with intensive parenting and the competence between their past experiences and the new method can cause intergenerational conflicts. The conflicts on daily care were mainly on a practical level and concentrate on solving specific issues related to diet, clothing and healthcare. Although the two generations had common aims to enhance the physical competence of the child, they used different methods. Conflicts on discipline were mainly caused by different childcare philosophies. A personality judged to be important by the parents may not be given attention by the grandmother. The parents want to cultivate a child who can adapt to public life and show high competence in the future. However, the grandmothers come from the rural area and build up their behavior mainly in private sphere, and often had difficulty understanding some of the parents' rules. Different parenting styles, such as warm/strict parenting, can also generate conflicts. The intergenerational cooperation process reflects the concept of ambivalence. Peters, Hooher, and Zvonkovic (2006) and Luescher and Pilleme (1998) use the concept to point out that the intergenerational relationship is structured with both solidarity and conflicts. The grandmothers' agreement and disagreement with the urban childcare method and ideology caused both coordination and conflict between caregivers.

Although studies have uncovered intergenerational differences in childcare and used them to explain the conflicts in intergenerational cooperation (Goh, 2009; Xiao, 2016), the migrant grandmothers also experience the rural-urban differences on childcare, which influences their caregiving experiences and their explanation of the conflicts with parents in conjunction with the intergenerational childrearing differences. The differences between rural and urban childcare habitus and ideology, such as different hygienic standards and different understandings of the public sphere, can cause intergenerational conflicts. Moreover, due to the rural-urban division, the grandmothers had less education and economic resources (Giles, Wang, and Zhao, 2010; Kanbur and Zhang, 2005). As a result, the grandmothers found it difficult to support childhood consumption and children's education. They also had difficulty understanding some of the new requirements and methods in childcare, such as the meaning of creativity. As migrants in the urban community, these grandmothers often felt like strangers, and some lacked resources and support, which enhanced their uncertainty and stress.

While studies mainly focused on the difficulties and conflicts that grandmothers face in childrearing cooperation (Goh, 2009; Xiao, 2016), my research contributes to the research gap by focusing on the agency of grandmothers. Theoretically, the agency of rural-urban grandmothers means that facing a hegemonic discourse and a marginalized position, they have the autonomy to evaluate the discourse and the conditions. Moreover, they can make decisions to accept or reject the discourse based on their reflection. They can provide explanations to their decisions and actively use resources and actions to support the decisions. The concept is reflected in grandmothers' reflectivity on the different childrearing methods and the requirements of intensive parenting discourse; in grandmothers' autonomy to make choices between different childcare methods; and in grandmothers' various strategies to respond to the challenges of urban childrearing and the intergenerational conflicts on childcare.

Facing the intensive childrearing discourse in urban China, the grandmothers agreed with and

accepted some expectations included in the discourse. To some extent, the rural-urban inequality causes that the grandmothers regarded the urban living style as a more advanced and decent one. Their agreements come from their willingness to help their offspring to obtain and sustain a better urban lifestyle. They then used various strategies to meet expectations and to break the constraints of limited human and social resources – for example, they can use communication and observation to learn from various people or to search for alternative methods. The choice of strategy is based on their own ability, resources and willingness. However, facing the influences of urban childrearing, grandmothers sometimes also showed their autonomy to critique and reject some of the requirements, such as the trend of purchasing expensive childrearing products. Their autonomy comes from their confidence in their experiences. The experience of cultivating their own children led them to trust their own methods. Moreover, the grandmothers provided different narratives to defend their opinions, for example, they provide an alternative standard to evaluate a product through the durability and the efforts to make.

The agency of grandmother is also shown when they actively use strategies to deal with conflicts, which is different from the finding that the elderly are passive in conflicts (Ikels, 1990). The grandmothers constructed two narratives to instruct them to deal with family conflicts: *Everything will be accomplished smoothly in a harmonious family* and *All for the child*. The grandmothers were able to choose from different methods to balance the harmony of the family, the interests of the child and their own face based on intergenerational relationships and their changing attitudes. Their methods that they used include compromising temporarily, communication, hidden strategies and actively learning.

The resolution of the conflicts is embedded in intergenerational relations. Qi (2016) found that the Chinese family pattern tends to be relational. Adult children and parents include each other in intergenerational reciprocity, and they cooperate to achieve cross-generational interests. The

grandmothers in my research employ their agency under the influence of that relational family pattern. Grandmothers emphasize the stability of the childrearing coalition and resolve conflicts without damaging the harmony of the family. Existing studies on agency mostly discuss it agency in a conflict-oriented context. Agency in a conflict-oriented context, such as political agency, is radical and emphasizes people's resistance (McNay, 2010). And agents employ agency to obtain an advantaged position in the conflicts (Boermel, 2006; Goss and Lindquist, 1995; Richmond, 1988). However, agency can also be relational autonomy (McNay, 2016). I identify solidarity-oriented agency to contribute to the discussion of agency by showing how agency works in the solidarity-oriented relation. The grandmothers in my studies employ their agency in the context where the harmony of the family and the stability of the intergenerational cooperation are emphasized. The practice of agency in a solidarity-oriented context is more complicated. On the one hand, grandmothers' dealing with the family conflicts is to defence their own method of child care. On the other hand, grandmothers aim to keep the family solidarity and continue the intergeneration coordination. To make the balance, grandmothers prefer to use communicative, compromised, and hidden strategies to deal with the family conflicts, rather than use resistance or challenge.

Moreover, in a conflict-oriented context, the aim of using agency is to protect the interest of the agents themselves. However, another characteristic of grandmothers' agency is altruist-oriented agency, which means that the use of agency can be for the interest of others and the collective. The grandmothers in my research employ various strategies to overcome challenges and conflicts to take good care of their grandchildren and to provide benefits to the whole family rather than to protect their own interest.

The findings on the grandmothers' narratives and practices of childrearing in urban cities also contribute to the studies on rural-urban ageing migrations. Studies on rural-urban ageing migrants define ageing migrants as a burden on the receiving society and mainly focus on their

experiences in the communities, neglecting their identities as caregivers in the family (Meng et al., 2004; Wu, 2013; Zhang and Zhou, 2013; Zhou, 2002). My research discusses ageing migrants' contributions to urban cities, where they assist urban parents in caring for their children and share the intensive parenting burden. Moreover, my research explores various aspects of their post-migration life, including their interaction with the urban community and family, urban ideology and living methods, technology, urban consumption and education in the context of childrearing. My research thus breaks the stereotype of the grandmother as a dependent.

Recently, some scholars have explored the positive meaning of ageing life through examining different aspects of the lives of the elderly. My research advances this research by focusing on these grandmothers' agency in childrearing. Moreover, as the agency of migrants is discussed, my research furtherly contribute to the research domain by exploring the aging migrants' agency.

### **Limitations**

Because of the limited study period, there were only 20 informants in my research. Moreover, their receiving cities are both in north China. Therefore, the experiences of the rural-urban migrant grandmothers in my research can only reflect parts of migrant grandmothers' lives. However, by using a qualitative research method, my research has tried to deeply present the systematic mechanism of the grandmothers' childrearing practices.

In my research, I focus only on the middle-class families in urban China. The reason is that migrant grandmothers in middle-class families are more likely to be exposed to the intensive parenting discourse through their cooperation with their adult children. Intensive parenting discourse is mainly internalized by middle-class parents (Xiao, 2016). Moreover, parents in

middle-class families have more resources to employ the intensive parenting, such as financial resources, information and educational background. However, parents in working-class families have limited resources to practice the intensive parenting. Consequently, the intergenerational differences and conflicts on childrearing in working-class families are not as prominent as those in middle-class families. As my research aims to explore how grandmothers deal with the differences on childrearing, middle-class family provides me a better context to discuss the issue.

Moreover, my sample covers grandmothers in both first-tier and third-tier cities. However, there are differences between them. For example, migrant grandmothers in third-tier cities are more likely to experience intra-province migration. As a result, they may not face language differences and may have more geographical similarity to urban residents. The transport system in Beijing is more complicated, which can be more challenging for grandmothers living in this community. Due to the focus of the study and the limited time, I leave the comparison of the two groups for future studies. Moreover, I find more similarities between them. The cooperation methods used, the challenges and intergenerational conflicts faced and the strategies used by grandmothers in Beijing to respond to the conflicts and challenges were also reported by grandmothers in Taian. For example, both grandmother Qin in Beijing and grandmother Gong in Taian highlighted the importance of harmony in the family. Both grandmother Lu in Taian and grandmother Liao in Beijing complained about the parents' consumption attitudes. Given that the main purpose of my present research is to give a systematic description and analysis of the grandmothers' childrearing experience within the context of the urban childcare discourse and their agency, I focused on their similarities and leave the former question for future study.

Finally, the experiences of paternal grandmothers may be different from the experiences of maternal grandmothers because of patriarchy and patrilocal traditions. Even though my study

includes some discussion of these differences, an in-depth and systematic comparison should be made in further studies. The grandfather's role should also be discussed.

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